

The Situation in Mali: Recent Developments in the UNSC and their Consequences



The Security Council unanimously adopts resolution 2690 (2023) terminating the mandate of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) under resolution 2640 (2022) as of June 30 2023. The resolution requests MINUSMA to immediately start on 1 July 2023 the cessation of its operations, transfer of its tasks, as well as the orderly and safe drawdown and withdrawal of its personnel, with the objective of completing this process by 31 December 2023, in close consultation with the Transition Government of Mali.

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While the situation in Mali is hardly a matter of concern for the international community at large, recent developments are arguably of significance as regards future practice in the UN Security Council (UNSC). Thus, in June 2023, Mali's transitional government (effectively the ruling military regime) asked

that the Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), the UN peacekeeping force established by the UNSC in 2013, leave immediately, a request granted by it a fortnight later. And in late August 2023, the Russian Federation vetoed a draft resolution that would have extended for the sixth time the sanctions against those obstructing Mali's transition to peace as well as the mandate of the Panel of Experts overseeing their application. The combined result of these developments is that the situation in Mali, which the UNSC has determined to constitute a threat to international peace and security, is no longer within its purview, raising, inter alia, the question if this was a one-off incident or a prelude to uncharted waters.

The termination of MINUSMA

[Resolution 2100 \(2013\)](#) established MINUSMA to which the functions of the [International Support Mission in Mali](#) (set up by the Economic Community of West African States in September 2012) were transferred. Its mandate was to support the transitional government to re-establish authority over the country and to rebuild the security sector. Even though Resolution 2100 (2013) was unanimously adopted, Russia [said](#) that it was 'of alarm' because of the peacekeeping force's nature which had 'unpredictable consequences for the safety of United Nations personnel and the Mission's legal status'. At the center of Russia's reservations was the lack of a clear division between peacekeeping operations and peace enforcement activities. [According to its representative](#), 'Blue helmets should not be used to arrest those accused of having carried out war crimes'. But when MINUSMA's mandate was augmented under [Resolution 2164 \(2014\)](#) to include, inter alia, the protection of human rights, a task that no doubt involves apprehending those accused of war crimes, Russia voted again in favour.

Running MINUSMA has not come cheap: with some 17.000 personnel deployed, the budget for the period from July 2021 to June 2022 exceeded USD 1,2 billion (UN General Assembly (UNGA) [Resolution 75/302](#)), a huge

amount considering that Malian GDP for 2022 is [estimated](#) at USD 18.8 billion. In March 2022, it was made known that Malian armed forces, allegedly accompanied by members of the Russia-based private military contractor, the Wagner Group, executed several hundred people in central Mali, an incident that, despite calls by UN human rights experts, has apparently never been investigated by the authorities. On 16 June 2023, during the UNSC's 9350th meeting, Mali's transitional government said that there was a 'crisis of confidence' between the population and itself on the one hand, and MINUSMA on the other hand. Five days later, it officially demanded ([S/2023/463](#)) its immediate withdrawal, also complaining that the Secretary General's recommendations to the UNSC regarding the situation failed to consider the population's expectations and the government's priorities.

On 30 June 2023, [Resolution 2690 \(2023\)](#) terminated MINUSMA as of the same date, this being the last day of its mandate under [Resolution 2640 \(2022\)](#). However, termination did not mean that it was immediately closed down: some operations will continue until 30 September 2023, others until 31 December 2023 and the actual liquidation will begin on 1 January 2024. According to the [Secretary-General](#), 'The exit of MINUSMA is being treated as a United Nations system-wide priority'. Interestingly enough, [S/2023/463](#) did not mention that the constitutional referendum originally scheduled for 2017 was to be held on 18 June 2023. Despite serious [concerns](#) over the new Constitution, the low turnout (39%) at the referendum and the amazingly high rate of its [approval](#) (97%), it is an important step towards democratic transition, if of course its provisions are strictly adhered to.

Mali sanctions and the Russian veto

Some four years after MINUSMA's establishment, [Resolution 2374 \(2017\)](#) envisaged that sanctions (travel bans and asset freezes) will be taken against those threatening the peace, security, and stability of Mali. A Sanctions Committee and a Panel of Experts were created to implement it. The latter's [Report](#) of 3 August 2023 was highly critical of the Mali government

and also alleged that its armed forces and the Wagner Group committed sexual violence. On 11 August 2023, France and the United Arab Emirates (UEA) circulated a draft resolution to have the validity of the sanctions and the mandate of the Panel of Experts extended until 30 September 2024. But five days later, Mali officially [requested](#) that sanctions be lifted because (a) it was Mali itself that in 2017 had called on the UNSC to establish a sanctions regime and the reasons were no longer there, and (b) there was no cooperation with the Panel of Experts which had surpassed its mandate and whose Reports were biased (for this reason, in June 2022 the government had revoked their visas preventing in situ visits). Shortly afterwards, the Russian Federation circulated its own draft resolution, which would have renewed sanctions for another year but dissolved the Panel of Experts with immediate effect. Despite various attempts to find a compromise between the differing points of view of the drafts' sponsors, none was found. On 30 August 2023, acceptance of the French/UAE draft was blocked as Russia exercised its veto power (China abstained). In a post-voting [statement](#) Russia said that the draft resolution failed to take into consideration its position as well as that of Mali.

The consequences of these developments

In that [statement](#), Russia, after calling the veto as 'highly unlikely to be unexpected', effectively warned sponsors of future resolutions to make 'wisdom and pragmatism' their top priorities and to show political will to avoid unnecessary confrontations in the UNSC, especially when a compromise is extremely possible. Certainly, pronouncements to that effect have been made in the past. However, what differentiates this situation is that, with the (rather obvious) support of a P5 (permanent members of the UNSC), a Member State has managed in only two months to get rid of a peacekeeping force and a (rather inquisitive) Panel of Experts. And this despite the [views](#) expressed by the three African UNSC members (Mozambique Gabon and Ghana) that both should be maintained.

Now that the Resolution 2374 (2017) sanctions have lapsed, Member States are no longer obliged to implement them. It remains to be seen which states will do so but it would appear that, among others, [Canada](#) and the EU will maintain them. The EU sanctions are rather important because they have targeted persons over and above those subject to the UNSC Mali sanctions, e.g. in February 2023 the [head of the Wagner Group in Mali](#) was listed. As is well known, when a P5 has exercised its veto, a formal UNGA meeting must be convened within 10 working days under [UNGA Resolution 76/262](#). It is doubtful if it can achieve anything of substance. But there is another, often neglected, perspective in the maze of UN politics: the human factor. According to [UNICEF and WFP](#), this year emergency food assistance must reach 8.8 million Malians, including 4.7 million children (out of a total population of around 22 million).

Credit: UN Photo/Manuel Elías: Security Council Terminates Mandate of MINUSMA