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## Intervention and Peace Operations: Dilemmas of Internal Conflicts and Transnational Threats

Sofía Sebastián



The Hague Institute  
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STIMSON

## ***Abstract***

The hybrid and transnational nature of current conflicts represent one of today's most pressing global security challenges; with crises spanning from western Africa to the Himalayas. This paper examines issues of intervention and security as applied to conflicts that feature significant levels of armed fragmentation and are afflicted by varying levels of transnational security threats. These include terrorism, organized crime, cross-border sectarian insurgencies, and the like. It also evaluates the policies, strategies and mechanisms in place to address these threats and makes recommendations for a strengthened international response in the context of UN peace operations. The paper draws from the Malian conflict to reflect on these issues.

## ***About the author***

Soffia Sebastián is a TAPIR Fellow (Transatlantic Post-Doc Fellowship for International Relations and Security), recently based at the nonpartisan Stimson Center. She holds a PhD in Government from the London School of Economics (LSE), an MSc in Foreign Service from Georgetown University, and a BA in Political Science and International Relations from the Universidad Complutense de Madrid.

Commission on Global Security, Justice & Governance  
<http://www.globalsecurityjusticegovernance.org>  
<https://twitter.com/BetterGlobalGov>

The Hague Institute for Global Justice  
Sophialaan 10 2514 JR The Hague  
The Netherlands

Tel: +31 (0)70 30 28 130  
<http://www.thehagueinstituteforglobaljustice.org>  
<https://twitter.com/HagueInstitute>

The Stimson Center  
1211 Connecticut Avenue, N.W., 8th Floor  
Washington, DC 20036  
United States

Tel: +1-202-223-5956  
<http://www.stimson.org>  
<http://twitter.com/StimsonCenter>

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# 1. Introduction

This paper explores the hybrid<sup>1</sup> and transnational nature of current internal conflicts and the challenges for UN peacekeeping operations. It contends that current conflicts are afflicted by three interconnected challenges: high fragmentation and factionalism, linkages between armed groups and transnational criminal networks (including some with ties to radical ideologies and terrorist organizations),<sup>2</sup> and the use of asymmetrical combat strategies,<sup>3</sup> including insurgency, terrorist tactics, and gang violence. One of the most paradigmatic examples of such violence is Mali, “where weak governance, territorial grievances, weak border control, and an influx of weapons and fighters from Libya have created an environment hospitable to insurgents, terrorists, and traffickers.”<sup>4</sup>

The nature and interconnectedness of these security threats has transformed today’s internal conflicts into protracted, high-casualty wars that so far have eluded international efforts at mediation and intervention (see the cases of Syria, CAR or Mali to name a few).<sup>5</sup> Fragmentation, for example, has increased the likelihood of spoiler issues in peace processes;<sup>6</sup> a problem that has been aggravated in situations where armed groups become atomized and network-based, with little organizational structures of command and control (a situation typical in organized crime and jihadi networks).<sup>7</sup> Conflict dynamics in contexts of fragmentation and hybridity have also tended to be more fluid, volatile and dynamic; making it harder for mediators to identify potential partners for peace negotiations, fully apprehend developments on the ground and craft contingency plans accordingly.

Transnational security threats (especially the links between armed groups and criminal or terrorist networks) have also served to aggravate armed fragmentation and prolong the conflicts, keeping failed/failing states in a vicious circle of structural violence and fragility. Last but not least, the use of new fighting tactics; including suicide bombers, improvised explosive devices (IEDs), and kidnapping, have challenged conventional perceptions of how war is conducted and presented significant operational challenges for interveners, especially in the context of peacekeeping

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<sup>1</sup> Here, the term hybridity refers to the fragmented and multi-faceted nature of current internal conflicts, characterized by the use of irregular tactics, links to transnational crime and terrorist networks, cross-border sectarian insurgencies, etc.

<sup>2</sup> In this paper, an armed group is defined as an armed, non-state actor with a minimal degree of cohesiveness as an organization “and a certain duration of its violent campaign” (Krause and Miliken 2009, 203). Armed groups may involve insurgent groups (those who enjoy control of a certain part of the state’s territory); militant groups (who may not hold effective control of a territory); urban gangs, warlords and criminal networks (who engage in the pursuit of illicit activities through control over natural resources, drugs, trafficking, smuggling, etc); private militias; and transnational groups (who operate across international borders), including terrorist organizations (Krause and Miliken 2009).

<sup>3</sup> Frank Hoffman defines an asymmetric threat as “any adversary that simultaneously and adaptively employs a fused mix of conventional weapons, irregular tactics, terrorism and criminal behavior in the battle space to obtain their political objectives” (Hoffman 2009).

<sup>4</sup> Kemp et al. 2013, 10.

<sup>5</sup> Artiñano et al. (2014), for example, argue that the presence of transnational terrorist networks poses “a fundamentally different threat” to the UN than other armed groups the UN has faced in the past.

<sup>6</sup> United Nations 2008. In this paper, armed fragmentation refers to the existence of numerous, localized and relatively autonomous rival groups that fight for political inclusion and access to (or control of) political, economic and/or ideological resources. From a quantitative perspective, armed fragmentation typically refers to conflicts that involve more than three groups or factions (see Doyle 2002). From a qualitative standpoint, armed fragmentation refers to a situation in which groups are incoherent, and lack visible leadership structures (Doyle 2002), and/or have become atomized and network-based, with little organizational structures of command and control.

<sup>7</sup> The UNSC, for example, has noted that the nexus of terrorism and organized crime complicates resolution efforts (UNSC 2014e)

operations (in Mali, for example, more than 40 peacekeepers have been killed and around 100 wounded since the UN mission was launched in July 2013). In this new milieu, anything can happen at any time and armed forces have to “be able to apply force from the maximum to the minimum, and to switch between levels within seconds.”<sup>8</sup> These developments have posed greater risks for civilians and introduced a more complex environment for peacekeepers.

International efforts aimed at addressing these security challenges have been ad-hoc and piecemeal and lacked the leadership, capacity and resources required to end the cycle of violence. International strategies have also been informed by narrow agendas and lacked comprehensive approaches to these interlinked security challenges. The 2011 World Bank report, for example, observed that the implication of the new forms of violence, where local political conflicts, organized crime,<sup>9</sup> and internationalized disputes are intertwined, are profound. Hence, “[o]ur strategies must be comprehensive. Our institutions must overcome their narrow preoccupations and learn to work across issues in a concerted fashion.”<sup>10</sup> Limited international action has been the result of insufficient information about the interlinks between conflict and transnational threats (and its translation into appropriate policy prescriptions), lack of political will and/or concerns about security and other strategic considerations, lack of capacity and resources, and the absence of strategic and operational guidelines on how to operate in these environments (especially in the context of peace operations).

This paper uses the case of Mali to reflect on intervention challenges at the political, structural and operational levels in internal conflicts that are afflicted by various transnational security threats. It evaluates the policies, strategies and mechanisms intended to address these threats and makes recommendations for a strengthened international policy response. The first three sections of the paper use the case of Mali to explore the manner in which different transnational threats and conflict dynamics have played out in a specific illustration. These sections provide a brief account of the Malian conflict, including a short description of its dynamics, the roots of the conflict, international responses (especially vis-à-vis the UN peacekeeping mission in Mali) and the state of play at the present time. Drawing from the Malian case, the following section addresses various security threats in current conflicts and the challenges for peacekeepers. More specifically, this section examines the issue of armed fragmentation in the context of transnational security threats and the impact on peace negotiations (political challenge), the intertwinements between criminal networks and conflict dynamics (structural challenge), and the use of asymmetric warfare by armed groups (operational challenge). The final section offers several recommendations for UN peacekeeping operations.

## 2. Mali

The origins of the current crisis in Mali date back to January 17, 2012 when a Tuareg rebel group, MNLA (le Mouvement National pour la Liberation de l’Azawad), launched an attack to establish an independent republic in northern Mali, known as Azawad.<sup>11</sup> Initial battles in Menaka, Aguelok and Tessalit rapidly spread to other areas in the north. Fighting continued for several weeks, but a military coup launched on March 21, 2012, by poorly equipped young officers, who were disenchanted with an army racked by nepotism, proved fatal to the military’s campaign in the north.

<sup>8</sup> Friesendorf 2012, 59.

<sup>9</sup> Organized crime is defined as a “self-perpetuating illegal activity carried out by a structured group over a period of time for material benefit” (Stepanova 2012).

<sup>10</sup> World Bank 2011.

<sup>11</sup> The Tuaregs are a Berber nomadic group based in Niger, Mali, Algeria, Libya and Burkina Faso.

The government crumbled, and following a few successful offensives by MNLA forces in various northern towns that had been abandoned by the collapsing army, the rebels declared the independence of the Azawad republic (including the three northern regions of Gao, Tidal and Timbuktu) on April 6.

Under heavy international pressure, and based on a settlement brokered by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in April, the newly-installed military junta led by US-trained army captain Amadou Sanogo agreed to restore the constitution and transfer executive powers to a civilian authority. The president of the National Assembly, Dioncounda Traore, took over the presidency and a new government of national unity was formed. In the meantime, and following the declaration of Azawad independence in April, new fighting broke out in the north between various rebel factions; especially between MNLA and Ansar Dine (a Tuareg Jihadi-Salafi rebel group with ties to terrorist organizations),<sup>12</sup> and between MNLA and other terrorist/extremist groups that had not participated in the initial campaign against the Malian government. These groups included al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and an off-shoot known as the Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO).

A few months after the declaration of independence, the MNLA lost control of almost the entire northern territory to a more effective military alliance of jihadi organizations comprised of Ansar Dine, AQIM and MUJAO.<sup>13</sup> (Ansar Dine controlled the city of Kidal, shared control of Timbuktu with one of AQIM's militias, and MUJAO held the city of Gao.) Beginning in June, the jihadists imposed a strict interpretation of Sharia law. According to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, the conflict and subsequent Islamist takeover in northern Mali caused massive population displacements (up to one third of the population in the north) and a litany of human rights abuses – particularly brutal for women and children – including recruitment of child soldiers, forced marriage, and public executions.<sup>14</sup>

## 2.1 Conflict Roots

It is difficult to pinpoint the root causes of the crisis in Mali. The conflict is best seen as “a multidimensional mix”<sup>15</sup> of deep-seated north-south frictions (mainly over the nature and form of the state and its relation with the north), corrupted and misguided state policies in northern Mali, transient inter- and intra-communal tensions, violent extremism, criminal interests, and important regional ramifications that have made the conflict all the more challenging to resolve. These conflict dynamics have been exacerbated by the deeply divided nature of the Malian society with deep fractures running along ethnic, tribal, and clan lines (there are four main ethnic groups in the north: the Tuaregs, the Songhai, the Arabs, and the Fulani, most of which are further divided into tribes, clans, and sub-clans).<sup>16</sup> The diversity of groups has given way to a similarly varied amalgam of movements and organizations (see box 1). Most groups lack a coherent structure and are often

<sup>12</sup> MNLA was joined in the fight against the government by Ansar Dine, but the two groups broke their alliance in March 2012, disagreeing over the role of Sharia law (Ansar Dine's goal was not independence for Azawad but the imposition of the Sharia law in the whole territory of Mali)

<sup>13</sup> Lecocq et al. 2013.

<sup>14</sup> “Islamist use fear, drug money to maintain control of northern Mali – UN rights official”, UN News Center, 12 October 2012; see also John Lee Anderson, “State of Terror. What happened when an al-Qaeda affiliate ruled in Mali.” *The New Yorker*, July 1, 2013.

<sup>15</sup> Emmanuel Bombande and Peter van van Tuijl, “In Mali, Peace and Reconciliation is a Balancing Act”, The Global Observatory, International Peace Institute (IPI), February 7, 2014.

<sup>16</sup> Tuaregs account for more than 50 percent of northern Malians, Arabs 10 percent and Songhai around 35 percent of approximately 1.2 million people (US Cable, “Berabiche and AQIM in Northern Mali,” 08BAMAKO371, 17 April 2008).

“[the] result of ‘marriages of interest’ between certain individuals and/or smaller groupings, who can quickly change sides from one group to another for opportunistic reasons.”<sup>17</sup>

The persistence of economic and political grievances by the Tuareg community (and the incapacity of the central government to effectively address them) constitutes one of the key structural causes of the current conflict. Grievances date back to the revolts of 1990-1992 and 2006. These rebellions ended in peace agreements (the National Pact in 1992 and the Algiers Accords of 2006) that involved ample concessions on paper for autonomy in the north; including the creation of a northern security force. The accords, however, were never fully implemented, and tensions continued to simmer below the surface. Some rebels resumed fighting in 2006 but were eventually forced into Libya in 2009.

Rather than engaging actively in the peace process and implementing an economic development plan, as envisioned in the Algiers Accords, the Malian government retreated from the north and adopted a dual strategy that aggravated inter-communal tensions. Step one of the strategy entailed playing off tribal leaders to keep the rebels at bay.<sup>18</sup> The then president Amadou Toumani Toure (ATT),<sup>19</sup> for example, used Tuareg Imghad leaders and Arab militias (established by prominent Arab businessmen to protect their business from rebel attacks) to neutralize insurgents who came prominently from the Ifoghas and Idnan tribes.<sup>20</sup> Step two of the strategy involved the use of organized crime as an instrument to exercise influence over local elites by allowing them to freely engage in criminal activities with impunity.<sup>21</sup> ATT thus delegated state control to lower status Tuareg clans, opportunistic local elites, and cooperative Arab armed militias;<sup>22</sup> creating new vested interests and alliances that compounded the complex web of group relations in the north, and between the center and the periphery.

These strategies eventually backfired when Bamako started to lose control over the situation in the north, and when the rule of law and the legitimacy of state institutions became irreversibly compromised through the government’s complicity with organized crime.<sup>23</sup> It is not surprising that MNLA’s self-determination platform at the time of its creation revolved around a list of grievances linked to the Malian government’s inadequate northern strategy; including economic marginalization of the north, the government’s failure to comply with the commitments of peace agreements, brutalization of the population by the security forces, the government’s complicity with drug trafficking, its passive approach towards terrorist organizations, and rampant corruption related to the use of international aid intended for the north.<sup>24</sup>

Two additional developments compounded the nature of the conflict: the emergence and consolidation of Mali as a transit state for drug trafficking and the development of extremist ideologies tied to terrorist organizations. Drug trafficking in Mali started in the early to mid-2000s. The country provided a particularly ripe environment given the widespread practice of illicit smuggling of cigarettes and other items since the 1980s, following a series of droughts that forced many nomad

<sup>17</sup> Koepf 2014, 15.

<sup>18</sup> Lacher 2012; Whitehouse 2012; Lecocq et al. 2013.

<sup>19</sup> ATT was in power from 2002 until 2012, when the March coup deposed him two months before the expiration of his second term in office.

<sup>20</sup> Arab paramilitary forces were often times led by members of the Mali military; creating mutual dependency among the state, businessmen and prominent Tuareg figures (Lacher 2012; International Crisis Group 2012; US Cable, “Prominent Tuareg’s view of Arab militias, rebellion, and AQIM,” 09BAMAKO163, 18 March 2009).

<sup>21</sup> Lacher 2012.

<sup>22</sup> Boukhars 2013.

<sup>23</sup> Lacher 2012, 11.

<sup>24</sup> International Crisis Group 2012.

pastoralists into the informal economy in urban centers.<sup>25</sup> Cigarette smuggling, for example, contributed to the emergence of small gangs and prominent Arab and Tuareg figures that later played a leading role in the rebel and jihadist groups that took up arms in 2012. Mokhtar Belmokhtar, for example, a leading member of AQIM, is believed to have been involved in the cigarette smuggling business.<sup>26</sup> Drug trafficking contributed to the conflict in different ways. First, it transformed the nature of criminality, making it more profitable and higher-risk. Second, it distorted the balance of power between the different communities and tribes; exacerbating intra-group and inter-tribal tensions leading up to the 2012 revolt. Finally, it allowed actors involved in the illegal business to play a leading role in the political and military realms.<sup>27</sup>

The emergence of Jihad in the Sahel (see box 1), had similar disrupting effects upon the conflict and contributed to exacerbating inter- and intra-communal tensions. It also distorted the nature of political and military alliances, dramatically transforming conflict dynamics. Some members of the Lamhar and Ifogha tribes, for example, became powerful intermediaries in the kidnapping business, which provided them with a “certain amount of power and ... political influence.”<sup>28</sup> Similarly, Ansar Dine’s growing strategic importance and military gains in the north following the 2012 revolt, were only possible thanks to resources provided by AQIM.<sup>29</sup> This said, it is difficult to fully comprehend the exact nature of any association between criminal networks, rebel organizations, and terrorist organizations due to lack of primary sources. Generally, it is believed that ties between these groups have often been the result of “alliances of convenience,” driven by mostly economic gain.<sup>30</sup>

In addition to these complex dynamics, other contextual factors provided trigger points; including the remilitarization of northern Mali resulting from the return of Libyan fighters of Malian origin, who joined different organizations based on tribal and clan interests, and the influx of arms from jihadi and Tuareg groups returning from Libya.<sup>31</sup> While other conflict dynamics also contributed to the conflict, the Libyan war sped up the process and precipitated the transformation of the different networks into a rebellion, adding “fuel to an already volatile situation.”<sup>32</sup>

### Box 1: Armed Groups in Mali

There are at least three major Tuareg organizations in Mali. **The MNLA** was created officially in October 2011 as a coalition of different groups, with a military leadership heavily influenced by returnees from Libya. This group, defeated by a stronger military alliance composed of Ansar Dine, AQIM and MUJAO in June 2012, regained political relevance thanks to operation Serval, a French military intervention intended to oust terrorists groups in early 2013. MNLA has suffered various splits since 2011, including **Ansar Dine**, created by Iyad Ag Ghali a few months before the revolt in 2012. Ansar Dine lost significant military and political relevance during the French intervention in 2013. In fact, days after the beginning of the offensive, a new moderate political organization, **the Islamic Movement of Azawad (MIA)**, broke with Ansar Dine. MIA was renamed **the High Council for the Unity of Azawad (HCUA)** in May 2013 when the organization renounced the principles of terrorism. Ansar Dine in turned disappeared from the political landscape, although its

<sup>25</sup> Lacher 2012; Briscoe 2014.

<sup>26</sup> Lacher 2012.

<sup>27</sup> Lacher 2012.

<sup>28</sup> Pellerin 2014, 27.

<sup>29</sup> International Crisis Group 2012.

<sup>30</sup> Briscoe 2014; Arief 2013; see also “Fresh approach needed to quell terrorism threat in the Sahel” *IRIN News*, 7 October 2010 and US Cable, “Berabiche and AQIM in Northern Mali,” 08BAMAKO371, 17 April 2008.

<sup>31</sup> Lecocq et al. 2013; UNODC 2013.

<sup>32</sup> Mireille Affa’a-Mindzie, “For Progress in Mali and the Sahel, Local Governance Cannot Be Ignored,” *The Global Observatory*, IPI, March 5, 2013; see also Lecocq et al. 2013; International Crisis Group 2012.

absence weighs heavily over the current peace negotiations (International Crisis Group 2014b). MNLA has suffered further splits in recent months, such as **the Coalition for the People of Azawad (CPA)** in March 2014 as a result of disagreements over the MNLA leader's hard stance and obstructionist approach in the peace negotiations (Peter Tinti, "Lines in the Malian Sand: Tuareg Fractures Widen as Talks Continue to Stall," *Think Africa Press*, 25 March 2014).

Within the Arab group, **the Arab Movement of Azawad (MAA)** is composed of various Arab armed groups and militias created during ATT rule (some of which were expelled from the Timbuktu and Gao areas during the Islamist takeover in 2012) and some figures linked to drug trafficking, including supporters of MUJAO (Lacher 2012; International Crisis Group 2012). Divisions between factions supporting talks with the government and those opposed to them run deep.

**The Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC)**, created by a former Armed Islamic Group (GIA) commander, established itself in Mali in 2003 following the kidnapping of 32 tourists in Southern Algeria (International Crisis Group 2012). GSPC was renamed **AQIM** in 2007, when the group affiliated with al-Qaeda in the hopes of attaining further legitimacy, recruiters and other resources for operations. It has become one of al-Qaeda's wealthiest affiliates in part due to a variegated financing strategy including kidnapping for ransom – the most lucrative activity – and trafficking of arms, vehicles, cigarettes and persons (Lewis, David, "Al-Qaeda's richest faction dominant in North Mali: US," *Reuters*, 26 July 2012; Laub 2014). Notwithstanding the efforts to globalize and internationalize the movement, AQIM has remained a regional, quasi-guerrilla organization with limited global capabilities and "little operational, advisory or financial input from al-Qaeda" (Rejavec 2014, 23). AQIM maintained a leading role within the Salafi movement in Mali until they became the target of operation Serval in 2013. The organization reappeared in September 2013 with a suicide attack on a military camp, and has since maintained a visible role in the conflict (Koeopf 2014; Wulf and Mesko 2014).

**MUJAO**, an offshoot organization formed and run by Lamhar Arab drug traffickers, was created in December 2011 to protect Arab illicit business from the MNLA (Briscoe 2014). Another splinter battalion was created in December 2012, **al-Mulathamun ("Those Who Sign in Blood")**, following a dispute between AQIM's leader, Abdelmalek Doukdel, and one of its key commanders, Mokhtar Belmokhtar, over the Islamist takeover of northern Mali and the French intervention. "Those Who Sign in Blood" joined MUJAO in August 2013 to form a new organization called **"Al Mourabitoun,"** which has claimed various attacks against MINUSMA and was responsible for the recent attack in a popular restaurant in Bamako that killed five civilians.

Within the Songhai, **the Coordination of movements and Patriotic Groups of Resistance (CMFPR)**, reactivated in the spring of 2012, brings together various old Songhai self-defense militias whose goal is to liberate northern Mali from the Tuareg and the Islamists.

### 3. International Responses

International responses to the Malian conflict were slow to materialize despite initial calls by ECOWAS to deploy a 3,000 troop force. The Islamist takeover of the north in July 2012 prompted fears of Mali becoming the new Somalia, and in September 2013, amidst increasing deterioration of security, President Taore officially requested the UN to authorize an international military force to assist the Malian army in recovering northern towns from Islamist extremists. The initiative, however, met with domestic opposition and created divisions within the international community.

It was not until October that a consensus on intervention began to form. On October 12, the UNSC adopted a resolution (under French leadership), declaring "readiness" to respond to President Taore's appeal, and requested a detailed intervention plan within 45 days.<sup>33</sup> The AU replaced ECOWAS in the planning of the operation and the African-led International Support Mission in Mali (AFISMA) was authorized by the UNSC in December 2012, while diplomatic efforts to resolve the crisis continued. The UNSC resolution supported and encouraged the parties to complete the

<sup>33</sup> See UNSC 2012a; See also Adam Nossiter, "The Whiff of Conflict Grows in Mali," *the New York Times*, 23 October 2012.

transition road map negotiated by ECOWAS in April 2012. It also encouraged the establishment of a political dialogue between the Malian government and all armed groups who cut ties with terrorist organizations and recognized Mali's territorial integrity. In terms of security provisions, the resolution provided for two different courses of action: the training of the Malian military forces and the deployment of an Africa-led military intervention force to assist Malian authorities in recovering the areas under the control of terrorist, extremist, and armed groups. No specific deadline was set for deployment however. In fact, the resolution called for military planning to be further refined before the start of offensive operations.<sup>34</sup>

Ultimately, the deployment of the African forces was slow to materialize, and the Malian government made an official plea for immediate French assistance to counteract rebel advances in the north. The fall of Konna in early January 2013 (only a few hundred kilometers away from Bamako), raised concerns about what the next targets might be; including possibly Sevaré, a Malian military base close to Konna and the Malian capital. These developments prompted the French to launch Operation Serval in order to halt terrorist advances, secure Mali's territorial integrity, and prepare the ground for the deployment of AFISMA. The French intervention was a success during the initial stages. It managed to stop the rebel advances and repel Jihadist militants from the major population centers in northern Mali in less than a month.<sup>35</sup> In the meantime, the Malian authorities adopted a transition roadmap that established both a schedule for democratic elections and a framework for peace negotiations with civilian and rebel groups in the north (the National Commission for Dialogue and Reconciliation).

Financial and logistical problems associated with the deployment of AFISMA prompted France to take on another initiative, aimed at transforming the African mission into a UN peacekeeping operation.<sup>36</sup> The new international force, MINUSMA (United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali), was approved on April 25 with a strength of 11,200 troops, 1,120 police personnel, and 672 international civilian posts. The mandate included stabilization (and reestablishment of state authority throughout the Malian territory),<sup>37</sup> civilian protection, and support of the political process (along similar lines as outlined in the AFISMA mandate). While not directly authorized to undertake military activities against terrorist organizations (which was and still remains the primary goal of French forces), the UNSC did authorize MINUSMA to deter threats and take active steps to prevent the return of armed elements as part of its stabilization activities.<sup>38</sup> This specific task blurred the line between more traditional peacekeeping and peace enforcement, and between tactical and strategic violence.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> See UNSC 2012b.

<sup>35</sup> UNSC 2013a.

<sup>36</sup> Koepf 2013. African troops were ill-equipped and ill-prepared for combat: they lacked funding, transportation capability, and reconnaissance aircrafts (Boukhars 2013). By April, for example, AFISMA only had two reconnaissance aircrafts, four combat aircrafts based in Burkina Faso, six combat helicopters and a few transport helicopters in a territory bigger than France and the UK together (see Armee Francaise, "Guerre a Mali: La Misma, faible force," *Jeune Afrique*, 16 April 2013).

<sup>37</sup> Much confusion exists around the meaning of stabilization in UN peace operations (UN doctrine has so far failed to provide a definition). Broadly speaking, stabilization may be understood as the activities "conducted in politically messy, violent, challenging and potentially non-permissive environments with either no viable political settlement or one that is contested" (Stabilisation Unit 2014).

<sup>38</sup> UNSC 2013c and 2014b. There is a fine line between stabilization tasks such as preventing the return of armed groups and conducting antiterrorist activities. The fact that MINUSMA conducted joint operations with French troops in the Gao region has contributed to further blurring the lines between the two security forces (even if MINUSMA was never directly involved in clearing the region from armed groups).

<sup>39</sup> The Capstone doctrine establishes that peacekeeping may involve the use of force at the tactical level with the authorization of the Security Council and the consent of the main parties to the conflict "to defend its mandate against

While the resolution authorizing MINUSMA referenced the problems associated with terrorism and transnational criminal networks, no anti-criminal responsibilities were given to the mission (understandably to a certain degree given that peacekeeping operations are generally overstretched). The Secretary-General recommended the establishment of an expert group to investigate “the identity and activities of those involved in transnational and organized crime in Mali and the sub-region, with the possibility of imposing punitive, targeted sanctions.”<sup>40</sup> The recommendation, however, was never implemented. The Secretary-General also recommended a regional approach to address transnational crime and enhance border security (quite critical and urgently needed in the Malian context), but this was only marginally covered in the UN Integrated Sahel Strategy launched in December 2013 (the degree to which this strategy will be backed with the necessary resources and political commitment from regional and international actors remains yet to be seen<sup>41</sup>). Last but not least, MINUSMA was provided with an important police component, but they were not given an executive mandate or border surveillance responsibilities. Eventually, police units undertook some counter-narcotics activities but only through capacity-building with a United Nations Police Transnational Organized Crime Cell co-located with Malian counterparts.

In terms of the political dialogue, mediation efforts by Burkina Faso’s president Blaise Compaoré (on behalf of ECOWAS) achieved some successes. On June 18, 2013, following 11 intense days of negotiations (and heavy involvement and arm-twisting of international actors such as France, MINUSMA and the AU), the Malian government and two main Tuareg rebel organizations (MNL and HCUA), signed “the preliminary agreement on the presidential election and inclusive peace talks in Mali” in Ouagadougou, the capital of Burkina Faso.<sup>42</sup> The agreement established a two-phased peace process. Step one involved presidential elections in July 2013 and a set of confidence-building measures aimed at providing a secure environment for the elections (including inter alia an immediate ceasefire, the progressive deployment of Malian security forces and administrative personnel in the north, and the cantonment and disarmament of armed groups). Step two entailed a political dialogue between the central government and the armed groups, 60 days after the election of a new president. The objective of the dialogue was to achieve a final agreement on the institutional status of northern Mali, a development strategy for the north, and the reorganization of the Malian armed forces. The elections were successfully and peacefully concluded on July 28 and August 11, 2013, with high participation rates (marking the first UN achievement). The newly elected president, Ibrahim Boubacar Keita (a former prime minister and president of the National Assembly), took office on September 19. In addition to the elections, two significant achievements of the agreement involved the recognition of Mali’s territorial integrity and the rejection of terrorism and the criminal economy by all of the signatories.<sup>43</sup>

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spoilers” and/or assist the national authorities in maintaining law and order (United Nations 2008, 98). Peace enforcement, on the contrary, may involve the use of force at the strategic or international level, without the consent of the host nation/and or main parties to the conflict, “which is normally prohibited for Member states” (United Nations 2008, 18; see also United Nations 2010).

<sup>40</sup> UNSC 2013a.

<sup>41</sup> See Tardy 2014.

<sup>42</sup> Other groups such as The Azawad Arab Movement (MAA) and the Coordination of Patriotic Resistance Movements and Forces (CMFPR) signed a sideline declaration on 18 June 2013 in support of the agreement.

<sup>43</sup> “Accord préliminaire à l’élection présidentielle et aux pourparlers inclusifs de paix au Mali”, Ouagadougou, 18 June 2013, available at <http://scd.rfi.fr/sites/filesrfi/Accord%20sign%C3%A9%20C3%A0%20Ouagadougou%20le%2018%20juin.pdf>

## 4. International Impact

The results of the various international mechanisms in Mali have been mixed to date. Following the initial campaign by French forces, the security situation turned unstable.<sup>44</sup> While terrorist groups were successfully repelled during the first stages of operation Serval, forcing jihadists to move part of their activities to Niger and regroup in Southern Libya; the subsequent French drawdown has reversed some of the initial achievements (there are only 1,000 French troops left in Mali as a result of the transformation of Serval into the regional counterterrorist operation Barkhane, a 3,000-strong French intervention force intended to combat terrorist organizations in Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger). Terrorist groups, who rapidly filled the security gap left by the French, have resumed the fight and intensified their military campaign against international forces and government institutions, turning northern Mali into one of the deadliest peacekeeping environments.<sup>45</sup> The security situation in the fall of 2014 became so precarious that Malian Foreign Minister Abdoulaye Diop requested a more robust mandate for MINUSMA<sup>46</sup> and urged the UNSC to send a rapid intervention force to effectively combat terrorism. As he observed, Mali “again runs the risk of becoming the destination of hordes of terrorists who have been forced out of other parts of the world.”<sup>47</sup>

Despite various US and French military capacity-building programs since the mid-2000s and the more recent assistance provided by various international actors (including the EU Training Mission, launched on April 1 under strong French pressure), the situation for Mali’s military is precarious. Local military forces are still disorganized, divided, “understaffed, inadequately trained, and not capable of effectively carrying out counterterrorism activities” or maintaining the territory secured by the French.<sup>48</sup> The restoration of state authority in the north has been marginal, especially in rural areas. The situation was particularly dramatic in May 2014, when demonstrations against the Prime Minister Moussa Mara in an official visit to Kidal turned violent and resulted in MNLA rebel forces taking over the city and repelling the Malian army. Following these events, the Prime Minister declared that Mali was at war again. The situation in Kidal remains highly unstable, with no single authority able to exercise full control of the territory.<sup>49</sup>

MINUSMA has, in turn, struggled to meet deployment targets. As of March 2015, almost two years since the mission was approved, around 78 percent of the authorized uniformed personnel have been deployed.<sup>50</sup> Deployment of civilian staff in the north has remained a challenge due to safety and security conditions, with only 10 percent based outside Bamako (in contrast to 90 percent of military personnel currently deployed in the north). Last but not least, training and equipment has been lacking. Most of MINUSMA troops were rehatted from the African-led mission and have yet to meet UN standards for equipment and

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<sup>44</sup> UNSC 2014a.

<sup>45</sup> Between June and mid-September, for example, armed groups launched 27 attacks against UN facilities and personnel, including 15 improvised explosive devices or mine episodes and 12 rocket or mortar fire incidents (UNSC 2014c). Attacks have intensified since September 2014 with 10 Chadian peacekeepers killed by roadside bombs, 9 Nigerien peacekeepers ambushed and killed in Menaka and a Senegalese peacekeeper dead after being reached by rocket fire in a joint UN-French military base in Kidal.

<sup>46</sup> Security Council Report, June 2014 Monthly Forecast, Mali, [http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/monthly-forecast/2014-06/mali\\_13.php?print=true](http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/monthly-forecast/2014-06/mali_13.php?print=true)

<sup>47</sup> Malian Foreign Minister Abdoulaye Diop, quoted in UNSC 7274<sup>th</sup> meeting, 8 October 2014, S/PV.7274.

<sup>48</sup> Koepf 2014; Leboeuf 2014; Boukhars 2013.

<sup>49</sup> Wulf and Mesko 2014.

<sup>50</sup> A total of 9,883 uniformed personnel (8,831 military personnel and 1052 police) out of an authorized force of 12,640 personnel have been deployed. As per the international civilian posts, 522 personnel out of 672 authorized are currently deployed (see <http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/missions/minusma/facts.shtml>, accessed March 21, 2015).

capability. These forces were given a four month period to adhere to UN standards, but no concrete steps were enforced.<sup>51</sup>

The deployment of a Dutch contingent of around 350 troops (including 96 from Special Operation forces who conduct patrols in areas not previously covered by MINUSMA), along with 3 attack and 4 transport helicopters, has provided further credence to MINUSMA, increasing its intelligence capabilities and overall mobility.<sup>52</sup> Three unarmed unmanned aerial systems (drones) have also been deployed to conduct surveillance duties.<sup>53</sup> While these reinforcements have enhanced MINUSMA's ability to conduct reconnaissance, intelligence and escort duties, there remain significant gaps in coverage for the vast northern territory. As a result, MINUSMA's capacity to act as an effective deterrence force is still in question. As Richard Gowan has argued, for a force of the size of MINUSMA, the UN would at least require 15-20 helicopters.<sup>54</sup>

The political dialogue between the north and Bamako has also met challenges and remains at a standstill. The deadline for the initiation of the political dialogue expired on November 8, 2013, and negotiations (between the government and six different armed groups) were not resumed until early July 2014.<sup>55</sup> At that juncture, a roadmap for the peace process was signed (thanks to the mediation of Algeria) calling for three rounds of negotiations starting in September.<sup>56</sup> The goal of the roadmap was to have a final agreement by the end of November. Clashes between armed groups and pro-government militias (resulting in six people killed) prior to the third round of negotiations fueled tensions however, and undermined the prospects of a peace agreement.<sup>57</sup> Ultimately, the negotiations broke off in November without an agreement, after rebel forces demanded greater autonomy than the government was willing to grant. Talks resumed in February 2015, following intense clashes between rebel groups and government forces, and a peace agreement was signed by the government on March 1. A coalition of rebel groups (including MNLA and the MAA) considered the agreement not to go far enough and has demanded more talks. Risks of inter-communal violence have been escalating in the past few months, and the government and armed groups continue to fight "for territory in the vacuum of a viable political road map."<sup>58</sup>

With respect to the criminal economy, data is not readily available in light of the chaotic environment and the absence of criminal records. Some data suggests that the activity of illicit networks has been disrupted owing to the drastic changes in operating conditions. These include the proliferation of armed groups (which makes deals for protection and passage more difficult and unpredictable), the presence of peacekeepers and other international forces (which have increased the level of surveillance and the risks associated with drug-trafficking), and the elimination of the state's complicity with the illicit economy.<sup>59</sup> Other observers, however, believe that the drug trade has not been affected and that smuggling continues

<sup>51</sup> What's in Blue, "Informal Interactive Dialogue on UN Mission in Mali's Mandate," November 10, 2014.

<sup>52</sup> See "Dutch contributions in Mali", at <http://www.defensie.nl/english/topics/mali/contents/dutch-contributions-in-mali> (accessed November 15, 2014).

<sup>53</sup> Washington has also provided non-lethal support (such as refueling capacity, intelligence, and logistic support) to both the French and MINUSMA (see Morgan Lorraine Roach and Brett D. Schaefer, "United Nations Peacekeeping Mission in Mali: Only after Stability is Restored," The Heritage Foundation Issue Brief 3850, February 12, 2013).

<sup>54</sup> Gowan, Richard. 2013. "Ireland, Mali and UN peacekeeping," ECFR Blog, 7 February 2013.

<sup>55</sup> These include three "hardliner" groups, namely MNLA, HCUA, MAA, and three moderates, including a branch of MAA, CPA, and CMFPR.

<sup>56</sup> Seemingly, Bamako requested Algeria to play a more active role in peace talks. Burkina Faso was believed to be more accommodating of rebel forces' positions.

<sup>57</sup> "Mali, rebels start third round of peace talks" *Reuters*, 20 November 2014.

<sup>58</sup> Hannah Armstrong, quoted in Javier Blas, "Growing Insecurity in Mali Tests France's Sahel Task force," *The Financial Times. Global Insight*, 27 November 2014.

<sup>59</sup> This latter point is raised by Briscoe 2014, citing a Kidal-based political source.

unabated. The report presented by the Secretary-General to the Security Council in June 2014 on the situation in Mali warned that trafficking and transnational organized crime remained “significant enablers of insecurity throughout the north.”<sup>60</sup> A report by The Global Initiative also noted that northern Mali has remained a key hub for illicit trafficking.<sup>61</sup> According to this report, both Serval and MINUSMA have had little impact upon illicit trafficking. While aerial surveillance presumably has prompted some tactical changes on the part of traffickers (such as avoiding the use of large convoys), “most of northern Mali is still wide open.”<sup>62</sup> Local elites, who used to cut deals with state officials, have managed to forge new arrangements with the different groups that control the area.<sup>63</sup>

## 5. Attendant Dilemmas

The conflict in Mali reveals a set of security tensions that collectively represent a critical challenge for intervention strategies. This section exposes three specific challenges facing UN peacekeeping operations at the political, structural and operational levels. These include the challenge of armed fragmentation in a context of transnational crime and jihadi extremism; the nexus of criminality and terrorism and its intertwinements with local conflict dynamics; and the operational challenges facing peacekeeping operations in asymmetric environments.

### 5.1 The Challenge of Political Engagement in Asymmetric Environments

Armed fragmentation presents exceptional challenges for potential interveners and peace negotiators; especially in situations where groups have become atomized and have little organizational structures for command and control.<sup>64</sup> In contexts of profound factionalism and fleeting alliances, mediators may find themselves talking to interlocutors who are not capable of making “realistic or coherent claims.”<sup>65</sup> Leaders will not be able to compel subordinates to support their commitment to peace negotiations (or even communicate their desire to engage in a peace process); and rebels will be more concerned with their own survival than with any other strategic consideration.<sup>66</sup> Who speaks for the rebels, who represents the real interests at stake and who is in a position to determine the destiny and demands of the group are critical questions that need to be addressed before engaging in peace negotiations. If this information is not available (or if these conditions are not clearly defined), “any external support for negotiations is likely to be ineffective, since it is unclear whom external powers should designate as legitimate negotiating partners.”<sup>67</sup>

Inter- and intra-ethnic rivalries are also salient challenges in peace negotiations in these contexts, given the way these affect the leader’s perceptions of political security and survival. Leaders within groups that are afflicted by rampant divisions, splits and have weak structures of command and control will be less likely to engage in a peace process when such engagement is believed to weaken their position within the organization or within their own ethnic group.<sup>68</sup> In other words, insecure

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<sup>60</sup> UNSC 2014a, para. 63. The December Secretary-General report observed that Malian transnational organized crime units remain largely ineffective due to lack of resources (UNSC 2014d).

<sup>61</sup> The Global Initiative 2014.

<sup>62</sup> Businessman in Timbuktu quoted in The Global Initiative 2014, 9.

<sup>63</sup> The Global Initiative 2014, citing local interlocutors.

<sup>64</sup> See, for example, King 1997 and Doyle 2002.

<sup>65</sup> Louise Arbour, “Open Letter to the UN Security Council on Mali.” Crisis Group, Brussels, 3 June 2014.

<sup>66</sup> King 1997.

<sup>67</sup> King 1997, 66.

<sup>68</sup> See Nordlinger 1972; King 1997.

leaders, whose position within the group is challenged by other officials or by potential splits, will be far more reluctant than secure leaders to take serious risks and engage in conflict resolution.<sup>69</sup> The challenge in crafting an effective intervention strategy in these environments is to properly account for the dynamics at the group or tribal level and to fully comprehend the system of local incentives at the intra- and inter-ethnic levels; a common challenge for external interveners (who generally focus on conflict dynamics at the macro level).

Armed fragmentation becomes more challenging in scenarios where groups may be associated with transnational criminal networks (some of which may also have ties to terrorist organizations). Generally speaking, the goals of criminal and terrorist networks are different from those of rebel groups who challenge the state in the pursuit of territorial, political and/or economic resources. Criminal networks, for example, while interested in undermining state authority, are usually disinclined to directly confront the state, as they fear that such action will disrupt their businesses. Jihadi extremists are also largely not concerned with power but with the establishment of safe havens for training, planning and the organization of activities for global jihad.<sup>70</sup> This said, these distinctions become less relevant in recent conflicts, especially in failed and dysfunctional states.<sup>71</sup> Criminal networks, may, for example, benefit from the war economy; see little interest in peace negotiations that would undermine their business operations and opportunities;<sup>72</sup> and, in turn, act as spoilers to peace processes. Terrorist groups, for their part, may become interested in either controlling part of the territory as a way to project power (as in the case of ISIS in Syria and Iraq, and jihadi groups in Mali) or perpetuating the state of war as a means to freely conduct their recruiting and training activities without obstruction from a central authority.

Engaging with non-state armed actors in these contexts can be an arduous exercise, given the difficulties in identifying the different groups' real motives and singling out "more politically oriented or more criminally dominated groups from the complex web of localized violence."<sup>73</sup> This raises important questions about the issue of engagement with non-state armed actors: What groups are legitimate and need to be included in the peace process? What strategies/criteria do you use to include and engage outlawed, criminal, and/or extremist groups? Do you engage diplomatically or use force to defeat them? How do you engage with criminal networks without being perceived as offering them "undue recognition as legitimate political actors"?<sup>74</sup>

Current practice suggests that interveners should engage with those actors who are interested in finding a political settlement to the conflict, are regarded as legitimate representatives of the interests of a community with stakes in the conflict, and have the capacity to deliver a peace agreement or other negotiated peace arrangements (engagement with radical, fragmented groups with whom finding a common ground may be impossible is thus not advisable).<sup>75</sup> In the Malian scenario, many believe that engagement with drug traffickers and other organizations engaged in illegal activities is inevitable if efforts to undermine jihadist extremists are to be successful.<sup>76</sup> This

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<sup>69</sup> Nordlinger 1972. The opposite may also hold true, namely a situation in which leaders in favor of continuing the fight behave moderately, fearing further splits within their party.

<sup>70</sup> Often times, terrorist groups' strategies pit them against the government, but not always. See for example al-Qaeda in 2001, Mali during the administration of ATT or cases where the state is too fragile to be able to control the whole territory.

<sup>71</sup> Stepanova 2012.

<sup>72</sup> Dudouet 2010; see also Artiñano et al. 2014. That said, criminal networks may benefit from some form of stability so that they can conduct their business in a relatively peaceful environment.

<sup>73</sup> Stepanova 2012, 42; see also Artiñano et al. 2014.

<sup>74</sup> Dudouet 2010.

<sup>75</sup> Dudouet 2010.

<sup>76</sup> Lacher 2012.

seems to be the strategy followed by international mediators in Mali. As a UN official observed, the international community has convened a political process with those who renounce terrorism. “Some of the groups at the table have links with extremist groups, but the international community has turned a blind eye for the sake of a political solution. At least the groups involved seem to have an interest in reaching an agreement and having a conversation. ... What to do with terrorist organizations remains a challenge.”<sup>77</sup>

While criteria to define armed groups ripe for political engagement can be useful in determining when it is desirable to engage in mediation, dealing with hard-core, radical organizations remains a dilemma (existing national and international rules of engagement with terrorist groups, which urge states to take criminal action against terrorist organizations, pose additional limitations).<sup>78</sup> Interveners have generally used coercive methods to deal with these groups, including the use of force, sanctions, law enforcement, containment and control (through police and intelligence), isolation or exclusion. Other less coercive methods have also been used such as enforcing splits so that moderate forces can be integrated into the political space (as demonstrated in the Mali example).<sup>79</sup> Success based on the use of exclusively coercive methods, especially the use of force, has proven elusive however.<sup>80</sup> Some of the risks associated with these strategies include the emergence of more radical splinter groups or pushing radical organizations into neighboring countries to regroup and launch new.

Humanitarian actors have developed alternative approaches to deal with local extremist groups aimed at securing humanitarian access to populations in need, but such goal-oriented arrangements risk providing radical groups with time to rearm, reorganize, and redeploy.<sup>81</sup> Furthermore, information about these dealings is scant, precluding a framework of lessons learned.<sup>82</sup> The US experience with the Taliban has also offered some lessons (even if engagement has so far resulted in failure), including the need to establish principles for talks and reciprocal confidence building measures (such as local cease-fires, de-escalation of hostilities, release of insurgents, etc.).<sup>83</sup> Further research and support is however needed in order to understand how to promote dialogue and engage with local insurgent groups “at different levels, in different places, at different times and for different purposes,”<sup>84</sup> and understand what specific leadership role the UN and other international and/or regional actors can effectively play in these situations. Without this support, conflict resolution efforts and peace negotiations in complex, fragmented and asymmetric environments will be inconsistent, hazardous, and doomed to fail.

## *5.2 Structural Challenges: The Nexus of Organized Crime and Extremist Groups*

In 2010, the Security Council identified transnational organized crime, drug trafficking, and the financing of terrorism, as threats to international peace and security and asked the Secretary-General to consider these threats in conflict prevention strategies, conflict analysis, integrated mission

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<sup>77</sup> Personal interview with UN official, New York, October 24, 2014.

<sup>78</sup> See for example UNSC 2001; Briscoe 2013; Podder 2012; Jackson 2012.

<sup>79</sup> See Claudia Hofmann and Ulrich Schneckener 2011 for a description of strategies available to mediators.

<sup>80</sup> See for example, Fiona Blyth, “Is the French Military the Best Counterterrorism Response in Mali?” The Global Observatory, International Peace Institute, May 13, 2013

<sup>81</sup> Briscoe 2013. See also Jackson and Aynte 2013.

<sup>82</sup> Jackson 2012.

<sup>83</sup> See Grossman 2013. Each measure, however, requires close monitoring and reciprocity and careful control to manage spoilers on all sides (Waldman 2010).

<sup>84</sup> Jackson 2012.

assessment and planning, and to report on “the role played by these threats in different situations.”<sup>85</sup> Yet, the analysis of this type of threats has not been integrated into mission assessments and planning for the most part,<sup>86</sup> and, with few exceptions, peacekeeping and peace operations have been given limited responsibilities in the area of transnational crime and/or on the relationships between organized crime and terrorist networks (one of the key structural sources of instability and violence in current conflicts). Indeed, with some exceptions, police operations in UN missions have been mostly focused on community policing and “building and reforming police, justice, and correction institutions in the host country,”<sup>87</sup> rather than providing operational support to the host state in the fight against organized crime and other transnational networks. While some missions have been mandated with tasks in the fight against illicit networks, Walter Kemp et al. have identified a glaring lack of strategic and operational guidance, “either from member states or from [UN] headquarters.”<sup>88</sup>

Furthermore, a purely technical law enforcement approach is unlikely to promote the kind of framework that will provide interveners with the tools to fully grasp the deep structural interconnections between criminal networks, terrorist activities, and conflict dynamics (and the degree to which the problem is entrenched in the political and governance structures and at the societal level). Information and intelligence-gathering is thus critical to understand the scope of the problem and the degree to which criminal activities may interfere with conflict dynamics at the local, national and regional levels. Mechanisms of information gathering and strategic analysis should thus be an integral part of missions, especially during the early stages of intervention (even if it is merely setting up proper info-gathering instruments and mechanisms to collect primary source materials<sup>89</sup>) and also during the lifespan of a mission to monitor the ever-changing nature of political, criminal and military alliances. These efforts need to be coupled with a careful assessment of the resources that peace operations may (or many not) bring in order to address the links between transnational threats and local conflict dynamics.<sup>90</sup> Emphasis needs also to be placed on how activities aimed at addressing terrorism may hinder efforts on stopping organized crime.<sup>91</sup>

Some have also suggested avoiding a military response under any circumstance (for fears of reinforcing the association between criminal networks and terrorist organizations) and using a carrot and stick strategy. This strategy would consist of targeting the most disruptive actors, based on their connections to terrorist organizations, and offer a “way out” or a financial amnesty to the

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<sup>85</sup> UNSC 2010. In response, the Secretary-General created the UN Task Force on Transnational Organized Crime and Drug Trafficking, co-chaired by the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and the Department of Political Affairs (DPA) and with the participation of other department and entities, including DPKO. The Task Force has yet to demonstrate its added value for field missions (Kemp et al. 2013). UNODC, for its part, has developed some analytics on the relationships between crime and instability but its programming is largely focused on law enforcement capacity-building, legislative drafting and drug control (Cockayne 2011).

<sup>86</sup> Some UN peacekeeping operations have started to include cross-border crime analysis into mission planning but it is unclear the degree to which this practice is widespread and systematic, and the way in which it has impacted the mandate. Some recent UN institutional innovations could change this situation moving forward. The Global Focal Point for Police, Justice and Corrections, a new entity co-chaired by DPKO and UNDP, aims to integrate resources in the area of police, justice and corrections from different UN departments, offices and agencies. It is however too early to fully grasp the potential of this arrangement (see Durch et al. 2014).

<sup>87</sup> Kemp et al 2013. UNODC, for example, is currently supporting criminal justice systems in the Sahel to fight illicit trafficking, organized crime and terrorism (see “Sahel region countries agree to cooperate in response to illicit trafficking, organized crime and terrorism”, UNODC, 19 June 2013 (<http://www.unodc.org>)).

<sup>88</sup> Kemp et al 2013, 7.

<sup>89</sup> Boutellis 2013.

<sup>90</sup> Cockayne and Kavanagh 2011.

<sup>91</sup> Sanderson 2004.

less disruptive elements of the criminal economy.<sup>92</sup> The challenge, however, is to ensure that peace negotiations, and any peace agreement resulting from them, do not strengthen the power and operational capacity of criminal groups (especially those with ties to terrorist organizations).<sup>93</sup> Viable alternatives for those willing to exit the illegal trade must be made available. Learning about who profits directly from illicit activities and what is the relationship between them and the state and other armed and terrorist groups seems particularly critical in crafting these strategies.

Ultimately, the nexus of organized crime and terrorism can only be eliminated through a holistic strategy that also involves: enhanced regional cooperation,<sup>94</sup> development, tackling the incentive structures that promote associations between rebel forces and criminal networks, strengthening of the rule of law and criminal justice, and strong and resolute policy from the central government to fight corruption within its own ranks. Closer coordination between peacekeeping missions and UN country teams thus seems essential in these contexts.

### *5.3 Operational Challenges facing Peacekeeping in Asymmetric Environments*

In the fall of 2014, John Bosco Kazura, MINUSMA's Force Commander, contended that MINUSMA "is in a terrorist-fighting situation without an anti-terrorist mandate and with no adequate training, equipment, logistics, and intelligence to deal with that situation."<sup>95</sup> This highlights the unresolved gap in peacekeeping practice between means and goals and the challenges this gap poses for contemporary peacekeeping operations in increasingly complex and hazardous conflict situations.

Terrorist-fighting environments are characterized by the employment of new war tactics; including suicide bombers, improvised explosive devices, and kidnapping, which have defied any linearity in the conduct of war. In this milieu, anything can happen at any time, and armed forces have to "be able to apply force from the maximum to the minimum, and to switch between levels within seconds."<sup>96</sup> The line between different armed groups and forms of armed violence remains blurred.<sup>97</sup> Criminal networks and terrorist organizations also challenge the classic model of peacekeeping, because criminals often operate transnationally and peace operations are generally mandated to operate within a national context. This poses enormous operational challenges and can generate unintended consequences beyond the conflict's national borders.<sup>98</sup> As the UN envoy to the Sahel Hiroute Guebre Sellassie recently stated, "if the situation in Libya is not quickly brought under control, many states in the region could be destabilized in the near future", expressing special concern about the allegations that ISIS had set up training camps in the Libyan desert.<sup>99</sup> In these scenarios, the challenges peacekeeping missions face include how to conduct strategic and offensive

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<sup>92</sup> Pellerin 2014.

<sup>93</sup> Lacher 2012.

<sup>94</sup> There are various regional initiatives aimed at combatting illicit trafficking and organized crime, including the United Nations Office for West Africa's West Africa Coast Initiative (Mali, however, is not part of the initiative). On counter-terrorism, Algeria has led various initiatives, including CEMOC (Comite d'etat-major operationnel conjoint) based in Southern Algeria, and the UFL (Unite de Fusion et de liaison) based in Algiers. These organizations, however, have become "empty shells" given the lack of trust among its members (Daemers 2014). The African Union has sought to promote and enlarge intel-sharing to combat terrorism and illegal trafficking in the region within the Nouakchott Process, a framework for regional security cooperation created in March 2013.

<sup>95</sup> John Bosco Kazura, quoted in United Nations Security Council, 7275th meeting, 9 October 2014, S/PV.7275.

<sup>96</sup> Friesendorf 2012, 59.

<sup>97</sup> Krause and Miliken 2010, 216; see also Stepanova 2012.

<sup>98</sup> Hansen 2014.

<sup>99</sup> Hiroute Guebre Sellassie, Security Council briefing on the situation in the Sahel, 11 December 2014, <http://www.un.org/wcm/content/site/undpa/main/about/speeches/pid/25611> (accessed 16 December, 2014).

tasks (in other words, how to confront the terrorist threat with existing resources), how to do force protection even if the mission is not in the business of confronting terrorist organizations, and how to avoid regional spill-overs while operating on a nation-centric basis. For operations of this type, timely, accurate and relevant intelligence is critical at the operational and tactical levels.<sup>100</sup>

Despite limited resources, peacekeeping missions have demonstrated a fair degree of adaptability and flexibility in these environments. In the Malian context, the lack of equipment and resources has prompted MINUSMA to partner with donors who are in a position to provide necessary equipment (the US, for example, has provided 150 armored personnel carrier vehicles). It has also promoted the setup of a trust fund (currently holding 45 million dollars), to support equipment and training for MINUSMA troops (much of these funds are being used to provide counter IED-equipment and training in order to be able to operate more safely in a context of asymmetric threats).<sup>101</sup> The most forward-looking innovation, however, has involved the creation of the All Source Information Fusion Unit (ASIFU), an operational and tactical military intelligence unit, and the first of its kind.<sup>102</sup> ASIFU is designed to collect, analyze and provide integrated “timely, relevant and actionable” intelligence with collection units stationed in Timbuktu and Gao.<sup>103</sup> While the experiment is still in its earliest stages,<sup>104</sup> it enhances the speed of the response. “If something happens in the north,” a UN official observed, “we have a helicopter that can do reconnaissance of the situation and we can have troops deployed shortly after rather than days after. ... The ultimate goal is to be able to anticipate terrorist attacks or threats against civilians but this is very challenging given the size of the area and the nature of those threats. It’s a long-term process.”<sup>105</sup>

It remains to be seen how ASIFU will address critical strategic and operational challenges on the ground, including: a military peacekeeping force that consists of units from Troop Contributing Countries that are not familiar or trained in conducting intelligence-led operations (most European deployments will be located in Headquarters);<sup>106</sup> limited operability in areas north of Gao and Timbuktu;<sup>107</sup> lack of adequate mobility capabilities (despite the Dutch contributions); ongoing terrorist attacks on UN personnel and facilities; an intel-sharing culture based on distrust; and additional challenges associated with peacekeeping doctrine, culture and practice.<sup>108</sup> The use of other technology, such as drones, also faces significant operational hurdles such as how to obtain

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<sup>100</sup> Goransson 2014.

<sup>101</sup> Personal interview with UN official, New York, 25 October 2014.

<sup>102</sup> ASIFU is different from the Joint Mission Analysis Cells (JMAC), introduced as a small operational information analysis hub in peacekeeping operations in 2005 with no mandate to collect first-hand intelligence. JMAC are instead intended to provide the civilian leadership with “an integrated operational monitoring, reporting and information analysis hub at Mission Headquarters to support the more effective mission-wide situational awareness, security information and analysis for management decision-making” (Shetler-Jones 2008, 517). These cells, however, face various challenges, including lack of resources, lack of civil-military integration due to cultural differences, and lack of understanding of their functions (Goransson 2014).

<sup>103</sup> United Nations Mission Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission Mali (MINUSMA), “*Statement of Unit Requirement for All Source Information Fusion Unit*”, New York: United Nations (confidential), quoted from Goransson 2014. ASIFU was made possible thanks to the contributions by the Dutch, Swedes and Norwegian contingents in response to DPKO’s Under-Secretary Ladsous call for an intelligence unit in MINUSMA.

<sup>104</sup> The Dutch have already deployed in Bamako and Gao and the Swedes will be deployed in Timbuktu. As of November 2014, there was no ASIFU presence in Kidal, which remains the most unstable and insecure area. It remains to be seen how and when further expansion in the north is possible.

<sup>105</sup> Personal interview with UN official, New York, 24 October 2014.

<sup>106</sup> Goransson 2014.

<sup>107</sup> Most troops cannot be deployed in the most dangerous northern areas given the restrictions imposed by TTCs (What’s in blue, cited in ft. 51).

<sup>108</sup> See Goransson 2014 for an overview of the challenges associated with peacekeeping doctrine.

consent from the relevant parties to a conflict (including neighboring countries who may feel uneasy about the use of surveillance mechanisms in their borders), and questions related to who interprets, consumes, and transforms the data.<sup>109</sup> All of these issues will require fresh thinking and further guidance on how to operate in such complex and deadly environments.<sup>110</sup>

The deployment of peacekeeping operations in complex environments, where there is no peace to keep, has sparked an intense debate among scholars, diplomats, policy makers, and UN officials about the future of peace operations (in the summer of 2014, for example, the Secretary-General announced a new strategic review on peace operations and a High Level Independent Panel was established in October). Some regret that the UN is progressively abandoning the principles of peacekeeping (especially the ability to act as an impartial mediator and the use of minimum force). They warn that “the UN is being given tasks it has not been designed for ... [which in the long term] will have grave consequences, undermining the general acceptance of UN peacekeeping operations as a tool to help states emerging from conflict.”<sup>111</sup> For this group, peacekeeping forces should be limited to protecting civilians in immediate danger or tackling small problems, for a limited duration of time. Others have called for bridging the gap between principles and practice. A UN official, for example, argued, “our focus needs to be the political process and its challenges, not counterterrorism. ... But that doesn’t mean we don’t have to deal with it because it can disrupt and threaten the political process. ... In the Malian context, this really brings up to push the envelope.”<sup>112</sup>

An informal brainstorming session on MINUSMA’s changing security situation was held (off the record) with Council members on November 10, 2014, with the discussion focused on the need for a more robust mandate and the potential for the establishment of an intervention brigade (similar to the one in Congo) to dismantle terrorist and criminal networks in the north.<sup>113</sup> Some UN African countries (including neighboring countries such as Niger, interested in containing and eliminating the terrorist threat) have favored the latter option, but Council members remain divided between those in favor of pushing the envelope and those who regard peacekeeping as merely a political instrument intended to support a peace process. Russia and China, for example, have expressed reservations about recent peace enforcement mandates. During the discussion surrounding the adoption of MINUSMA’s mandate, Russia warned that the resolution and the establishment of the Force Intervention Brigade in Congo marked a growing shift towards the military aspects of UN peacekeeping. As Russia’s Permanent Representative to the United Nations observed, “What was once the exception now threatens to become unacknowledged standard practice, with unpredictable and unclear consequences for the security of United Nations personnel and their international legal status.”<sup>114</sup> The Secretariat has also expressed certain reservations given the operational challenges facing peacekeeping missions in asymmetric scenarios; including the changing nature of security threats, the absence of state authority, and difficulties associated with

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<sup>109</sup> Major General Patrick Cammaert, interviewed by Bianca Selway in “New Threats in Africa Mean New Questions for UN Peacekeeping,” *The Global Observatory*, 16 December 2013.

<sup>110</sup> The report of the Expert Panel on Technology and Innovation in UN peacekeeping, released in December 2014, represents the first step in addressing these issues (see United Nations 2014)

<sup>111</sup> Karlsrud 2015, 50.

<sup>112</sup> Personal interview with UN official, New York, 24 October 2014.

<sup>113</sup> What’s in Blue, cited in ft. 51. The Force Intervention Brigade (FIB), authorized in March 2013 within the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUSCO), was envisioned as a “robust, highly mobile and versatile” force tasked with the responsibility to neutralize armed groups, reduce the threat posed by these organizations in relation to state authority and civilian security (UNSC 2013c).

<sup>114</sup> United Nations Security Council, Meeting 6952th, 25 April 2013, S/PV.6952, p.2.

the location of forces that are properly equipped and have experience contending with asymmetric threat environments.<sup>115</sup>

Against the backdrop of the High Independent Level Panel, some of the critical operational and doctrine-related questions that will need to be addressed include: Should the UN develop new principles and doctrine to inform peacekeeping practice or should peacekeeping initiatives be separated from war-fighting contexts and deployed only when there is a peace to keep? If the UN is to engage in these scenarios, what can (and cannot) peacekeeping operations do? How can politics in the Security Council be overcome to use peacekeeping forces more effectively? If peacekeeping is not war-fighting, who will address the transnational security challenges of current conflicts? How the UN decides to resolve these tensions and dilemmas will be critical in determining the future status and form of peace operations.

## 6. Responding to Attendant Dilemmas

This section introduces some proposals aimed at addressing the challenges identified in the previous section. The overall goal is to strengthen comprehensive, institutional responses by the UN and other international actors when faced with complex internal conflicts where armed fragmentation, ties to transnational criminal networks, and asymmetric warfare pose insurmountable challenges for intervention.

**Proposal 1:** Develop new doctrinal principles and guidelines for peacekeeping missions operating in unstabilized environments. More specifically:

- Define the criteria under which ad-hoc forces or peacekeeping operations may be used to “neutralize” or “deter” transnational armed groups that are considered to be illegitimate.
- Develop operational and tactical guidelines on how to confront asymmetric threats with existing resources and how to do force protection even if the mission is not mandated to engage directly with armed groups.
- Provide operational guidelines in the use of versatile force to match diverse threats and levels of violence.
- Develop standards and guidelines on the collection, collation, analysis, and use of intelligence.

**Proposal 2:** Create an Information and Strategic Analysis Center (along the lines suggested in the Brahimi report) with the following mandate: Keeping integrated records on various peace and security issues (including on transnational security threats); generating lessons learned on, for example, effective responses to transnational threats in different intervention contexts by UN and other international and regional actors; producing policy analyses on issues such as the local drivers of radicalization and extremism;<sup>116</sup> formulating short- to long-term strategies; distributing the knowledge within the United Nations and to international and regional partners; bringing relevant transnational issues to the attention of the Security Council.

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<sup>115</sup> What’s in Blue, cited in ft. 51.

<sup>116</sup> UNDP and the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate have, for example, jointly launched a study to assess the perceptions of communities living in border areas in the Sahel on the drivers of radicalization, insecurity and violent extremism (see Special Envoy Hiroute Guebre Sellassie, Security Council briefing on the situation in the Sahel, 11 December 2014).

**Proposal 3:** Review and strengthen mechanisms for information sharing and coordination at headquarters and on the ground between different actors that hold relevant information on transnational threats (including member states, Troop Contributing Countries, Police Contributing Countries, neighboring countries, regional organizations, and different UN entities with information and policy responsibilities relating to transnational crime and terrorism, including UNODC, UNODC and DPA's task force, DPKO's situation center, JMACs, etc.).<sup>117</sup>

**Proposal 4:** Include expertise on transnational threats within the existing standing capacities so that field missions can have access to rapidly mobilized resources in constantly evolving and changing environments. Also increase expertise on organized crime and terrorism (and the links between the two) both at Headquarters and in field missions operating in complex, asymmetric environments. Experts should be versed on the various political, structural/technical and operational challenges associated with these threats.

**Proposal 5:** Include regional and border responsibilities in peacekeeping mandates, especially in situations that require responses that go beyond the "nation-centric" peacekeeping model.<sup>118</sup> The goal is to remove operational limitations in the fight against transnational asymmetric threats and avoid conflict spill-over across boundaries. Additionally, focus energetically on reviving, strengthening, and maximizing the use of regional initiatives and resources involved in combatting organized crime and terrorism.

**Proposal 6:** Establish an expert group with a mandate to strengthen UN's good offices in asymmetric environments and in the context of transnational security threats. The expert group should provide lessons learned; benchmarks for the identification of potential partners; and resources required for successful political engagement at different levels and for different purposes.

### **Box 2: Policy Implications**

New doctrinal principles and operational guidelines need to be developed for peacekeeping missions operating in unstabilized and asymmetric environments.

The nexus of transnational crime and terrorism in current conflicts requires peacekeeping to engage in responses that go beyond the nation-centric model.

UN standing capacities need to be strengthened with expertise on transnational threats so that field missions can have access to rapidly mobilized resources in constantly evolving environments.

The UN should create an Information and Strategic analysis center with a mandate to keep integrated records on transnational threats; generate lessons learned; formulate short- to long-term strategies; and bring relevant issues to the attention of the Security Council.

Mechanisms for information sharing at UN headquarters and on the ground between intervening actors need to be strengthened.

<sup>117</sup> Cockayne 2009.

<sup>118</sup> This may require a debate within the Security Council about the nature and type of these responsibilities and whether peacekeeping operations are ripe for undertaking such responsibilities.

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