



Enhancing the Effectiveness of the G5 Sahel Force by Strengthening Strategic Coherence and International Support

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Executive Summary

At the UN Security Council and in other forums in Africa and Europe diplomats are considering how to increase international support to the G5 Sahel Force. The support is aimed at filling critical gaps that have hindered the mobility and operational tempo of the G5 Sahel Force. The overall goal is to enhance its operational capacity and effectiveness in an effort to restore stability in the Sahel. Despite the presence of the UN Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), the Group of Five Sahel (G5 Sahel) Force, as well as French-led and European Union missions, the security situation in the Sahel has significantly deteriorated over the last few years.

The United Nations has provided support to the G5 Sahel Force via MINUSMA since December 2017, but the current arrangement is not sustainable. The support includes fuel, rations, casualty and medical evacuation, and engineering support, such as building camps. To overcome these challenges, the Secretary-General presented three support options to the Security Council in 2020. The first option was for a dedicated UN support office funded by assessed contributions. The second was for a dedicated UN support office funded by voluntary contributions via a trust fund. The third was for a continuation of the current MINUSMA arrangement, but with an expansion of its mandate that would allow it to operate in all the G5 Sahel countries.

Drawing on lessons identified from the support provided by the UN to the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), and a wide number of experiences with voluntary funded trust funds in other mission support settings, we discuss a few political, financial, doctrinal, human rights and operational considerations.

From a political perspective, there is no shortage of Sahel strategies, however one major shortcoming is that there is no overall strategic vision and framework for cooperation among the various parallel missions and across the security-development-humanitarian nexus. The effort to negotiate and design a UN support package for the G5 Sahel Force may create an opportunity for the Security Council to align key stakeholders in the Sahel behind one overall shared vision and a set of shared objectives. Such an initiative will be key to ensure political primacy and help to shift the focus away from a short-term hard security pre-occupation with combating terrorism to a more medium to long-term holistic strategy aimed at sustaining peace, enhancing development and managing climate-related peace, security and development risks.

From a doctrinal perspective, UN support to the G5 Sahel force via MINUSMA makes the distinction between peacekeeping and counter-terrorism operations difficult to discern for policymakers and practitioners, and almost impossible for local populations.

Establishing a dedicated support office for the G5 Sahel Force would consolidate several developments. If funded from assessed contributions it would signal that the use of assessed contributions to support African Union or African-led operations has progressed from an exception (AMISOM) to a practice. It would also be the first time that there is a dedicated support mission operating alongside a UN peacekeeping mission (MINUSMA). It would also consolidate a new type of peace operation, namely support operations, managed by the Department of Support (DOS). It would also be a mission that operates simultaneously in several countries, which would create its own legal challenges.

The UN's operational support capability is the most advanced of any international or regional organisation, but it is designed for peace operations. This limits the kind of support the UN can provide to combat operations. The wear and tear of combat operations like the G5 Sahel Force on materiel, the pace of re-supply and the need for CASEVAC support is significantly higher than in UN peacekeeping operations.

From a financial perspective, a support office for the G5 Sahel Force could be financed from assessed contributions and from voluntary contributions via an UN trust fund. In all the cases where trust funds have been used to support African-led operations in the past, voluntary support fell far short of operational needs and this led the AU to conclude in 2015 that trust funds are neither reliable, predictable nor easily accessible.

From a human rights perspective there is concern about the track record of some of the armies that make up the G5 Sahel Force. For example, in Mali, a third of the civilian casualties can be attributed to government forces, slightly more than what can be attributed to jihadist groups. A UN support package can be used as leverage to

¹ We would like to thank Arthur Boutellis, Jaïr van der Lijn and Natasja Rupesinghe for very useful comments and inputs, and Anab Ovidie Grand for research assistance. All errors remain our own.

strengthen the Casualty and Incident Tracking and Analysis Cell in the G5 Sahel Force, and coupled with continued and strengthened independent monitoring and reporting, it could help to reduce civilian casualties and enhance compliance with the UN’s human rights due diligence policy.

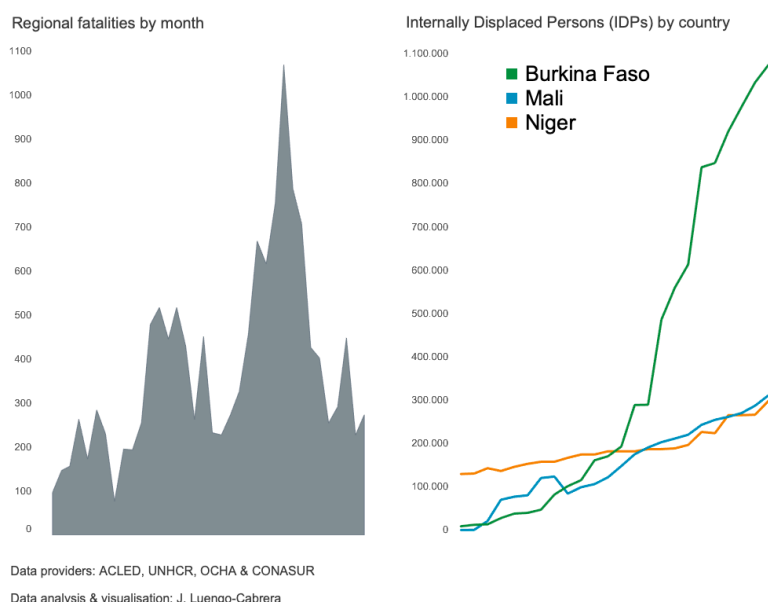
We find that a UN support office funded from assessed contributions, complimented with voluntary contributions, appear to be the only solution for reliable and predictable support to those core needs of the G5 Sahel Force that cannot be met by the G5 Sahel countries themselves, or via bilateral support to those countries.

Introduction

During the last few years, there has been a spike in intercommunal conflict and terrorist activities in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, leading to record levels of civilian casualties and forced displacements in the region (Figure 1).²

Burkina Faso, Mali & Niger

Deadly violence & population displacement
Monthly data, January 2018 - December 2020



The United Nations has provided support to the G5 Sahel Force via MINUSMA since December 2017. This support is additional to bilateral support and G5 Sahel Member states’ direct support and re-supply to its battalions. This includes fuel, rations, medical evacuations and engineering support, such as building camps, and is aimed at filling critical gaps that have hindered the mobility and operational tempo of the Force. Although intended as a temporary measure, support from MINUSMA to the G5 Sahel Force has been strengthened in several rounds since it was first mandated.³ In a June 2020 report the Secretary-General warned that although MINUSMA’s support to the Force has been essential and critical,⁴ a number of challenges have prevented the G5 Force from fully benefitting from the support provided by the UN, and that the current arrangements are not sustainable.⁵ In order to overcome these challenges

the Secretary-General presented three options to the Security Council in 2020, two of which included establishing a separate dedicated UN Support Office.⁶

Option 1: Dedicated UN Support Office, funded by assessed contributions:

- aeromedical evacuation capacity and related medical support;
- life support services, including rations, fuel and water, adapted to the requirements of the Joint Force; consumables, including field defence stores, first aid kits, tactical tentage, accommodation materiel and medical supplies; technical support to apply and implement the human rights due diligence policy;
- capacity for managing its environmental footprint; maintenance contracts, geospatial, telecommunications and information technology and infrastructure support; and transport and other types of support provided to the Joint Force and its troops.

2 R4sahel (2021) Coordination platform for forced displacement in Sahel: Total Population of Concern. Retrieved from <https://r4sahel.info/en/situations/sahelcrisis>.

3 UN (2017) *Security Council Resolution 2391*. New York: United Nations.

4 UN (2020) *Situation in Mali – Report of the Secretary-General, S/2020/476*, New York: United Nations

5 Chad has recently deployed 1,200 troops to the tri-border area between Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger as part of the G5 Sahel Force.

The fate of Chad’s full participation in the force [is now in the balance](#) as President Déby died 20 April 2021 following fighting with rebel forces on, and troops may be called home to reinforce stability.

6 UN (2020) *Situation in Mali*.

Option 2: Dedicated UN Support Office, funded by a trust fund

This option would be similar to Option 1, depending on the level of funding provided by donors.

Option 3: Continued support from MINUSMA and donors

The third option presented a string of measures to provide life support, ration packs and fuel, casualty evacuation and engineering support to the Joint Force in the whole area of operations. As today, MINUSMA would be the central mechanism for support, but would need a mandate to provide support to the Joint Force in the other four countries and would depend on contractors for much of the work.

The two separate Support Office options “were not substantively discussed.”⁷ In the subsequent June 2020 resolution of the Security Council, the Council took note of, but did not make a decision on the options presented to it.⁸ Instead the Council re-affirmed that the support arrangement is a temporary measure and asked the Secretary-General to report in 2021 on the progress made, amongst others, with the setting up of a procurement system by the G5 Sahel. In his 2021 report to the Council the Secretary-General reports that G5 Sahel Force continued to face major challenges to its operational and logistical capacities, and that the reliance on voluntary financial contributions continues to raise concerns with respect to the predictability and therefore sustainability of resourcing.⁹ The Secretary-General reports that the G5 Sahel Force and partners view the UN support as essential and reiterates his call for a more comprehensive solution that ensures predictable funding for the operations of the Force.

Drawing on lessons identified from the support provided by the UN via its support offices in Somalia (UNSOA and UNSOS) to the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), and a wide number of experiences with voluntary funded trust funds in other mission support settings, we discuss a few political, financial, doctrinal, human rights and operational considerations that various modes of support to the G5 Sahel Force would entail.

Political considerations

The G5 Sahel is a political initiative that was launched in 2014 to enhance cooperation among Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger to address shared challenges, including terrorism, organized crime, climate change and demographic growth.¹⁰ The G5 Sahel Force was established by these countries in 2017 to respond to the threat of terrorism in the Sahel.¹¹ Strategically, the overall aim of international support for the G5 Sahel Force is to enhance its capabilities, mobility and operational effectiveness. The overall goal is to contribute to prevent and counter the spread of violent extremism, to protect civilians, to prevent displacement and to restore stability in the Sahel region.

However, as is well established, there can be no military solution to the kind of challenges facing the Sahel.¹² Violent extremism is a symptom of much deeper structural inequalities and there are more immediate grievances related to political and economic exclusion and marginalisation.¹³ The need for a comprehensive and holistic response to these challenges has been recognized, and several initiatives are under way.

The Sahel Alliance was launched by France, Germany, the EU and the G5 Sahel countries in 2017.¹⁴ It has launched several programmes aimed at improving living conditions, resilience and social cohesion including in the Liptako-Gourma border region.¹⁵ In January 2020 the same group of countries also launched the Coalition for

7 SCR (2020) ‘Mali: MINUSMA Mandate Renewal’, *Security Council Report*, 26 June 2020. Retrieved from: <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/whatsinblue/2020/06/mali-mandate-renewal-of-minusma.php>.

8 UN (2020) *Security Council Resolution 2531*, New York: United Nations.

9 UN (2021) *Report of the Secretary-General on the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel*, S/2021/442, New York: United Nations.

10 European Council on Foreign Relations (2021) *Mapping African Regional Cooperation: G5 Sahel*. <https://ecfr.eu/special/african-cooperation/g5-sahel/>

11 Rupesinghe, Natasja (2018) The Joint Force of the G5 Sahel. An appropriate Response to Combat Terrorism? *Conflict Trends* (2) <https://www.accord.org.za/conflict-trends/the-joint-force-of-the-g5-sahel/>

12 Osland, Kari M. & Henriette U. Erstad (2020) The Fragility Dilemma and Divergent Security Complexes in the Sahel, *The International Spectator*, 55:4, 18-36, DOI: [10.1080/03932729.2020.1833474](https://doi.org/10.1080/03932729.2020.1833474)

13 Boås, Morten & Francesco Strazzari (2020) Governance, Fragility and Insurgency in the Sahel: A Hybrid Political Order in the Making, *The International Spectator*, 55:4, 1-17, DOI: [10.1080/03932729.2020.1835324](https://doi.org/10.1080/03932729.2020.1835324)

14 The Sahel Alliance (2021) *The Sahel Alliance*. Retrieved from: <https://www.alliance-sahel.org/en/sahel-alliance/>

15 The Sahel Alliance (2021) *Emergency Programme for the Stabilisation of G5 Sahel Border Areas*. Retrieved from <https://www.alliance-sahel.org/en/projets-pdu/emergency-programme-for-the-stabilisation-of-g5-sahel-border-areas/>

the Sahel at the Pau Summit to further strengthen coordination among the G5 Sahel members and their international partners,¹⁶ and a second summit took stock of progress in Chad in February 2021.¹⁷

The UN, EU and other international partners also contribute millions of dollars worth of peacebuilding, development and humanitarian assistance.¹⁸ This UN assistance is coordinated through a UN Integrated Strategy for the Sahel.¹⁹ Several bilateral partners, like Norway,²⁰ have their own Sahel strategies. In July 2020, 22 local and 14 international NGOs working in the Sahel also created the People's Coalition for the Sahel with a focus on protection, human security, political strategy, humanitarian assistance and justice.²¹ Although there is thus no shortage of partners, assistance and Sahel strategies, one major shortcoming is that there is no overall strategic vision and framework for cooperation among the various parallel missions and across the security-development-humanitarian nexus.

The effort to negotiate and design a UN support package for the G5 Sahel Force may create a political opportunity for the Security Council to involve all the key stakeholders in the Sahel to align behind one overall shared vision and a set of common objectives. The Security Council is at times operationally and technically focussed on its own missions and those of others that seek its authorization. If the aim is to enhance the operational effectiveness of the G5 Sahel Force then the Council needs to look beyond the technical questions of how the support can be provided, and focus also on ensuring that the support provided is directed by a comprehensive and coherent strategy.

As the UN Security Council has the primary responsibility for international peace and security, negotiating a resolution to strengthen the support to the G5 Sahel Force creates an opportunity for the Security Council to articulate a strategic vision for the Sahel as well as establish mechanisms for ensuring that its implementation is monitored and coordinated.

An emerging finding of the Effectiveness of Peace Operations Network has been that one of the most important factors that contribute to the effectiveness of peace operations is coherent political support among key stakeholders and partners, including especially within the Security Council.²² Embedding the support provided by the UN to the G5 Sahel Force in such a strategic framework for the Sahel will not only greatly enhance the effectiveness of the support package and the Force, but also create a much stronger basis for the effectiveness of MINUSMA and the other international and regional efforts.

Such an initiative will thus be key to ensure political primacy and help to shift the focus away from a short-term hard security pre-occupation with combating terrorism to a more medium to long-term holistic strategy aimed at sustaining peace, enhancing development and managing climate-related peace, security and development risks.

Doctrinal and operational considerations

MINUSMA has so far suffered 140 fatalities due to malicious attacks,²³ and although its mandate is exceptionally robust, it still falls short of local expectations, which expects it to be more of a counter-terrorism force.²⁴ The experiences from MINUSMA continue to have an impact on the course of UN peace operations – it was an important impetus for the Cruz report on peacekeeper safety in 2017 and the Action for Peace (A4P) initiative in 2018,²⁵ and the design of a support package for the G5 Sahel Force may influence the future direction of support mechanisms to regional and sub-regional operations.

16 The Coalition for the Sahel (2020) *The Coalition*. Retrieved from <https://www.coalition-sahel.org/en/coalition-pour-le-sahel/>

17 Wilkins, Henry (2021) Ahead of Sahel summit, Where do France and G5 countries stand? *Al Jazeera*, 14 February. Retrieved from <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/2/14/macron-to-meet-african-leaders-as-sahel-conflict-drags-on>

18 European Commission (2020) *EU steps up support for Africa's Central Sahel countries* (Press Release). Brussels: European Commission.

19 UN (2020) *United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel* (Progress report 2018-2019). New York: United Nations.

20 Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2021) *Strategy for Norway's efforts in the Sahel region 2018-2020*. Oslo: Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

21 The Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect (2020) *The People's Coalition for the Sahel Presentation of the Four People's Pillars*. Retrieved from <https://www.globalr2p.org/publications/the-peoples-coalition-for-the-sahel/>

22 de Coning, Cedric (2019) *Are peace operations effective? Emerging trends and observations from the studies of the Effectiveness of Peace Operations Network*. Effectiveness of Peace Operations Network (EPON). Oslo: EPON. The Effectiveness of Peace Operations Network aims to enhance the effectiveness of international peace operations by enabling and supporting collaborative research. <https://effectivepeaceops.net>.

23 UN (2021) *Fatalities by Mission and Incident Type up to 31 Mar 2021* [Table]. New York: United Nations.

24 Boutellis, Arthur (2021, forthcoming) *MINUSMA's 2021 mandate renewal in uncertain times*. Oslo: Effectiveness of Peace Operations Network.

25 Haeri, David (2018) *Strengthening UN Peacekeeping: Placing the Santos Cruz Report in Context*. The Global Observatory. <https://theglobalobservatory.org/2018/02/strengthening-peacekeeping-cruz-report-context/>; UN (2018) *Secretary-General's remarks to Security Council High-Level Debate on Collective Action to Improve UN Peacekeeping Operations*. Retrieved from <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statement/2018-03-28/secretary-generals-remarks-security-council-high-level-debate>

Strictly speaking, MINUSMA is a peacekeeping operation, but it has been mandated to support the G5 Sahel Force since 2017 and has worked closely with the French-led *Barkhane* operation since its deployment. This makes the distinction between peacekeeping and counter-terrorism operations difficult to discern for policymakers and practitioners,²⁶ and almost impossible for local populations. The Secretary-General explicitly states that “[u]nder no circumstances does the United Nations deliver life support supplies to combat areas,” underscoring the dilemmas that arise when using the UN to support a counter-terrorism operation.²⁷ The Secretary-General has argued that a separate UN support office would make the division of labour between those fighting terrorism and those keeping the peace clearer, but it is unlikely that local populations will notice this distinction.

Although building on the experiences from UNSOS, a support office would be a first for the UN, as it would be mandated to operate across several countries. It would also be the first time having a UN peacekeeping mission deployed alongside a UN support office to a counter-terror operation.

One of the clearest recommendations from studies of UNSOA/UNSOS has been the need to create a separate set of rules, procedures and frameworks for UN support to peace enforcement²⁸ operations like AMISOM and the G5 Sahel Force.²⁹ The UN’s operational support capability is the most advanced of any international or regional organisation, but it is designed for peace operations. This limits the kind of support the UN can provide to combat operations. The wear and tear of combat operations like the G5 Sahel Force on materiel, the pace of re-supply and the need for CASEVAC support is significantly higher than in UN peacekeeping operations. This has resulted in continuous and serious friction between troop contributors and the UN support offices in Somalia. There is thus a need to adapt the budgeting assumptions and the rules that guide operational support for peace enforcement missions, to reflect this reality.

While it could be argued that the support provided by UNSOA/UNSOS to AMISOM was an exception, the creation of a second support office would signal that the UN has developed a new type of operation, led by the Department of Operational Support, where the UN provides technical and operational support to a peace enforcement operation carried out by a regional organisation or an ad hoc coalition of the willing. Thus, doctrinally as well as operationally, there will be a pressing need for the UN to develop new guidance and adapt existing rules, regulations and practices for this type of support operations. Some of these changes would need approval by the UN General Assembly.

Establishing a new support office for the G5 Sahel Force funded from assessed contributions would also signal that the use of assessed contributions to support African Union or African-led operations has progressed from an exception (AMISOM) to a practice. The AU and A3 has sought in-principle Council approval for this practice since 2015, and considerable joint AU-UN work has gone into developing a range of options,³⁰ but the US, with the quiet support of some of the other permanent members of the Security Council, have not been willing to take that step to date, with the US even going so far as to threaten to veto a resolution in 2018.³¹ The support office options were dismissed out of hand during the mandate renewal discussion for MINUSMA in 2020.³² The new Biden Administration has not yet given an indication of its position on this issue.

Financial considerations

A UN support office for the G5 Sahel Force could be funded by assessed contributions or voluntary contributions via an UN trust fund.

The UN has a long history of using voluntary funded trust funds to support African-led operations. The African mission in Sudan (AMIS) that preceded UNAMID received support through such funds, as did the AU missions in Somalia (AMISOM), Mali (AFISMA) and the Central African Republic (MISCA). In all these cases voluntary

26 Karlsrud, John (2019) Towards UN counter-terrorism operations?, *Third World Quarterly*, 38 (6): 1215-1231. DOI: 10.1080/01436597.2016.1268907.

27 UN, *Situation in Mali*.

28 Williams, Paul D. (2019) *Lessons for “Partnership Peacekeeping” from the African Union Mission in Somalia*. New York: International Peace Institute.

29 African Union Commission (2017) *Report on the Ten-Year AMISOM Lessons Learned Conference*. Addis Ababa: African Union Commission.

30 UN (2017) *Report of the Secretary-General on options for authorization and support for African Union peace support operations*. New York: United Nations.

31 International Crisis Group (2020) *The Price of Peace: Securing UN Financing for AU Peace Operations* (Report 286). Brussels: International Crisis Group.

32 SCR, ‘Mali: MINUSMA Mandate Renewal’.

support fell far short of operational needs and the AU concluded in 2015 that trust funds are neither reliable, predictable nor easily accessible,³³ especially for the type of high-tempo operations that the G5 Sahel Force is called on to undertake. It is thus well established from past experience that voluntary funding is not a viable option for supporting the core logistical needs of a mission of this nature. Trust funds can be a useful mechanism, however, to support specific programmatic elements, such as quick impact projects.

In the Central African Republic, Darfur and Mali the solution was to transfer responsibility for these missions from the African Union to the UN, so that they can be funded instead via the UN's assessed contributions system. In Somalia, where several joint assessment found that it was not feasible for the UN to take over the mission,³⁴ the first assessed contribution support office (UNSOA) was established.

The 2015 High Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations, the Brahimi Report in 2000 and the UN peacekeeping capstone doctrine of 2008 all stress that UN peacekeeping operations are not fit for peace enforcement and counter-terror operations. Overcoming the financial dilemma by re-hatting the G5 Sahel Force into a UN mission, as was done with UNAMID, MINUSMA and MINUSCA, or embedding the G5 Sahel force into a UN mission as was done with the Forced Intervention Brigade in MONUSCO in the DRC, are thus not options for supporting the G5 Sahel Force.

Establishing a dedicated UN support office, financed through assessed contributions is thus realistically the only option that would enable reliable and predictable funding for the G5 Sahel Force.

The UN Secretary-General has indicated on several occasions that he supports the use of assessed contributions for supporting African-led operations authorised by the AU's Peace and Security Council and the UN Security Council, but based on objections from previous US administrations and other Security Council members, this proposal has not gained sufficient support in the past.³⁵

The Biden Administration is more supportive of UN peace operations than the Trump Administration was, but even the Obama Administration stressed that the AMISOM support model (especially the assessed contributions aspect) is an exception that should not be repeated. The Biden Administration has also announced a plan for paying back US arrears to the UN over the next two years, and it would probably prefer to use its resources towards that aim. There is thus little appetite in the Security Council for establishing new missions that would further increase the peacekeeping budget.

Human rights considerations

The FAMA, when conducting counter-terrorism operations within and outside the G5 Sahel Force framework, has "repeatedly been implicated in perpetrating extrajudicial killings and other human rights violations against civilians".³⁶ In fact, according to MINUSMA's civilian casualty tracking unit, a third of the civilian casualties can be attributed to government forces, slightly more than what can be attributed to jihadist groups. Government forces in Burkina Faso have committed similar abuses, according to the Human Rights Watch.³⁷

AMISOM was faced with considerable challenges when it implemented its compliance framework, but it has established a dedicated Civilian Casualty Tracking Analysis and Response Cell (CCTARC) that tracks harm to civilians caused by AMISOM operations including death, injury, Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (SEA) and damage to property including livestock.³⁸ A UN support package can be used to further strengthen the new Casualty and Incident Tracking and Analysis Cell of the G5 Sahel Force that was officially launched in Bamako on 27 January 2021.³⁹ Coupled with continued and strengthened independent monitoring and reporting from the OHCHR,⁴⁰ the

33 African Union Commission (2015) *The Common African Position on the UN review of Peace Operations*. Addis Ababa: African Union Commission.

34 Williams, Paul D.; D'Allesandro, Michele; Darkwa, Linda; de Coning, Cedric; Helal, Amina; Machakaire, James; and Rupesinghe, Natasja (2018) *Assessing the Effectiveness of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM)*. Oslo: The Effectiveness of Peace Operations Network.

35 What's In Blue (2020) *Security Council Videoconference on the G5 Sahel Joint Force*. Security Council Report. Retrieved from <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/whatsinblue/2020/06/security-council-videoconference-on-the-g5-sahel-joint-force.php>

36 Smith, Sean (2021) *Early Waning and Rapid Response: Reinforcing MINUSMA's Ability to Protect Civilians*. Washington D.C.: Center for Civilians in Conflict.

37 Human Rights Watch (2020) *Burkina Faso, Events of 2020*. Retrieved from <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2021/country-chapters/burkina-faso#490732>

38 Rupesinghe, Natasja (2019) *The Civilian Casualty Tracking Analysis and Response Cell in the African Union Mission in Somalia: an emerging best practice for AU peace support operations?* (NUPI Policy Brief 3/2019). Oslo: Norwegian Institute of International Affairs.

39 UN (2021) *Report of the Secretary-General on the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel*.

40 United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (2020) Project supporting the G5 Sahel Joint Force with Implementation of the Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law Compliance Framework. Retrieved from <https://www.ohchr.org>

new cell should help to reduce civilian casualties and enhance compliance with the UN's human rights due diligence policy. However, it needs to be recognized that there are limitations to what such compliance frameworks can achieve if the national judicial systems in these Sahelian countries are not able to hold their own military personnel to account. So far, there has been a serious lack of progress on investigations into abuses allegedly committed by the security forces in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger.

Conclusion

It is likely that the Security Council will mandate an “enhanced support model” to the G5 Sahel Force, with MINUSMA and private contractors as the key ingredients. However, weighing all the options, we argue that a UN support office funded from assessed contributions, complimented with voluntary contributions, would be a more reliable and predictable solution for supporting those core needs of the G5 Sahel Force that cannot be met by the G5 Sahel countries themselves, or via bilateral support to those countries.

A dedicated UN support office would reduce the political, doctrinal, legal and operational challenges that MINUSMA are currently faced with. A dedicated support office would also be an opportunity for improved coordination between the G5 Sahel Force and the UN, AU, EU and others, and a catalyst for intelligence sharing and joint planning. Any form of support would, however, have to pay special attention to the poor human rights record of the security forces of the G5 Sahel countries. Negotiating a dedicated UN support office creates new opportunities for improve compliance mechanisms.

It needs to be emphasized, however, that there can be no military solution to the kind of challenges facing the Sahel. The Security Council can use the opportunity presented by negotiations over UN support to the G5 Sahel Force to involve all key stakeholders in generating a shared strategic vision and joint strategic framework for international support to the Sahel. Such an initiative will be key to ensure political primacy, and to shift the focus away from a short-term hard security focus on combating terrorism to a more medium to long-term holistic strategy aimed at sustaining peace, enhancing development and managing climate-related peace, security and development risks.

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Photo: G5 Sahel's Joint Force

