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7 Tangled up in glue

Multilateral crisis responses in Mali

John Karlsrud, Natasja Rupesinghe and Denis M. Tull

- **Phase one: Tuareg and jihadist rebellion (January–December 2012)**
- **Phase two: African responses and France's Operation Serval (January–July 2013)**
- **Phase three: enter MINUSMA and EU missions (July 2013-present)**
- **Phase four: the Joint Force of the G5 Sahel—a regional solution? (February 2017–present)**
- **Has there been a rapid crisis response in Mali?**
- **A peace operation patchwork**
- **Conclusion**

In January 2012, Mali plunged into a multifaceted crisis, triggered by an extraordinary series of events. A separatist Tuareg rebellion, a military coup d'état, and the collapse of state authority paved the way for the Islamist occupation of Mali's three most northern regions, Gao, Timbuktu, and Kidal. Consequently, Mali quickly rose on the agenda of regional and global actors, initiating several unilateral and multilateral interventions to stabilize the country. Since then, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the African Union (AU), the United Nations (UN), France, the United States, the European Union (EU), and regional players through the Joint Force of the G5 Sahel (FC-G5S) have launched stabilization initiatives. Mali thus provides an opportunity to examine the cooperation, coordination, and potential competition involved in contemporary "crisis response." This chapter examines these international responses, which can be divided into four, partially overlapping, phases: First, the initial reaction to the Tuareg/jihadist rebellion in early 2012 and the coup in Bamako (January–December 2012); second, the French (Operation Serval) and the ECOWAS/AU response to the southern offensive of the jihadists (January 2013–July 2013);

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third, the aftermath of Serval and the deployment of the UN Multidimensional Mission for Stabilization in Mali (MINUSMA) and other missions/operations (July 2013–present); and fourth and finally, the deployment of the FC-G5S (February 2017–present).

Phase one: Tuareg and jihadist rebellion (January–December 2012)

The starting point for the crisis was the nationalist Tuareg uprising against the central government,[1] spearheaded by the Movement National pour la Liberation de l'Azawad (MNLA), which started with an attack on military installations in Menaka on 17 January 2012. Successive Tuareg rebellions have been launched throughout the postcolonial period largely as a response to the perceived economic and political marginalization of the northern regions, and the government's failure to implement promises of decentralization agreed upon in previous peace agreements.[2] The MNLA were emboldened by an injection of 1,500 to 2,000 Tuareg fighters with military experience from Libya following the 2011 North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)-led intervention in Libya and subsequent fall of Muammar Qaddafi.[3]

Frustrated by the government's inadequate response to the rebellion, a coup was launched against President Amadou Toumani Touré of Mali by a group of low ranking soldiers led by Captain Amadou Haya Sanogo, on 22 March 2012. Taking advantage of the ensuing breakdown of central state authority and the collapse of the Malian Armed Forces (FAMA), the MNLA forged an alliance with several radical, armed Islamist groups which had become increasingly important actors in the region. These included Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), with origins in Algeria but which had long been active in the Sahara; the Movement for Divine Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO); and Ansar Dine, a locally rooted jihadist group. Within days, the MNLA and the Islamists took control of Gao, Timbuktu, and Kidal in northern Mali, some two thirds of the country's national territory. On 6 April 2012, the MNLA proclaimed the "Republic of Azawad," and the Islamist groups imposed Sharia law on the population. Eventually, fighting broke out between the Islamist alliance and the MNLA, and the MNLA lost control of the positions it held in northern Mali.

These events sent shock waves at both regional and continental levels. ECOWAS immediately condemned the coup and sent a mediation team led by Burkina Faso's President Blaise Campaoré, urging the military junta to hand over power to a civilian-led government by

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applying a series of travel and economic sanctions.[4] On 6 April 2012, a framework agreement was signed with the junta agreeing on the restoration of constitutional order. Dioncounda Traoré, the speaker of the National Assembly, was installed as president and Cheikh Modibo Diarra as prime minister of a transitional government.[5] Shortly after, as the situation deteriorated, ECOWAS expressed its readiness to deploy the ECOWAS Standby Force upon the request of the Malian government.[6]

On 12 June 2012, the AU authorized a regional peace support operation, to be executed by the ECOWAS force,[7] and drawing on the model for the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) it called on the UN Security Council to authorize a "support package funded by UN-assessed contributions."[8] However, the key states on the Security Council—France as the former colonial power, and the United States as the largest funder of the assessed budget—were not ready to support such an option, with the result that the council only stated that it "*Expresses its readiness* to further examine the request of ECOWAS once additional information has been provided regarding the objectives, means and modalities of the envisaged deployment and other possible measures."[9] The initiative was also firmly opposed by key actors in Bamako, as well as by Algeria and Mauritania, two of the most influential players in the region, and not members of ECOWAS.[10] As a result, "due to disagreements between ECOWAS, Algeria and Mauritania about taking military action, this option did not come to fruition."[11]

The process continued to move forward at a very slow pace for the duration of 2012. Finally, in November that year, the UN secretary-general endorsed a concept of operations developed by ECOWAS and the AU,[12] and on 20 December the UN Security Council authorized the African-led International Support Mission in Mali (AFISMA) for an initial period of one year under Resolution 2085.[13] AFISMA was mandated, inter alia, to "take all necessary measures … [t]o support the Malian authorities in recovering the areas in the north of its territory under the control of terrorist, extremist and armed groups."[14]

Phase two: African responses and France's Operation Serval (January–July 2013)

In January 2013 the situation deteriorated as the jihadist groups started moving southwards. The capture of the town of Konna on 9 January signaled the possibility that the jihadists were intending to take over central Mali (Mopti and Ségou) and move towards Bamako. As

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AFISMA's deployment was still elusive, the Malian government requested military support from France on 11 January.

The French military operation, Serval, was launched that very day, 11 January. Within weeks it had gained control of most of northern Mali, with support from the United States and other NATO members, including strategic airlift capacity, in-flight fueling, and surveillance and intelligence support.[15] On the ground, Serval was accompanied by Chadian troops deployed as part of AFISMA, who also enjoyed logistical support from Western partners. The Islamists fled into the mountains, across the borders, or assimilated back into the local populations. It should also be noted that Serval stopped an attempted coup against interim president Dioncounda Traoré.[16] Beginning in August 2014, Paris, for its part, transformed Serval into a highly versatile regional expeditionary counter-terrorism force (Operation Barkhane) that would track and neutralize terrorists across the Sahel, including in Mali.

Planning for a UN peacekeeping mission in Mali had commenced already in February 2013, in response to the deteriorating security situation and the International Criminal Court's investigations into possible atrocity crimes committed.[17] There was mounting pressure on the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations in New York to act. On 25 April, the Security Council adopted Resolution 2100,[18] authorizing the deployment of MINUSMA. This mission assumed authority from AFISMA on 1 July, cutting short AFISMA's intended deployment period to less than the one year originally envisaged. The Security Council requested "the Secretary-General to include in MINUSMA, in close coordination with the AU and ECOWAS, AFISMA military and police personnel appropriate to United Nations standards."[19] Subsequently, the entire strength of AFISMA—6,587 military and police personnel—was re-hatted on 1 July 2013.[20]

Phase three: enter MINUSMA and EU missions (July 2013-present)

MINUSMA was deployed into an ongoing conflict with no peace to keep, but with clear expectations from the AU and the host government to help in the fight against terrorist and armed groups in the north. In the discussions over the mandate for MINUSMA, the AU asked for a peace enforcement mandate, an "action-oriented assistance to the Malian Government" to "actively sustain efforts aimed at dismantling the terrorist and criminal networks in the north of the country."[21] Unhappy with the mandate that eventually was given to

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MINUSMA by the Security Council, the Malian government in 2014 unsuccessfully asked for the establishment of a regional "rapid intervention force capable of effectively combating terrorists,"[22] with three potential constellations in mind: (1) to be included in MINUSMA, modeled on the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Force Intervention Brigade (FIB) in the UN Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUSCO); (2) to be deployed as a separate force, but with logistical support from the UN; or (3) as a parallel force, but with a Security Council resolution or presidential statement "supporting the establishment and deployment of the force, so as to facilitate the mobilization of international support."[23]

Although exceptionally robust, MINUSMA's mandate fell short of these expectations. The Security Council mandated it "to stabilize key population centres, especially in the north of Mali and, in this context, to deter threats and take active steps to prevent the return of armed elements to those areas" and "to support transitional authorities of Mali to extend and re-establish State administration throughout the country."[24] Christopher Chivvis argued that France pushed for its deployment as it "reduced the chances of its troops becoming mired in a long and bloody counter-insurgency operation."[25] It is unclear if France and the UN overestimated the impact of Serval on the jihadist movements, for they reconstituted their capacities relatively quickly. As a result, MINUSMA has been in a counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism mode since its inception, without the necessary mandate, or doctrinal and operational tools to deal with such a situation.[26] MINUSMA is one of the deadliest peacekeeping operations in the history of the UN, with 95 fatalities due to "malicious attacks" between its inception and 31 December 2017.[27] Because of the continuous attacks, MINUSMA's mandate was sharpened in June 2016, asking the mission "to anticipate, deter and counter threats, including asymmetric threats, and to take robust and active steps to protect civilians … engaging in direct operations pursuant only to serious and credible threats."[28]

Western member states have been involved in various ways in the conflict since the deployment of Serval. Denmark, Germany, The Netherlands, and Sweden have all made significant troop and capability contributions to MINUSMA since 2013,[29] partly in conjunction with their bids for a place on the UN Security Council, but also as part of their international engagement and burden-sharing with the United States in the global "war on terror," relabeled as preventing and countering violent extremism.[30] These contributions were motivated by the fear of a spread of global terrorist groups like Al Qaeda and the Islamic State, and figured prominently in the pronouncements of Western

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leaders when motivating their contributions to, for example, Serval/Barkhane, MINUSMA, and the EU Training Mission in Mali (EUTM Mali).[31] The EU deployed two missions to support security sector reform: EUTM Mali in 2013, comprising roughly 500 personnel to train and assist Mali's armed forces, and the EU Capacity Building Mission in Mali (EUCAP Sahel Mali) in 2015 with 100 personnel to assist the internal security forces.

Phase four: the Joint Force of the G5 Sahel—a regional solution? (February 2017–present)

Except Algeria, which has served as the chief mediator between the government and Tuareg rebels and as the chair of the Peace Accord's Follow-Up Committee, all neighboring states were involved in Mali mainly as troop contributors to MINUSMA. ECOWAS countries (plus Chad) provide almost two thirds (62.7 percent) of MINUSMA's 11,609 military.[32] In 2017, however, regional actors stepped up their game when the countries of the Group of Five for the Sahel (the G5S, consisting of Burkina Faso, Chad, Mauritania, Mali, and Niger) decided to establish a joint force, the FC-G5S, to fight terrorist groups and organized crime in their joint border areas. The G5S is a sub-regional arrangement that was founded in February 2014 to address development and security challenges by enhancing cross-border cooperation. Discussions around an African force had been ongoing since 2013–2014 to respond to escalating insecurity brought on by the increased activity of jihadist groups.[33] As neither ECOWAS nor the AU articulated any clear vision of a force, the G5S heads of state, inspired by the model of the Chadian–Sudanese Mixed Force as well as the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) authorized in 2015 to combat Boko Haram in Nigeria, decided to create a joint force.[34] The AU Peace and Security Council (PSC) authorized the force's deployment on 13 April 2017 for a 12-month period, with a troop strength of 5,000. Following intense political negotiation, the UN Security Council "welcomed" the G5 Sahel as a new model of "regional counter-terrorism cooperation," falling short of the UN Charter's Chapter VII mandate the French had been pushing for.[35] The FC-G5S was officially launched in Bamako on 2 July 2017.

The force was mandated to combat terrorism, drug trafficking and human trafficking, contribute to the restoration of state authority and the return of displaced persons and refugees, facilitate humanitarian operations and the delivery of aid, and contribute to the implementation of development actions.[36] The FC-G5S set up its force

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headquarters in Sévaré, in Mopti, central Mali. With significant support from Barkhane, the force had completed two "operations" by March 2018. Full operational capacity was announced in May 2018. France was instrumental in mobilizing international financial support for the joint force, which the UN Security Council, most notably the United States, had refused to provide. A donor conference in Paris on 23 February that year had brought a total of $509 million of pledges for the force.[37] See Table 7.1 below for a timeline of international responses to the crisis in Mali between January 2013 and March 2018.

Has there been a rapid crisis response in Mali?

If rapid crisis response is conceptualized as "a quick reaction to the outbreak of a crisis," the answer is no. However, in Mali, and arguably many other places (the Central African Republic, Afghanistan, and the Democratic Republic of Congo, among others), the onset of the crisis did not represent the high-water mark of violence or political turmoil.

For the most part, the crisis in Mali has not given impetus to rapid military response. Though initial diplomatic reactions from ECOWAS were swift, progress in deploying an intervention force was decidedly slow throughout 2012, partially due to the unwillingness of the UN Security Council to provide funding. However, the quick and determined intervention of France (Operation Serval) in January 2013, and the parallel deployment of AFISMA, could be characterized as rapid responses. Sparked by the offensive of the jihadist forces southwards, Serval was largely a consequence of the failure of what had been expected to be the initial crisis response, i.e. the intervention by ECOWAS and the AU. From a military point of view, the quick recapture of most of northern Mali could be considered significant in preventing atrocities from taking place.[38] The subsequent deployment of MINUSMA was supposed to signal the start of stabilization and peacebuilding. However, five years later, no significant strategic progress has been achieved in Mali, and there is instead evidence of a securitization of the situation.

The peace agreement in 2015 between the Malian government and Tuareg rebels was another step forward on paper, but progress on the ground has been painstakingly slow. Instability has spread to central Mali, where violent extremist jihadist groups, claiming allegiance to the "Katibat Macina" (also known as the Macina Liberation Front) have become increasingly entrenched in local communities, by exploiting long-standing grievances against the state and existing conflicts around resources.[39] Instability has also spread along the borders of

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Organization/ countries	Q1/2013	Q2/2013	Q3/2013	Q4/2013	Q1/2014	Q2/2014	Q3/2014	Q4/2014	Q1/2015	Q2/2015	Q3/2015	Q4/2015	Q1/2016	Q2/2016	Q3/2016	Q4/2016	Q1/2017	Q2/2017	Q3/2017	Q4/2017	Q1/2018
Serval/France	Serval (4,000 troops)																				
Barkhane							Barkhane (4,000 troops)														
ECOWAS/Chad	AFISMA (7,464)																				
UN			MINUSMA (14,900 total, 11,300 troops)																		
EU	EUTM (600 troops)																				
EU									EUCAP Sahel (100 civilians)												
Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauretania, Niger																			FC-G5S (5,000 troops)		

Table 7.1
Note that the initial mandated strength of AFISMA was 3,300, but this was rapidly increased as the situation unfolded in Q1 2013.

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Burkina Faso and Niger, which became priority axes of the FC-G5S. The newly formed "Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims" (Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin' or JNIM), which was announced in March 2017, an Al Qaeda-led umbrella organization including Ansar Dine, AQIM, the Katibat Macina, and Al-Mourabitoun, have also demonstrated increased coordination and sophistication in their attacks, and claim to be reorganizing to confront the FC-G5S. The international intervention should thus only be considered a partial or short-term success achieved in early 2013, whilst a more comprehensive, inclusive, and sustainable settlement remains elusive.

A peace operation patchwork

In considering rapid response mechanisms and subsequent stabilization efforts, we will discuss four broader issues that are relevant in the case of Mali:[40]

1. Inter-organizational rivalries among competing interveners;
2. An extremely challenging national and regional intervention environment;
3. Cooperation challenges amongst numerous parallel deployments, which included military, civilian, and diplomatic tools; and
4. The FC-G5S and the future of African crisis response.

Sequenced entries and inter-organizational competition: ECOWAS–AU–UN

The first issue which stands out is the inter-organizational rivalries that hindered responsiveness at the onset and throughout the Mali crisis. This concerned relations between ECOWAS and the AU, and later between these African actors and the UN.

In the initial stages of the Mali meltdown, crisis response mechanisms were deployed in a relatively straightforward fashion. In accordance with the AU's principles, procedures, and practices, ECOWAS, as the subsidiary regional body, seized the leadership in addressing the rebellion in northern Mali and the subsequent coup in Bamako. However, as the question of a military intervention gained traction, inter-African tensions grew pronounced. The AU and ECOWAS struggled to agree on "whether the AU or ECOWAS should be responsible for the mission,"[41] a bone of contention that was partly a result of geography insofar as the crisis also concerned Mali's neighbors Mauritania and Algeria, which are not members of ECOWAS. But political

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and institutional interests were also at stake. The AU was wary of ECOWAS seeking authorization directly from the UN Security Council, and wanted to firm up the principle of subsidiarity between the regional economic communities/regional mechanisms (RECs/RMs) and the AU Peace and Security Council.[42]

The absence of a determined African intervention finally forced the hand of France, which deployed Serval as a rapid reaction force to stop the jihadist advance in its tracks. Serval sparked more inter-organizational tensions and competitions, this time between the AU and ECOWAS on the one hand, and the UN on the other. Subsequent to Serval, African participation in crisis management was marginal, with the exception of peace negotiations between Tuareg rebels and the Malian government, in which African players (ECOWAS, Burkina Faso, and Algeria) were actively involved. Frustrated by the inability of ECOWAS and the AU to deploy a robust intervention, France and other players firmly and perhaps pragmatically pushed for the deployment of a UN peace operation, regardless of the AFISMA troops, which had arrived shortly after the onset of Serval. Question marks about African capabilities, equipment and finance certainly played a role in the sidelining of African actors. Nonetheless, the political fallout with African organizations and partners proved harmful on many counts, especially as it came right on the heels of the NATO-led intervention in Libya, where African agency had likewise been marginalized by Western countries. Perhaps in the knowledge of their own limited capabilities, ECOWAS and the AU were not principally opposed to the transition from AFISMA to MINUSMA. However, they did seek participation and leadership to assert African ownership of the crisis.

African support for the transition from AFISMA to MINUSMA hinged on the following expectations: a central political role for African players, including leadership positions in the new mission; a UN support package for AFISMA; and the idea that MINUSMA would receive a counter-terrorism mandate. However, none of these demands were met.[43] Only hours before Resolution 2100 was adopted on 25 April 2013, the AU protested that “Africa was not appropriately consulted in the drafting and consultation process that led to the adoption of the UN Security Council resolution [2100] authorizing the deployment of a UN Multidimensional Mission for Stabilization in Mali (MINUSMA) to take over AFISMA.”[44] The AU wanted to be consulted and argued for the UN primarily taking on political and development tasks, with AFISMA continuing to cover the security pillar together with Serval until security benchmarks were met.[45] This

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~~deception~~ de facto ended the African involvement in the Malian crisis, except for the weighty contribution of troops for MINUSMA.

In the long run, the crowding out of African institutional players in conflict resolution, and thus the absence of substantial international (UN) and regional cooperation, has no doubt weakened crisis response and stabilization efforts in Mali. With its limited resources and an ill-suited mandate, MINUSMA became a convenient scapegoat for Malian and regional leaders bemoaning the political impasse in Mali, the steady deterioration of the security situation and its spill-over effects into neighboring countries.[46]

A challenging environment: local and regional resistance

While responsibility for the lack of coordination and cooperation rests with the numerous actors involved, it needs to be emphasized that the political context in Mali and the region was a particularly challenging one. The fact that the external crisis response was not unanimously welcomed by Malian actors created a difficult playing field for outsiders. Malian reluctance to cooperate with crisis responders, much less invite them, was evident in the attitude of the March 2012 coup leaders, who correctly assumed that ECOWAS was intent on forcing them out of government. But Malian resistance went deeper than that. The coup had been greeted by popular support, nourishing popular expectations that a corrupt and incompetent political class would be ousted for good. In this sense, the ECOWAS goal of re-establishing constitutional order was widely equated with the status quo ante and the return of a corrupt political class.[47]

It was only in the final quarter of 2012 that the government, ECOWAS, the AU and other international partners agreed on a road map for the deployment of AFISMA to stabilize Mali, the rebuilding of the Malian armed forces (by EUTM Mali), and a subsequent offensive to liberate the north. However, this agreement remained ambiguous and reluctance persisted inside Mali's political class. Even after the military junta had given way to the transitional government, the latter was hesitant to invite outside intervention, including by France.[48] The euphoria around Serval only briefly suspended Malian unease about external intervention.

In the wake of Serval, the ambiguous relationship between outside actors and Mali came once more to the fore. The interim government was only willing to accept a UN peacekeeping force with a narrow and offensive mandate that would focus on the north, due to concerns regarding the UN's potential interference with politics in Bamako.[49]

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Over time, many Malians, political elites, and ordinary citizens have come to scrutinize the effectiveness and even the objectives of outside interveners. The debate about the appropriateness of MINUSMA's mandate has created political frictions that have undermined the legitimacy of the mission, both in Mali and the sub-region. It is against this background of mounting critiques of MINUSMA that the creation of the FC-G5S gained momentum, with the governments of the G5 Sahel states suggesting that regional leadership—and a counter-terrorist mandate—would provide a comparative advantage in addressing the crisis accumulating particularly in Mali's border zones with Niger and Burkina Faso. The FC-G5S thus added another layer of military intervention in the region, further amplifying the challenges of coordination and cooperation.

"Plug and play"? Parallel deployments

If inter-organizational competition has hindered rapid crisis response, subsequent events in Mali are a textbook case of how multi-organizational competition hampers effectiveness. In Mali, the sheer number of external interventions has prompted observers to describe the situation as a "security traffic jam" to highlight not only the myriad actors and initiatives involved, but also that this multitude of overlapping, competing, and at times contradictory interests renders ineffective international efforts to address Mali's security challenges.[50] Parallel deployments are particularly evident. In early 2018, no less than five different military operations or civil-military missions were present in Mali: the French counter-terrorism Operation Barkhane (whose regional mandate includes Mali), the UN stabilization mission MINUSMA, two EU Training Missions (EUTM and EUCAP Sahel Mali), and the FC-G5S. That these layers of security actors created complexity and therefore coordination and cooperation challenges was only to be expected.

In hindsight, it seems plausible to argue that the remarkably sweeping success of Serval created a false sense of accomplishment and even hubris. On the Malian side, President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita, who won the 2013 elections held immediately in the aftermath of the liberation of the north, gave every impression that the polls and the return to constitutional order also signaled the return to political normalcy. A sense of urgency and a willingness to interrogate the causes of the crisis was never perceptible. It was certainly not expressed in terms of policies and structural reforms, to the disappointment of voters and external partners.[51] The liberation of northern Mali sparked widespread international enthusiasm that drew in a wide range of external

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partners eager to play a role in Mali's recovery, partly perhaps because of Mali's donor darling status previous to the crisis.

France certainly played its part in mobilizing the UN and the EU, similar to the aftermath of its Sangaris operation in the Central African Republic (CAR) that was to follow later in 2013.[52] As would be the case in the CAR, the French understanding of burden-sharing envisioned stabilization activities by a UN mission and the rebuilding of the security sector by EU missions. Operation Barkhane, for its part, would focus on the kinetic end of the spectrum, carrying out counter-terrorist operations across the Sahel. It remains open to debate whether this division of labor reflected a larger strategic design. As of 2018, the impression is rather one of a patchwork of parallel, individual missions and operations that were loosely connected at best.[53] Information-sharing and limited mutual assistance agreements, as for example between MINUSMA and Barkhane, were hardly reflective of a comprehensive, well-coordinated approach. Limited ability or willingness to coordinate a multitude of actors and their activities extended beyond the military. In the realm of security sector assistance, for example, no fewer than 70 different projects to assist Mali's security sector (justice, defense, and internal security) were being implemented by various internal partners in early 2017. However, most of these initiatives were not based on concerted action, let alone a common strategy. There was little coordination between these partners or between them and the Malian side.[54]

In addition, all of these actors found themselves stymied by adverse Malian realities: MINUSMA's strategic priority—the implementation of the peace agreement—made little if any progress, while the mission itself was under constant attack by jihadist forces. Barkhane achieved many tactical successes, but was unable to translate these into broader strategic gains, a perhaps predictable outcome given its limited objective (counter-terrorism) and vast area of operations. In the absence of a peace process, any effort by EU training and advisory missions to rebuild Mali's security forces met limited success, and certainly did not change the broader political and security dynamics.

Yet another layer: the FC-G5S

Although the G5 Sahel is part of a trend of ad hoc coalitions to deal with crises,[55] and may not be regarded as a crisis response mechanism, there are good reasons to pay attention to it. First, the FC-G5S is clearly a reaction to the dramatic deterioration of security in Mali and its regional ramifications. Second, a study of the dynamics and

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consequences of the FC-G5S creation also provides more insight into inter-organizational cooperation in Mali, and the evolving peace and security architecture in Africa.[56] The FC-G5S can be considered as a military response to a particular dimension of the Malian conflict, namely the cross-border spilling of insecurity, crime, and terrorism into neighboring countries.[57] Thus, its 5,000 soldiers will focus on the three (internal) border regions of the G5 states: Mauritania–Mali; Mali–Niger–Burkina Faso; and Niger–Chad. Touted as a regional solution to a truly regional problem, the FC-G5S will probably have a limited impact on the Mali crisis as such, though it may help to contain the further expansion of insecurity across the region. But even attaining this limited objective will require significant efforts: unprecedented cross-border military cooperation between the five Sahel states, and significant outside assistance in terms of finance, logistics, and equipment.

Modalities for coordination and cooperation between the FC-G5S are still being determined. MINUSMA will support the FC-G5S operations through an operational and logistical support plan, subject to financial reimbursement to the UN through an EU-coordinated mechanism,[58] given the persistent opposition of the United States to additional UN expenditures on peacekeeping. However, it is important to stress that MINUSMA already lacked the capacity to effectively implement its own mandate. MINUSMA and the FC-G5S divided the theater of operations into "operational boxes," which basically indicated the geographical space each force occupies, to ensure deconfliction during operations.[59] The FC-G5S and MINUSMA also aimed to develop a memorandum of understanding to determine the scope of operational coordination. It remains to be seen whether the FC-G5S and MINUSMA will reach a level of coordination that sees joint strategies developed to contain and reduce the threat of non-state armed groups, and any such cooperation would probably remain unofficial, as this could further blur the line between MINUSMA's "peacekeeping" and the FC-G5S "counter-terrorism" posture. Another factor blurring this line was the extensive involvement of the G5 Sahel countries in MINUSMA. At the time of writing, the G5 Sahel countries contributed a significant portion of MINUSMA's troops and police: 1,711 military and 162 police from Burkina Faso; 1,394 military and 17 police from Chad; four military from Mauritania; and 859 military and 33 police from Niger.[60] There were concerns that if the FC-G5S succeeded in attracting sustainable funding, Sahelian troop contributors might downsize their participation MINUSMA's military component, as G5 Sahel member states may

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prefer to put their soldiers in an "African" force, with a more robust counter-terrorism mandate.

Beyond the short- and medium-term cooperation challenges, the format of the G5 raised a host of questions about the future of African-led crisis responses. Africa's claim to regional ownership in crisis response and management within the framework of the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) is still far from effective, as the Mali crisis itself and the weakness of the long-awaited African Standby Force (ASF) have documented.[61] The intermittent launch of the African Capacity for Immediate Response to Crisis (ACIRC) was conceived as a transitional arrangement until the ASF would be ready. Some have argued that the ACIRC initiative was a reaction to the "embarrassment" provoked by the inability of ECOWAS and the AU to launch their own Mali intervention.[62] This sentiment had been amplified by the irony that the effective troubleshooter to step in was France, the former colonial power.

If the relationship and responsibilities between the AU and the RECs in terms of crisis response remains a matter of uncertainty,[63] the launch of the FC-G5S injected a novel dimension into the institutional politics of the APSA. Indeed, the authorization of the FC-G5S by the AU Peace and Security Council and the UN Security Council spurred some critical reflections at the level of the AU Commission on the continued relevance of the APSA and the ASF.

On the one hand, regional ad hoc coalitions conform to the spirit of collective self-defense of the APSA, boost national capacities to fight organized crime and terrorism, and are therefore welcomed as initiatives to end armed conflict. On the other hand, the FC-G5S did not position itself within the formal APSA. However, regional ad hoc coalitions such as the Regional Joint Task Force against the Lord's Resistance Army (RCI-LRA), the Multinational Joint Task Force against Boko Haram in the Lake Chad Basin and now the FC-G5S transcend the geographical and arguably arbitrary boundaries of the RECs/RMs. This calls into question the continued relevance of the RECs/RMs as implementing agents of the APSA. While the threats confronting the G5 Sahel states technically fall within the geographical boundaries of ECOWAS, the West African REC was not consulted in the discussions around the FC-G5S, and ideas about the force were not brought up at any ECOWAS summit,[64] suggesting that the G5 Sahel states intentionally sought to bypass ECOWAS. Neither do operations like the FC-G5S conform to the traditional peace-support-operations model envisaged in the ASF, which was officially declared to have achieved full operational capacity in 2015. In fact it led many to

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question why huge investments are still being made in an African rapid reaction capacity.[65]

In addition, the FC-G5S called into question the political authority of the AU as the continental body responsible for mandating and deploying peace support operations. Yet it must be recognized that without the approval of the PSC and the transmission of the request for the force to be approved by the UN Security Council, it is unlikely the FC-G5S would have been "welcomed" at all by the council. The G5 Sahel states sought PSC authorization to garner political legitimacy, and create a perception that they are still operating within a multilateral framework—something which would be imperative for fundraising purposes. Indeed, donor support is a significant aspect considering the aid dependency of the African security architecture. It was perhaps for this reason that neither the AU nor ECOWAS showed much enthusiasm for the FC-G5S, although the PSC finally approved its concept of operations,[66] thus somehow and belatedly appropriating the FC-G5S as a tool of AU-associated conflict resolution. In the uncertain event that the AU and the RECs may no longer impose themselves as the first port of call, competition between the AU, RECs/RMs, and informal ad hoc coalitions becomes a likely prospect.[67] If, from a donor perspective, ad hoc coalitions in Africa prove effective, as the MNJTF has shown, European partners and others may see little reason to continue providing financial support to the AU and its APSA.[68] In other words, if the FC-G5S and the MNJTF were to come to mark a new and promising trend, ~~it would~~ pose a significant political and institutional challenge to APSA and the ongoing efforts to operationalize the ASF.

Conclusion

Mali, and the wider Sahel region, are laboratories for international interventions similar to the Balkans situation during the 1990s and beginning of the 2000s. There are myriad actors and organizations, old and new, and all eager to prove their relevance. Coordination is already a challenge within these multilateral organizations which cover a large geographical space with multinational military forces seeking to deliver ambitious mandates in ~~a~~ complex and increasingly hostile mission setting. Coordination between them, their Malian counterparts and the array of other unilateral security actors is therefore a mammoth task. Tensions run on many levels. The UN is in doctrinally uncharted waters, mandated to deploy in parallel to the counter-terrorist Operation Barkhane, and support the counter-terrorism operation of the FC-

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G5S. European states have been eager to participate in MINUSMA, although the result has been a token contribution on the ground.

France, which has been perhaps *the* principal orchestrator, pushing for the successive deployments of MINUSMA, EUTM, EUCAP, and the FC-G5S, has shown little interest in coordination between these operations and Serval/Barkhane. Although all these deployments have been (successive) parts of an exit strategy for Barkhane, its drawdown seems increasingly elusive. In fact, the situation has steadily deteriorated, with ~~insecurity now taking hold~~ in central Mali, which is likely to become the new strategic focus of a belated crisis response. In Niger, troops from France, the United States, and Germany are deployed, and others are joining the fray.

The Mali case thus holds important lessons for the evolving ~~African Peace and Security Architecture~~ and rapid response on the African continent. Sub-regional organizations like ECOWAS have been the natural building blocks of this architecture, but every crisis will have a unique set of interests crisis-crossing the ~~borders~~ between these blocs. Ad hoc coalitions have the advantage of gathering the member states that are willing to put their troops in harm's way. Furthermore, they do not create an inconvenient financial or procedural precedence that may hamper flexibility and self-interest ~~around the next corner of history~~. However, in the longer term, a turn to ad hoc coalitions as the standard modus operandi is likely to undercut interest and funding in the building blocks of APSA, although it may be the investment in these that has created the necessary interoperability, doctrinal frameworks, and training for ad hoc coalitions to be deployed and succeed on the ground.

Applying the analytical framework provided by this volume's editors, we argue that the four phases of the Mali crisis have mostly been marked by dysfunctional competition, with the possible exception of the quick deployment of France and AFISMA at the beginning of 2013. This is due to the continued lack of agreement on the objectives of international deployment, particularly in the case of MINUSMA, with an expectation from the host state, its neighbors, and the AU that the mission should shoulder a greater part of the hard end of the security tasks, and be given a counter-terrorism mandate. In the absence of such a mandate, the FC-G5S has been formed. While it could contribute to a functional burden-sharing of the security tasks on the ground, it also adds to the mutual hampering and dysfunctional competition between sub-regional and regional organizations, as it poses a possible existential threat to the long-term viability of the African Standby Force, the African Peace and Security Architecture as it is currently envisaged, and ultimately the AU.

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