

A white military helicopter, likely a UH-60 Black Hawk, is parked on a tarmac. The sun is setting in the background, creating a dramatic orange and yellow glow. Several people in high-visibility vests are standing near the helicopter and a white pickup truck in the distance. The helicopter's rotors are visible, and the overall scene is set against a cloudy sky.

PROTECTING CIVILIANS IN MALI:

Why Air Assets Matter
for MINUSMA

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*COVER : An Mi-8 utility helicopter stands ready to fly
a MINUSMA delegation to Aguelhok, Kidal region.*

MINUSMA/Marco Dormino

ORGANIZATIONAL MISSION AND VISION

Center for Civilians in Conflict (CIVIC) is an international organization dedicated to promoting the protection of civilians caught in conflict. CIVIC's mission is to work with armed actors and civilians in conflict to develop and implement solutions to prevent, mitigate, and respond to civilian harm. Our vision is a world where parties to armed conflict recognize the dignity and rights of civilians, prevent civilian harm, protect civilians caught in conflict, and amend harm.

CIVIC was established in 2003 by Marla Ruzicka, a young American activist and humanitarian who advocated on behalf of civilian war victims and their families in Iraq and Afghanistan. Building on her extraordinary legacy, CIVIC now operates in conflict zones throughout the Middle East, Africa, Europe, and South Asia to advance a higher standard of protection for civilians.

At CIVIC, we believe that parties to armed conflict have a responsibility to prevent and address civilian harm. To accomplish this, we assess the causes of civilian harm in particular conflicts, craft practical solutions to address that harm, and advocate for the adoption of new policies and practices that lead to the improved well-being of civilians caught in conflict. Recognizing the power of collaboration, we engage with civilians, governments, militaries, and international and regional institutions to identify and institutionalize strengthened protections for civilians in conflict.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Seán Smith, CIVIC's Mali-based Peacekeeping Researcher, authored this report. The research was primarily conducted by Smith, with support from research consultant Samba Cisse in Mopti region. It was reviewed by: Alison Giffen, Peacekeeping Director; Lauren Spink, Senior Peacekeeping Researcher; Shannon Green, Senior Director of Programs; and Marc Linning, Senior Protection Advisor. In addition, several MINUSMA officials and subject matter experts, including some from UN headquarters, provided valuable feedback on a draft of the report. Elena Abbott copyedited the report and John Rebaud & Audrey Tchakirian designed it.

CIVIC remains grateful to the many committed humanitarian actors and MINUSMA officials who continue to engage in discussions with CIVIC on how to improve the protection of civilians in the complex operating environment of Mali.

We are also deeply grateful to the Malian civilians and civil society leaders who spoke to CIVIC during the research. They have borne the brunt of the violence in Mali and they are the stakeholders who stand to gain or lose the most from decisions concerning MINUSMA's capabilities and deployments.

We would also like to thank the Kingdom of the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs Department of Stabilization and Humanitarian Aid for supporting CIVIC's Peacekeeping Program and for making it possible to produce this research and report.

ACRONYMS

APV: Armored Protected Vehicle

CASEVAC: Casualty Evacuation

COVID-19: Coronavirus Disease 2019

FAMa: Armed Forces of Mali

IED: Improvised Explosive Device

ISR: Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance

MINUSMA: United Nations' Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali

POC: Protection of Civilians

QRF: Quick Reaction Force

RPA: Remotely piloted aircraft

TAG: Terrorist Armed Group

TCC: Troop Contributing Country

UN: United Nations

UNMAS: United Nations Mine Action Service

UNPOL: United Nations Police

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Organizational Mission and Vision	i
Acknowledgments	i
Acronyms	ii
Executive Summary	1
Recommendations	3
Methodology	4
Increasing Threats, an Expanded Mandate, and the Need to Reconfigure	5
The Value of Air Assets	8
Saving Lives Through Casualty Evacuation (CASEVAC)	10
Military Utility Helicopters Facilitate	
MINUSMA's Engagement with Communities	12
Situational Awareness and Early Warning	16
Strain on Resources Results in Trade-offs Between Protection Activities	20
Challenges to Force Generation	23
A Way Forward	25



Salvadorian Armed Helicopter Unit Serving with MINUSMA UN Photo/Sylvain Liechti

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

“If you want outcomes, you have to invest. Since the beginning of the Mission, we have never received what we have asked for.”¹

In many modern peacekeeping contexts, missions struggle to implement their mandates without adequate air assets. The need for air assets is particularly pronounced in Mali because of the country’s size, the frequent use of improvised explosive devices on key transport routes, the high propensity for flooding, and the scarcity of decent roads. Yet the United Nations’ Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) does not have the necessary military helicopters and intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) aircraft to achieve its objectives, which include the increasingly important task of protecting civilians.

Air assets are essential for a wide array of tasks, many of which are directly related to MINUSMA’s mandate to protect civilians. For example, helicopters equipped with medical units routinely evacuate wounded civilians and peacekeepers to the nearest medical facility. In addition, military utility helicopters can facilitate the rapid deployment of ground troops to respond to early warnings. Air assets also ensure that Mission personnel can engage with communities to better understand people’s needs and concerns, and they help carry out activities that promote social cohesion and reduce violence. ISR capabilities are critical force multipliers in providing situational awareness and early warning of threats to civilians.

MINUSMA has lacked military air assets for a number of years, but security developments since 2015 have aggravated this resource deficit. Three trends have posed significant challenges to the Mission in the last few years. First, the country’s central region of Mopti—an area that had been relatively stable and previously hosted a small presence of Mission personnel and—has become the most violence-afflicted region in Mali.² Second, intercommunal violence is now a much more prominent feature of Mali’s security environment. Third, civilians have increasingly become the primary targets and victims of attacks.

“If you want outcomes, you have to invest. Since the beginning of the Mission, we have never received what we have asked for.”

— MINUSMA civilian official interviewed in Bamako

When first deployed in 2013, MINUSMA was mandated and designed to support the brokering and implementation of a peace agreement among parties in northern Mali. In June 2019, the UN Security Council sought to address the evolving conflict dynamics by adding a second strategic priority to MINUSMA’s mandate. This new strategic priority called on the Mission to help the Malian authorities protect civilians and reduce intercommunal violence in the center of the country. In addition, protection of civilians (POC) was elevated among the Mission’s list of priority tasks.³ The mandate’s increased prioritization of the protection of civilians is a welcome and overdue development, but it has to be matched with sufficient resources for the Mission to have any chance of succeeding.

The expansion of MINUSMA’s strategic priorities—both thematically and geographically—requires immediate action by Member States, the UN Secretary-General, and the UN Secretariat to fill pre-existing capability

1 CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #59, Bamako, October 2019.

2 This metric includes the number of violent incidents and number of people killed. ACLED Data Export Tool, February 2020, <https://www.acleddata.com/data/>

3 Alison Giffen and Seán Smith, “What Does MINUSMA’s Revised Mandate Mean for the Protection of Civilians in Mali? Part 1: Prioritizing Protection,” Center for Civilians in Conflict (blog), July 26, 2019, <https://civiliansinconflict.org/blog/minusma-revised-mandate-poc-mali/>.

gaps and respond to new requirements. Despite the attempts to reconfigure the Mission's footprint and put more resources into Mopti, MINUSMA does not yet have any military air assets permanently based in the central region.

This report includes several studies highlighting the critical value of air assets for MINUSMA's ability to protect civilians in Mali. It also outlines how the lack of military helicopters and ISR platforms based in central Mali is compelling MINUSMA to draw air assets from the north to fulfil its expanded mandate—an action that risks leaving the Mission exposed in key areas. When the requested aircraft are already required in their customary operational zones, MINUSMA's capacity to identify, deter, and respond to potential threats to civilians in Mopti is extremely limited. This report also details why civilian helicopters are not always a viable alternative to military helicopters in the Malian security context.

To address emerging challenges and enhance the Mission's ability to implement its expanded mandate, MINUSMA has developed a Mission-wide Adaptation Plan. The Plan does not entail any changes to MINUSMA's ceiling of 13,289 military and 1,920 police personnel, which was authorized in the 2019 mandate renewal.⁴ But the Adaptation Plan does require the deployment of additional attack and utility helicopters and ISR assets to enhance the Mission's ability to protect civilians. MINUSMA included the new costs associated with these additional capabilities in its budget request for the upcoming fiscal year, July 1, 2020–June 30, 2021.⁵

While the Mission and the UN Security Council have taken notable steps to address the elevated threat to civilians in central Mali, Member States have yet to commit or deploy sufficient air assets. The UN Department of Peace Operations had planned to hold a Force Generation Conference in April 2020 to mobilize Member States to contribute much-needed air assets to MINUSMA, but the conference has been postponed due to the coronavirus pandemic.⁶ If the

Force Generation conference is further postponed or canceled, the UN Secretary-General and Member States will need to find an alternative way to secure the required assets and troops and to develop a contingency plan for addressing ongoing gaps.

Unfortunately, there are many other long-standing challenges to generating military air assets from troop contributing countries (TCCs). This report discusses how potential contributors have to weigh the deployment of scarce assets to MINUSMA against other domestic and international security priorities, as well as the financial costs involved in deployment and concerns about the safety and security of their personnel. Member States have developed some creative solutions, such as security assistance partnerships that help to build the capabilities of TCCs who are willing to deploy but need additional training or equipment. However, more partnerships are needed.

The Malian government also has an important part to play in enabling MINUSMA to deploy and use additional air assets for the protection of civilians. MINUSMA needs the Malian government to allocate land so that it can construct airstrips, hangars, and accommodation for the personnel that accompany air assets. The UN has already been negotiating with the Malian government to acquire additional land in Mopti, but the need for land will only increase as the Mission seeks to put more personnel and air assets in central Mali.⁷

Finally, this report analyzes an example of the Mission's air assets being critically overstretched to accommodate a last-minute request by the Malian government. This overburdening resulted in a POC-focused operation being suspended and peacekeepers being left in the field without Casualty Evacuation (CASEVAC) coverage for 12 hours. This case study reveals that the Mission does not always have enough helicopters to carry out protection-related tasks simultaneously. It also underlines the importance of the Malian authorities submitting requests for assistance from MINUSMA in a timely manner.

4 *United Nations Security Council Resolution 2480 (2019)*, June 28, 2019, UN SC Doc. S/RES/2480, para. 21.

5 Email correspondence with UN Secretariat civilian official, #47, April 2020.

6 This report was finalized and published during the COVID-19 virus outbreak. Like the Force Generation Conference, other future events referenced in this report may be affected by the pandemic.

7 CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #76, Sévaré, November 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #1, Bamako, January 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #12, Bamako, February 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA police official, #16, Sévaré, February 2020.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To UN Member States (excluding the Government of Mali, which is addressed separately):

- In line with the current trend of increasing violence against civilians, continue to ensure that the protection of civilians is prioritized in the text and the implementation of MINUSMA's mandate.
- Contribute the required air assets to MINUSMA to help close the gap between identified needs and capabilities.
- Invest political capital to urge governments with the required air assets to contribute to the Mission.
- Enable Member States to contribute to MINUSMA by providing security assistance in the form of training, equipment, and maintenance.
- Support MINUSMA's budget requests for resources that may be required to enable the deployment of requested air assets, as well as their safe and effective use.
- Use diplomatic channels to encourage the Government of Mali to accelerate the allocation of additional land to MINUSMA so that the Mission can deploy resources to areas where threats to civilians are greatest.
- Regularly call on the Secretary-General to provide frequent updates on progress and challenges associated with generating and deploying air assets.

To the UN Secretariat:

- In light of the postponement of the MINUSMA Force Generation Conference, find alternative ways to effectively encourage Member States to pledge and deploy the air assets detailed in the special edition of MINUSMA's Uniformed Capability Requirements document in support of the Mission's Adaptation Plan.⁸
- Identify the key reasons why Member States are unwilling and/or unable to deploy air assets to MINUSMA, such as needing improved medical support guarantees, and work to address these concerns.

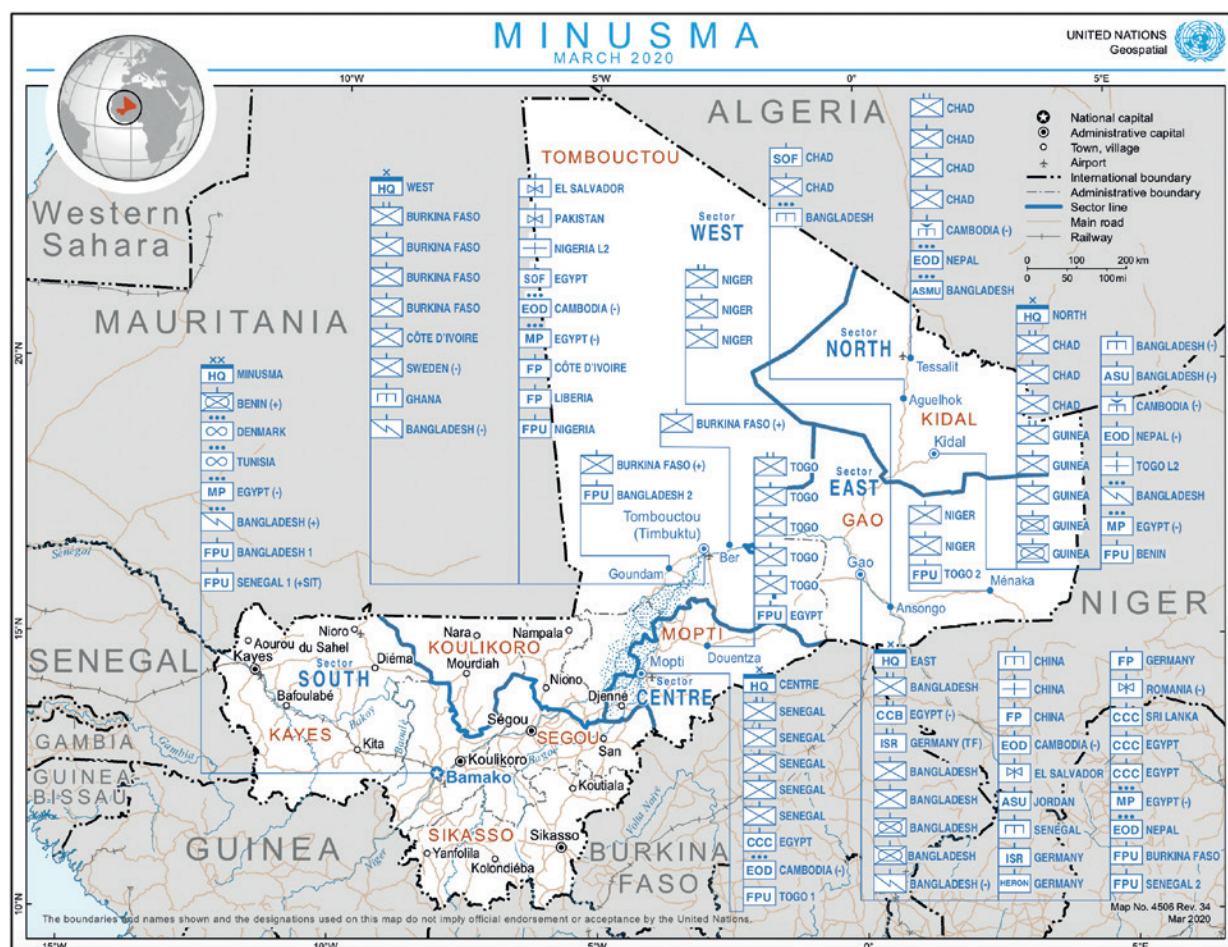
To MINUSMA:

- Continue to prioritize the use of air assets and other resources to protect civilians.
- Ensure that peacekeepers in the field have CASEVAC coverage at all times.

To the Malian government:

- Expedite negotiations for the allocation of land to MINUSMA in order to enable additional or expanded accommodation, hangars, and other infrastructure needed to support the deployment of air assets.
- Submit flight requests to the Mission in a timely manner and ensure that all government members are aware of the resource constraints the Mission faces.

8 UN Department of Peace Operations, "Uniformed Capability Requirements: MINUSMA Special Edition," January 2020, https://pcrs.un.org/Lists/Resources/03-%20Uniformed%20Capability%20Requirements%20for%20UN%20Peacekeeping/2020/MINUSMA%20Force%20Adaptation%20Plan%20Uniformed%20Capability%20Requirements_Jan%202020.pdf?Mobile=1.



Source: UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations⁹

METHODOLOGY

This report is based on research conducted by CIVIC between May 2019 and April 2020. Over this period, CIVIC carried out interviews with 123 stakeholders, including interviews with 33 MINUSMA civilian officials, 18 MINUSMA military officials, 5 United Nations Police (UNPOL) officials, 9 officials from UN headquarters, 11 humanitarian actors, 8 foreign diplomats in Bamako, 16 Malian civil society leaders, 3 Malian officials, and 20 civilians in the Koulikoro and Mopti regions of Mali.

A subset of these interviews focused on the capability requirements and gaps in MINUSMA's air assets. All of these interviews informed CIVIC's understanding of the context in which MINUSMA is implementing its mandate to protect civilians. Citations provided reflect all interviews consulted during the drafting of this paper. A draft was shared with key stakeholders for review before publication.

⁹ UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations, MINUSMA Map of Deployment, February 2020, <https://www.un.org/Depts/Cartographic/map/dpko/MINUSMA.pdf>

INCREASING THREATS, AN EXPANDED MANDATE, AND THE NEED TO RECONFIGURE

The security context in Mali has changed significantly since MINUSMA's deployment in 2013. The Mission is facing new threats in parts of the country that were previously relatively stable. The most noteworthy development has undoubtedly been the intensification and spread of intercommunal violence in central Mali. For instance, in 2017, ethnic militia that were not signatories to the 2015 Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in Mali (hereafter referred to as the peace agreement) were responsible for six percent of all attacks on civilians in Mali.¹⁰ By contrast, non-signatory ethnic militia accounted for 40 percent of such incidents in 2019.¹¹ This worrying trend culminated in three large-scale massacres of civilians in the Mopti region in the first six months of 2019.¹²

The explicit targeting of civilians along ethnic lines in mass attacks represented a new element in the Malian conflict to which the Mission is still trying to adjust. For the past 29 consecutive months, more security incidents—including instances of violence against civilians—have occurred in Mopti than in Mali's other nine regions.¹³ The fact that MINUSMA is itself a prime target of attacks in central Mali—something that peacekeepers in northern Mali have long been subjected to—greatly hampers the Mission's ability to protect civilians. And yet, even with these changes to the security environment, MINUSMA still has no military utility helicopters, no attack helicopters, and no ISR platforms permanently based in the Mopti region.

In addition to the dynamic situation in Mopti, Mali's northern regions continue to be marked by violence and insecurity. The Secretary-General's last quarterly report for 2019 noted an increase in "terrorist activity" in the regions of Ménaka and Gao.¹⁴ Indeed, the threat is so severe that in November 2019 the Malian armed forces (FAMA) retreated from three of their bases in Gao and Ménaka following a series of deadly attacks against Malian soldiers in the preceding weeks.¹⁵ Meanwhile, violent extremists and non-state armed actors continue to exert control over large swaths of Timbuktu and Kidal regions, as well.¹⁶

The Security Council has been slow to adjust the Mission's mandate to address the evolving security context in Mali. The Mission was originally mandated and deployed to support the brokering and implementation of the peace agreement. The "protection of civilians and stabilization" has been included as a task in MINUSMA's mandate since the Mission's creation in 2013.¹⁷ However, due in part to the scale of violence against civilians—which was relatively low in comparison to other peacekeeping contexts—and the types of abuses occurring during the early years of the Mission's deployment, POC was not viewed as a top priority for MINUSMA.¹⁸ Moreover, the early mandates kept the Mission's focus on protection and stabilization in the north. In 2015, the mandate directed the Mission "to stabilize the key population centres and other areas where civilians are at risk, *notably in the North of Mali...*"¹⁹

10 ACLED Data Export Tool, January 2020, <https://www.acleddata.com/data/>.

11 ACLED Data Export Tool, January 2020, <https://www.acleddata.com/data/>.

12 "Mali : un village peul attaqué, 37 morts," *Libération*, January 1, 2019, https://www.liberation.fr/planete/2019/01/01/mali-un-village-peul-attaque-37-morts_1700644; Morgane le Cam, "Au Mali, avec les rescapés du massacre d'Ogossagou," *Le Monde*, April 8, 2019, https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2019/04/08/au-mali-avec-les-rescapes-du-massacre-d-ogossagou_5447557_3212.html; "Mali : 35 morts, dont 24 enfants, le bilan de la tuerie de Sobane revu à la baisse," *Jeune Afrique*, June 12, 2019, <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/787609/politique/mali-35-morts-dont-24-enfants-le-bilan-de-la-tuerie-de-sobane-revu-a-la-baisse/>.

13 ACLED Data Export Tool, January 2020, <https://www.acleddata.com/data/>.

14 UN Security Council, "Situation in Mali: Report of the Secretary-General," December 2019, para. 44, <https://www.undocs.org/en/S/2019/983>.

15 Christophe Boissouvier, "Mali: 'Repli ne veut pas dire abandon,' affirme Ibrahim Maïga, chercheur à l'ISS," *RFI*, November 12, 2019, <http://www.rfi.fr/emission/20191112-mali-repli-veut-pas-dire-abandon-ibrahim-maiga-chercheur-iss?ref=tw>; Baba Ahmed, "Mali's military abandons isolated outposts amid attacks," *AP News*, November 16, 2019, <https://apnews.com/4c746a3c33834b36a2f59f38b7e4d98d>; UN Security Council, "Situation in Mali: Report of the Secretary-General," December 2019, para. 12, <https://www.undocs.org/en/S/2019/983>.

16 UN Security Council, "Situation in Mali: Report of the Secretary-General," December 2019, para. 14, 44, and 47, <https://www.undocs.org/en/S/2019/983>.

17 UN Security Council Resolution 2100 (2013), April 25, 2013, UN SC Doc. S/RES/2100, para. 16 (c).

18 Namie Dirazza, "Protecting Civilians in the Context of Violent Extremism: The Dilemmas of UN Peacekeeping in Mali," *International Peace Institute*, October 2018, 17.

19 UN Security Council Resolution 2227 (2015), June 29, 2015, UN SC Doc. S/RES/2227, para 14 (d-ii), emphasis added.

And yet, even with these changes to the security environment, MINUSMA still has no military utility helicopters, no attack helicopters, and no ISR platforms permanently based in the Mopti region.

MINUSMA's initial footprint reflected its early mandates. The Mission's personnel and assets were focused in northern urban centers and Bamako. In 2016, in response to the increasing violence in central Mali, the Security Council added the words "and Centre" to the mandate language highlighted above.²⁰ However, the Security Council did not include an explicit reference to POC or the central region when outlining the Mission's strategic priority.²¹

So, in 2018, the Mission's leadership responded to the deteriorating situation by initiating the development of a Mission-wide strategy to address the central region.²² In June 2019, MINUSMA created Sector Center, which delineated a new geographic area of operation focused on eastern Mopti.²³ This was done in part to strengthen the Force's ability to operate autonomously and quickly in the central region.

Later that month (June 2019), the Security Council added a second strategic priority to MINUSMA's mandate. The priority called on the Mission to "facilitate the implementation of a comprehensive politically-led Malian strategy to **protect civilians, reduce intercommunal violence**, and re-establish State authority, State presence and basic social services **in Central Mali....**"²⁴ The 2019 mandate (Resolution 2480) states that MINUSMA should prioritize using capacity and resources to pursue the Mission's first strategic priority: to support the implementation of the peace agreement. But it also adds that the Mission "should ensure that sufficient mission resources are allocated to the implementation of the second strategic priority."

This addition requires the Mission to dedicate more resources to the central region and to protecting civilians.²⁵

20 UN Security Council Resolution 2295 (2016), June 30, 2016, UN SC Doc. S/RES/2295, para. 19(c)(ii). The language of this resolution reads as follows: "In support of the Malian authorities, to stabilize the key population centres and other areas where civilians are at risk, notably in the North and Centre of Mali...."

21 UN Security Council Resolution 2295 (2016), para. 16. The UN Security Council includes strategic priorities in mission mandates to signal the UN Secretariat, Mission leadership, and other Member States regarding its main objectives for and interests in the peacekeeping operation. Strategic priorities are more significant than a Mission's tasks.

22 CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #3, Bamako, May 2018; Dirazza, "Protecting Civilians in the Context of Violent Extremism," 24.

23 MINUSMA's military operations and activities in Mali are divided up into five distinct sectors. The Mission's other four military sectors have their headquarters in Timbuktu, Gao, Kidal, and Bamako. See MINUSMA Map of Deployment on page 4 for more detail on the areas of operation under each sector.

24 UN Security Council Resolution 2480 (2019), June 28, 2019, UN SC Doc. S/RES/2480, para. 20, emphasis added. Note that the new mandate also elevates protection in two other ways. Within the strategic priorities, the mandate includes six priority tasks for the Mission. In the second priority task, the Security Council added an explicit direction to the Mission "to support Malian authorities in reducing violence and intercommunal tensions." The new mandate has also moved the protection of civilians up from the fourth priority task to become the third. See Giffen and Smith, "What Does MINUSMA's Revised Mandate Mean for the Protection of Civilians in Mali?"

25 UN Security Council Resolution 2480 (2019), para. 21. See Giffen and Smith, "What Does MINUSMA's Revised Mandate Mean for the Protection of Civilians in Mali?" Note that existing Security Council resolutions, including S/RES/1894 and the 2019 Department of Peace Operations Policy titled "The Protection of Civilians in United Nations Peacekeeping," also require peacekeeping missions to prioritize the protection of civilians in decisions regarding the allocation, deployment, and use of available mission capacity and resources.

When the Security Council added the second strategic priority to MINUSMA's mandate, it did not remove any of the pre-existing tasks.²⁶ Thus, it has been difficult for the Mission to contribute adequate resources to the second strategic priority, as its capabilities were already stretched. However, the Security Council recognized that the new priority could possibly require adjustments to the Mission. It therefore requested the Secretary-General "to conduct, within six months of the adoption of the resolution, a thorough assessment of the situation in Northern and Central Mali and of the Mission's configuration in regards to the implementation of its primary and second strategic priorities."²⁷ The resolution also explicitly asked the Secretary-General to send the Security Council a letter drawing on the perspectives of all actors—including the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and the Force Commander—to provide information on "security challenges in Mali," "progress in mission operations," and "troop performance and rotations."²⁸

In response to the Security Council's request, the Secretary-General's quarterly report from December 2019 included some information on resource needs and adaptation. The report stressed: "Given the highly complex threat environment, the increase in

terrorist activity and the limited national capacities, MINUSMA doing more requires additional resources."²⁹ Subsequently, MINUSMA's leadership outlined a Mission Adaptation Plan proposing to create a Mobile Task Force capability that would be deployed across all sectors. It is designed to allow MINUSMA's military personnel to rapidly mobilize assets from various sectors to respond to security threats and enhance the Mission's ability to protect civilians.

According to a UN Secretariat document, the capabilities required to reconfigure the Mission in this manner include, "...tailored units and enhanced capabilities, most important among them additional air mobility."³⁰ Indeed, MINUSMA's principal request is for military utility helicopters and ISR assets to be deployed to every operational sector.³¹ Notably, the Mission Adaptation Plan does not include a request for additional uniformed personnel. Yet the change to the Mission's configuration will nevertheless require an increase to the Mission's July 1, 2020–June 30, 2021 budget request. The proposed budget has been submitted to UN Member States and will be negotiated in the UN General Assembly's Fifth Committee before June 30, 2020 (the end of the UN's fiscal year).³²

26 At the same time as the Security Council passed the new mandate, the UN General Assembly's Fifth Committee—the Member State body that approves peacekeeping budgets—authorized an operating budget for MINUSMA that was \$11.3 million below what the Secretary-General had requested. "Budget for the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali for the period from 1 July 2019 to 30 June 2020: Report to the Secretary General," UN Digital Library, <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3797700?ln=en>.

27 UN Security Council Resolution 2480 (2019), para. 21.

28 UN Security Council Resolution 2480 (2019), para. 65.

29 UN Security Council, "Situation in Mali: Report of the Secretary-General," December 2019, para. 98, <https://www.undocs.org/en/S/2019/983>.

30 UN Department of Peace Operations, "Uniformed Capability Requirements: MINUSMA Special Edition," January 2020.

31 Sector Center (Mopti), Sector East (Gao and Ménaka), Sector West (Timbuktu), and Sector North (Kidal).

32 Written correspondence with UN Secretariat civilian official, #47, New York, April 2020.



Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General (SRSG) for Mali and Head of MINUSMA, Mahamat Saleh Annadif, arrives at the MINUSMA camp in Ber, Timbuktu region. MINUSMA/Marco Dormino

THE VALUE OF AIR ASSETS

Air assets matter for the effectiveness and mobility of any peacekeeping operation. For example, helicopters equipped with medical units routinely evacuate wounded civilians and peacekeepers to the nearest medical facility. In addition, light attack helicopters and remotely piloted aircraft (RPA) can be used to provide situational awareness and early warning, while military utility helicopters can facilitate the rapid deployment of ground troops to respond to potential threats.³³ Air assets also ensure that Mission personnel can engage

with communities to better understand people's needs and concerns, and they help personnel carry out activities that promote social cohesion and reduce violence.

The need for air assets is especially acute in a context like Mali, where a relatively small number of personnel operate across large geographical areas. Moreover, rainy seasons cause extensive annual flooding, road infrastructure is poor, national air services are limited, and roadside explosive devices are widely used.³⁴

³³ RPA, more popularly known as drones, also have many other valuable functions. They can perform reconnaissance missions to help identify a safe landing spot for a civilian helicopter coming to assist in a CASEVAC scenario, for example. They can also survey the conditions of roads to help ground units travel over difficult terrain, and they can watch for potential ambush threats. The former aspect is especially important when considering that, "land teams sometimes spend whole days just to travel six kilometers because they get bogged down and stuck in the mud during the rainy season." CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #63, Bamako, October 2019.

³⁴ "Protection With Less Presence": How the Peacekeeping Operation in the Democratic Republic of Congo is Attempting to Deliver Protection with Fewer Resources," Center for Civilians in Conflict, January 2018; "Moving Toward Mobility: Providing Protection to Civilians Through Static Presence and Mobile Peacekeeping in South Sudan," Center for Civilians in Conflict, March 2019.

As one foreign diplomat put it, the UN's air assets are practically the only thing connecting the north to Bamako.³⁵ One peacekeeper told CIVIC, "we are asked to be agile and flexible in our mandate—that's a helicopter."³⁶

Despite their importance, MINUSMA has long lacked an adequate number of military air assets—attack helicopters, utility helicopters, and ISR platforms—to achieve its objectives.³⁷ The increase in threats in Mali and the Mission's expanded mandate have exacerbated the deficit. For example, the Mission has been operating in the Kidal region without any kind of military helicopter for several years, which has inhibited its effectiveness.³⁸ The arrival of a Senegalese Quick Reaction Force (QRF) in 2017 was intended to improve matters in Mopti region, but the deployment lacked the required helicopter detachment—leaving Sector Center without a military utility helicopter, as well.³⁹ The deployment of Pakistani military utility helicopters in Timbuktu in early 2020 should boost MINUSMA's ability to engage in this difficult northern region, but the Mission has yet to find a replacement for the Romanian military utility helicopter unit in Gao that will be leaving Mali later this year. MINUSMA is also budgeted to have six piloted, fixed-wing military aircraft for ISR purposes, but had no such planes as of March 2020.⁴⁰

Supplying the Mission with more military air assets would significantly increase its capacity to protect civilians. However, the supply of air assets is not the only factor that needs to be addressed. Another problem is that MINUSMA officials are often unable to use the few air assets they do have in a flexible manner. The primary cause of this inability to operate freely is that some troop contributing countries attach restrictive caveats when pledging their aircraft to UN peacekeeping missions.

“We are asked to be agile and flexible in our mandate—that’s a helicopter.”

— MINUSMA military official interviewed in Bamako

These caveats might include, for example, restrictions on when and where troops can be deployed.⁴¹ Although the current report does not explore this topic in any depth, MINUSMA officials did complain to CIVIC that such caveats prevent the Mission from using some air assets to 100 percent of their capabilities.⁴²

The short supply of military air assets reached its nadir in August and September of 2019 following the scheduled withdrawal of a Canadian contingent in July. Over the previous 12 months, the Canadian contingent had been providing one utility line and one CASEVAC line out of Gao, the Mission's primary hub in northern Mali.⁴³ Canada had committed its resources to MINUSMA for one year only. It was agreed that Romanian air assets would replace those of the Canadians in Gao, but the earliest these helicopters could begin service in Gao was October 1—a full two months after the Canadians were due to leave.

35 CIVIC interview with foreign diplomat, #14, Bamako, May 2019.

36 CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #68, Bamako, October 2019.

37 Alexandra Novosseloff, "Keeping Peace from Above: Air Assets in UN Peace Operations," International Peace Institute, October 12, 2017, <https://www.ipinst.org/2017/10/air-assets-un-peace-ops>

38 CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #57, Bamako, September 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #59, Bamako, October 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #69, conducted via telephone, October 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #70, Bamako, October 2019.

39 CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #57, Bamako, September 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #59, Bamako, October 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #76, Sévaré, November 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #78, Sévaré, November 2019; CIVIC interview with UN Secretariat military official, #46, New York, January 2020.

40 CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #59, Bamako, October 2019; email correspondence with MINUSMA military official, #63, November 2019; email correspondence with MINUSMA military official, #57, November 2019.

41 Peter Albrecht, Signe Marie Cold-Ravnkilde, and Rikke Haugegaard, "Inequality in MINUSMA #1 African Soldiers are in the Firing Line in Mali," Danish Institute for International Studies, December 2016, 5. For additional information on national caveats in UN peacekeeping operations, see Alexandra Novosseloff, "No Caveats, Please? Breaking a Myth in UN Peace Operations," *Global Peace Operations Review*, September 12, 2016.

42 CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #10, Bamako, September 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #55, Bamako, September 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #59, Bamako, October 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #11, Bamako, July 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #24, Bamako, August 2019.

43 One tasking or service line equates to one helicopter being available and dedicated to performing certain tasks at any given time. A utility line involves transporting supplies, equipment, civilian staff, and armed personnel. A CASEVAC line entails a medically equipped helicopter being on permanent standby to evacuate casualties to hospital.

To help bridge the gap, the Canadians extended their CASEVAC line by one month, leaving one Chinook helicopter to provide coverage until the end of August.⁴⁴ The utility line, however, ceased at the end of July as scheduled. As a result, the Force was left with one military transport helicopter for the entire country during August 2019.⁴⁵ Once the Canadians had recalled all of their aircraft, the Mission did not have a single military transport helicopter in Mali for the whole of September.⁴⁶ The Mission had to contract a Mi-8 civilian helicopter to cover the gap in CASEVAC coverage in Gao during this period.⁴⁷

Saving Lives Through Casualty Evacuation (CASEVAC)

The UN has made a concerted effort in recent years to change the way its peacekeeping missions operate in high-risk environments. In 2017, the Secretary-General commissioned a report led by retired Lieutenant-General Carlos Alberto dos Santos Cruz to propose ways that the UN could reduce fatalities and injuries in peacekeeping operations. Several of the report's principal recommendations focused on the need to make the CASEVAC system more effective.⁴⁸ Helicopters are at the very heart of this system, helping to swiftly airlift injured peacekeepers and civilians to field hospitals for emergency treatment.

Indeed, MINUSMA's civilian and military helicopters routinely save the lives of peacekeepers and civilians in Mali. MINUSMA currently has 14 civilian helicopters, seven of which are specifically designated for CASEVAC and are equipped with medical instruments.⁴⁹ The Mission has two additional military helicopters that evacuate casualties. The CASEVAC service is indispensable for MINUSMA, which is frequently

Once the Canadians had recalled all of their aircraft, the Mission did not have a single military transport helicopter in Mali for the whole of September.

referred to as “the deadliest UN peacekeeping mission” due to the number of peacekeepers who have been killed since the Mission's deployment in 2013.⁵⁰ Without the ability to rescue people by helicopter—often from remote locations—the number of peacekeepers lost would almost certainly be higher still, as demonstrated by an attack last year in Aguelhok.

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- 44 Peter Albrecht, Signe Marie Cold-Ravnkilde, and Rikke Haugegaard, “Inequality in MINUSMA #1 African Soldiers are in the CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #57, Bamako, September 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #59, Bamako, October 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #55, Bamako, September 2019.
- 45 CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #24, Bamako, August 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #57, Bamako, September 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #59, Bamako, October 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #55, Bamako, September 2019.
- 46 CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #57, Bamako, September 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #59, Bamako, October 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #55, Bamako, September 2019.
- 47 CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #57, Bamako, September 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #59, Bamako, October 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #55, Bamako, September 2019.
- 48 Carlos Alberto dos Santos Cruz, “Improving Security of United Nations Peacekeepers: We need to change the way we are doing business,” December 2017, https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/improving_security_of_united_nations_peacekeepers_report.pdf
- 49 CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #57, Bamako, September 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #59, Bamako, October 2019.
- 50 “Chinese peacekeeper among four killed in Mali attacks,” *BBC News*, June 1, 2016, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-36424583>; “U.N. chief visits deadliest peacekeeping mission in Mali,” *Seattle Times*, May 29, 2018, <https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/un-chief-visits-deadliest-peacekeeping-mission-in-mali/>; Kevin Sieff, “The World's Deadliest UN Peacekeeping Mission,” *The Washington Post*, February 17, 2017, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/sf/world/2017/02/17/the-worlds-deadliest-u-n-peacekeeping-mission/>; “Mali in crisis: The fight between the Dogon and Fulani,” *Al Jazeera*, August 24, 2019, <https://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/talktojazeera/inthefield/2019/08/mali-crisis-fight-dogon-fulani-190822125317990.html>; “Mali: deux attaques contre la Minusma dans le nord en un week-end,” *RFI*, May 20, 2019, <http://www.rfi.fr/afrique/20190520-mali-deux-attaques-minusma-nord-week-end>; Morgane le Cam, “Au Mali, Antonio Guterres en meilleur allié de la Force conjointe du G5 Sahel,” *Le Monde*, May 31, 2018, https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2018/05/31/au-mali-antonio-guterres-en-meilleur-allie-de-la-force-conjointe-du-g5-sahel_5307732_3212.html.

CASE STUDY: Evacuating casualties in Aguelhok

In January 2019, an extremist armed group launched a sustained attack on MINUSMA's outpost in Aguelhok, located in the northeastern region of Kidal.⁵¹ Eleven Chadian peacekeepers were killed in the incident, making it the deadliest single attack ever inflicted on the Mission.⁵² The death toll would undoubtedly have been even higher had the Mission not been able to quickly rescue 22 injured peacekeepers using its dedicated CASEVAC civilian and military helicopters.⁵³ Fourteen peacekeepers were immediately transferred to the Mission's medical facility in Kidal, while another eight who had sustained more serious injuries were taken by military helicopter to the Mission's hospital in Gao.⁵⁴ The seven most critically wounded peacekeepers were subsequently flown by a civilian plane to Dakar for advanced medical treatment.⁵⁵ Many of the Chadians "would have bled to death if it hadn't been for the airlift," a foreign diplomat told CIVIC.⁵⁶

Thanks to the responsiveness of the civilian Mi-8 helicopter based in the region, twelve of the most seriously injured patients were admitted to the hospital in Kidal within three hours of the start of the attack.⁵⁷ Had it not been for the fact that fighting was ongoing "for 30 to 40 minutes" when the civilian CASEVAC aircraft first arrived on scene, the wounded peacekeepers would have been evacuated even more quickly.⁵⁸

“When there are flare-ups between signatory armed groups, it can sometimes take us two to three days to get to there.”

— MINUSMA military official interviewed in Bamako

51 The armed group responsible for the attack was Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam Wal-Muslimin (JNIM).

52 “Mali. Un 11^e militaire tchadien tué après un attentat djihadiste dans le nord-est du pays,” *Ouest France*, February 15, 2019, <https://www.ouest-france.fr/monde/mali/mali-un-11e-militaire-tchadien-apres-un-attentat-djihadiste-dans-le-nord-est-du-pays-6225213>.

53 CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #59, Bamako, October 2019; MINUSMA internal document #1, on file with CIVIC; email correspondence with MINUSMA civilian official, #45, April 2020.

54 MINUSMA internal document #1, on file with CIVIC; email correspondence with MINUSMA civilian official, #45, April 2020.

55 MINUSMA internal document #1, on file with CIVIC; email correspondence with MINUSMA civilian official, #45, April 2020.

56 CIVIC interview with foreign diplomat, #14, Bamako, May 2019.

57 MINUSMA internal document #1, on file with CIVIC; MINUSMA internal document #7, on file with CIVIC; email correspondence with MINUSMA civilian official, #45, April 2020.

58 CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #69, conducted via telephone, October 2019.

Although civilian-contracted helicopters are important for many of MINUSMA's activities—especially CASEVAC—they cannot easily substitute for military air assets due to the fact that armed actors target the Mission. Civilian helicopters like the Mi-8, which are contracted from private companies, are not equipped with armor or mounted weapons.⁵⁹ They are therefore unable to provide overhead protection to ground units during operations, and they cannot secure their own landing sites. These gaps are critical given the prevailing security environment in central and northern Mali and greatly reduce the Mission's mobility.⁶⁰ A military official told CIVIC that the Mission is “in desperate need of more military aviation....” They added, “When there are flare-ups between signatory armed groups, it can sometimes take us two to three days to get to there.”⁶¹

Military Utility Helicopters Facilitate MINUSMA's Engagement with Communities

Many of MINUSMA's mandated tasks contributing to the protection of civilians and human rights depend upon the civilian components of the Mission being able to engage with communities.⁶² For example, MINUSMA's Human Rights Division is responsible for monitoring and investigating violations of international humanitarian and human rights laws. The Civil Affairs Division is responsible for promoting social cohesion, with networks that are a key source of early warnings.⁶³ The Political Affairs Division convenes and participates in meetings that seek to resolve local conflicts through dialogue and compromise. Meanwhile, POC advisors are tasked with identifying and understanding threats to civilians and strengthening protection mechanisms.

However, Sector Center is an especially dangerous place to travel overland. As illustrated in Image 1, Mopti accounted for more improvised explosive device (IED) incidents in 2019 than all of Mali's other regions put together.⁶⁴ The lack of a military utility helicopter in Sector Center therefore makes it extremely difficult for MINUSMA's civilian components to engage communities beyond the areas where there are Mission bases.

59 CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #57, Bamako, September 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #59, Bamako, October 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #68, Bamako, October 2019.

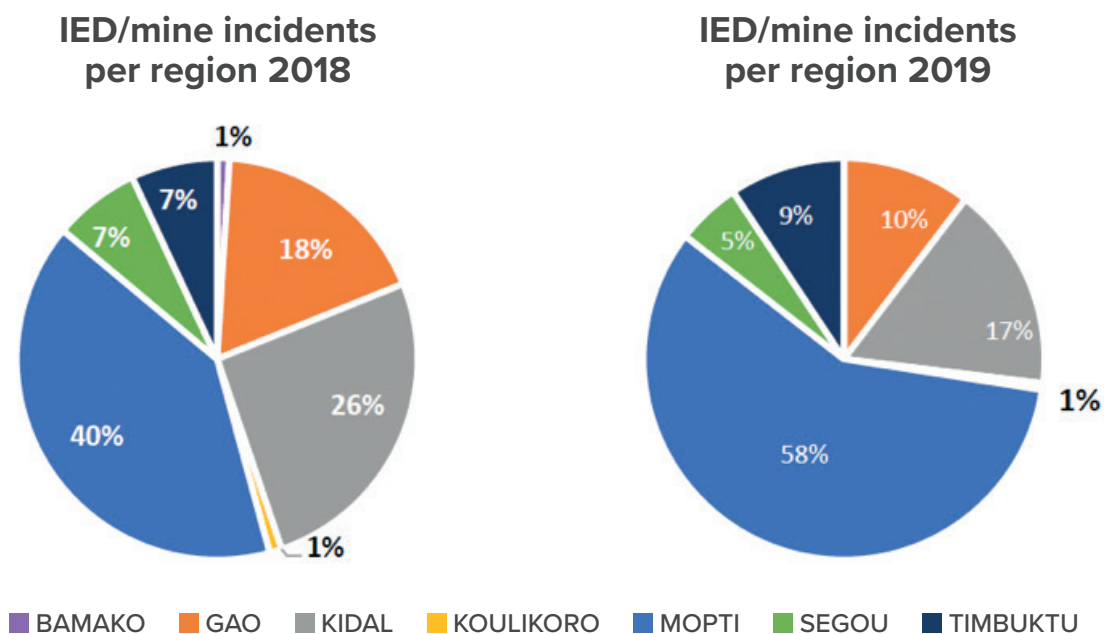
60 CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #22, Bamako, August 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #24, Bamako, August 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #68, Bamako, October 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #69, conducted via telephone, October 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #70, Bamako, October 2019.

61 CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #24, Bamako, August 2019.

62 Paragraph 28 (c) ii of Resolution 2480 calls on MINUSMA to: “strengthen early warning and to increase efforts to monitor and document violations of international humanitarian law and violations and abuses of international human rights law” and “strengthen community engagement and protection mechanisms, including interaction with civilians, community outreach, reconciliation, mediation, support to the resolution of local and intercommunal conflicts and public information”.

63 CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #42, Bamako, August 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #50, Bamako, September 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #51, Bamako, September 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #2, Bamako, January 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #14, Sévaré, February 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA police official, #16, Sévaré, February 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #17, Sévaré, February 2020;

64 CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #57, Bamako, September 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #59, Bamako, October 2019.



Source: UNMAS.⁶⁵

“People say we [MINUSMA] are not surrendering territory, but we’ve already lost it. We did not have the resources.... For more than six months we couldn’t go there by road [because of flooding]. An APV would have drowned... we needed armed helicopters.”

— MINUSMA civilian official interviewed in Sévaré

65 UNMAS, Mali Explosive Threat Overview, December 2019, on file with CIVIC.

The region's propensity to flood during the wet season poses another major problem, especially in the part of Mopti to the west of the river Niger known as the *Zone Inondée*, or "Flooded Zone."⁶⁶ A civilian official in Mopti told CIVIC that "people say we [MINUSMA] are not surrendering territory, but we've already lost it. We did not have the resources....

For more than six months we couldn't go there by road [because of flooding]. An APV would have drowned... we needed armed helicopters."⁶⁷ Another civilian official added that the "[civilian] Mi-8s are useless [for community engagement purposes] unless there are troops on the ground to secure the landing site."⁶⁸

CASE STUDY: Human Rights Investigations in Boulikessi, Mopti Region

On September 30, 2019, there was an attack on the FAMA in Boulikessi, which is in the remote eastern area of Mopti region. Following the attack, the human rights team requested the Force to facilitate an investigation.⁶⁹ One military official explained that, with no military utility helicopter available to transport troops, this action would have required sending a ground unit from Gao down to Boulikessi to secure the landing site for the civilian helicopter coming from Sévaré. "It would have taken the ground unit three days to get there and three days to return," he said.⁷⁰ The Force determined that sending out a heavy ground unit for such a long period of time across such treacherous terrain was not advisable, so the investigation did not take place.⁷¹

Human rights staff members pointed out that they had conducted an investigation in Boulikessi the previous year and it had not been so logistically burdensome.⁷² At that time, however, the Mission was able to call on the armed Apache helicopters that were stationed in Gao to support the investigation. With the Apaches, it had been possible to deploy a team of two military helicopters—one to provide overhead protection and one to transport troops to secure the landing site for the civilian helicopter.

66 CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #68, Bamako, October 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #76, Sévaré, November 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #77, Sévaré, November 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #78, Sévaré, November 2019.

67 CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #77, Sévaré, November 2019. The *Zone Inondée* is now largely under the control of the armed jihadist group Katiba Macina.

68 CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #69, conducted via telephone, October 2019.

69 CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #68, Bamako, October 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #73, Bamako, November 2019; email correspondence with MINUSMA civilian official, #42, January 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #89, Sévaré, November 2019.

70 CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #68, Bamako, October 2019.

71 CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #68, Bamako, October 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #73, Bamako, November 2019; email correspondence with MINUSMA civilian official, #42, November 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #89, Sévaré, November 2019.

72 CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #68, Bamako, October 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #73, Bamako, November 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #89, Sévaré, November 2019.



MINUSMA personnel conduct an investigation into recent armed attacks in Bankass cercle, Mopti region..
 MINUSMA/Marco Dormino

The lack of military air assets also constrains community engagement in the north. One MINUSMA civilian official commented, “We’ve been asking for military helicopters in Kidal for five years.” This official added that the situation in the region “has stagnated because we have no air coverage to be able to do operations.”⁷³ The official’s impression was confirmed to CIVIC by three Mission personnel working in Kidal.⁷⁴ One MINUSMA staff member noted, “There are two cercles [out of four] in Kidal where we have not been—Tin-Essakou and Abeibara. With military assets, the capacity to project and engage communities would be much higher. We’d also be able to help government officials and local authorities to go to places they have not been. Many of the *prefets* and *sous-prefets* are still based in Gao or Bamako. When they do come to Kidal, they are only in Kidal city.”⁷⁵

“We’ve been asking for military helicopters in Kidal for five years.”

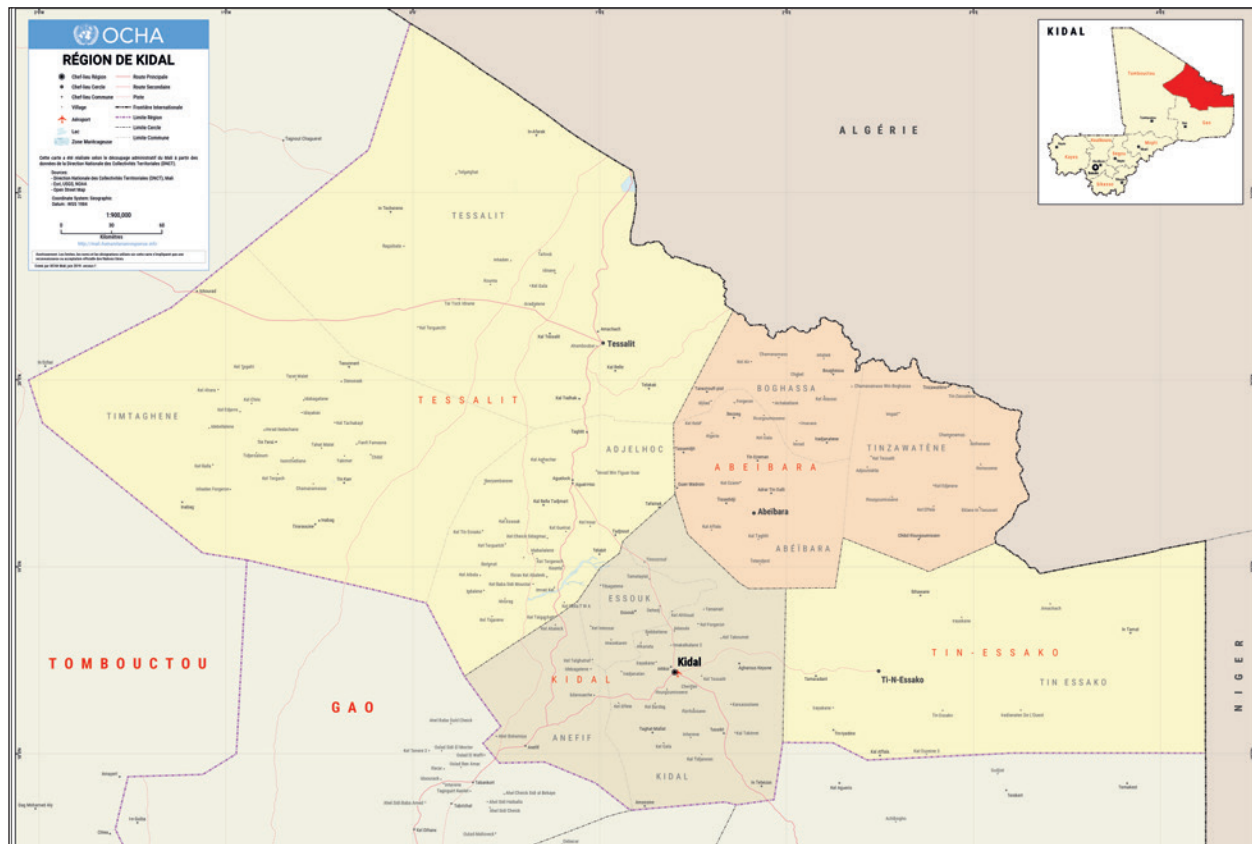
— MINUSMA civilian official interviewed in Bamako

73 CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #59, Bamako, October 2019.

74 CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #69, conducted via telephone, October 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #70, Bamako, October 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #5, conducted via telephone, January 2020.

75 CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #69, conducted via telephone, October 2019.

Kidal's four cercles



Source: OCHA

Situational Awareness and Early Warning

The scarcity of long-range ISR platforms—either in the form of piloted aircraft or RPA—is an impediment to MINUSMA's ability to fulfill its mandate. Numerous officials told CIVIC that RPA, in particular, are a critical asset for the protection of civilians because they provide the Mission with situational awareness. They help indicate where attacks are likely to take place and therefore where Mission personnel need to be.⁷⁶

RPA are equipped with special sensors that enable them to track movements on the ground—even at night, which is when attacks against villages typically occur and when patrolling is most challenging for the Mission.⁷⁷ Some Mission personnel maintain that RPA are indispensable because of their ability to perform reconnaissance missions for up to 24 hours without taking a break.⁷⁸ This ability gives them a distinct advantage over piloted ISR, which cannot stay in the air for as long due to pilot fatigue.⁷⁹

- 76 CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #47, Bamako, September 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #63, Bamako, October 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #55, Bamako, September 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #57, Bamako, September 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #61, Bamako, October 2019.
- 77 The massacres in Koulogon, Ogossagou, and Sobane Da all took place during the night. CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #63, Bamako, October 2019; email correspondence with MINUSMA civilian official, #45, April 2020.
- 78 CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #68, Bamako, October 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #63, Bamako, October 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #61, Bamako, October 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #55, Bamako, September 2019.
- 79 CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #68, Bamako, October 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #63, Bamako, October 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #61, Bamako, October 2019.

CASE STUDY: Reconnaissance and Surveillance in Timbuktu

Late on September 18, 2019, a group of youths—mostly from the Songhai community—erected a blockade on one of the main access roads to the city of Timbuktu in northern Mali. The youth were reportedly protesting the abduction of two members of their community who were being held for ransom.⁸⁰ Rising levels of criminality had been exacerbating tensions during the preceding months.⁸¹ The situation escalated when a vehicle containing members of the local Arab community—some of whom were reportedly armed—tried to force its way through the barricade. Shots were fired at those blocking the road, and at least two people suffered gunshot wounds.⁸²

According to one MINUSMA peacekeeper, one of MINUSMA's RPA—a Hermes drone—was flying from Goundam to Ber in the northwestern region of Timbuktu on the morning of September 19.⁸³ During the reconnaissance operation, it passed over the city of Timbuktu and spotted a crowd of people amassing and heading toward the Abaradjou district.⁸⁴ At about the same time, MINUSMA sent out a flash report warning of escalating tensions in the city.⁸⁵ The presence of the Hermes provided the Mission with eyes on the gathering protest. The ability to livestream the images enabled both the Sector Commander in Timbuktu and senior military leaders at MINUSMA's headquarters in Bamako to monitor the city in real time and calibrate the Mission's response accordingly.⁸⁶

The same peacekeeper who spoke to CIVIC about the incident relayed that the RPA allowed MINUSMA personnel to monitor the largely Songhai crowd as it moved to the Arab-owned house of the Vice President of Timbuktu's Interim Authority where the alleged perpetrators of the shootings were hiding.⁸⁷ The Mission sent an UNPOL unit to Abaradjou to try to control the situation and deployed an MD-500 light attack helicopter, which provided clearer pictures of the unfolding events and allowed the Mission to identify some of the participants.⁸⁸ However, the UNPOL officers were soon forced to withdraw as additional support was required to control the crowd.⁸⁹ Unfortunately, neither MINUSMA nor the Malian Security and Defense Forces were able to prevent the Vice President's house from being ransacked and set ablaze.⁹⁰

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

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- 80 CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #75, Bamako, November 2019; Baba Ahmed, "Mali : à Tombouctou, les habitants assistent depuis des mois à une montée des tensions," *Jeune Afrique*, September 22, 2019, <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/832572/politique/grand-format-a-tombouctou-les-habitants-assistent-depuis-des-mois-a-une-montee-des-tensions/>; MINUSMA internal document #6, on file with CIVIC.
- 81 Ahmed, "Mali : à Tombouctou, les habitants assistent depuis des mois à une montée des tensions"; "Mali: violences sporadiques à Tombouctou, deux enfants tués," *RFI*, September 20, 2019, <http://www.rfi.fr/afrique/20190920-mali-violences-sporadiques-tombouctou-enfants-tues>; MINUSMA internal document #6, on file with CIVIC.
- 82 CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #75, Bamako, November 2019; Ahmed, "Mali : à Tombouctou, les habitants assistent depuis des mois à une montée des tensions"; MINUSMA internal document #2, on file with CIVIC.
- 83 CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #63, Bamako, October 2019; email correspondence with MINUSMA civilian official, #45, April 2020.
- 84 CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #63, Bamako, October 2019; email correspondence with MINUSMA civilian official, #45, April 2020.
- 85 CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #63, Bamako, October 2019; MINUSMA internal document #3, on file with CIVIC; email correspondence with MINUSMA civilian official, #45, April 2020.
- 86 CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #63, Bamako, October 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #68, Bamako, October 2019; email correspondence with MINUSMA civilian official, #45, April 2020; email correspondence with MINUSMA civilian official, #46, April 2020.
- 87 CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #63, Bamako, October 2019.
- 88 CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #57, Bamako, September 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #63, Bamako, October 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #75, Bamako, November 2019; MINUSMA internal document #3, on file with CIVIC; MINUSMA internal document #4, on file with CIVIC; MINUSMA internal document #5, on file with CIVIC.
- 89 CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #75, Bamako, November 2019; MINUSMA internal document #3, on file with CIVIC.
- 90 CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #75, Bamako, November 2019; Ahmed, "Mali : à Tombouctou, les habitants assistent depuis des mois à une montée des tensions"; MINUSMA internal document #6, on file with CIVIC.

CASE STUDY: Reconnaissance and Surveillance in Timbuktu continued...

News of the violent incidents quickly spread beyond the city, prompting units from the CMA and the Plateforme—armed groups who are signatories to the peace agreement—to approach Timbuktu.⁹¹ The groups claimed that since the FAMA were incapable of protecting the local population, they were poised to intervene in the event of further attacks.⁹² The involvement of these parties within Timbuktu could have exacerbated tensions and violence, so the RPA was later sent to monitor the outskirts of the city where they were positioned. Swedish peacekeepers also went out to talk to the armed groups to make it clear that their activities were being surveilled.⁹³

According to a peacekeeper who spoke with CIVIC, the Mission kept an RPA over Timbuktu for 22 hours, enabling it to oversee movements into the city throughout the night.⁹⁴ Despite the shortcomings of the Mission's response, both the attack helicopter and the RPA were instrumental in enabling MINUSMA to monitor a volatile scenario.



A Salvadorian MD-500 light attack helicopter surveys the ground in Timbuktu region. Gema Cortes

91 CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #61, Bamako, October 2019; Ahmed, “Mali : à Tombouctou, les habitants assistent depuis des mois à une montée des tensions”; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #63, Bamako, October 2019.

92 Ahmed, “Mali : à Tombouctou, les habitants assistent depuis des mois à une montée des tensions”; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #75, Bamako, November 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #61, Bamako, October 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #63, Bamako, October 2019.

93 CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #75, Bamako, November 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #61, Bamako, October 2019; Ahmed, “Mali : à Tombouctou, les habitants assistent depuis des mois à une montée des tensions”; MINUSMA internal document #3, on file with CIVIC.

94 CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #63, Bamako, October 2019.

The Mission currently has a single aerial ISR aircraft available for the whole of Mali, a country that is about twice the size of France.⁹⁵ Until late last year, the Mission had a maximum of three remotely piloted ISR aircraft that it could use simultaneously.⁹⁶ The German contingent provided one tasking line in Gao, while three commercially-contracted Hermes aircraft—of which only two were available at any one time—were based in Timbuktu.⁹⁷ In late 2019, the commercial contract was discontinued following reliability problems with the aircraft.⁹⁸ An official from the UN Secretariat relayed to CIVIC that they plan to release a request for proposal by April 15, 2020 to solicit bids for addressing this gap.⁹⁹

Yet one MINUSMA military official explained to CIVIC that even when the Hermes were still operating in Mali, three RPA was “not sufficient.” “Ideally,” according to this official, “there would be two [available at all times] per sector. With that, we could fly day missions and night missions.”¹⁰⁰ Another military official commented that RPA “are a force multiplier... it is abysmal how many we have.”¹⁰¹

Having enough ISR aircraft is only part of the solution. Several MINUSMA officials emphasized that having the capacity to provide early warning is good, but only if the Mission is also able to respond quickly.¹⁰² Conversations that CIVIC conducted with Malian civilians in the Koulikoro and Mopti regions indicate that some communities feel MINUSMA is not responding adequately to threats.¹⁰³ One displaced person who fled violence in Koro cercle in Mopti region during the past year told CIVIC: “MINUSMA doesn’t react. If they come, it’s just to look at the dead bodies.”¹⁰⁴

In a region like Mopti that doesn’t permanently have light attack helicopters or any utility helicopters, an RPA spotting an immediate threat to civilians would offer little assurance that the Mission would be able to intervene in time. Ground units often need at least several hours to reach the location, so an RPA could do little more than bear witness to a massacre. While ISR thus play an important role, they are only part of the mix of assets needed to develop effective early warning.

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- 95 CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #63, Bamako, October 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #57, Bamako, September 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #61, Bamako, October 2019; email correspondence with MINUSMA civilian official, #45, April 2020.
 - 96 CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #63, Bamako, October 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #57, Bamako, September 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #61, Bamako, October 2019; email correspondence with MINUSMA civilian official, #45, April 2020.
 - 97 CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #57, Bamako, September 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #63, Bamako, October 2019; email correspondence with MINUSMA civilian official, #45, April 2020.
 - 98 CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #75, Bamako, November 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #57, Bamako, September 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #61, Bamako, October 2019; MINUSMA internal document #4, on file with CIVIC; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #63, Bamako, October 2019.
 - 99 Email correspondence with UN Secretariat civilian official, #47, April 2020.
 - 100 CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #63, Bamako, October 2019.
 - 101 CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #55, Bamako, September 2019.
 - 102 CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #29, Bamako, August 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #68, Bamako, October 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #42, Bamako, August 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #50, Bamako, September 2019.
 - 103 CIVIC interview with civilian, #1, Zantiguila, August 2019; CIVIC interview with civilian, #3, Zantiguila, August 2019; CIVIC interview with civilian, #4, Zantiguila, August 2019; CIVIC interview with civil society leader, #92, Sévaré, November 2019; CIVIC interview with civil society leader, #94, Sévaré, November 2019; CIVIC interview with civil society leader, #98, Sévaré, November 2019; CIVIC interview with civil society leader, #99, Sévaré, November 2019; CIVIC interview with civil society leader, #100, Sévaré, November 2019; CIVIC interview with civil society leader, #101, Sévaré, November 2019; CIVIC interview with civil society leader, #107, Sévaré, November 2019; CIVIC interview with civilian, #110, Mopti, November 2019; CIVIC interview with civilian, #111, Mopti, November 2019; CIVIC interview with civil society leader, #114, Sévaré, December 2019; CIVIC interview with local official based in Mopti region, #92, Bamako, December 2019.
 - 104 CIVIC interview with civilian, #4, Zantiguila, August 2019.

The Mission currently has a single aerial ISR aircraft available for the whole of Mali, a country that is about twice the size of France.

STRAIN ON RESOURCES RESULTS IN TRADE-OFFS BETWEEN PROTECTION ACTIVITIES

UN peacekeeping operations have to prioritize how to use their limited resources between and within tasks. The mounting number of competing objectives—coupled with the Mission’s limited supply of air assets—is forcing officials to relocate or repurpose assets, which frequently leaves critical protection gaps.¹⁰⁵ For example, when Sector Center was created in 2019, transferring operational command for tactical activities in the Mopti region from Timbuktu in the north to Sévaré in the center, there were still no military helicopters or ISR systems permanently assigned to Mopti. This situation was still the case as of April 2020.¹⁰⁶ To deter attacks in Mopti, operations in central Mali must therefore draw frequently on air assets from other sectors to provide

early warning and deter attacks, including drawing on light attack helicopters—in the form of El Salvador’s MD-500s—from Sector West and Sector East.¹⁰⁷

One military official commented to CIVIC, “We have a robust mandate. We need to be able to make a show of force, not just a show of presence....”¹⁰⁸ While the use of offensive weapons remains a sensitive subject and the Mission has very rarely opened fire to deter armed groups,¹⁰⁹ several MINUSMA officials confirmed that the light attack helicopters are one of the most effective means the Mission has to prevent potentially imminent attacks on villages because of their speed and their show of force.¹¹⁰

105 CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #70, Bamako, October 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official #72, conducted via telephone, November 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #63, Bamako, October 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #78, Sévaré, November 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #57, Bamako, September 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #67, Bamako, October 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #68, Bamako, October 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #55, Bamako, September 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #76, Sévaré, November 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #77, Sévaré, November 2019.

106 CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #12, Bamako, February 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #14, Sévaré, February 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #29, Sévaré, February 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #33, Sévaré, February 2020; email correspondence with MINUSMA civilian official, #42, November 2019.

107 Email correspondence with MINUSMA military official, #57, Bamako, October 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #63, Bamako, October 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #77, Sévaré, November 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #78, Sévaré, November 2019; CIVIC interview with military official, #33, Sévaré, February 2020.

108 CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #68, Bamako, October 2019.

109 CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #26, Bamako, August 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #84, Sévaré, November 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #29, Sévaré, February 2020; email correspondence with MINUSMA military official, #1, Bamako, March 2020. Further research is necessary to determine why MINUSMA seldom uses its offensive weapons and whether firing warning shots more often would be beneficial or harmful to the protection of civilians.

110 CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #77, Sévaré, November 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #78, Sévaré, November 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #84, Sévaré, November 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #85, Sévaré, November 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA police official, #16, Sévaré, February 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #34, Sévaré, February 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #12, Bamako, February 2020.

Attempts to mitigate the shortage of military air assets in Mopti by using assets from other sectors risk leaving the Mission exposed in other strategically important regions.¹¹¹ A military official emphasized to CIVIC: “Sometimes we use the Timbuktu MD-500s down in Douentza [in Mopti]. But they don’t have the endurance to travel to the north of Sector West if they were suddenly needed there.”¹¹² Nevertheless, there are still periods when the MD-500s have to return to Gao or Timbuktu, depriving Sector Center of one of its primary tools to respond to intercommunal attacks in Mopti.¹¹³ “It’s very discouraging for everyone involved if a mayor phones to say that his village is about to be attacked and we cannot respond,” commented one civilian official at MINUSMA.¹¹⁴

The absence of an ISR platform in Mopti means that RPA have also been relocated from other sectors to carry out missions in central Mali. There are two significant problems with this. First, the shortage of assets limits the Mission’s ability to build up a consistent understanding of what is happening in each of the regions. A military official explained:

“You have to revisit on a regular basis to establish what is the normal pattern of life and distinguish unusual changes. It needs a daily revisit, but there are competing priorities. We want to follow this pattern of life everywhere. In the north, it’s the movements of the signatory armed groups and TAGs [Terrorist Armed Groups]. In the center, it’s the threat of intercommunal violence. We need to be able to tackle both priorities simultaneously.”¹¹⁵

The second problem with relocating RPA from other sectors is that moving assets from one vast territory to another is highly inefficient.¹¹⁶ Relocating an RPA from either Gao or Timbuktu to the Mopti region takes about three hours, according to two officials.¹¹⁷ A military official further stated that this inevitably “takes away the time you have for the mission... that’s six hours wasted flying there and back.”¹¹⁸ The Adaptation Plan foresees the deployment of a piloted ISR platform in Sector Center, which would help address this problem.¹¹⁹

“It’s very discouraging for everyone involved if a mayor phones to say that his village is about to be attacked and we cannot respond”

— MINUSMA civilian official interviewed in Sévaré

111 CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #63, Bamako, October 2019; CIVIC interview with northern-based MINUSMA civilian official, #70, Bamako, October 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #72, conducted via telephone, November 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #78, Sévaré, November 2019.

112 CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #63, Bamako, October 2019.

113 CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #57, Bamako, September 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #78, Sévaré, November 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #84, Sévaré, November 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #85, Sévaré, November 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #12, Bamako, February 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #33, Sévaré, February 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #34, Sévaré, February 2020.

114 CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #34, Sévaré, February 2020.

115 CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #68, Bamako, October 2019.

116 CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #22, Bamako, August 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #63, Bamako, October 2019; email correspondence with MINUSMA civilian official, #45, April 2020.

117 CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #63, Bamako, October 2019; email correspondence with MINUSMA civilian official, #45, April 2020.

118 CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #63, Bamako, October 2019.

119 CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #63, Bamako, October 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #59, Bamako, October 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #24, Bamako, August 2019.

CASE STUDY: Trying to Do Two Jobs at Once

A prime example of MINUSMA making a difficult and controversial trade-off occurred in mid-2019. From August 1–5, Prime Minister Boubou Cissé travelled to the Mopti region to attend the signing of a series of non-aggression agreements between communities in Tenenkou, Diafarabé, Kemacina, and Djenné.¹²⁰ Since Mali lacks a civil aviation service and the government's recent purchases of military helicopters have been fraught with problems, the Prime Minister requested logistical assistance from MINUSMA to facilitate the visit.¹²¹ The day before the trip, the Prime Minister's office informed MINUSMA that his delegation had expanded to about 40 people from the initially agreed upon 20 to 30 passengers.¹²²

This change posed a problem for the Mission. MINUSMA had only two civilian Mi-8 helicopters based in Mopti—one to transport supplies and people and another dedicated to CASEVAC. The transport helicopter that MINUSMA had already assigned for the task could not accommodate 40 people, so the Mission offered to transport the enlarged party in two trips.¹²³ The Prime Minister relayed that the delegation should arrive as one in order to present a united front in support of the agreements.¹²⁴ On the eve of the visit, having exhausted other options, MINUSMA re-tasked the standby CASEVAC helicopter in Mopti to travel overnight to Bamako to enable the Prime Minister's delegation to travel together.¹²⁵

At the time, MINUSMA had ground units comprising 800–1000 peacekeepers deployed in the field far from the regional base in Sévaré as part of ongoing patrols to protect civilians.¹²⁶ The decision to re-task the second Mi-8 in support of the Prime Minister's delegation left Sector Center without CASEVAC coverage.¹²⁷ As a result, the Force stood down all troops in Sector Center and suspended the planned patrols for the following day.¹²⁸ An Mi-8 was sent down to Sévaré from Timbuktu the next day to serve as the standby CASEVAC aircraft, which allowed military operations to resume.¹²⁹ Nevertheless, Sector Center was without CASEVAC coverage for 12 hours.¹³⁰ This scenario of shifting assets underscores that if the Prime Minister's office had submitted the request for an expanded delegation just days earlier—or if MINUSMA had additional air assets—the Mission would have been in a much better position to accommodate the request.¹³¹

120 “Mali : les dessous de la visite de Boubou Cissé dans le centre,” *Nord Sud Journal*, August 5, 2019, <https://www.nordsudjournal.com/boubou-cisse-mopti/>.

121 “Communication catastrophique d’IBK et son fils Karim Keita autour des hélicoptères cloués au sol,” Bamada, July 14, 2019, <http://bamada.net/communication-catastrophique-dibk-et-son-fils-karim-keita-autour-des-helicopteres-cloues-au-sol>.

122 CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #57, Bamako, September 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #56, Bamako, September 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #55, Bamako, September 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #67, Bamako, October 2019.

123 CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #55, Bamako, September 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #56, Bamako, September 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #57, Bamako, September 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #67, Bamako, October 2019; email correspondence with MINUSMA civilian official, #45, April 2020.

124 CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #57, Bamako, September 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #67, Bamako, October 2019; email correspondence with MINUSMA civilian official, #45, April 2020.

125 CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #57, Bamako, September 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #68, Bamako, October 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #55, Bamako, September 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #67, Bamako, October 2019.

126 CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #68, Bamako, October 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #57, Bamako, September 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #47, Bamako, September 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #55, Bamako, September 2019.

127 CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #47, Bamako, September 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #57, Bamako, September 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #68, Bamako, October 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #55, Bamako, September 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #67, Bamako, October 2019.

128 CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #57, Bamako, September 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #47, Bamako, September 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #68, Bamako, October 2019.

129 Ahmed, “Mali : à Tombouctou, les habitants assistent depuis des mois à une montée des tensions”; “Mali: violences sporadiques à Tombouctou, deux enfants tués,” RFI, September 20, 2019, <http://www.rfi.fr/afrique/20190920-mali-violences-sporadiques-tombouctou-enfants-tues>; MINUSMA internal document #6, on file with CIVIC.

130 Ahmed, “Mali : à Tombouctou, les habitants assistent depuis des mois à une montée des tensions”; “Mali: violences sporadiques à Tombouctou, deux enfants tués,” RFI, September 20, 2019, <http://www.rfi.fr/afrique/20190920-mali-violences-sporadiques-tombouctou-enfants-tues>; MINUSMA internal document #6, on file with CIVIC.

131 Ahmed, “Mali : à Tombouctou, les habitants assistent depuis des mois à une montée des tensions”; “Mali: violences sporadiques à Tombouctou, deux enfants tués,” RFI, September 20, 2019, <http://www.rfi.fr/afrique/20190920-mali-violences-sporadiques-tombouctou-enfants-tues>; MINUSMA internal document #6, on file with CIVIC.

The decision to re-task the second Mi-8 in support of the Prime Minister's delegation left Sector Center without CASEVAC coverage.

CHALLENGES TO FORCE GENERATION

MINUSMA's mandate contains several tasks related to the protection of civilians that are frequently compromised by the lack of air assets. On the one hand, Resolution 2480 instructs the Mission to take "robust and proactive steps to protect civilians, including through the deployment of ground and air assets...."¹³² On the other hand, it calls on MINUSMA to "support Malian authorities in reducing violence and intercommunal tensions by using its good offices."¹³³ A further priority task offers even more detail, mandating the Mission "to exercise good offices, confidence-building and facilitation at the national and local levels, in order to support dialogue with and among all stakeholders towards reconciliation and social cohesion."¹³⁴ Given the lack of adequate assets to meet these varied and often competing demands, MINUSMA leaders face dilemmas like the one detailed in the case study above. Should it pursue POC objectives by supporting the Malian government's political outreach and mediation efforts, or should it pursue POC objectives through military patrols?

The UN faces myriad obstacles when trying to generate military air assets for MINUSMA. These challenges include: competing demands for a relatively limited number of appropriate air assets; the cost of deploying the assets; the safety and security of personnel; and adequate land, buildings, and infrastructure in Mali to accommodate the assets and personnel. Furthermore, UN Member States willing to deploy to Mali may not have assets or capabilities that meet UN standards or the demands of the context, such as the ability to fly at night.¹³⁵ Member States can develop security assistance partnerships to try to address gaps—for example, the US Department of State and Department of Defense provided training, equipment, and related support to El Salvador, enabling the country to deploy a military helicopter unit to MINUSMA—but these partnerships take time to bear fruit, especially when they concern training in the use and maintenance of sophisticated technology.¹³⁶ Where Member States do have the assets, UN peacekeeping may not be a national priority when compared with disaster response or law enforcement. Similarly, other national security priorities, including bilateral or coalition efforts to counter terrorist threats in the Sahel or in other parts of the world may take precedence.

Moreover, the cost of deploying air assets to Mali is high. Once deployed, TCCs are responsible for the costs of maintaining their assets and enablers.

¹³² UN Security Council Resolution 2480 (2019), para. 28(c-ii).

¹³³ UN Security Council Resolution 2480 (2019), para. 28(b-i).

¹³⁴ UN Security Council Resolution 2480 (2019), para. 28 (d-i).

¹³⁵ CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #12, Bamako, February 2020; CIVIC interview with UN Secretariat military official, #46, New York, January 2020; email correspondence with MINUSMA civilian official, #45, April 2020.

¹³⁶ CIVIC interview with UN Secretariat military official, #46, New York, January 2020; Emily Hamble, "With U.S. Support, El Salvador Steps Up for Peacekeeping Mission in Mali," U.S. Department of State Dipnote, May 29, 2018, <https://www.state.gov/with-u-s-support-el-salvador-steps-up-for-peacekeeping-mission-in-mali/>.

Mali presents a harsh environment, with factors such as heat, dust, and sandstorms all capable of taking a heavy toll on air assets. Maintenance costs are therefore considerable.¹³⁷ While TCCs are reimbursed for deploying personnel, including the individuals who deploy with the air assets such as flight and maintenance crews, these reimbursements may not cover the full cost of the individual or unit deployed. As importantly, TCCs are not reimbursed if their assets and enablers are damaged during deployment (unless they are insured). For instance, Bangladesh's three utility helicopters sustained significant damage during a mortar attack on MINUSMA's camp in Kidal in October 2016.¹³⁸ The helicopter unit was unable to resume operations and had to be repatriated the following year, representing a large loss to both MINUSMA and Bangladesh.¹³⁹

Another concern for Member States who have the required capabilities to deploy is the safety and security of their personnel. However, while Mali is one of the most dangerous contexts in the history of UN peacekeeping, it is important to note that there have not been any instances of MINUSMA personnel being killed by a hostile act while in an aircraft.

In fact, given the threats of IED attacks and ambushes, traveling by air is safer in many ways than traveling over land. That said, there have been several accidents involving MINUSMA aircraft, some of which have led to fatalities.¹⁴⁰

TCCs understandably want assurances that medical support can be provided in line with certain standards, including the NATO 10–1–2 rule, which defines the timeline from point of injury to life-saving treatment.¹⁴¹ An International Peace Institute report from earlier this year cited inadequate medical guarantees as “the greatest barrier to entry for European TCCs.”¹⁴² It noted, for example, that European TCCs expressed concern about how effectively UN peacekeeping missions can evacuate casualties given that utility helicopters—both civilian and military—are under the control of senior civilian officials rather than military leaders.¹⁴³ Another particular concern cited was that UN hospitals do not always meet the troop contributing country's national standards.¹⁴⁴ The proposal in MINUSMA's Adaptation Plan to develop a Level II hospital in Mopti would thus eliminate one of the barriers to Member States committing personnel and air assets to Sector Center.¹⁴⁵

137 CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #57, Bamako, September 2019; Dawnieca Palma, “Maintaining an Aircraft in Mali,” *The Maple Leaf*, <https://ml-fd.caf-fac.ca/en/2019/06/30484>; Andrea Shalal, “Germany defends performance of crashed Tiger helicopter in Mali,” *Reuters*, July 27, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mali-un-crash-germany/germany-defends-performance-of-crashed-tiger-helicopter-in-mali-idUSKBN1AC2YL>; Joseph Trevithick, “Armed UN Little Bird Helicopters Are a Big Deal for Peacekeepers in Mali,” *The Drive*, November 27, 2017, <https://www.thedrive.com/the-war-zone/16433/armed-un-little-bird-helicopters-are-a-big-deal-for-peacekeepers-in-mali>.

138 UN Security Council, “Situation in Mali: Report of the Secretary-General,” December 2016, para. 25, <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/855517?ln=fr>; UN Security Council, “Situation in Mali: Report of the Secretary-General,” September 2017, para. 64, https://minusma.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/170928_sg_report_on_mali_september_eng.pdf.

139 UN Security Council, “Situation in Mali: Report of the Secretary-General,” September 2017, para. 64.

140 “Two Dutch airmen dead in Mali helicopter crash: officials,” *Reuters*, March 17, 2015, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mali-un-netherlands/two-dutch-airmen-dead-in-mali-helicopter-crash-officials-idUSKBN0MD2AZ20150317>; Sabine Siebold, “Exclusive: Airbus staff error led to fatal Mali copter crash - German official,” *Reuters*, December 12, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mali-un-germany-airbus-exclusive/exclusive-airbus-staff-error-led-to-fatal-mali-copter-crash-german-official-idUSKBN10B0WL>; “Salvadoran Air Force MD 500 Helicopter Crashes in Mal,” *DEFPOST*, December 1, 2019, <https://defpost.com/salvadoran-air-force-md-500-helicopter-crashes-in-mali/>.

141 The 10–1–2 standard includes: life-saving first-response measures to control severe bleeding and maintain airway, breathing, and circulation within 10 minutes of injury, wounding, or onset of acute symptoms; advanced resuscitation and pre-hospital emergency care within 1 hour of injury, wounding, or onset of acute symptoms; and life, limb, and function-preserving surgical and resuscitative care no later than 2 hours after injury or wounding. See NATO Standard, Allied Joint Doctrine for Medical Support, AJP-4.10, edition C, version 1, September 2019, section 3–8.

142 Arthur Boutellis and Michael Beary, “Sharing the Burden: Lessons from the European Return to Multidimensional Peacekeeping,” International Peace Institute, January 2020, 8.

143 Boutellis and Beary, “Sharing the Burden,” 8–9. While CIVIC did not specifically look at the issue of authority over aircraft, it is important to note that MINUSMA has recently introduced new procedures to simplify and expedite the deployment of air assets to evacuate casualties.

144 Boutellis and Beary, “Sharing the Burden,” 8–9.

145 UN Department of Peace Operations, “Uniformed Capability Requirements: MINUSMA Special Edition,” January 2020. The level of a hospital describes the type of care that the hospital can provide. Level II hospitals are required to provide: “surgical and life-saving capabilities, as well as common hospital services... damage control surgery; post-operative services and high-dependency care; an [Aeromedical Evacuation Teams (AMET)] capability; intensive care-resuscitation; in-patient services; basic imaging services; laboratory, pharmaceutical, preventive medicine and dental services; as well as record maintenance and administrative support.” See: United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations and Department of Field Support, “Medical Support Manual for United Nations Field Missions,” 3rd Edition, 2015, 48, <http://dag.un.org/bitstream/handle/11176/387299/2015.12%20Medical%20Support%20Manual%20for%20UN%20Field%20Missions.pdf?sequence=4&isAllowed=y>.

The UN will first need the Malian government to allocate land for airstrips, hangers, and accommodation for the personnel that accompany the assets.

Finally, it should be noted that even if the UN is able to generate the air assets from Member States, they won't necessarily be able to deploy quickly. The UN will first need the Malian government to allocate land for airstrips, hangers, and accommodation for the personnel that accompany the assets. The UN has already been negotiating with the Malian government to acquire additional land near MINUSMA's camp in Sévaré, but the need for space will only increase as the Mission seeks to put more personnel and air assets in Sector Center.¹⁴⁶ In addition, the UN may need to move its engineering units or contract commercial companies to build this infrastructure, which could further delay the deployment of critically important air assets.

A WAY FORWARD

Resolution 2480 requests MINUSMA to “carry out its mandate...with a flexible and agile posture.”¹⁴⁷ It also instructs the Mission to “take mobile, flexible, robust and proactive steps to protect civilians, including through the deployment of ground and air assets.”¹⁴⁸ To fulfill these obligations, it is imperative that the UN Department of Peace Operations and Member States work creatively to fill existing and upcoming military air asset gaps despite the challenges. Notably, there are a number of ways that Member States could benefit from deploying military air assets to UN peacekeeping operations, including MINUSMA. These benefits include, but are not limited to: an enhanced reputation within the international community; an enhanced ability to develop or maintain interoperability with other countries; the acquisition of training and experience that comes through deployment in a conflict zone; and contributing to peace and stability in a region that is deemed strategically important.¹⁴⁹

In regions where there are no attack helicopters consistently available, it is very difficult for the Mission to mount a credible mobile deterrent to attacks on civilians beyond areas where troops are already present. Where there is no ISR platform, the Mission's ability to monitor developments and identify imminent threats to civilians is significantly diminished. And where there is no military utility helicopter to transport armed troops, all elements of the multi-dimensional mission are greatly limited in their ability to report on human rights violations and engage the communities they are supposed to help protect.

Amid what will surely be complex and contested negotiations in 2020 regarding MINUSMA's budget and mandate, it will be easy to lose sight of the things that the Security Council has already agreed upon. It is thus vital that Member States focus their attention on securing air assets to fill the existing gaps in MINUSMA's capabilities and generating additional assets as outlined in the special edition of MINUSMA's Uniformed Capability Requirements document in support of the Mission Adaptation Plan.¹⁵⁰ Expecting the Mission to do more in such a challenging and dangerous environment without first addressing these critical deficits does a great disservice to MINUSMA's own personnel. More importantly, it does a great disservice to the Malian civilians they are there to protect.

146 CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #76, Sévaré, November 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #1, Bamako, January 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #12, Bamako, February 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA police official, #16, Sévaré, February 2020.

147 UN Security Council Resolution 2480 (2019), para. 22.

148 UN Security Council Resolution 2480 (2019), para. 28(c-ii).

149 Boutellis and Beary, “Sharing the Burden,” 3.

150 UN Department of Peace Operations, “Uniformed Capability Requirements: MINUSMA Special Edition,” January 2020.

ABOUT THIS REPORT

Peacekeeping missions often struggle to acquire the resources they need to accomplish the growing range of tasks they are mandated to perform. In this respect, the peacekeeping mission in Mali (MINUSMA) is no exception. Indeed, the Mission has lacked military air assets in critical areas for several years. The deterioration of the security environment in central Mali since 2015 and the subsequent expansion of the Mission's mandate have further exacerbated these deficits. The shortage of military air assets greatly limits MINUSMA's ability to protect civilians in areas where they are most at risk of being attacked.

'Protecting Civilians in Mali: Why Air Assets Matter for MINUSMA' examines the numerous ways in which helicopters, planes, and intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) aircraft enable the Mission to undertake its mandate to protect civilians. The report includes several studies that demonstrate the value of air assets to MINUSMA. It also details how the lack of military helicopters and ISR aircraft based in central Mali is compelling MINUSMA to draw air assets from the north to fulfill its expanded mandate—an action that risks leaving the Mission exposed in key areas.

The report highlights how MINUSMA has developed an Adaptation Plan to respond to these challenges, which proposes that the Mission become more mobile to implement its expanded mandate. As this plan requires the acquisition of additional helicopters and ISR aircraft, the report also discusses the challenges that the UN must overcome to persuade Member States to contribute highly-prized air assets to MINUSMA. Finally, the report offers recommendations to MINUSMA, the UN Secretariat, UN Member States, and the Government of Mali as to what can be done to help the Mission better protect civilians. Without additional air assets, MINUSMA's capacity to identify, deter, and respond to potential threats to civilians—especially in central Mali—will remain extremely limited.

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