Mali © MSF

CASE STUDY

Perilous terrain
Humanitarian action at risk in Mali

Alejandro Pozo Marín

March 2017

MEDECINS
SANS FRONTIERES

Index

Acronyms

AFD	*Agence Française de Développement*
AOGs	Armed Opposition Groups
CIMIC	Civil-Military Coordination
CSCom	*Centre Santé Communautaire*
EHP	*Equipe Humanitaire Pays*
FAMa	Malian Armed Forces
GoM	Government of Mali
GTAH	*Groupe Tematique Humanitaire*
HC	Humanitarian Coordinator
RC	Resident Coordinator
DSRSG	Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary General
IHL	International Humanitarian Law
INGO	International NGO
MSF	*Médecins Sans Frontières*
MINUSMA	UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali
QIP	Quick Impact Project
UNDSS	United Nations Department of Safety and Security
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
UNHAS	United Nations Humanitarian Air Service
UNOCHA	UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
UNSG	United Nations Secretary General

Executive Summary

This paper examines the incursion of military and political actors into the humanitarian realm in Mali, a context shaped by the rationales of "integration", "stabilisation" and "counter-terrorism", and argues that it is jeopardising humanitarian action in the country. The purpose of this report is to elaborate upon this, and to raise concerns regarding current and potential consequences of what MSF believes to be a blatant and harmful instrumentalisation of humanitarian action.

The humanitarian situation in Mali remains precarious. Despite a peace agreement signed in 2015 between the government and some of Mali's insurgent groups, the country is far from peaceful. Insecurity is rife, especially in the northern areas of the country where government presence is minimal. Despite great humanitarian needs, the insecurity and lack of government structural support has resulted in limited services and poor access to healthcare for the population living in those areas. With no functioning services, the provision of healthcare depends to a large extent on assistance from humanitarian organisations. However, the presence of humanitarian actors is limited, mostly, but not exclusively, due to the security challenges.

In the Sahel, the interests of foreign states go far beyond humanitarian concerns and include energy security, the fight against terrorism and irregular migration. Indicative of its geopolitical relevance, there are three intertwined foreign military operations in Mali, all in support of the Malian government and its armed forces and against certain armed groups. These operations are contested by a number of armed actors and, in fact, the UN mission in Mali is amongst the most attacked in the UN's history.

The foreign response to the challenges and interests in Mali is framed by three different rationales: integration, stabilisation and counter-terrorism. They are all based on the ideas of complementarity and synergy. Whilst it is clear that the principles behind the intervention of foreign forces in Mali are the prerogative of states, MSF is greatly concerned about the consequences of subordinating (and potentially sacrificing) humanitarian assistance to political goals. If separately, these three logics may already negatively impact on humanitarian action, their juxtaposition is potentially explosive. This is aggravated by the intentional incursion of the military into the humanitarian realm through Quick Impact Projects and other similar activities in order to obtain swift wins (such as improving acceptance to reduce hostility against them), even at the cost of damaging the perception of humanitarian action.

Humanitarian action in Mali is challenged in four ways, which worryingly, overlap and reinforce one another. Firstly, it risks being perceived as part of the political agenda in Mali, an agenda of support to the government in its aim to neutralise certain armed groups. The second is the risk of de-legitimising humanitarian action in Mali, and this after instrumentalising it, with the express intention of achieving goals of a different nature which are incompatible with the humanitarian principles. Populations in general and armed opposition groups in particular may reject both the assistance and the humanitarian actors if they perceive aid as an integral component of the political agenda they oppose. The third risk is a consequence of the previous two: humanitarians may be attacked if they are identified as part of the enemy to fight. The use of armed escorts by humanitarians and the use of vehicles not clearly identified as military, both observed in Mali, can increase the likelihood of such attacks. The fourth risk is that humanitarians will simply not be able to implement vital humanitarian assistance

for communities in need as all the previous risks may severely limit access to populations and affect their acceptance. Thus, whereas one of the declared aims of these military operations is the "creation of conditions for the provision of humanitarian assistance", they may provoke precisely the opposite effect, and endanger the continuation of humanitarian action in wide areas of Mali.

Gaining access to populations in need has been a struggle for humanitarian actors since the armed conflict began. Yet, while the current dynamics with the UN mission and foreign forces may seriously taint the perception of humanitarian actors, and thus render access even more difficult in the not-so-distant future, the humanitarian sector in Mali appears to have accepted the status quo with resignation. Without any noticeable resistance, a basic pragmatism prevails when it comes to military-humanitarian activities.

MSF is deeply concerned that the emergency gap – that is the lack of sufficient humanitarian presence and quality response to populations most in need – which has existed to a certain extent in the country since the start of the conflict, is becoming wider. Humanitarian action is still possible and feasible in Mali, albeit with great difficulty. However, the fragile balance of acceptance by the population could break at any point and the situation could easily deteriorate. Humanitarian actors have a key role to play in negotiating and safeguarding access to populations in need. Whilst we call on the military actors to withhold from instrumentalising aid, we equally call on humanitarian actors to resist playing into any of the three rationales analysed in this report and to reject any practice that may jeopardise access to the most vulnerable.

Introduction

MSF believes the incursion of military and political actors into the humanitarian realm jeopardises humanitarian action in Mali

Why this report?

MSF believes that the incursion of military and political actors into the humanitarian realm, in a context shaped by the rationales of integration, stabilisation and counter-terrorism, is jeopardising humanitarian action in Mali. The purpose of this report is to argue why, and raise concerns regarding current and potential consequences of what MSF believes to be a blatant and harmful instrumentalisation of humanitarian action.

Methodology

This report is based on open semi-structured interviews with over 35 key stakeholders (most of them met in person in Mali), as well as follow-up email conversations. Interviewees included representatives from local and international NGOs, UN and other humanitarian organisations, MINUSMA, the Government of Mali, foreign governments and military contingents, and non-state armed groups. In many cases, there was an obvious reluctance to disclose or discuss certain details covered in this analysis; interestingly, more among the civilian bodies than the military. The interviews and cross-sectional analyses were complemented by open-source information available on the internet and in other documents. The time and effort dedicated by those interviewed, as well as their contributions, have been invaluable to this paper.

1. Contextualising Mali

Northern Mali has been an active conflict zone characterised by a volatile security situation and limited access to basic services, particularly healthcare

The situation is not defined as a mortality crisis; however, humanitarian assistance is sorely needed and humanitarian actors are not present

Why does Mali matter?

In humanitarian terms. The humanitarian situation in Mali remains precarious. Since 2012, northern Mali has been an active conflict zone characterised by a volatile security situation and very limited access for the population to basic services, particularly healthcare. In most areas in the north of the country, the state is not present and, where it is, it is more symbolic than it is effective in terms of service provision. In the northern region of Kidal, the Government of Mali (GoM) is completely absent and access to healthcare for the population, including the nomadic communities, has been further jeopardised by the withdrawal of NGOs working in the region, as a result of deteriorating security conditions. In fact, the presence of humanitarian actors has often been reduced to flash visits and remote operations. Epidemic diseases, such as measles, malaria and meningitis are highly prevalent in Mali. Respiratory infections, diarrhoeal diseases, childbirth problems and malnutrition have resulted in high child mortality; especially in remote and hard-to-reach areas. The situation is not currently defined as a mortality crisis; however, humanitarian assistance is sorely needed and humanitarian actors are not present.

In geopolitical terms. According to the European Union (EU), apart from historical and cultural ties, "the Sahel has a prominent place on the EU's political agenda. Europe has multiple interests in the region, including the fight against insecurity and organised crime, energy security and illegal migration." The EU claims to address the region's multifaceted challenges through its Comprehensive Strategy for Security and Development in the Sahel, adopted by the Council in March 2011.[1] France is one of the EU countries with most interests in the region. Outside of the EU, other state actors also have strong interests and concerns regarding the Sahel.

A myriad of armed actors[2]

In June 2015, almost three and a half years after the onset of the conflict, The GoM signed a peace agreement with two umbrella organisations: the CMA (Coordination des Mouvements de l'Azawad) and GATIA (Groupe Autodéfense Touareg Imghad et Alliés).[3] However, these two coalitions are composed of a number of different armed groups, among which splits and alliances are frequent. Moreover, there are a number of armed opposition groups (AOGs) who did not participate in the peace process. A number of them are referred to in Mali as "terrorists" or "radicals", and some are on

There are three ongoing foreign military operations in Mali, all supporting the Malian government

the lists of designated terrorist groups in certain countries.[4] The Malian Armed Forces (FAMa) are present throughout the country, but have less control in the north,[5] particularly in rural areas. They have lost all control in Kidal and have huge problems of legitimacy in certain areas of central Mali.[6]

There are three ongoing foreign military operations in Mali, all supporting the Malian government and its armed forces in the fight against the non-signatory armed groups:

**1.
OPÉRATION BARKHANE
(French military operation)**

Starting on 1 August 2014, Barkhane is a UNSC-authorised operation of approximately 3,500 troops, and the successor of Opération Serval in Mali (11 January 2013–31 July 2014, mobilising up to 4,500 troops) and Opération Épervier in Chad (mobilising around 950 troops in August 2013). Currently the most expensive French foreign military operation,[7, 8] Barkhane has troops and heavy equipment[9] on the ground in five countries: Chad, Mali, Niger, Mauritania and Burkina Faso.[10, 11] While it is essentially a counter-terrorist operation, it also engages in other tasks such as supporting local government and armies in those countries, considered "allies".[12] French operations, such as this one, seek synergies with other civilian efforts, as per a French inter-ministry strategy adopted in 2009 on civil-military management of external crises.[13]

**2.
MINUSMA
(UN Multidimensional Integrated
Stabilization Mission in Mali)**

MINUSMA is by far the most attacked UN mission in the world. In UN peacekeeping history, it ranks third for fatalities caused by "malicious acts" in a given year

This mission is authorised by the UNSC[14] to support political processes and carry out a number of security-related tasks including the vague objective of "the creation of conditions" for the provision of humanitarian assistance[15] "in close coordination with humanitarian actors."[16] As of 31 January 2017, the mission is composed of 11,880 troops, police and experts from 54 countries. Many of the most relevant contributors are countries affected by the crisis in Mali.[17] Europe's interest in Mali is evident from the high deployment and the concentration of blue helmets to this mission, the biggest contributors being the Netherlands, with a total of 442 troops and police (94% of all blue helmets in 21 UN missions), Germany, 270 (60%), Sweden, 230 (77%), Portugal, 68 (81%) and Denmark, 49 (67%).[18]

The mission has the authority to use all necessary means, including force, and was promoted by France. Some interviewees stated that the MINUSMA military is viewed as a coalition of military contingents, where each one is more accountable to their own government (including in the provision of intelligence information) than to the central command of the mission. MINUSMA is by far the most attacked UN mission in the world, as the table below shows. In fact, in the history of UN peacekeeping it is the mission with the third highest number of fatalities caused by "malicious acts" in a given year, after ONUC in 1961 and UNOSOM in 1993 and 1994.[19]

Table 1. MINUSMA fatalities	2013	2014	2015	2016
% UN blue helmets fatalities (cases MINUSMA / all cases)	5.5 % (6/109)	31 % (39/126)	23 % (29/124)	**39 % (38/98)**
% fatalities by "malicious acts"[20] (cases MINUSMA / all cases)	11 % (4/36)	72 % (28/39)	35 % (12/34)	**82 % (27/33)**

Source: UN Peacekeeping[21]

3.
EUROPEAN UNION MISSIONS IN THE SAHEL

There are three missions of the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) of the EU in the Sahel: EUCAP SAHEL Niger, EUCAP SAHEL Mali (civilian)[22] and the EUTM Mali.[23] These missions provide advice and training to the FAMa and security forces on counter-terrorism and fighting organised crime.[24] EUTM Mali is composed of nearly 550 troops from 23 EU member states.[25] France has led the mission and has been its most important contributor.

2.
The entrenched framework of subordination of humanitarian aid to political objectives

The principles of impartiality and independence are severely jeopardised by their subordination to and association with political objectives

The purpose of this section is to describe and analyse the three rationales framing the foreign military interventions in Mali, namely *integration*, *stabilisation* and *counter-terrorism*. These three rationales co-exist in Mali and are central to understanding the context in which humanitarian action is conducted in the country.

2.1. The rationale of "integration"

After the end of the Cold War, the UN espoused the concept of multi-dimensional operations aiming to "integrate" political, military, policing, economic, development and humanitarian goals in one shared agenda. The main purpose of the integration approach, as described in the UN Secretary General decision of 2008, was "to maximise the individual and collective impact of the UN's response, concentrating on those activities required to consolidate peace."[26] This meant seeking synergies between all dimensions of UN interventions. MSF does not challenge that this rationale was in the general interest of the population, and acknowledges that political crises require political solutions. However, MSF contends that, if humanitarian action is subordinated to, and associated with, political objectives, the principles of impartiality and independence are severely jeopardised, particularly when goals are not compatible (which is often the case). UN humanitarian agencies cannot be solely driven by humanitarian needs and they have limited capacity to make (or defend) their own choices. Moreover, and perhaps more worrying, given that UN humanitarian agencies play a role in coordination of national and international NGOs, as well as a significant role in channelling funds, all humanitarian actors can be easily perceived as pawns in a comprehensive strategy by international states and institutions. In fact, the UN is not alone in seeking synergies between its political, military, development and humanitarian branches: a "comprehensive approach" has been adopted by institutions (such as the European Union), countries (UK, USA, France and many others) and military actors (NATO). This practice is problematic as the perception of neutrality is automatically tarnished when humanitarian activities are integrated in a political and military agenda.

In Mali's MINUSMA, as in other integrated missions, the leadership of the political and humanitarian branches fall to one person with the triple-hatted role of Humanitarian Coordinator, the UN Resident Coordinator and the Deputy Special Representative of the UN Secretary General. In other countries, these roles may overlap or be differentiated, but interviews showed that in Mali the general perception is that, in practice, they cannot be entirely independent of each other. In case of conflict between them, our assumption is that political objectives will trump humanitarian needs.

2.2. The rationale of "stabilisation"

UN stabilisation missions are relatively new. Currently, there are four UN stabilisation missions: Central African Republic (MINUSCA), Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), Haiti (MINUSTAH) and Mali (MINUSMA). Stabilisation missions share certain characteristics that are worth highlighting to frame the discussion in this analysis:[27]

- Stabilisation missions are not "neutral" missions and differ from other UN missions where sides are not officially taken. MINUSMA and other stabilisation missions seek to extend the presence, authority and legitimacy of the government, the main warring party in the country, and can resort to any means to ensure this goal, including the use of force or self-proclaimed "humanitarian" activities. MINUSMA is generally perceived by AOGs in Mali as a party to the conflict, unambiguously authorised to be a warring force in support of the GoM.

- Although, stabilisation missions are considered to come under the umbrella of "peacekeeping", at the time of the deployment of troops there was no peace to keep in Mali, and the current peace agreement only involves a limited number of armed groups. This means that the condition of consent by the warring parties typical of peacekeeping operations did not apply in this case. In fact, there were many armed groups that expressly opposed the presence of foreign troops. MINUSMA is not a peacekeeping force but an intervention force. This may explain why MINUSMA has been the most attacked UN mission in the past 23 years. As a consequence, MINUSMA has increasingly remained in "safe havens" with minimised movements in certain locations, thus losing credibility and the respect of local communities. This lack of acceptance, either genuine or forced by AOGs, may explain the absence of local protest after certain attacks against MINUSMA.

Stabilisation missions are not "neutral" missions. MINUSMA is generally perceived by AOGs in Mali as a party to the conflict, unambiguously authorised to be a warring force in support of the GoM

Certain UN humanitarian agencies and INGOs do not consider MINUSMA as a party to an armed conflict,[28] and even challenge that the GoM is a warring party itself.[29] However, a number of insurgent armed actors –notably the non-signatories of the peace agreement and those designated as terrorist groups by certain states and institutions– perceive the GoM, MINUSMA and Barkhane as the enemies they must fight.

2.3. The rationale of "counter-terrorism"

This approach has been taken in a growing number of contexts, with Iraq, Syria, Somalia, Afghanistan and the Sahel among the most prominent ones. In Mali, while Barkhane is the only operation with an explicit counter-terrorism mandate,[30] MINUSMA and EUTM are also perceived to be part of the counter-terrorism agenda, for the following reasons:

- It is not reasonable to expect that AOGs (or the average Malian) will be able to differentiate between the mandates of French soldiers of the Barkhane, MINUSMA or EUTM missions. Moreover, these French officers are all ultimately accountable to the same people.

- Forces can "re-hat": For instance, Chadian troops were part of a French counter-terrorist operation before joining MINUSMA.

- The UNSC resolution 2295 (2016) authorised MINUSMA to adopt a more "proactive and robust posture", including when "protecting civilians against asymmetric threat". Some UNSC members questioned the text's "ambiguous language" and the role of MINUSMA in fighting terrorists.[31, 32]

- The designation of "terrorist" often extends to insurgents that may collaborate with the already established groups, mainly for opportunistic reasons, with no otherwise clear association.[33]

- Certain national contingents may be interested in supporting the counter-terrorism efforts but instead support MINUSMA, as a way to show their domestic audiences they are active in the counter-terrorism fight or to gather information to be used for their own security-related aims. The majority of European contingents in MINUSMA seem to be focused on intelligence gathering, which goes beyond MINUSMA's mandate. In fact, the main Western contributors have fully or partially justified their presence in MINUSMA with intelligence-related activities, including the Netherlands[34], Denmark[35], Germany[36], Sweden[37] and Norway[38]. These countries have regularly ranked among the top 10 humanitarian state donors for Mali since 2012, when the armed conflict in Mali started.[39]

While Barkhane is the only operation with an explicit counter-terrorism mandate, MINUSMA and EUTM are also perceived to be part of the counter-terrorism agenda

The main Western contributors have fully or partially justified their presence in MINUSMA with intelligence-related activities

Neither the context nor the MINUSMA contingents' interests can be dissociated from the counter-terrorism rationale

The combination of integration, stabilisation and counter-terrorism is a potentially explosive mix for humanitarian action, and Mali is the only country where the three rationales coexist and overlap

Military bodies implement QIPs to try to improve their acceptance by the local population. QIPs have proven to be dangerous for humanitarian action in contexts of acute armed conflict

Despite their potential corrosive damage to humanitarian action QIPs and "humanitarian" activities by military actors are unlikely to stop

Neither the context nor the MINUSMA contingents' interests can be dissociated from the counter-terrorism rationale. Joint activities between Barkhane, MINUSMA and the FAMa reinforce this perception.

2.4. An explosive mix

The combination of integration, stabilisation and counter-terrorism is a potentially explosive mix for humanitarian action, and Mali is the only country where the three rationales coexist and overlap. It is not MSF's role to comment on the stabilisation or counter-terrorism agendas, or on what should be done politically in Mali. Yet, it is important to raise awareness about potential negative consequences that those agendas may have on vulnerable populations and the ability of humanitarian actors to address critical needs in Mali.

All types of military bodies implement Quick Impact Projects (QIPs)[40] to try to improve their acceptance by the local population, and MINUSMA and Barkhane are no exception. The military (and governments) expect that such acceptance may lead to a less hostile environment and thus reduce the risk of attacks against them. Whilst exceptions exist, in general it has been shown that the more adverse a context is in security terms, the more acceptance-driven "humanitarian" activities the military will conduct. It is not by chance that the four UN military operations with the largest budgets for QIPs are MINUSMA, MINUSCA, MINUSTAH and MONUSCO,[41] precisely the only four missions with the stabilisation rationale. In fact, the concept of QIPs is directly linked with stabilisation, as they can quickly show advances that can be considered symbols of a "stable" society; it is part of the battle for "winning the hearts and minds".

In such environments, QIPs and similar activities are part of the strategy, and this has proven to be dangerous for humanitarian action in contexts of acute armed conflict.[42] The root of the problem is the association engendered when two very different actors seemingly try to do the same thing, yet come from radically different motivations. Moreover, the supposed increased acceptance of the military through QIPs is still to be demonstrated in scenarios of stabilisation and counter-terrorism.[43] However, despite their potential corrosive damage to humanitarian action and their questionable use to military action, QIPs and "humanitarian" activities by military actors are unlikely to stop as they have become integral to their operations.

AOGs can perceive humanitarian actors as an "integral" part of the enemy they fight. Even people familiar with the humanitarian system struggle to differentiate between the military and humanitarian components

The combination of the two UN rationales of integration and stabilisation means in practice that humanitarian assistance can easily be instrumentalised to help consolidate the presence, authority and legitimisation of one of the warring parties: the GoM. Consequently, AOGs can perceive humanitarian actors as an "integral" part of the enemy they fight. The particularity that this is taking place in a context of counter-terrorism can only aggravate concerns, as AOGs whose survival is at stake are often highly reluctant and suspicious towards any actor directly or indirectly perceived as associated with counter-terrorism. An increased resort to QIPs and similar activities increases the likelihood of association.

In Mali, there are numerous areas of overlap between the military and the humanitarians, as described later in this report. Unfortunately, QIPs are only the tip of the iceberg in an amalgam where even the people most familiar with the humanitarian system struggle to differentiate between military and humanitarian components. Individually, each of the three rationales of integration, stabilisation and counter-terrorism seeks to collaborate with humanitarian actors, and each risks causing the subordination of humanitarian action to political aims that seek overall coherence. Together, the mix can be explosive, as the perception of such subordination is triply aggravated and the risks of association of humanitarian actors as part of the whole significantly increase. Such a situation undoubtedly further reduces an already challenged humanitarian space, as has been seen in contexts like Somalia and the Middle East, where the association with politics and with the West has proved catastrophic for humanitarians. In Mali, humanitarian assistance is still possible but is precarious, and the fragile equilibrium could easily be broken given the minefield on which it rests.

3.
The consequences of subordinating humanitarian action to politics in Mali
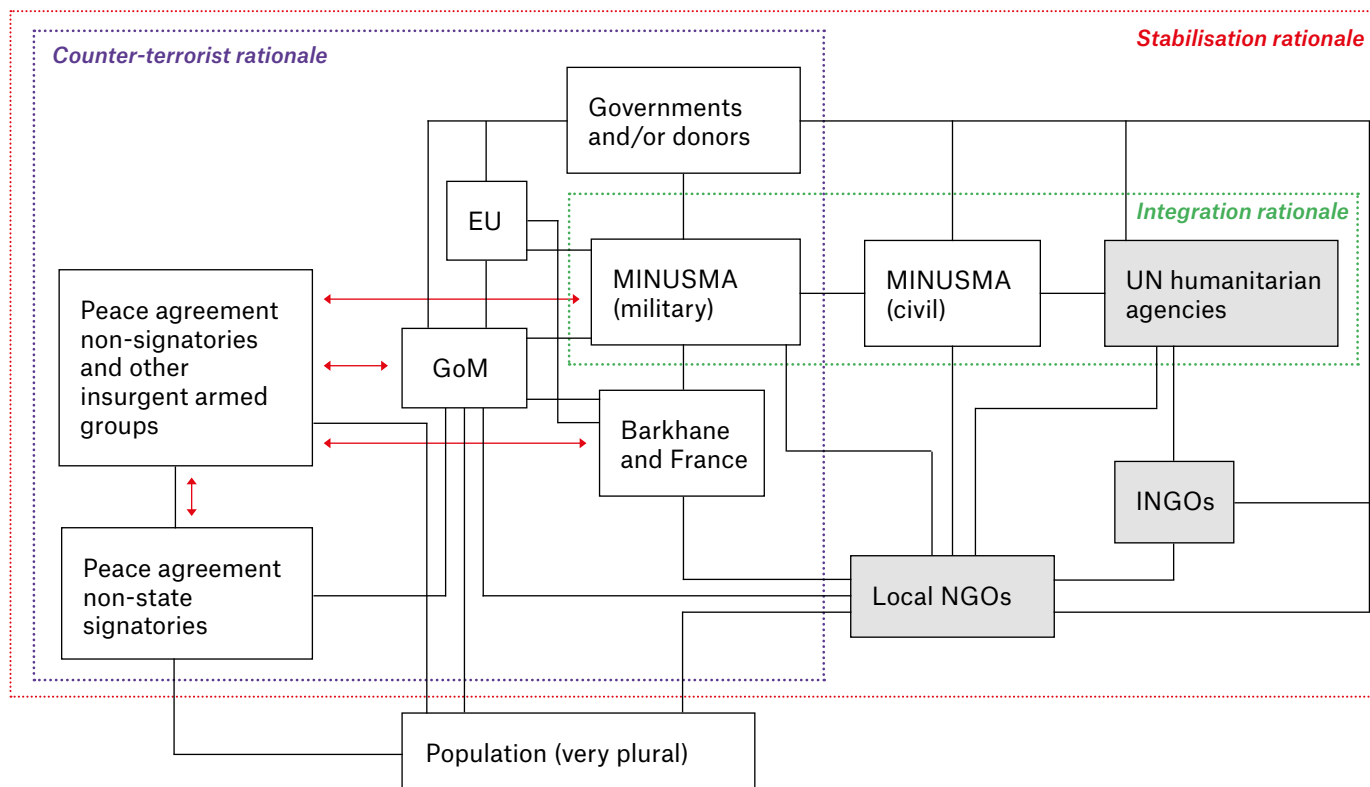
The association between (foreign) humanitarians and the (foreign) military may be catastrophic for the former

3.1. Misperception. The risks of being identified as part of the whole

The UN claims that there is only one UN in Mali, encompassing the political, military, development and humanitarian branches. The EU insists on its comprehensive strategy for security and development in the Sahel, which also includes military and humanitarian operations. France looks for synergies between the political, development, military and humanitarian strategies. All for one and one for all, in support of the GoM and against designated terrorist groups.

As stated, MINUSMA and Barkhane are not traditional peacekeeping operations whose presence is accepted by the warring parties. When the foreign apparatus as a whole is perceived as aiming to extend the presence, authority and legitimacy of the government, the association between (foreign) humanitarians and the (foreign) military may be catastrophic for the former. As the following chart illustrates, establishing a clear separation between humanitarian actors and political/military actors is not easy. However, this separation needs to be clear because humanitarian actors base their security on a positive perception and understanding of their role (acceptance).

Chart 1. A crowded and mixed arena

Source: Prepared by the author

Moreover, there are many areas of overlap between the different foreign actors in Mali, as the graph below shows:

Chart 2. Areas of overlap between foreign and domestic actors and agendas

MSF and/or other humanitarian	UN humanitarian system	MINUSMA & other UN (political) bodies	Government of Mali	Barkhane & other counter-terror actors
Humanitarian rationale. Overlap: humanitarian platforms[44] (GTAH, EPH, UN clusters); similar activities and rhetoric; similar perception by locals				
	Integration rationale – only 1 UN. Overlap: sharing of facilities; armed escorts and convoys; same risks analysis and rules; synergies expressly sought; same leaders for different agendas			
QIPs and other similar activities		*Stabilisation* rationale. Overlap: multi-dimensional support to the GoM; joint military activities and patrols; QIPs and "humanitarian" activities to favour both MINUSMA and the GoM		
QIPs and other similar activities		Stabilisation and *counter-terrorist* rationale. Overlap: multi-dimensional support to the GoM; joint military activities; QIPs and "humanitarian" activities to favour MINUSMA, Barkhane and the GoM; terrorism-related rhetoric used within the UN, notably the UNSC and UNGA and member states; activities of intelligence by contingents		
Local NGOs and other local actors. Links with all as implementers, partners, collaborators or simply as recipients of funds				

Source: Prepared by the author

The deliberate inclusion of humanitarian aid in the overall frame makes it nearly impossible for humanitarian organisations to unambiguously differentiate themselves and demonstrate their independence

The deliberate inclusion of humanitarian aid in the overall frame set to legitimatise the government and impose a political agenda makes it nearly impossible for humanitarian organisations to unambiguously differentiate themselves and demonstrate their independence. Worryingly, not all humanitarian INGOs find it problematic to openly support the ambition for the GoM to extend its authority with the help of foreign forces. Alongside many other humanitarian and development INGOs, MSF seeks to cover an assistance vacuum and thus may be perceived as contributing to "stabilisation" efforts.

3.2. De-legitimization. The risk of losing credibility as humanitarians

Military and political agents may be ready to sacrifice humanitarian action for political wins. However, humanitarian action must remain genuine and credible in order to be accepted

The term "humanitarian" is instrumentalised to designate something of a completely different nature

INGOs all state they do not collaborate with MINUSMA and Barkhane projects. However, local and regional NGOs are often partners

While the previous point related to the potential perception of humanitarian action as part of a whole that can subordinate humanitarian action to political and military agendas, this point refers to the specific intention of the military to use humanitarian action as an instrument, pretending to be who they are not (humanitarians), even at the cost of damaging the perception of humanitarianism. Humanitarian action must remain genuine and credible in order to be accepted, but it seems that military and political agents may be ready to sacrifice it in the name of a quick pragmatic political win. One day, Barkhane and MINUSMA will leave Mali, but humanitarian action will most likely still be needed. By then, the notion of humanitarianism may be too sullied.

In Mali, the military not only coexists in the field with humanitarians, but also conducts "humanitarian" activities, in other words, the term "humanitarian" is instrumentalised to designate something of a completely different nature. As openly acknowledged by the military, the essential reasons for them to engage in such tasks are to help build acceptance of their presence by the local population and reduce hostility towards them (they also also seek to improve the acceptance of the GoM/FAMa).[45] Visibility of these activities is of course central.[46]

MINUSMA and Barkhane engage in "humanitarian" activities in a variety of ways. A non-comprehensive list follows in the table below. All types of activities listed also cover northern Mali, where concerns of association are greatest. In theory, implementing partners for all such projects can include local, national and international NGOs and associations, and such participation is encouraged. In practice, all INGOs state they do not collaborate with such projects.[47, 48] However, local and regional NGOs are often partners, which supports the military's strategy of "integrating" and is additionally justified in terms of empowerment in line with the localisation agenda.[49] MINUSMA and Barkhane both have CIMIC (Civil-Military Coordination) officers "at the service of the humanitarians". Interestingly, Barkhane stated that they will not approach the humanitarians, in order to avoid negative impact on perception and that it is for them to approach Barkhane.[50] This may constitute a recognition on their behalf of the dangers faced by humanitarians when associated with the military.

Table 2. Military engagement in "humanitarian" activities

Type of activity	Funded by	Characteristics	Including health related activities?[51]	Expenditure
1. MINUSMA-Funded QIPs[52]	UN's assessed budget	Max. 6 months, Max. USD 50,000. Participation of many branches of the UN in Mali, both military and civilian.[53, 54]	Yes (e.g. donations of medicines)	$11.8M spent 2013-30 Nov 2016, 220 projects in total[55]
2. Other MINUSMA QIPS and similar activities[56]	Military contingents (contributing states' MoD)	Ad hoc activities to gain acceptance from the population, for instance, when arriving to new places.	Yes (e.g. distribution of medicines)	Unknown (figures are not public)[57]
3. Peace Dividend Projects / Trust Fund[58]	State donors (funds can be earmarked and/or not)	They "follow the same identification, formulation, approval, implementation, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms as MINUSMA's QIPs", but can finance projects of a longer duration and budget.[59]	Yes[60]	(Nov 2016) $27M approx.[61] Mixed funding MINUSMA QIPs and Trust Fund is possible
4. Barkhane – medical activities	Barkhane (France)	Ad hoc activities to gain acceptance from the population, for instance, when arriving to new places. Also, Barkhane states that its military hospitals in Gao and Tessalit are open for the local population.[62]	Yes (they say 60-75 consultations per operation)[63]	Unknown (figures are not public)
5. Barkhane QIPs an d similar activities[64]	Barkhane (France)	QIPs cover three thematic areas: education, water and electricity. Limited contribution by MINUSMA and UN agencies.[65] Local NGOs contribute.	Yes	€575.000, more than 40 projects Aug 2014 - Jul 2016[66,67]
6. Quick impact development projects[68,69]	France, EU, Mali[70]	It tries to combine the QIPs logic plus development projects not directly linked to military force, so that the "dividends of peace" can be immediately received.[71]	Yes, expressly included	AFD budget of €6M for 2015-16.[72] French embassy: €1,17M (2014)[73]
7. PBF - UN Peacebuilding Fund in Mali[74,75]	State donors	PBF is supporting the implementation of the peace agreements in "high-risk interventions in the north of the country, where other partners were unable, or hesitant, to intervene".[76]	Unclear[77]	$10.93M since 2013

Source: Prepared by the author

There is widespread incursion of the military into the humanitarian sphere. Humanitarian action is being instrumentalised in search of military and political aims that are incompatible with the humanitarian principles

Besides the traditional humanitarian actors (local and international NGOs, ICRC, UN humanitarian agencies) and MINUSMA and Barkhane (who implement projects like those listed in the table), the GoM, foreign governments and even insurgent groups[78] also claim to engage in humanitarian or development activities. Given the difficulty of monitoring activities in certain zones, some donors are known to delegate the monitoring task to foreign military bodies, who in turn may opportunistically increase their options to win the hearts and minds of the population by associating themselves to the projects they supervise. For instance, Barkhane acts as a liaison of the French embassy (in the so-called quick impact development projects –see Table 2) to monitor the projects when there are no civilian officers in the field or, if there are, they will accompany and protect them "to speed up normalisation in the context of a general approach to the crisis".[79, 80] Hence, the potential for a vicious cycle emerges: first, as will be analysed later, the insufficient presence and performance of humanitarian actors in certain locations may be exacerbated by the incursion of the military into the sphere of humanitarian action. Second, military bodies claim that they do what humanitarians cannot. Barkhane itself justifies its direct engagement in medical activities by stating that they are not only meant to improve acceptance but that they also "fill a gap". All in all, what seems clear is that there is a widespread incursion of the military into the humanitarian sphere, and that humanitarian action is being instrumentalised in search of military and political aims that are incompatible with humanitarian principles. These practices benefit from the collaboration of both state donors and the UN system as a whole.

The risk of associating humanitarian activities with intelligence-gathering is obvious

The risk of associating humanitarian activities with intelligence-gathering is obvious. Yet, it is not something that the different contingents try to mitigate or even dissimulate. For instance, the Dutch contingent in MINUSMA openly says that it "is mainly involved in conducting reconnaissance and gathering intelligence, serving, as it were, as the 'eyes and ears' of the mission".[81] To succeed, they combine, for instance, the use of Apache attack helicopters with social activities aimed at increasing proximity with the population.[82] The Netherlands' military and policing contribution in Mali, in their own words, "dovetails with existing Dutch development cooperation efforts in Mali" in a context that the Dutch government labels as related to the fight against terrorism.[83] This combination of activities can undoubtedly generate mistrust and rejection from AOGs and part of the population,[84] particularly in a context of suspicion and hostility where people suspected of collaboration with Western forces have been killed.[85]

When aid is used as a superficial cover-up for a larger (and hidden) objective, this can backfire and lead to a situation where all aid is rejected

Consequently, when aid is used as a superficial cover-up for a larger (and hidden) objective, this can backfire and lead to a situation where all aid is rejected. In Ber (Timbuktu), for instance, in August 2016, Barkhane and the FAMa tried but failed to provide medical aid as a way to spearhead a joint operation of securitisation. According to the French, "certain combatants manipulated the population and prevented them from any hope for development."[86] During an interview, a member of an armed group said this was an attempt by the military to establish a presence in Ber, but the community had been mobilised to oppose these types of activities. At least one more published example of rejection of aid has been found during this research, but it is assumed that there are others that have not been publicly reported.[87] While rejection of aid is a legitimate choice by the population, it becomes problematic the moment it is expressed through violence against humanitarian workers (not yet explicitly the case in Mali but the potential is there).

The response of the humanitarian sector

The GTAH requests that QIPs respect two conditions: geographical separation and separation in the type of activities. So far, these conditions have not been respected and the expectation is that they will not be respected in the near future

The Country Humanitarian Team (EHP, for its initials in French), which is comprised of INGOs and UN agencies, clearly states in their Code of Conduct that "in no case may the military means associated with one of the parties to the conflict be involved in the provision of humanitarian aid".[88] However, the Humanitarian Assistance Technical Group in Mali (GTAH, for its initials in French),[89] which is a coordination platform made up only of international NGOs, is not formally opposed to QIPs and similar activities.[90] The GTAH only requests that QIPs respect two conditions: geographical separation (the military should not perform these activities in the very same places where the humanitarians operate)[91]; and separation in the type of activities, with an express petition for armies to engage in electricity and infrastructure building, as these are rarely covered by the humanitarians. However, health and education are often the areas that provide the easiest and fastest results for QIPs and it is unlikely they will stop action in these areas. In fact, Barkhane and MINUSMA prioritise these kinds of activities. So far, the GTAH conditions have not been respected and the expectation is that they will not be respected in the near future. A high-ranking UN official made it clear to certain INGOs that the QIPs will be carried out no matter what the humanitarian sector may say, but that the door would be open to joint coordination.

There is a de facto acceptance by humanitarian actors of the UN rationales of integration and stabilisation, including QIPs and activities with similar goals

The answer to the problems QIPs create is not for the INGOs to police or validate, but for the military to respect the humanitarian space and principles

Among the humanitarian community in Mali, there is a de facto acceptance (with resignation) of the UN rationales of integration and stabilisation, including QIPs and other activities that have similar goals. While many INGO representatives clearly oppose these dynamics personally, neither the GTAH nor individual agencies seem to have an active stance or an advocacy strategy to warn about the risks of these frameworks. Some humanitarian actors believe that these risks are partly mitigated by including INGOs in the QIPs validation committees. Currently, lists are being shared in an exercise that goes in that direction, yet the exercise has so far proved to be superficial, if not outright dishonest.[92] However, clearly the answer to the potential problems that QIPs create is not for the INGOs to police or validate the QIPs, but for the military to respect the humanitarian space and principles.

The GTAH has resigned itself to basic pragmatism when it comes to military-humanitarian activities; it does not challenge them but instead tries to make them as palatable as possible. While there is no common position with regard to this issue, the INGOs seem to have "lost the battle of principles".[93] The rules of the game have changed from humanitarian action clearly separated from any political aim to subordination, to an extended agenda that includes the expansion of the presence and authority of the GoM. The double (triple) role (political and humanitarian) of the HC/RC/DSRSG allows the system to state that the humanitarians are listened to while political decisions are taken with little interference. The humanitarian community relies on OCHA to defend its space, but in this context of leading edge integration, OCHA has not been able to do this.[94] Unfortunately, this is not a specific problem of the humanitarian system in Mali, but a structural problem that is inherent to the concept of integrated missions, which has been aiming to create a synergy between the political, military and humanitarian action for over a decade. The stabilisation and counter-terrorist rationales have only added further complications.

Humanitarian actors have struggled with insecurity and incidents in Mali since the beginning of the conflict in 2012

FAMa, Barkhane and MINUSMA are clearly targeted. Surprisingly, humanitarians do not feel targeted

Two issues which may increase risk for humanitarians are: the use of armed escorts by humanitarians and the use of vehicles not clearly identified as military

3.3. Targeting. The risk of being attacked

Humanitarian actors have struggled with insecurity and incidents in Mali since the beginning of the conflict in 2012. They have been robbed, kidnapped and killed, and as a result, the presence of INGOs has decreased in the area, which in turn creates an emergency gap, or in other words, a situation where critical needs are unmet, mainly due to the absence of actors. Tragic examples of attacks are known[95] but there is no reliable compounded data on incidents. In general terms, the AOGs don't conduct indiscriminate attacks, and FAMa, Barkhane and MINUSMA are clearly targeted. Surprisingly, humanitarians do not feel targeted.[96] The contrast with other contexts is striking: it is difficult to find a country at war where foreign forces in support of governments are so highly targeted while the UN humanitarians under the integration rationale seem not to be. This apparent paradox could be partially explained by the fact that there is very limited humanitarian presence and therefore little exposure to the risk: if there is no presence of humanitarian actors, there will not be incidents. Therefore, a security incident-based comparison between the military and the humanitarians is unwise, as their vulnerability (and exposure) is significantly different. MSF cannot know if the existing attacks on humanitarian workers were due to their being confused with the military or a perceived association with them, or whether they were due to a deliberate intention to harm humanitarians, or related to internal staff issues, or if they were criminal acts. **Nevertheless, MSF is concerned that there could be an increase in targeted attacks** in a context where all actors may be perceived to work for a common political objective, particularly given the high level of malicious attacks against the foreign forces.

Two issues which may increase risk for humanitarians are: the use of armed escorts by humanitarians and the use of vehicles not clearly identified as military.

The use of armed escorts

The UN Department for Safety and Security (UNDSS), in charge of security management for the whole UN, has issued two surprising recommendations (which in practice are treated as directives[97]) for the UN civilian agencies, humanitarians included, namely (a) the use of armed escorts in areas deemed insecure for the UN and (b) the use of MINUSMA compounds as bases for UN civilian staff visiting such areas. In other words, it requires the non-targeted UN agencies to travel and lodge with MINUSMA, i.e. with those

that are under attack. These conditions are understandably uncomfortable for the UN humanitarian actors, and often are a reason to avoid going to the risky areas rather than an enabler of access. INGOs are less bound by UNDSS recommendations, but they are nevertheless heavily influenced by them and some might not dare contravene UNDSS advice.

Given the track record of MINUSMA in the country, one could argue being accompanied by MINUSMA actually increases the risk for UN civilian agencies

Given the track record of MINUSMA in the country, one could argue that rather than affording protection, being accompanied by MINUSMA (even if armed) actually increases the risk for UN civilian agencies.[98] MINUSMA's weekly reports contain many cases of attacks to non-humanitarian civilian groups escorted by the military.[99] However, it is hard, if not impossible, to determine if the civilian groups were also expressly targeted or if they were attacked because of their association with MINUSMA, or a combination of both. When it comes to discussions about the use of armed escorts in Mali, the balance between the acceptance and deterrence components of security management is a hard one to strike. MINUSMA's security logic is based on deterrence, yet the humanitarians' security is based on acceptance from the population. The safety of humanitarians can be jeopardised by being associated with MINUSMA, an actor whose low acceptance by the population in northern Mali is amply demonstrated.[100]

Some representatives of UN agencies have stated that not being able to move without an armed escort is one of the reasons why they are not present in wide areas of northern Mali

MINUSMA states that escorting "MINUSMA's civil personnel, NGOs and humanitarian actors" is one of its main activities.[101] The weekly reports produced by MINUSMA include a section specifying the number of escorts performed, often dozens. Yet, armed escorts are seen as a "last resort" within the humanitarian community in Mali, and the EHP code of conduct sates that they should be used only "if the positive impact of aid to populations far outweighs the risks resulting from the use of escorts".[102] However, the UNDSS directives are that UN humanitarian agencies (EHP members) must use armed escorts if they want to move in certain areas in northern Mali. Some representatives of UN agencies have stated that not being able to move without an armed escort is one of the reasons why they are not present in wide areas of northern Mali. Nevertheless, UN humanitarian agencies often use armed escorts, both within collective actions (e.g. the "Caravan for Peace"[103]) or in joint missions (e.g. MINUSMA and World Food Programme[104]). Humanitarian NGOs have also used armed escorts, including the use of AOGs for escorting local NGOs or monitoring distributions.[105] All INGOs claim that they never use escorts.[106]

UN soldier near a UN vehicle after it drove over an explosive device near Kidal, in northern Mali

MINUSMA's blue helmets in Kidal

The military can take measures to reduce their visibility, but in doing so, they can transfer risk to the humanitarians

Whose car is this?

A quick Google search for images of MINUSMA vehicles used in northern Mali shows a big disparity in terms of type of car and identification. These vehicles include the white 4x4 hardtops and pickups traditionally used by civilian and humanitarian actors. Using the same type of vehicles for intelligence gathering and other military activities may provoke confusion, reluctance and suspicion among the population about the identity and/or motivations of the occupants. Contrary to MINUSMA, Barkhane does not use these types of vehicles, but few people can differentiate between French soldiers operating under Barkhane, MINUSMA or EUTM Mali.[107] Part of the population and AOGs perceive the French soldiers as one entity, without distinguishing between different military operations.

According to interviews, at the beginning of the operation, the UN military vehicles displayed the name "MINUSMA" in addition to the classic UN logo in black. As this label attracted hostility, MINUSMA decided to stop using it on their white 4x4 vehicles. Today, MINUSMA cars are identified with just a big black "UN" sign on the doors on both sides and on the roof, and only sometimes on the back.[108] In doing so, the military tries to avoid attracting attention from a distance, when the car cannot be identified and the uniforms are not visible. The problem for humanitarian actors is that an observer that is not familiar with the plurality of foreign actors may not be able to make a distinction between military and humanitarian vehicles if these are not easily distinguishable. The military can take measures to reduce their visibility but in doing so they can transfer risk to the humanitarians.[109]

MSF shared these concerns with MINUSMA, who answered that what they do is "legal" and in accordance with International Humanitarian Law (IHL). But firstly, the legality of the use of civilian-like assets for military action remains a subject for debate among IHL specialists;[110] and secondly, what is legal may not be sufficient to avoid confusion or association, particularly in contexts like Mali where certain armed actors perceive the military as enemies, as acknowledged during the interviews by two representatives of different AOGs. The initials "UN" (either in black or in blue) do not mean the same for everybody and for many they do not mean anything at all. The UN military operations do not use clearly marked green or camouflage vehicles, the practice most common to NATO, the AU, the EU or, in Mali, Barkhane.[111] Whilst these other forces have occasionally resorted to civilian-type vehicles for intelligence-gathering and/or to remain unnoticed, the use by the UN military

The identification of MINUSMA vehicles is misleading, and does not sufficiently protect humanitarian action.
If humanitarian workers and attacking forces use the same type of vehicles, people cannot know if occupants carry weapons of medicines

The humanitarian response in many zones in northern and central Mali is severely limited by insecurity. This situation precedes the deployment of the various foreign military forces. Nevertheless, the impact of the integration, stabilisation and counter-terrorism rationales can exacerbate the difficulties in a number of ways

is systematic. The identification of MINUSMA vehicles is misleading, and does not sufficiently protect humanitarian action. If humanitarian workers and attacking forces use the same type of vehicles, people cannot know if occupants carry weapons or medicines.

3.4. Reduced impact. The risk of not doing the job

Despite significant needs, the humanitarian response in many zones in northern and central Mali is severely limited by insecurity. Humanitarian actors, including MSF, either struggle to provide a timely and efficient response or are not present at all. The risk of attacks, kidnapping or killing is perceived as too high for both international and national staff.

This situation precedes the deployment of the various foreign military forces and therefore cannot be attributed to the impact of their presence. Nevertheless, the impact of the integration, stabilisation and counter-terrorism rationales can exacerbate the difficulties in a number of ways. The first one is by increasing the security concerns as seen in the previous sections. Others are discussed and illustrated below:

a) *Reducing existing capacity*. Mixing military and civil activities can negatively impact local service providers, as was clearly observed recently during the electoral process. In Douentza (Mopti region), the FAMa selected a community health centre (Centre de Santé Communautaire, CSCom) to host the voting process precisely because it had no history of being attacked and was thus considered safe. The CSCom was immediately attacked. The medical staff fled straightaway and the health centre remained closed for several days.

b) *Pushing actors out*. Military-driven instrumental 'aid' activities can also exacerbate gaps in the humanitarian response, as humanitarian groups refuse to work in the same zone to maintain a distance from the military forces so as to reduce the risk of association. As an example, MINUSMA has contacted an MSF-supported CSCom at least three times to propose donations of medicines. The CSCom has consistently refused these offers arguing that there is clearly no need because MSF regularly supplies them. MSF has also requested MINUSMA to stop these attempts because they can create problems due to the association with the military, and clearly told both the CSCom and the MINUSMA that MSF would likely disengage from its permanent support to the health centre if MINUSMA was in any way involved in supporting

the facility. Unfortunately, these initiatives continue to take place. In 2015, in the same CSCom, members of a MINUSMA contingent entered the compound and began to treat patients in the courtyard, telling people that they had the best medicines. This attitude not only carries the risk of association, but it potentially undermines the image of humanitarian actors. The CSCom is located precisely in an area where MINUSMA is highly targeted.

c) *Making coordination more difficult.* For instance, in Menaka, the UNHCR is responsible for coordination but the humanitarian actors present prefer not to be contacted by UNHCR to avoid association with the agency due to its use of escorts.

d) *Subordinating humanitarian priorities to political developments.* Humanitarian donors may be conditioned by the stabilisation agenda, subtly or explicitly directing implementing partners to perform convenient activities in convenient locations as per the political developments or priorities, rather than based on impartial needs assessments. Given the UN's central role in channelling donor funds and their lead coordination function, this risk can only be exacerbated.

e) *Limiting access.* As previously discussed, the perception in northern Mali is that the military are expressly targeted but the humanitarians are not. However, in line with the integration rationale, there is only one UN security risk analysis that applies for both the military and the humanitarian components.[112] As one humanitarian worker in Mali poignantly said, "as the UNDSS decisions have blocked the movements of the UN humanitarian actors, it's difficult for them to know the risk they may face as they have never taken that risk."[113,114] As a result of the broader coherence efforts, there are many ways in which implementing actors are procedurally and/or informally dependent upon the UN, so when the UN humanitarian agencies freeze, a large part of the system freezes with them.

The entire UN humanitarian system is physically absent in the Kidal region, and the presence of implementing actors (local, national and international) is extremely limited. Security partially justifies this absence, but another key factor is linked to transport difficulties that are in turn exacerbated by association with the MINUSMA (or efforts to avoid being associated with them). At the time of writing, it is not possible for humanitarian actors to take flights to Kidal, and the only way to access the city and

> When the UN humanitarian agencies freeze, a large part of the system freezes with them

> The entire UN humanitarian system is physically absent in the Kidal region, and the presence of implementing actors (local, national and international) is extremely limited

its surroundings is by road, an option that significantly increases the security risks and is challenging during the rainy season. The alternative is to use a MINUSMA helicopter and to land in the MINUSMA camp, but this is mostly not an option for INGOs due to the risk of association.

The runway in Kidal was damaged in May 2014 during demonstrations against the visit of the Malian prime minister. MINUSMA rehabilitated and reopened it again in February 2016. Only two months later, in April, it was ransacked during demonstrations against international forces. Discussions followed with representatives of communities who made it clear that the humanitarians are welcome but not the military. MINUSMA has declared the runway no longer secure for use by anyone. The majority of INGOs are dependent on the UN Humanitarian Air Service (UNHAS) for logistics and transport. When no air service is available, the INGOs' ability to operate is greatly reduced, and the low presence of humanitarian actors in the region could be explained in part by this difficult access.

f) *Relying excessively on local partners.* IIn order to overcome the limitations of access, some humanitarian actors have decided to partner up with local NGOs. Whilst many INGOs and donors have the intention of working with local actors on the grounds of empowerment and increased understanding of the context, security constraints are also an important driver for the increased reliance on local actors. This is also exacerbated by the rationales of integration, stabilisation and counter-terrorism. Whilst many INGOs strongly promote their partnership with local NGOs as an objective in itself, others have also acknowledged in private that they would deploy their own teams to the area if it were not for the security constraints. Whilst it is clear that the localisation of aid (working through autonomous local partners) is a valuable strategy in many contexts, MSF has raised concerns about a general push towards localised aid in contexts of acute or protracted armed conflict.[115] Working exclusively through local partners in these contexts presents challenges with regard to transfer of risk, monitoring of aid and adherence to principles, and these challenges need to be addressed and responsibly managed.

In many areas of northern Mali, local NGOs are the main implementing agencies. Interestingly, and also of concern, the local organisations who implement the QIPs are also the implementing partners of the INGOs. Therefore, a local

When no air service is available, INGOs' ability to operate is greatly reduced. This could partly explain the low presence of humanitarian actors in the region

Whilst many INGOs and donors have the intention of working with local actors on the grounds of empowerment, security constraints are also an important driver for the increased reliance on local actors

Working exclusively through local partners in these contexts presents challenges with regard to transfer of risk, monitoring of aid and adherence to principles

Localisation should not be the only humanitarian response in this war-torn area

NGO may at the same time be an implementing partner of MINUSMA, Barkhane, a UN agency and of an INGO. It is beyond the scope of this report to answer how these local NGOs navigate these multiple partnerships, what it means for their perception and what their connection with local power actors are, but the situation certainly raises a number of red flags. As per MSF experience worldwide, pressures, political use of aid, opportunism, coercion, deviation of resources or privileged use of services are frequent dynamics in such violent contexts. Therefore, localisation should not be the only humanitarian response in this war-torn area.

4.
MSF's struggle for impact in Mali[116]

The two main challenges for MSF have been avoiding association with all other actors and maintaining access

MSF strives to clearly adhere to the humanitarian principles of neutrality, impartiality and independence, but also to ensure that this is perceived by all actors

Since the armed conflict began in Mali, MSF has had difficulty in accessing populations in need. While insecurity was clearly the main limitation, significant efforts have been made to pre-emptively manage the risks stemming from the juxtaposition of the three rationales described in this report. MSF has made efforts to be clearly differentiated from any other actor, whether humanitarian, political or military. The two main challenges for MSF have been avoiding association with all other actors and maintaining access. While standard MSF policies for contexts of acute armed conflicts were implemented to minimise security- and acceptance-related risks, the organisation took specific measures that responded to the specificities of the Malian context.

MSF's Perception

The association with non-humanitarian actors is of great concern. MSF strives to clearly adhere to the humanitarian principles of neutrality, impartiality and independence, but also to ensure that this is perceived by all actors including the warring parties, other power actors and the general population. By default, MSF's policies in all contexts of acute armed conflict imply a rejection of political positioning. In Mali, MSF has no official opinion on stabilisation, counter-terrorism, the peace process or on what should be done about this crisis in political terms. This is self-imposed to avoid being perceived as taking sides or being biased. Secondly, MSF always negotiates access directly with all actors, most clearly with the warring parties. MSF does not rely on any intermediary, including the UN humanitarian coordinator, to dialogue with any other actor, as the UN is clearly a political actor. MSF tries to ensure that all actors know not only who MSF is but can also distinguish who MSF is not, and prefers not to delegate this task, which is considered key for access. Thirdly, and also related to the rationale of integration, MSF chooses not to be a formal member of any coordination body that is not strictly humanitarian. In Mali, this includes the UN cluster system, the GTAH and the EPH. MSF maintains a role as observer in those platforms and a good dialogue with its members, but will not formally endorse any of their decisions, as MSF wants neither to be associated in any form nor to officially contribute to any of the mentioned rationales. Fourthly, 100% of MSF activities in Mali are funded by private donations. MSF defends its independence (real or perceived) in the country by not accepting funding from any state or institution directly or indirectly engaged in the political process. In Mali, this independence extends to a decision not to use any UN in-kind donations such as medicines or vaccines. However, the UN can donate directly to the Ministry of Health in the sites where MSF works.

© MSF

MSF vehicles in Ansongo

In MSF's view, the best way to differentiate from armed actors is to avoid collaboration

In Ansongo, MSF has mitigated the risk of visual confusion or association with non-humanitarian actors by painting its cars pink, thus clearly and boldly differentiating them (see photo).[117] This is not the first time MSF has resorted to this strategy, as it was exactly the same approach used in Bunia (DRC) over a decade ago and – with different purposes – in Darfur. However, this strategy is only possible with MSF's own vehicles in Ansongo town. When moving to the periphery in the Gao region or in any place in the Kidal region, MSF uses, like all other NGOs, rented vehicles which cannot be painted the same way. Thus, whilst MSF has tried to clearly differentiate its cars, this remains a concern outside of Ansongo.

In MSF's view, the best way to differentiate from armed actors is to avoid collaboration. In Mali, and in every other context of acute armed conflict, MSF generally refuses to use armed escorts and to move in convoys with any actor that could be associated with military and political objectives.[118] As regards sharing information, MSF also refuses to collaborate with intelligence bodies, a stance that is not always well received by those bodies.[119]

MSF's Access

In this complicated and risky context, MSF has also taken additional measures to ensure access to populations. For instance, MSF struggled to find a safe option for flight transportation, and analysed the suitability of using UN (UNHAS), EU (ECHO) or ICRC flights. The analysis included understanding local acceptance of the different flights, the need to avoid association and logistic constraints. The option of using MINUSMA helicopters to reach Kidal was immediately ruled out because of the weak local acceptance of MINUSMA. MSF showed a certain openness with ECHO and even with UNHAS for transport to Gao, but decided not to use any of their flights in Kidal. In the end, the organisation decided to use its own plane, despite the high cost of this option. A new risk assessment regarding the use of road transportation was conducted when it was no longer possible to fly to Kidal following the closure of the airport. It was then deemed possible to negotiate access directly with various armed actors present along the route, and MSF now uses the road to reach Kidal. This negotiated access is of course an ongoing activity that needs dedicated investment to ensure that acceptance is maintained.

Although working with local partners is a potentially effective way to overcome access constraints in a context such as Mali, working exclusively through local partners is still considered an unacceptable compromise for MSF

When MSF decided to launch activities in Kidal it had insufficient contacts or local information to put together a good understanding of the context or a credible risk analysis. At the time, internal regulations did now allow newly recruited local staff to travel outside of Kidal village, and international staff were not permitted in the project at all. MSF opted for collaboration with a local NGO based in Kidal to facilitate MSF's remote support to health centres outside of Kidal village. This is an uncomfortable formula for MSF, one that is only considered in situations of extremely limited access. By default, the organisation will always try to directly implement its activities, given that proximity to beneficiary populations is considered an integral part of the intervention and not just a side benefit. This choice was ¬a temporary strategy to build a closer relationship with local power actors and a better understanding of the local needs. Over time, this strategy proved challenging for MSF and put into question the ability to guarantee adherence to humanitarian principles. Beyond the obvious shortcomings linked to not being able to directly assess needs and monitor activities, could MSF guarantee impartiality and independence in medical activities by partnering with a local NGO that was also implementing the activities of other actors? Over time, MSF expanded its network and built up a sufficient understanding of the context and local actors. This allowed for the deployment of international staff and a move towards direct implementation, maintaining the partnership with the local NGO. Although working with local partners is a potentially effective way to overcome access constraints in a context such as Mali, working exclusively through local partners is still considered an unacceptable compromise for MSF.

MSF has tried to maintain direct access to populations through reducing the risk of security incidents

MSF has tried to maintain direct access to populations through reducing the risk of security incidents. One of the measures traditionally taken by MSF is the profiling of international staff to mitigate their vulnerability. In northern Mali, the risk of kidnapping for westerners is high. Thus, MSF analysed what characteristics (such as nationality, skin colour or cultural aspects) minimised staff's vulnerability in the MSF project sites. MSF then started using certain profiles that were defined as less at risk and avoided deploying staff considered high risk. International staff from African countries are more common in the Mali mission than in other MSF missions, a preventive measure that so far has allowed MSF a level of access that otherwise would not have been possible. This initiative has not been easy to implement, as suitable profiles are not always available and the risk of discrimination that comes with this strategy remains an ethical dilemma for the organisation. MSF's headquarters have been under additional stress to find the right profiles and maintain operations with fully staffed teams.

Close dialogue with the main warring parties, as well as the main institutional and military actors allows MSF to adapt as required in order to remain operational in the communities with most needs, but this is not an easy task

Given the numerous (and costly) measures that have been necessary to maintain access, MSF has been forced to question its operational ambitions and the scope of its medical activities. This is a constant struggle for the organisation, finding ways to be present in areas where the needs are greatest (impartiality) but that require large operational adaptations in order to gain access.

The continued presence of MSF in Mali requires continual reinforcement both of MSF perception and measures to ensure access. MSF maintains close dialogue with the main warring parties as well as the main institutional and military actors. Feedback from such dialogue and regular analysis of the evolving context allows MSF to adapt as required in order to remain operational in the communities with most needs, but this is not an easy task.

MSF permanently seeks to safeguard the humanitarian space and avoid the subordination of humanitarian action to rationales that are incompatible with the humanitarian principles

MSF permanently seeks to safeguard the humanitarian space and avoid the subordination of humanitarian action to rationales that are incompatible with the humanitarian principles. Internal measures taken by the organisation are often of help, but they are insufficient to ensure the safe continuation of humanitarian action, or even the continuation of MSF operations. Thus, advocacy is an integral component of MSF's medical humanitarian mandate. In fact, this report is indeed framed in MSF's efforts to raise awareness on the dangers of subordinating humanitarian action to political developments.

Conclusions

The humanitarian situation in Mali remains very precarious. In most areas in the north, the state is not present and, where it is, it is more political and symbolic rather than functional. It is an active conflict zone characterised by a precarious and volatile security situation and very limited access of the population to basic services, particularly healthcare. In Kidal, the Government of Mali remains completely absent, and access to healthcare for the population has been further jeopardised by the withdrawal of NGOs working in the region, as a result of deteriorating security conditions. Humanitarian actors must find ways to ensure a presence and address the critical needs of the population.

For humanitarian actors, including MSF, insecurity in northern Mali has clearly been the main operational limitation. But this has been aggravated by the need to redouble efforts to avoid association with all other actors and agendas. Humanitarian action is still possible and feasible in Mali, albeit with great difficulty. However, the fragile balance of acceptance by the population we all seek to help could break at any point and the situation could easily deteriorate.

The current framework of the international response in Mali (including integration, stabilisation and counter-terrorism) and the determination by the military (and the politicians behind them) to conduct "humanitarian" activities have shaped a fragile and dangerous environment for humanitarian action rather than protecting it. MINUSMA has an explicit mandate for the "creation of conditions for the provision of humanitarian assistance". However, rather than reinforcing a strict separation between the military (which is highly targeted in northern Mali) and the humanitarians, and respecting humanitarian principles and space, both MINUSMA and Barkhane deliberately and openly instrumentalise humanitarian action, which may provoke precisely the opposite effect, and endanger the continuation of humanitarian action in wide zones of Mali. The purposeful blurring of lines between the military (and the political) actors and the humanitarians may facilitate their military objectives, in particular after arriving to new areas, winning hearts and minds and for information gathering. Yet, these practices may endanger not only aid workers working in the same area, but also humanitarian action in the whole region if the integrity of its impulse and intention is delegitimised. These initiatives are not just isolated incursions by the military into the humanitarian realm, but rather they fall within a general strategy approved and validated by governments, donors and the entire UN system.

Foreign military and political actors would like to see humanitarians as partners and conduct projects jointly. So far, international NGOs are not participating in these practices, but they don't actively oppose them either: non-cooperation without condemnation. In contrast, some local and national actors (NGOs and others) do collaborate with "humanitarian" activities carried out by MINUSMA and Barkhane. Surprisingly, despite the big efforts by the military to blur the lines and the limited vocal resistance by the humanitarians, there is a general perception that the population and AOGs are still able to differentiate between the military and the humanitarians. Nevertheless, the status quo rests on a fragile balance and MSF is concerned that the situation could easily deteriorate and threaten the acceptance of humanitarian action generally, and the safety of humanitarian workers in particular.

Humanitarian actors have a key role to play in negotiating and safeguarding access to populations in need. Whilst we call on the military actors to withhold from instrumentalising aid, we equally call on humanitarian actors to reject and denounce any practice that may jeopardise access to the most vulnerable, and to increase efforts to ensure differentiation between humanitarians and the military.

In an integrated mission in armed conflict settings, humanitarian action is often subordinated to political and or development goals and MSF has consistently warned that this may lead to a recurrent deprioritisation of the immediate and critical needs of the population. In a context where the integrated mission takes on a stabilisation role and adopts the counter-terrorism rationale, humanitarian action is only too willingly instrumentalised for quick (and questionable) impact with little regard for the fact that, in doing so, humanitarian action is being sacrificed and might no longer be a viable option to address crises in the area in the mid and long term.

End notes

1   See Common Security and Defence Policy 2012, "CSDP Civil Mission in Sahel", p. 1, http://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/1704249/fact_sheet_sahel_coordinated9_july.pdf

2   The purpose of this report is not to explain the conflict dynamics, but rather to explore the impact of the incursion of the foreign military in the humanitarian arena. Therefore, this contextual introduction will be kept very short and simplified.

3   The CMA represents the ambition to create a separate state of "Azawad", which encompasses northern Mali; and GATIA represents the interests of those who want to keep the Azawad within the Republic of Mali. However, the members of these platforms also have ambitions beyond the administrative recognition of the Azawad.

4   For instance, US-designated terrorist groups in Mali include AQMI (*Al-Qaïda au Maghreb Islamique*), Ansar Dine, Al Mourabitoun and MUJAO (*Mouvement pour l'Unicité et le Jihad en Afrique de l'Ouest)*. See "Foreign Terrorist Organizations", US Department of State, https://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/other/des/123085.htm

5   At the time or writing, the FAMa are only present in the zones under the control of GATIA, which means that their presence is very limited in the north and only symbolic in Kidal, where the FAMa are only present at the Aguelhok camp controlled by MINUSMA.

6   In the areas of Tenenkou, Yawarou and Dountza in central Mali the FAMa have also lost control.

7   With a cost in 2015 of €563 million, 51% of all French military missions. De Legge, M. D., 2016, "Rapport d´Information fait au nom de la commission des finances sur les opérations extérieures du ministère de la défense", 26 October, Senate report, no. 85, p. 37, http://www.senat.fr/rap/r16-085/r16-0851.pdf.

8   The other current two large missions are Opération Chammal (in Syria/Iraq, 4,050 troops) and Damand (Lebanon, 900 troops). Apart from a permanent presence in foreign military bases and "sovereignty forces" in overseas territories, the rest of operations are with less than 100 soldiers. See the website of the French Ministry of Defence at: http://www.defense.gouv.fr/operations/rubriques_complementaires/carte-des-operations-et-missions-militaires

9   The operation has 200 armoured vehicles, 200 logistics vehicles, 4 fighters, 6-10 transport planes, 17 helicopters and 5 drones. See French Ministry of Defence 2016, "Dossier de presse Opération Barkhane", July, pp. 7-8.

10 The very name of "Barkhane" relates to the Sahara wind that flows "as the French soldiers do". Interview with Barkhane representatives in December 2016.

11 In Mali, Barkhane has a permanent base in Gao and other posts in Kidal, Tessalit, Ansongo and Timbuktu. 7 soldiers have died in Opération Barkhane, as well as 10 in Serval.

12 Interview with Barkhane representatives.

13 Already in 2008, the Livre blanc de la Défense stated that the resolution of crisis must adopt "strategies that bring together all diplomatic, financial, civil, cultural and military instruments, both in the phases of crisis prevention and crisis management as well as in the post-conflict stabilisation and reconstruction phases" (translated from French by the author). See: http://www.senat.fr/rap/r15-728/r15-7285.html

14 Resolution 2100 (25 April 2013); updated by resolutions 2164 (25 June 2014), resolution 2227 (29 June 2015) and resolution 2295 (29 June 2016).

15 The tasks are related to "stabilisation of the country and implementation of the transitional roadmap (...), protecting civilians, human rights monitoring, the creation of conditions for the provision of humanitarian assistance and the return of displaced persons, the extension of the state authority and the preparation of free, inclusive and peaceful elections." See: http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/missions/minusma/mandate.shtml

16 The verbatim text reads: "(f) *Humanitarian assistance and projects for stabilization.* (i) In support of the Malian authorities, to contribute to the creation of a secure environment for the safe, civilian-led delivery of humanitarian assistance, in accordance with humanitarian principles, and the voluntary, safe and dignified return or local integration or resettlement of internally displaced persons and refugees in close coordination with humanitarian actors; (ii) In support of the Malian authorities, to contribute to the creation of a secure environment for projects aimed at stabilizing the North of Mali, including quick impact projects." See: http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/missions/minusma/mandate.shtml

17 The top 7 contributors were Burkina Faso (1,892 troops, 62% of all Burkina's contributions to the UN), Bangladesh (1,671, 24%), Chad (1,340, 99%), Togo (1,092, 67%), Niger (887, 48%), Guinea (871, 95%) and Senegal (866, 24%). "UN Mission's Contributions by Country", updated 31 January 2017, https://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/contributors/2017/jan17_5.pdf

18 "UN Mission's Contributions by Country", op. cit.

[19] UN Peacekeeping: "Fatalities by Year, Mission and Incident Type", updated 31 January 2017, http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/fatalities/documents/stats_5ajan.pdf

[20] This category mainly excludes fatalities by accident and illness.

[21] UN Peacekeeping: "Fatalities by Year, Mission and Incident Type", op. cit.

[22] Official site for the mission: http://eucap-sahel-mali.eu/a-propos/la-mission

[23] Official site for the mission: http://www.eutmmali.eu/category/home

[24] As reported, the strategy for the Sahel "applies a development-based approach to security rather than a security-based approach to development" (translated from French by the author). See: "Sahel : repenser l'aide publique au développement", Senate, http://www.senat.fr/rap/r15-728/r15-7285.html

[25] Ibid.

[26] Decision of the UNSG in the Policy Committee (2008/24).

[27] Rupesinghe, N., 2016, "Community Engagement: softening the hard edge of stabilisation", ACUNS Conference Paper, draft in progress, 17 June, pp. 5-11.

[28] Mona Khalil, senior legal officer in the Office of the Legal Counsel, UN Office of Legal Affairs, already stated in 2014 the increasing likelihood for MINUSMA to potentially become a party to the conflict in Mali. Khalil stated that "in the event MINUSMA is deemed to be a party to the conflict, MINUSMA military personnel would lose their protected status and thereby become lawful targets under IHL." See Khalil, M., 2014, "Humanitarian law & policy in 2014: Peacekeeping missions as parties to conflicts", PHAP, 13 February, https://phap.org/thematic-notes/2014/february/humanitarian-law-policy-2014-peacekeeping-missions-parties-conflicts

[29] Even though the most commonly used definition of armed conflict involves the notion of governmental implication as a party. See, for instance, the University of Uppsala at: http://www.pcr.uu.se/research/ucdp/definitions/definition_of_armed_conflict

[30] In Mali, the French military mission Barkhane is in theory a strict counter-terrorism operation, but in practice it also seeks the extension of the presence, authority and legitimisation of the Malian state and spills over into integration and stabilisation rationales, as demonstrated by the fact that they conduct joint patrolling with the FAMa, closely collaborate with MINUSMA or even monitor the internationally-funded development and humanitarian projects.

[31] "Security Council Adopts Resolution 2295 (2016), Authorizing 'More Proactive and Robust' Mandate for United Nations Mission in Mali", SC/12426, 29 June 2016, https://www.un.org/press/en/2016/sc12426.doc.htm

[32] The representative from Uruguay in the UNSC, for instance, said that it was not appropriate for peacekeeping missions to participate in military operations to confront terrorism, and added that the firmer, more proactive posture authorised by the resolution should not lead MINUSMA to take preventive actions or attacks against terrorists, warning that such action would change the nature of what a peacekeeping mission should be.

[33] In fact, the special representative in Mali of the UNSG and head of the MINUSMA made it clear in an interview that armed groups had two options: "I say, and I repeat, that at present there are only two camps: that of peace, which is constituted by the government and its partners who have signed; and there is the terrorist camp, which has sworn to defeat this agreement." "MIKADO FM : Entretien avec le Chef de la MINUSMA M. Annadif", 3 May 2016, https://minusma.unmissions.org/mikado-fm-entretien-avec-le-chef-de-la-minusma-m-annadif

[34] See Ministry of Defence of the Netherlands: https://www.defensie.nl/english/topics/missions-abroad/contents/current-missions

[35] "The Danish effort in Mali", Danish Ministry of Defence, last updated 31 October 2016, http://www.fmn.dk/eng/allabout/Pages/TheeffortinMali.aspx

[36] Examples of activities include using Israeli-made drones. Lappin, Y., 2016, "Germany to operate Heron 1 UAVs in Mali", HIS Jane's 360, 22 July, http://www.janes.com/article/62477/germany-to-operate-heron-1-uavs-in-mali

[37] "Sweden to contribute to UN Force in Mali", Embassy of Sweden in Lusaka, 19 Jun 2014, http://www.swedenabroad.com/en-GB/Embassies/Lusaka/Current-affairs/News/Sweden-to-contribute-to-UN-Force-in-Mali-sys/

[38] "Information and intelligence in UN peacekeeping operations", Norwegian mission to the UN, 3 June 2016, http://www.norway-un.org/Statements2017/Archived-Statements/Statements-2016/Other-Statements/Information-and-intelligence-in-UN-peacekeeping-operations/#.WI9R6JdmoUd; Solberg, E. 2015, "UN peacekeeping operations", 28 September, https://www.regjeringen.no/en/aktuelt/un-peacekeeping-operations/id2454487

[39] See https://fts.unocha.org/countries/137/donors/2012?order=total_funding&sort=desc

[40] QIPs include projects in 13 sectors: health, education, security, public infrastructure, agriculture and production, handicraft, culture and heritage, rule of law and justice, public information, waste management, water management, conflict management and human rights. QIPs in the health sector include the provision of medicines to the populations in the areas of Kidal, Gao and Timbuktu, purchase of generators for health centres in Kidal and Ansongo, electrification of a health centre in Tessalit and the construction of incinerators for a hospital and health centres in Timbuktu. See: "Completed List Overview 2014-2015", MINUSMA, https://minusma.unmissions.org/en/quick-impact-projects-qips

[41] The total budget for QIPs for all UN peacekeeping operations from 1 July 2016 to 30 June 2017 is 19 million USD. MINUSMA ($4m), MINUSCA and MINUSTAH ($3m each) and MONUSCO ($2m) total $12m out of those $19 million, or 63%. Other operations are UNAMID and UNMII ($2m each); UNMISS and UNOCI ($1m each); and UNIFIL and UNISFA ($500,000 each). The remaining up to 15 UN operations have no budget for QIPs. The UN General Assembly 2016, "approved resources for peacekeeping operations for the period from 1 July 2016 to 30 June 2017", ref. A/C.5/70/24, 22 June.

[42] Afghanistan is probably one of the contexts where these dangers have been most evident.

[43] As widely stated in interviews.

[44] Set in 2012 within the frame of the INGO Forum in Mali (*Forum des ONG Internationales au Mali, FONGIM*), the GTAH (*Groupe Technique Assistance Humanitaire* – Humanitarian Assistance Technical Group), composed of around 35 INGOs, aims at ensuring and reinforcing coordination among humanitarian INGOs. The objectives also include dialogue with other actors such as the GoM, the UN agencies, the donors and the non-state groups. Certain GTAH members are part of the Country Humanitarian Team (*Equipe Humanitaire Pays*, EHP). The EHP is the central group of operational coordination and humanitarian strategic orientation in Mali. It is composed of the UN humanitarian coordinator, UN humanitarian agencies, OIM, donors, INGOs and the ICRC (observer). The work of the EHP shapes the decisions of the UN clusters. MSF is not a formal member of any of these groups (GTAH, EPH and the UN cluster system), but is an observer.

[45] In terminology for MINUSMA: "building confidence towards the peace process, the Mission and its mandate". "Quick Impact Projects (QIPs)", MINUSMA, http://minusma.unmissions.org/en/print/quick-impact-projects-qips

[46] As an example, Barkhane and FAMa implemented a project to build a well within a school at Tessalit. Whilst it was just a well, the inauguration ceremony was attended by the General representative of Barkhane in Mali, the president of the Regional Council of Kidal and the Armed Forces of Mali, in addition to representatives of the school and the neighbourhood. *Ma Idjane*, no. 4. PR publication found at the French Embassy.

[47] Barkhane representatives stated in an interview that they are open to work hand in hand with international NGOs, but they say none of them want to.

[48] According to the French embassy, certain INGOs coordinate certain projects where Barkhane participates. Names were not released despite being expressly requested.

[49] Interviews with representatives from Barkhane and the UN in Mali.

[50] Interview with Barkhane representatives, December 2016.

[51] This table does not include MINUSMA or Barkhane treating civilians injured in an ad hoc manner, as it responds to the human impulse (and obligation) of providing relief, instead of a planned activity intended to improve acceptance and/or facilitate operations. For instance, on 20 September 2016, the French soldiers performed a medical evacuation of certain (very few) severely injured occupants of a civilian truck that ran over a mine to the south of Abeïbara (destination Gao). *Ma Idjane*, no. 4. PR publication found at the French embassy.

[52] Financed by MINUSMA, Quick Impact Projects (QIPs) are community projects financed for a maximum cost of US$50,000 and a maximum duration of 6 months, in the fields of: a) services and small public infrastructure rehabilitation; b) training and awareness-raising activities, and c) employment and revenue creation.

[53] QIPs are under the coordination of MINUSMA's Stabilisation & Recovery Section, but there may be participation of several other UN mission components such as the Civil Affairs Division, Justice & Corrections Division, Human Rights Division, United Nations Police (UNPOL), military contingents, Public Information Office or the Environment & Culture Unit, among others. "Quick Impact Projects (QIPs)", MINUSMA, http://minusma.unmissions.org/en/print/quick-impact-projects-qips

[54] Private companies cannot submit a QIP, but they may implement a project as sub-contractor. "Quick Impact Projects (QIPs)", op. cit.

[55] The QIPs are reported in the MINUSMA's monthly bulletins published by the Stabilisation and Recovery unit. http://minusma.unmissions.org/en/monthly-bulletin

[56] MINUSMA can be perceived as a very plural mission with very unequal troop contribution, quality and availability of equipment, power, exposure to risk and own budget for QIPs and similar activities. Interviewees stated that certain contingents report first to their own national hierarchy rather than to MINUSMA's central command, and even suggested that MINUSMA might not always be aware of what the different contingents do in terms of QIPs. MINUSMA confirmed that they have no details about the contingents' budgets for their own projects and activities, but claimed that they are coordinated and communicated with the sector 9 (CIMIC) section and later reported.

[57] Despite requests, MSF could not get access to any list of contingents' QIPs not funded by MINUSMA.

[58] The UN Trust Fund for Peace and Security in Mali, created by the UNSC resolution 2085 (2012), allows the MINUSMA to implement "quick impact peace dividend projects" to build and maintain public support for the peace process in northern Mali. As stated by the MINUSMA's Stabilisation & Recovery Section, the Trust Fund "aims to provide vital support to the Malian Defence and Security Forces (MDSF), assist the Malian government in its efforts to ensure lasting peace and the return of state authority and constitutional order, and support critical development and humanitarian interventions contributing to the immediate and long-term efforts by the international community to resolve the crisis in Mali." MINUSMA's Stabilisation & Recovery Monthly Bulletin November 2016, p. 7, http://minusma.unmissions.org/en/monthly-bulletin

[59] As stated by one of the main donors to the Trust Fund in Mali. Ministry of Foreign Affairs – Danish embassy in Bamako 2015, "Internal grant Committee Meeting 3 November 2015, Agenda item no. 4", file no.: 104.Mali. Bridge-03/2015-45073, p. 8.

[60] For instance, the project "Support for a Rift Valley fever assessment mission to Menaka", implemented by FAO. Beyond health, projects may include rehabilitation of schools or the installation of solar-panel street lights, as well as armoured vehicles for the GoM or equipment to the Gendarmerie for crowd control in northern Mali. See the complete list of projects in the monthly bulletins elaborated by the MINUSMA's Stabilisation & Recovery Section.

[61] Contributed by the following donors: Australia, Canada, Denmark, Germany, Ireland, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Switzerland, Turkey, the United Kingdom and UN DOCO.

[62] Access, however, is not direct. For instance, in Tessalit, Barkhane stated that potential patients must contact the FAMa, who will do the triage and bring them to the Barkhane hospital. In Gao, patients may be accepted when they have already been treated at the civilian hospital but require further care that is not available there. Whilst the absolute number of civilian patients treated in Barkhane's hospital is "marginal", it may be significant when compared to the military. For instance, a representative of Barkhane stated in an interview that at the time of his visit in one hospital there were 5 civilians and 2 French soldiers. Interview with Barkhane representatives, December 2016.

[63] Interview with Barkhane, December 2016.

[64] Interviews with Barkhane, December 2016 and January 2017.

[65] They collaborate with MINUSMA and UN agencies but there are limitations to the collaboration in QIPs, mainly because of timings. Barkhane says they are faster than the UN, and while mixed QIP are possible, they prefer to do it on their own. Barkhane affirms that they communicate about these projects with OCHA "with whom Barkhane maintains frank, cordial and regular relations".

[66] They cover not only Mali but the whole operation in five countries. French Ministry of Defence (2016): "Dossier de presse Opération Barkhane", July, p. 6.

[67] This means that, on average, Barkhane QIPs have a budget of €14,375 each, which means that these QIPs are generally smaller than MINUSMA's QIPs.

[68] According to the French embassy: "This programme, through flexible intervention modalities, avoids intermediaries and involves local actors, relying on support on the logistics of a military force deployed on the ground." "Mali: associer les acteurs locaux pour améliorer les conditions de vie des populations des régions du Nord", French Embassy in Mali, no date, http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/le-ministere-et-son-reseau/le-reseau-de-cooperation-et-d-action-culturelle/dossier-notre-reseau-innove-des-projets-aux-quatre-coins-du-monde/article/mali-associer-les-acteurs-locaux-pour-ameliorer-les-conditions-de-vie-des

[69] Whilst this type relates to France, some synergies and cooperation may still be found in the case of other states. For instance, the Royal Embassy of Denmark may work with MINUSMA "to ensure that the identification, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of Danish-funded Peace Dividend Projects receive at least the same priority as MINUSMA's own QIPs and other activities funded through the Trust Fund." Ministry of Foreign Affairs – Danish embassy in Bamako 2015, op. cit., p. 13.

[70] In particular, the French Development Agency (AFD), the European Fiduciary Emergency Fund and Malian agencies.

[71] "Sahel: repenser l'aide publique au développement", French Senat, http://www.senat.fr/rap/r15-728/r15-7285.html

[72] "Mali: associer les acteurs locaux… ", op. cit.

[73] "The micro-project financing programme, carried out in 2014 by the Cultural Cooperation and Action Service (*Service de Coopération et d'Action Culturelle*) of the French Embassy with the support of the military force, provided a total funding of €1,167,000, 80% funded by French funds and 20% by the national budget." (translated from French by author). See "Mali : associer les acteurs locaux…", op. cit.

74 The common aim for the Peacebuilding Support Office is to "increase support for a peace settlement amongst parties and the population". In April 2014, Mali was declared formally eligible to receive PBF support in the following priority areas: 1) national reconciliation; 2) security sector and judiciary; 3) restoration of state authority and inclusive local governance, and 4) the reintegration of refugees and internally displaced persons into their communities. Since 2013, the PBF has allocated $10.93 million to support peace dividend activities in the northern regions of Mali, focusing on delivering basic services, working on gender-based violence and creating employment opportunities in conflict-affected areas. Most of these projects have a strong youth and gender component and promote community dialogue to foster social cohesion.

75 Partners of certain projects funded by the PBF in Mali include the Ministry of Defence, the Ministry of Interior and Security, MINUSMA and a number of NGOs. See: http://www.unpbf.org/countries/mali

76 UN General Assembly 2016, "Report of the Secretary-General on the Peacebuilding Fund", 4 February, p. 4.

77 See details at: http://www.unpbf.org/countries/mali

78 The French embassy argued that the "jihadi" groups also "build bridges" in reference to activities to win the hearts and minds of the populations, and that it is necessary to inform the population how to clearly distinguish between them. However, in this case the local population is expected to be able to differentiate between those armed groups and the stabilisation logic. Interview at the French embassy in Bamako.

79 Interviews with Barkhane representatives, December 2016 and January 2017.

80 The report of an inter-parliamentary group stated on March 2015 that: "It is also a matter of putting Barkhane in support of donors and agencies of the Malian government in order to initiate the development of Mali, especially that of the cities of the north. The first phase, which was completed at the end of last July, included 19 projects for the benefit of the communes for an amount of €600,000. The second phase, launched in August 2014, includes 86 projects for associations and local entrepreneurs, 75% financed by the French embassy and 25% by the GoM. These projects are located around four northern cities and radiate in the surrounding villages." (translated from French by the author), http://www.senat.fr/ga/ga125/ga125_mono.html#toc18

81 Ministry of Defence of the Netherlands. See: https://www.defensie.nl/english/topics/missions-abroad/contents/current-missions

82 As an example, a team of Dutch, German and Belgian military personnel took part in a spinning marathon in Mali and raised €1,560 for charities in Gao, including a shelter for children and a basketball club for young people and adults. The Dutch contingent commander reopened a school in Gao following the recent renovation of the classrooms thanks to a fund for small projects in areas were Dutch military personnel are deployed. The fund donated €5,000 to the school, where 200 children are educated. "A look at the Defence news, 25-31 July", 3 August 2016, https://www.defensie.nl/english/topics/malinews/2016/08/02/a-look-at-the-defence-news-25-31-july In another example, a local source said that the Dutch contingent has occasionally conducted activities such as distributing school materials and cookies for children in Kidal. Interview on December 2016.

83 "The Netherlands to contribute to UN mission in Mali", 1 November 2013, https://www.government.nl/latest/news/2013/11/01/the-netherlands-to-contribute-to-un-mission-in-mali

84 For instance, on 11 August, the MINUSMA's Dutch special unit distributed food and non-food items including medicines and mosquito nets to 70 displaced families (around 370 people) in Takalot, southeast of Kidal, in a joint visit with the MINUSMA's Civil Affairs section. As per MINUSMA's statement, the purpose of the visit was "to offer these donations but also to identify the problems of IDPs who had come from Kidal following the recent clashes between armed groups." https://minusma.unmissions.org/point-de-presse-jeudi-25-ao%C3%BBt-2016

85 See, for instance: "Mali: AQMI diffuse une vidéo sur l'exécution de deux Maliens accusés de 'collaboration'", AFP, 6 November 2016, http://fr.africatime.com/mali/articles/mali-aqmi-diffuse-une-video-sur-lexecution-de-deux-maliens-accuses-de-collaboration

86 *Ma Idjane*, no. 4. PR publication found at the French embassy.

87 In Tabankort, the French soldiers provided medical aid to an estimated 30 people, and this was observed as "a real success" as the last time in the city an armed group had prevented Barkhane from providing medical aid. *Ma Idjane*, no. 4. PR publication found at the French embassy.

88 "Code de Conduite pour l'opérationnalisation de l'Assistance Humanitaire – Équipe de Pays Humanitaire Mali", 17 July 2012.

89 See note 44 about the GTAH and the EHP.

90 The humanitarian sector did not mobilise against the integration of the UN mission in 2012, even though they did not agree with it. When the MINUSMA mandate was renewed, certain INGOs demanded the incursion of the military in the humanitarian arena to be reduced, but according to interviews this petition was not accepted.

91 However, the "place" has not been defined, and it may refer to the same building, village or province depending on the interpretation.

[92] Many humanitarians argue that at least today they have the right to have a look at the list of MINUSMA-funded QIPs before they are approved, and that this list is shared with the GTAH via OCHA. However, the list shared with GTAH by MINUSMA was the list for QIPs in Bamako, not for the north, which is where the QIPs carry risks for humanitarians. None of the 11 EHP members consulted had realised this, but some GTAH members did indeed provide feedback and raised the issue that the list was incomplete and not focusing on the north. The GTAH comments were shared with the leaders of the UN humanitarian branch, who generally agreed with the feedback. Two months later, the final feedback for the GTAH was still pending and no further progress had been made.

[93] This was expressly mentioned by several humanitarian actors interviewed.

[94] Interviews with different humanitarian actors.

[95] According to The Aid Worker Security Database updated 17 January 2017, since 2012 at least 7 Malian aid workers have been killed, 4 wounded and other 6 kidnapped. 2 international aid workers have also been wounded and another one kidnapped. See: https://aidworkersecurity.org/incidents/search?detail=1&country=ML. For instance, on 29 May 2014, two NRC national staff died when their vehicle was hit by an explosive device on a main route south of Timbuktu. On 31 March 2015, an international Red Cross worker was killed and a local colleague wounded when the aid truck they were driving came under fire between Gao and Ansongo, in an attack claimed by MUJAO. A spokesman for the group said the attack had killed "a driver who worked for the enemy" and that "we have achieved what we wanted with this attack". The ICRC said the staff member had been driving a truck from Gao to Niamey "to collect much-needed medical equipment for Gao hospital". The truck had been clearly marked with the Red Cross emblem. See, respectively: "Two NRC staff killed in Mali", NRC, 6 June 2014, https://www.nrc.no/news/2014/june/two-nrc-staff-killed-in-mali/; "Red Cross worker killed in terrorist attack on aid truck in Mali", 31 March 2015, http://dunyanews.tv/en/World/270927-Red-Cross-worker-killed-in-terrorist-attack-on-aid

[96] This has been consistent throughout the interviews.

[97] The UN humanitarian coordinator told MSF that the UNDSS only "recommends" and that UN humanitarian agencies are free to follow their own course in case of disagreement. However, UN agencies themselves and other observers said in interviews that UN agencies do not have the capacity to build an alternative analysis; they have certain security officers but that this is totally insufficient to challenge the big UNDSS machine. Moreover, in case of an unexpected security incident the consequences for decisions against UNDSS advice could be too high to assume such a risk. Under those factors, UNDSS recommendations could be considered as mandatory in practice.

[98] For instance, in May 2016, five Togolese blue helmets were killed in central Mali where they were escorting "a mission to assess the security and humanitarian situation, carried out by civilians from MINUSMA". "Attaque contre la MINUSMA: l'exécutif régional témoigne sa solidarité", 31 May 2016, https://minusma.unmissions.org/attaque-contre-la-minusma-l%E2%80%99ex%C3%A9cutif-r%C3%A9gional-t%C3%A9moigne-sa-solidarit%C3%A9

[99] Examples can be found at the MINUSMA website (News section).

[100] According to interviews and to MSF's experience in the field, there is a significant part of the population that clearly opposes MINUSMA and Barkhane. Surveys also show this opposition. For instance, the Mali-Mètre, surveys elaborated by the German Fondation Friedrich Ebertand, can be found here: http://www.fes-mali.org/index.php/mali-metre. However, the last research available was produced from 21 to 30 December 2015, and the situation has since changed. In the special report on the situation in Gao, Kidal and Menaka (produced in January-February 2015), 38.96% of respondents perceived "negative" or "very negative" the role of MINUSMA, and 20.65% did not trust operations Serval and Barkhane. However, the same survey paradoxically showed that 40.78% of respondents did not trust "the French military forces". See "Mali – Mètre. n° special pour Gao, Kidal, Ménaka", January-February 2015, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Mali, pp. 39-43, http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/mali/10100/2015-no-special-01.pdf.

[101] See https://minusma.unmissions.org/point-de-presse-hebdomadaire-de-la-minusma-%E2%80%93-9-juillet-2015.

[102] "Code de Conduite pour l'opérationnalisation de l'Assistance Humanitaire – Équipe de Pays Humanitaire Mali", 17 July 2012.

[103] The "Caravan for Peace" was organised in the Menaka region in late November 2016 with the participation of MINUSMA, Barkhane, UNOCHA, IOM, local NGOs and other groups, and obviously escorted with weapons. See: "Première caravane de la paix dans la nouvelle région de Ménaka : la MINUSMA s'associe aux autorités régionales pour sa réussite", 28 novembre 2016, https://minusma.unmissions.org/premi%C3%A8re-caravane-de-la-paix-dans-la-nouvelle-r%C3%A9gion-de-m%C3%A9naka-la-minusma-s%E2%80%99associe-aux-autorit%C3%A9s

[104] An example of the WFP utilising armed escorts. See: "Mission conjointe à Bourem", 23 April 2015, https://minusma.unmissions.org/mission-conjointe-%C3%A0-bourem

[105] "Mali: Negotiating Humanitarian Access in the North", IRIN, 1 May 2012, https://www.globalpolicy.org/ngos/role-of-ngos-in-the-international-arena/51687-mali-negotiating-humanitarian-access-in-the-north.html

[106] However, two INGO representatives interviewed stated (and named) that certain INGOs have occasionally resorted to these escorts and also contributed to QIPs, whilst no formal accusation has yet been made.

[107] As an example, a local actor told MSF that Barkhane soldiers were patrolling Kidal in white 4x4 unidentified vehicles (but always in uniform). These are exactly the same type of vehicles used in the city by civilian actors. The source said that this practice was raising suspicion among the AOGs and the population in general in relation to this type of cars. When consulted, a representative of Barkhane categorically stated that all Barkhane vehicles are armoured, and are clearly and properly identified, and stated that French soldiers who patrol in white 4x4 vehicles in Kidal are operating under MINUSMA, with a UN logo in black stamped on both sides.

[108] Interview with a MINUSMA representative.

[109] Picture 1 by Souleymane ag Anara (AFP) on 14 July 2016. It shows a UN soldier near a UN vehicle after it drove over an explosive device near Kidal, in northern Mali. http://www.france24.com/en/20160807-bomb-kills-un-peacekeeper-mali. Picture 2 by Adama Diarra (Reuters): MINUSMA's blue helmets in Kidal, 22 July 2015, http://www.rfi.fr/afrique/20150830-nord-mali-etats-anefis-kidal

[110] Specialists may interpret these practices as contrary to International Humanitarian Law (IHL) as defined in the Geneva Conventions, Additional Protocol 1, Articles 37 and 44. See Aharoni, A.; Coppock, K.; Latour, P.; Roland-Gosselin Muamba, L., and E. van der Velden (2015), "Opinion and debate: Confused in Congo: they shoot, we give the shots", MSF, https://www.msf.org.uk/article/opinion-and-debate-confused-in-congo-they-shoot-we-give-the-shots

[111] Barkhane claims that all activities are carried out in clearly differentiated vehicles (armoured) and in uniform, which they claim is an imposition both in Mali (as per their agreement with the Malian government) and in France (as they are officially "at war").

[112] This is a structural issue, as the very same factor applies to other integrated missions with a stabilisation mandate such as in DRC.

[113] Interview with a long-term humanitarian worker in Mali.

[114] For further reflection on the problems of separating security management from operational decision-making, see Buth, P., 2017, *Insecurity - always an insurmountable obstacle?*, MSF's Emergency Gap Series nº 5, January, https://emergencygap.msf.es/papers/emergency-gap-insecurity-always-insurmountable-obstacle

[115] While MSF has seen many examples of the important humanitarian contributions that national and local actors make, it has also witnessed a number of constraints and challenges that confront these actors when delivering humanitarian assistance, especially in situations of armed conflict. These limitations, which have been largely ignored by the localisation agenda, are examined from both a conceptual and practical point of view in: Schenkenberg, E., 2016, *The challenges of localised humanitarian aid*, MSF's Emergency Gap Series nº 3, November, https://emergencygap.msf.es/papers/emergency-gap-challenges-localised-humanitarian-aid

[116] MSF first worked in Mali in 1992. In 2015, MSF's budget in the country was € 11.5 million and the MSF teams totalled 631 staff. Key operations figures for 2015 included 182,000 outpatient consultations, 70,000 patients treated for malaria and 22,900 routine vaccinations. MSF 2016, *International Activity Report 2015*, p. 64.

[117] Picture 3 by MSF: MSF vehicles in Ansongo, December 2016.

[118] However, there are places where MSF has nevertheless used armed escorts, such as Somalia and Chechenia.

[119] In February 2013, a Malian international staff member coming from Mali was interrogated for 3 hours by Spanish security agents at Barcelona airport. Questions related to the dynamics of war in northern Mali, an area of special concern for Spain (at the time Spain was one of the top contributors of operation EUTM Mali). He was informed that the conversation would continue in his hotel the following morning. Two senior representatives of MSF were also at the hotel when the interrogation resumed. They explained that MSF could not and would not become an informant for actors engaged in the crisis in Mali, as this could endanger the security of its staff and the continuation of the humanitarian operations. The Spanish officers were surprised at MSF's stance as they expected collaboration in what they believed was a shared aim.