

BRIEF

Reasons for Canadian Contributions to the UN Mission in Mali

Despite the COVID-19 crisis, peace work must go on. War torn areas could become havens for the virus for the long term, just as they have for human suffering and conflict. UN peacekeeping is a crucial way to help countries come out of conflict, including in Mali. Canada made a significant but brief contribution to the UN peacekeeping mission in Mali (MINUSMA) in 2018–19, providing air transport and medevac support. But Mali and MINUSMA still struggle.

In a UN Security Council report, the UN Secretary-General outlined a bold Force Adaption Plan for MINUSMA. Earlier this year, the United Nations updated the [Statement of Unit Requirements](#) to meet the Force Adaption Plan. The United Nations has called on its Member States to provide helicopters, monitoring capabilities, medical support, and rapidly deployable units. This provides a sterling opportunity for Canada to contribute, particularly with a previously promised Quick Reaction Force.

There are many reasons why this is a good mission for Canada.

- PEACE PROCESS: Mali has a viable, though fragile, peace process that desperately requires support. Several major armed groups have agreed to cease their rebellion, giving up on their aspiration for an independent state in exchange for peace and greater prosperity. Those peace accords need capable peacekeepers to verify and support their implementation. Canada is already heavily invested in the peace process.
- TERRORISM: Mali is experiencing an ongoing threat from armed groups practicing terrorist tactics. International counter-terrorism missions are also currently operating in Mali. MINUSMA provides an essential and peaceful path to deal with terrorism, including by facilitating disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR). Canadian capabilities would bolster the success of such efforts.
- PROTECTION: MINUSMA's protection of civilians (POC) mandate needs reinforcement. A Canadian Quick Reaction Force would help considerably and buttress the efforts of troop contributing countries from the developing and developed world. Germany, Norway and Sweden would welcome Canada to rejoin the mission.
- HEALTH: While Mali has reported only a few cases of COVID-19, if peace is not established, the country and region could become and remain a centre for virus propagation for decades. MINUSMA has put in place measures to protect peacekeepers from the virus. It is not rotating troops until after July.
- DEMOCRACY: Mali has a decades-long history of multiparty democracy, having had regular elections since 1991. Malian democracy is still fragile and needs support, which MINUSMA can provide. Canadian military engagement would enable this continued transformation.
- CANADIAN EXPERIENCE: With its previous deployment of 13 months in MINUSMA, Canada has become familiar with the mission and, more generally, with UN peacekeeping, an

activity in which Canada had lost currency over the past two decades. Currently, Canada contributes only 29 military personnel and 17 police officers to peacekeeping, with Mali receiving the largest contribution.

– CANADIAN CAPABILITY: In 2017, Canada established a regional logistics hub in Senegal to support the last deployment. This permanent hub can now be used again. Furthermore, bilingual troops from Canada are especially welcome in francophone Mali, where the UN mission struggles to get bilingual English/French contingents.

– AID (Development Assistance): Canada is the third largest bilateral donor to Mali, after the United States and France. It has contributed some \$1.6 billion since 2000. Canada has an active embassy in the capital, Bamako, with many projects and aid investments to protect across the country. The durability of these projects depends on MINUSMA helping Mali successfully transition back to a viable peace.

If Mali's need and Canada's experience are insufficient to convince some persons, who may be of the *realpolitik* bent, there are also important national interests to be met.

– BUSINESS IN MALI: Canadian businesses operate in Mali. The country represents a frontier market into in which Canadian industry plays a key role, with hundreds of millions already invested, particularly in mining. And conflict is massively disruptive for business. To illustrate, in 2019 a Canadian company was attacked in neighbouring Burkina Faso; the Canadian government scrambled to find ways to help the company. Effective peacekeeping lessens the chance of attacks in Mali, including on Canadian companies. Peace is good for Canadian business.

– SECURITY COUNCIL SEAT: The UN Charter states that a nation's contributions to international peace and security are the primary consideration for election to a rotating seat in the UN Security Council. To boost its bid for a UNSC seat in 2021–22, Canada should once again show a sustained commitment to peacekeeping, an UN activity Canada helped create.

– LOW RISK: Although the 13,000-strong force has sustained 18 fatalities per year (on average) from hostile action, these have been mostly IED attacks against unprepared forces, like the Chadian units that are poorly equipped and lack detailed intelligence on immediate threats. By contrast, of the thousands of Western forces deployed in Mali since 2013, there has only been one fatality (a French soldier) killed from malicious acts. More Western forces have died from accidents than from hostile fire. Canada lost no military personnel during its 13-month deployment, despite the pre-deployment fear-mongering. Not a single shot was fired in anger at or by Canadian peacekeepers during the mission. MINUSMA offers an opportunity to bolster Canada's image among core allies in a low-risk military setting.

Canada can once again be a committed peacekeeper. And by contributing to global governance through the United Nations, Canada will make itself and the world safer.

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