

United Nations' Stabilisation Mission in Mali: The Politics and Emerging Challenges

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Abstract

This paper examined the United Nations stabilization mission in Mali, the politics of its adoption and emerging challenges. The data were generated through interviews complemented with literature. It employed Critical Theory of Robert Cox and thematic method in its analysis. The findings indicate that the mandate was adopted through a process that subordinated the leadership role of United Nations Secretariat to the national interest of France in the face of incapacity of African stakeholders in Mali. The interplay of French dominance, geostrategic context of the Malian conflict and incapacity of African stakeholders, underlie the determination of the character and adoption of the stabilization mandate and its challenges in the field. United Nations should uphold its principle impartial, Promote local ownership of the peace process, local security and de-emphasises stabilisation operations in Mali. African stakeholders must strengthen their commitment to peace operations, buildup and sustain a functional Standby Force (ASF) for prompt responses and sustainable leadership in managing Conflicts in Africa.

Keywords: Challenges of United Nations' Mission, Malian Crisis, MINUSMA and Stabilisation Mandate.

Introduction

The peace and security of contemporary international system have become threatened more from intra-state conflicts such as armed self-determination struggle, especially in Africa. Such intra-state conflicts "are among the most deadly and intractable conflicts on the peace and security agenda of the United Nations" (Vail 2000, p.1). Hence, the United Nation's deployment of peacekeeping operations equipped with expanded mandates, such as MINUSMA in Mali (de Coning, Karlsrud & Aoi 2017).

In 2012, National Movement for Liberation of Azawad (MNLA) led a separatist rebellion against the Malian state in a complex crisis. The rebels attacked and occupied northern Mali and unilaterally declared independent state of Azawad though they failed to secure international recognition. Consequences of this include a coup that ousted the civilian President and led to collapse of the much acclaimed democracy of over two decades in Mali. Then, the subsequent infiltration and involvement of violent extremists groups who took over some of the occupied parts of northern Mali in contest with MNLA. The conflict resulted in high insecurity and displacement of almost quarter of a million persons (International Displacement Monitoring Centre, 2014). Thus, the crisis drew great international attention and responses. Scholars and the international community established that the crisis constituted a threat to international peace and security (Kolb 2013; UN Security Council Res 2085, 2012; UN Secretary General's report 189, 2013). Subsequently, international interventions followed as United Nations passed resolution 2085 of December 20, 2012, authorizing international action- deployment of African-led International Support Mission in Mali (AFISMA).

African stakeholders responded to the crisis by first addressing the military takeover and organised for establishment of Transitional Government in Mali. They played key role by forming ECOWAS Mission in Mali (MICEMA) and laid the foundation for the process that will lead restoration of constitutional order. They also initiation the process that led to ECOWAS-led mediation, the adoption of the transitional

roadmap used Support and Follow-up-Group on the situation in Mali to mobilization support of international community for Mali, in addition to organizing ECOWAS Mission in Mali (MICEMA) and deployment of African International Support Mission in Mali [AFISMA] (African Union Peace and Security Council-PSC/PR/COMM. CCCLXXI, Para. 10, 2013; Theroux-Benoni, 2014).

However, when the insurgent groups advanced towards Kona with potential threat of encroaching into Bamako; AFISMA failed to deploy promptly; hence based on the invitation by Transition Government of Mali, France intervened with military Operation Serval on 11 January, 2013. Then, on March, 2013, AFISMA hurriedly deployed. Still, violence continued. Consequently, UN finally took over the Malian crisis by establishing United Nations' Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) on 25th April, 2013 and deployed on 1st July 2013 (UN Security Council Res 2100, 2013). Subsequently, MINUSMA was mobilised through integration of United Nations Office in Mali (UNOM) and re-hating of AFISMA (Theroux-Benoni, 2014).

The stabilization mission was given a peculiar mandate and deployed amidst conflict with reliable or effective peace to keep It also authorised use all necessary means to stabilise northern Mali in support of the Malian state to extend state control and to deter threat from armed groups. Thus, the mandate challenges the core principles of UN peacekeeping operations This notwithstanding; violence continued in Mali spreading from northern to central Mali Thus, MINUSMA became the most deadly UN mission because of its very high fatality record amongst peacekeepers. It is against this backdrop, that the paper examines the United Nations stabilization mission in Mali, the politics of its adoption and challenges in the mission. It probes the politics and interests behind United Nations response to the crisis in Mali with a peculiar stabilisation mandate, and its challenges. Hence, the paper seeks answers to the following questions: Why did United Nations adopt Stabilisation mission in Malian conflict? What factors underlie the determination of the character of the mandate and its adoption; and how does these relate to challenges of the core principle of UN peacekeeping in Mali? How does the politics of the adoption of the mandate and its character relate to the challenges in the field?

The central argument of the paper is that the character of MINUSMA and its operational challenges are related to politics of its adoption. The France's dominant role in pursuit of her national interests, subservient stance of UN, the geostrategic context of the conflict and incapacity of Africa determined the character and adoption of the stabilisation mandate of MINUSMA. Hence, the challenges of the mission are not just merely about the complexity of the mandate and the hostile context of the conflict, but politics of pursuit of national interests that are intertwined with the context of the conflict that brought about the decision in the first place to deploy a UN stabilization mission in Mali; even though the environment was alien to the type in which UN peacekeeping missions should operate.

The paper is structured as follows: after the introduction, it addressed the review of related literature and discussed theoretical and methodological issues. Next, it examined the politics and interests behind the determination of the character and adoption of the stabilization mandate and emerging challenges. In this regard, the paper examined the: the strategic context of the conflict; dominant role of France national interests in Mali and Sahel; and African stakeholders' place in the process. It also examined emerging challenges in the light of the core principles of United Nations peacekeeping operations. The final part of the paper drew conclusion on major findings and advanced recommendations.

Brief Historical Background to United Nations Stabilisation Mission

The issue of stabilisation mission in UN peacekeeping is contentious both in conceptualization in theory and its practice in the field of conflicts. Generally, stabilization was first introduced to peace operations in the context of NATO's Stabilisation Force (SFOR) in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1995 (Karlrud, 2015). In fact, the concept rose to prominence alongside the pre-occupation with state fragility and the counter-terrorism experiences of the Western countries in conflict zones of Iraq and Afghanistan (Natasja 2016; Karlrud 2015). Subsequently, stabilization took the form of military actions to stabilize conflict zones or

state to set conducive conditions for building of sustainable institutions (Karlrude, 2015). Hence, Gorur (2016) asserts that the root of modern concept of stabilisation can be traced to the Liberal Peace theory, a western ideological concept that merges neo-liberalism, democratization, and free market capitalism. However, making stabilization a western concept with ingredient of good governance may underestimate the general belief of the principle and mandate of stabilization.

In the context of United Nations peacekeeping operations, stabilization was first used in Haiti for the establishment of MINUSTHA, the first UN stabilization mission. Since then, other three stabilization missions have been established by UN in Democratic Republic of Congo, 2010- (MONUSCO), Central African Republic MINUSCAR- 2014 and MINUSMA- 2013 in Mali.

Review of Related Literature

The conceptualisation of the term *stabilisation* within the context of UN peacekeeping continues to be a contentious issue generating conceptual debate without any consensus on a clarified meaning (Gorur, 2016). Hence, he posits that this efforts have taken different perspectives in forms of stabilisation as: pre-peacebuilding, intervention in ongoing conflict and robust use of force (Gorur, 2016).

Curran and Holton (2015) argue that stabilisation focuses on re-establishing state autonomy and the use of military force in the area of counter insurgency and neutralizing spoilers to peace. Similarly, Dersso (2016, p.39) conceives stabilisation in the context of peacekeeping to mean “the mandate and task of peace operations whose main objectives covers the elimination or neutralisation of identified ‘spoilers’, armed groups and the restoration or extension of state authority to territories under the control of such armed groups”. Curran and Holton (2015) and Dersso (2016), underscore the support of state authorities by robust use of force to contain specified aggressors. Closely related to above scholars is the view of Gorur (2016, p.5), who conceives stabilisation as the “transfer of territorial control from spoilers to legitimate authorities”. He ignored the identity of the actors and how to determine that actor to whom territorial control is to be transferred and the means of securing and transferring the territory; which of course implies use of force. Thus, emphasis is on preservation of legitimate political authority or existing sovereign state, with implied use of military force.

Many scholars have taken note of the trend towards deploying UN stabilisation missions in midst of on-going conflict where there is no peace to keep, instead of where there is an effective or reliable peace to keep, in accordance with tradition of UN peacekeeping. Aoi, de Coning and Karlsrude (2017), de Coning (2015), Karlsrude (2015), Gorur (2016) also concur with the above view.

Karlsrud (2015) aligns with the perspective of stabilization as the robust use of force, and accordingly refers to stabilisation as: “using military means to stabilise a country, often with all necessary means to neutralise potential ‘spoilers’ to a conflict” Similarly, Peters (2015) refers to stabilisation mission as *enforcement peacekeeping*, hence insisting that UN peacekeeping is entering into an era of enforcement peacekeeping. In support of this view, Hunt (2016) posits that there is a ‘robust turn’ in UN peacekeeping operations which has introduced a new generation of peacekeeping missions characterized by increasing authorisation and implementation of stabilisation mandates.

Introducing more variables to the concept (de Coning (2015), refers to UN stabilisation operation as such that: deploys amidst conflict where there no peace to keep in order to support a state in crisis to re-establish order and stability and contain specified aggressors using force, political and developmental processes. In this manner, de Coning adds to the issue of deploying peacekeeping missions in midst of ongoing conflict without peace to keep and also making use of political and developmental means, in addition to the robust use of force as emphasised by Karlsrud (2015), Hunt (2016) and Peters (2015). From the foregoing, scholars have indicated that defining tenets of the concept of stabilisation include: tendency to deploy peacekeeping operations in ongoing conflicts where there is no effective or reliable peace to keep. There is also the issue of working in support of particular party to the conflict (the state authorities) to restore order by containing or neutralising specified aggressor or spoilers by the use of force. However,

stabilization also comprises of state-building and peacebuilding components which relies more on political and developmental means. These, characteristics of UN stabilisation missions are some of the contentious aspects of the mandate of MINUSMA in Mali.

On the determinants of the character and adoption of stabilisation mandates in United Nations peacekeeping: Karlsrud (2015), assert that, the key drivers for the slide towards stabilisation mandates [such as MINUSMA's] can be grouped into three categories. The *first* is the Protection of civilians in dangerous contexts, especially following the failure of UN to protect civilians in Bosnia and Rwanda in 1990s. Thus after Brahimi Report in 2000, it was instituted that UN peacekeeping mission may use robust actions to protect civilians when the need arises, but at the tactical level. *Second*, Experiences of Western states in Counter-terrorism in Afghanistan and Iraq for over a decade. de Coning, Karlsrud and Aoi (2017), concur with this point but clarifies that, the experiences of African Union in Somalia was also contributory to the trend towards robust mandates in UN peacekeeping missions. *Third* is the Influence of penholders in the UN Security Council. USA, UK and France are usually Penholders who draft UN mandates. In this regards, France was the penholder on MONUSCO and MINUSMA, and is noted to be a top advocate of inclusion of more robust mandates, even peace enforcement mandates in UN peace operations (Karlsrud, 2018). Through this avenue France and other penholders influence the character of such mandates towards robust mandate. In this regards, we emphasis that France influenced the character and adoption of the mandate of UN stabilisation mission in Mali.

On the *Implementation of the stabilisation mandates*: Karlsrud (2015) insists that enforcement mandate amounts to the UN engaging in "War fighting" and this combative stance is most probably leading to circle of violence with high likelihood that civilians will be targeted and killed in the field. Thus, he opines that the tendency of stabilisation mandates to target specific group has significant long-term implications for the United Nations and its role as a global impartial peacekeeper. Thus, Zard, (2016) asserts: the success of such stabilization missions like MINUSMA, remain bleak because of expanded mandates that integrates the task of peacemaking with combating complex intrastate conflict. Brosig, Sempijja and Norman (2017) in the same vein, posit that the unclear goals of mandates of multidimensional peacekeeping missions, especially stabilization missions that deploy in ongoing conflict where there is no reliable peace to keep such as: (in Mali, Central Africa Republic (CAR), Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC); faces continual violence which constrains the attainment of their goals. In similar line of argument, Peters (2015) and Hunt (2016), also note that the new trend towards a robust turn in UN peace operations may have unintended consequences that remain underexplored and requires further study. Hence, Charbonneau (2017) indicate that international interventions in Mali [MINUSMA and French forces] are a form of international politics of permanent military intervention which constrains the possibility of peace in Mali. The work of Charbonneau points out underlying politics of adopting a stabilization mission and the parallel French counter-terrorism Operation Barkhane which relies on offensive military operations more than on political process that allows local ownership of the peace process and respect of sovereignty of the state. This situation raises contention with fundamental principles of UN peacekeeping. According to de Coning, Karlsrud and Aoi (2017), the United Nations should not authorise such stabilisation mandates without special doctrine backing it; hence, they recommend that UN should include stabilization doctrine into UN peacekeeping with a special independent Stabilisation Unit that will provide for the possibility of offensive mandates, where it might be needed to facilitate progress in multinational peacekeeping.

Sabrow (2017) in a study that investigated the perception UN ideological and pragmatic legitimacy by recipients' population of peacekeeping operations; UN mission was found to have scored lowest in relation to regional and unilateral mission such as France and AFISMA, respectively in ideological and practical performance. This perception of the host population is vital because local population needs to own the peace process in order to make them sustainable (Edelstein cited in Sabrow 2017, p.160). The above findings, further demonstrate that there in need for further study of the implementation and resultant effects of UN stabilization operations such as MINUSMA, especially, in the interplay of politics, of interests

that underlies the determination of the character of the mandate of MINUSMA, its adoption and challenges in practice.

Theoretical and Methodological Issues

The paper adopted Critical Theory by Robert W. Cox (1981) as our theoretical framework of analysis. The Basic Assumptions of Critical Theory include: (a) every form of society entails some forms of domination and critical emancipating interests propels the struggle to change those relations. Hence, certain people or groups in society are oppressed and need empowerment and emancipation, and may sometimes take up arms to redress the injustices. The case of Mali is in line with this point (b) the purpose of critical theory is human emancipation (c) Critical Theory questions the existing world order which is believed to be unjustly configured. It rejects the prevailing social and power relationships and the institutions into which they are organized as the given guide and framework for action. Thus, it reflects on the characteristics and structure of world order and how it came about. It serves as a guide to strategic action for bringing about an alternative order different from the status quo. (d)The Theory tries to encompass basic processes at work in the development of social forces and forms of state, and the structure of global political economy (Cox 1981; Booth cited in Bellamy, Williams & Griffins, 2010). (e) Peacekeeping is not neutral but promotes the liberal ideology and interest of global hegemony to the benefits of the dominant states, powers blocs and leading peace interveners.

Hence, Bellamy, Williams and Griffins (2010) assert that, critical theory approach to peacekeeping operations usually examines fundamental questions that border around whom the intervener is their interest and the effects of the peacekeeping operations. :(a) What theories determines our perception of peace operations and whose interests are best served through the current practices of peace operations[stabilisation missions]? Put in another way *-who benefits more from stabilisation missions?* (b) “What theories and practices of peace operations will lead to human emancipation and how can such human emancipation be achieved? And what are the connections between the local actors and global structures?

In addressing the first question, some critical theorist, have argued that Peace Operations maintain (and are informed by) liberal theory and the capitalist global economy (Pugh, 2003). Global capitalism creates dependent economies which contribute to conflicts that create unfavourable environment for global capitalism. Subsequently, peacekeeping also serves, primarily to restore conducive environment for capitalist economic activities and secondly, to protect those peripheral societies from the scourge of war. However, Pugh (2004) explains that: in most cases, the global centre is unwilling to sacrifice men and material to bring peace to peripheral regions of the world and uses a range of proxies instead- including the UN, regional organizations and humanitarian agencies to maintain peace. Sometimes, however, the centre is prepared to act and dispatch its own soldiers as peacekeepers. In this regards, Critical Theory views peacekeeping as counter insurgency operation, funded technically as a means of achieving political and military domination,[such as in Mali] (Pugh, 2004). Hence, it is argued that liberal peace operations may re-enforce the social, political and economic structures that contributed to intractable crisis in the first place (Bellamy 2004). Thus, stabilisation missions authorises support of the failed state and structure that led to the crisis in Mali through many stabilisation or military operations.

Applying Critical Theory to the adoption of the UN stabilisation Mission in Mali, this paper argues that the mission’s mandate is seen as a liberal peace project informed and determined majorly by France and other European states in UN Security Council, especially the P-3 - penholders who draft, and also authorises peacekeeping mandates, and interveners within MINUSMA etc. Thus, peacekeeping missions seem to deploy where the interests of these powerful states are concerned, in this case, France. In relation to the 2012 Malian crisis, critical theory helps us to bring into lime light the impact and historical role of France through colonialism and contemporary neo-colonial process. France left a centralist government in Mali and has continued to have interest in successive governments of Mali. Given, continued neglect and

marginalisation of the northern Mali in the post-colonial era, Tuareg-led northern Mali resumed the historical separatist struggle for self-determination for independent state of Azawad which French colonial government denied them. Subsequently, the crisis culminated in 2012 crisis and deployment of UN stabilisation mission to Mali. In this case, at the root of the crisis is the struggle to emancipate the northern populations and area of Mali from internal and external domination of southern based government and neo-colonial influences of France. Thus, Malian conflict is historical and can be traced from the French imperial domination of Mali in the colonial era and its continued influence through Southern based government in Bamako that has dominated the Malian state in the post independent era. In this regard, Ogunrotifa (2011) aptly states that most conflicts are carry-over of power tussle and socio-economic relations inherited in the global capitalism, especially from colonial era to post-colonial period which seems to destabilise the foundation of the newly independent states, and creates room for intractable armed conflicts that gives rise to peacekeeping missions that authorises support of the failed state and structure that led to the crisis in Mali with “all necessary means”. Given Mali’s and Sahel region’s position as a transition route to Europe; there is the anticipation that security crisis spreading from Mali can easily be transported to Europe and the rest of the Western states through the Mediterranean sea. Hence, hence, peacekeepers [such as France and some European states, etc] seek to stabilise this Malian conflict that is threatening to their interests in Mali and Sahel (Ogunrotifa, 2011).

The stabilisation mission in Mali seems to serve first the interests of France or France’s interest in coincidence with Malian government’s interests, but not to the best interest of achieving sustainable peace for the generality of Malians, but to stabilize a zone that is strategically important to France and other European states. The deployment of the mission was tied to advance strategic exit of France from Mali after Operation Serval, hence, MINUSMA served the national interest of France in Mali and Sahel (Karlsrud 2018) Thus, we argue that France extensively influenced the adoption of the mandate of UN stabilization mission in Mali to enable primarily the protection of her national interest in Mali, Niger and the wider Sahel region. France for instance, controls substantial uranium mines in Niger, which contributes greatly to France status as a top exporter of Energy from uranium (Francis 2013; Shuriye & Ibrahim 2013). On the other hand, Mali too, is rich in reserves and has one of the largest amounts of mineral deposits and energy related resources including uranium which is of special interest to France (Francis, 2013; Shuriye & Ibrahim 2013).

Methodology: The paper is qualitative and used interviews complemented with literature. Thus, 15 respondents selected purposively from members of relevant international organizations- United Nations, Malian Embassy, non-governmental organization and research institutes that worked in Malian crisis. The respondents were selected from 3 continents :(America 13%, Europe 20% and Africa 67%) made up of 6 countries-(Nigeria, South Africa, Mali, USA, Canada and France). The study employed Critical Theory of Robert Cox as theoretical framework and thematic analysis. The scope of the paper covered from 2012 to 2017.

The Politics of Adoption of the United Nations’ Stabilisation Mission in Mali

We examined three factors: Role of National Interest of France and Europe in Mali and Sahel, the geostrategic Context of Malian crisis and the place of African Stake holders (African Union and ECOWAS) in the process of adoption of the UN Mission in Mali.

Role of the Context of the Malian Conflict in the Politics of Determination of MINUSMA and its StabilisationMandate

Table: 1 below, presents data on factors that determined the character and adoption of the stabilization mandate of MINUSMA.

Table 1: Determinants of the Stabilisation Character of the Mandate of MINUSMA			
S/ N	Emerging Themes	Freq	%
1	Hostile <i>context</i> of the conflict and need for protection of civilians and peacekeepers determined the character and adoption of the mandate	13	38.2
2	Other European states contributed high number of contingents in MINUSMA	11	32.4
3	Malian Government specifically asked for robust stabilization mandate	3	8.3
4	France played key role in the determination of the character of the mandate and its adoption	7	20.6
Total		34	100
<i>Source: Researchers Interview, 2018</i>			

According to data from the field, table:1 indicates that 38.24% of the responses assert that *the hostile context* of the Malian conflict was the major factor in determination of the character of stabilization mandate and its adoption. Another 8.32% supported this, but emphasised that Malian Transitional Government specifically requested for a robust mandate for MINUSMA to protect civilians and also peacekeepers. Thus, they emphasise the issue of complex environment insecurity emanating from multiple armed groups- rebels, jihadists, violent extremists and terrorist groups.

Then, 32.35% note a very high contingent and support from European States in the mission. This was explained in terms of the proximity of the context of Malian conflict (Mali and Sahel) to Europe through Mediterranean Sea which presents the possibility of transporting Malian security and migration crisis to Europe through Mediterranean Sea. Hence, the context of the conflict is critical for its strategic importance and also for the wealth of the region, especially its richness in energy and other resources which includes uranium in Niger and Mali, etc (Shuriye & Ibrahim, 2013, Francis, 2013). In this regards, some peacekeepers observed that European states are mining certain natural resources already in northern Mali (Respondent 6, MINUSMA Military, 2018). Therefore, the national and regional context of the Malian conflict (Mali and the Sahel) is of geostrategic importance to France and other Western States.

Furthermore, the context of the Malian conflict is a region where the stakeholders are constrained by financial and logistic incapacity to establish and sustain large international support missions such as AFISMA. These are conditions that characterise the context of Malian crisis. So, the issue of complex context of the Malian conflict is not just about insecurity from multiple armed actors and need for protection of civilians; but it is also about its geostrategic importance to Europe because of its proximity- migration and security implications, and economic wealth and national interests of France and other Europeans in the zone. These are the indexes with which to define and analyse the context of the Malian crisis in the politics that determined the adoption of the UN stabilization mission in Mali.

Role of the National Interests of France and other Europeans States in Mali and Sahel Region: As discussed above, the geostrategic importance of the context of Mali and Sahel is intertwined with national interests of Europe, particularly France. –Proceeding from interview data in Table: 1 above, it was recognized that France played key roles in the politics of that determined the adoption of the mission with its stabilization mandate as was indicated by 20.6%. On the role of France and other European states in adoption of the mandate, a respondent asserts:

In adoption, France was very keen on moving for adoption of UN Peacekeeping mission so that when its own troops - Serval must have gone, its counter-terrorism mission -Barhkane may then concentrate on counter terrorism. Then, other *Europeans states*-Dutch, Sweden, Germany etc contributions of troops were quite unique unlike in previous missions such as in Lebanon... But, I don't think they have much involvement in influencing the adoption of the mandate, so, they were certainly not pushing for more offensive mandate (Respondent 12, Field Researcher in Mali, 2018).

However, many scholars note that the French economic, political and security concerns are substantial in Mali and Sahel region. France as a dominant actor in this case, includes –positions as a Security Council member, Penholder on Mali mandate, former colonial master in Mali and some other states in the Sahel region and top advocate for inclusion of robust mandate in UN peace. In addition, other European states have interests more in their migration and emerging security concerns. Also, there are economic interest also in economic interests, especially in mining of natural resources which is ongoing in northern Mali and beyond. For instance, France has Uranium mining interest in neighbouring Niger- Nuclear Company Areva.

France depends on Uranium imports from Niger for its energy security. Nuclear power is the primary source of electricity in France... thus, in economic and financial terms France is the largest exporter of electricity in the world, with an estimated E3 billion Euro annually in sales. The two main electricity-generating companies, Areva and EDF (Electricit de France) operate the 59 nuclear plants in France. The French nuclear power industry depend heavily on the Uranium from its two uranium mines in Niger owned by French –led by consortium and operated by French interests (Francis 2013,p. 6).

Mali is also rich in energy resources, including uranium which is of special interest to France. Furthermore, France also, had interests in protecting many of its citizens and personnel in Niger, Mali, etc, some of whom have fallen victim to trans-border kidnapping which is prevalent in the conflict region of Sahel (Francis, 2013). Therefore, the stability of Mali, Niger etc, in Sahel region are of national interest to France. Hence, France's intervention in the Malian crisis through-Operation Serval, Operation Barkhane and also participation in MINUSMA and EU Mission in Mali will ensure that the crisis in Mali does not encroach into neighbouring Niger and destroy strategic national economic and mining interests for France.

On political relevance on the politics of adoption of the stabilization mandate of MINUSMA we note that France is: a Security Council member, Penholder on Mali mandate, former colonial master in Mali and some other states in the Sahel region and top advocate for inclusion of robust mandate in UN peace operations. At the beginning, it was France that first initiated the idea of deploying a UN mission to Mali. Contrary to French proposal; United Nations Secretariat was opposed to any idea of deploying a United Nations peacekeeping mission to Mali because of the complex and hostile context of the conflict which was not the type of environment or mission that the United Nations peacekeeping is trained and equipped to operate. However, under pressure from some interested members of the Security Council; the Secretariat caved in, and considered the French idea of deploying a UN to the same complex environment-northern Mali (Theoures-Benoni 2014). Following this shift of ground two options were put forward by the UN Secretariat (UN Security Council- Secretariat General's report 189/2013).

First Option gave opportunity for establishment of United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Political presence, alongside African-led military force. This meant a better sourced African -Led International Support Mission to Mali, which would then transform into UN mission once certain benchmarks are met which will include: cessation of major combat operations, reduction in level of residual

threats, etc. “AFISMA will have an offensive combat mandate and stabilization mandate, focusing on extremist armed groups” (UN Security Council, Report 189, 26 March 2013 pp. 13-15; Theoures-Benoni 2014)

Then, *Second Option* called for establishment of “multidimensional integrated United Nations stabilisation mission under Chapter VII [of UN Charter] alongside a parallel force”, to provide special enforcement support beyond the United Nations mandate and capability (UN Security Council, Report 189, 26 March 2013 paras. 13-15; Theoures-Benoni 2014). Eventually, UN declined the first option to African and authorized the second option to the favour of France to deploy alongside MINUSMA a the parallel force-counter-terrorism operation- now known as Barkhane. Consequently, the dominant role of France in the drafting of the mandate, determination of its character and eventual adoption of stabilization mandate for Mission in Mali.

The Place of African Stakeholders (AU and ECOWAS) in the Politics of Adoption of the mandate of MINUSMA: In the beginning of the crisis in 2012, especially after the military takeover of democratically elected government in Mali, African stakeholders (African Union, ECOWAS) played great leading roles in managing the crisis and restoring civilian rule in form of Transitional Government in Mali, until handover of AFISMA. Data from respondents’ on the question: What was the role of African Union and ECOWAS in the adoption and implementation of the mandate of MINUSMA, which took over authority from African Led- International Support Mission to Mali (AFISMA)? Indicate that African Union and ECOWAS played minimal or no role in the process of adoption of MINUSMA and its stabilization mandate and lost the initial influence they had during operations of AFISMA. On the other hand, France dominated the process. Consequently, the relegation of African stakeholders (African Union and ECOWAS), dominance of France in the drafting and adoption of the authorization of the stabilization mandate in Mali led to tension between African Union and United Nations. Hence, the African Union Peace and Security Council through its communiqué of 371st meeting April 2013 (PSC/PR/COMM (CCCLXXI) notes with concern that:

Africa was not appropriately consulted in the drafting and consultation process that led to the adoption of the UN Security Council resolution authorizing the (MINUSMA) takeover of AFISMA, and stresses that this situation is not in consonance with spirit of partnership that the AU and United Nations have been striving to promote for many years, on the basis of the provisions of Chapter VIII of the UN Charter (Para.10, PSC/PR/COMM (CCCLXXI) 2013).

The African Union Peace and Security Council further notes that:

The resolution does not adequately take into account the foundation laid by African stakeholders, who led to the launching of the process towards the return to constitutional order, the initiation of the ECOWAS-led mediation, the adoption of the transitional roadmap and the mobilization of the support of international community through the Support and Follow-up-Group on the situation in Mali. Council **also notes that** the resolution does not take into account the concerns formally expressed by the AU and ECOWAS and the proposals they constructively made to facilitate a coordinated international support for the ongoing efforts by Malian stakeholders (Para. 10. PSC/PR/COMM. (CCCLXXI) 2013).

Besides, the AU “also makes a strong appeal for African nationals to be appointed the MINUSMA Force Commander and Police Commissioner, to ensure the much-needed continuity and efficiency”(PSC/PR/COMM-CCCLXXI- 2013, p. 13). These requests were not honoured by the United Nations. Aptly, Theoures-Benoni (2014) notes that two major factors seemed to have influenced the response of UN in Mali during that period: the *first* factor has to do with exit strategy of France in Mali- France’s interest to down

size its troops and possibly take part in a multilateral mission in Mali, but due to political and financial considerations, will preferably go with a UN mission which is better financed than African led AFISMA. In the same vein, Karlsrud (2018) asserts that adoption of MINUSMA was a core part of French exit strategy for Mali and this implies using UN to serve national interest of France. The *second* factor was the financial and logistic incapacity of Africa to fully implement and sustain AFISMA (Theoures-Benoni, 2014). Therefore, Theoures-Benoni (2014, p.182) aptly notes that: "Malian crisis has once more pointed out the inability of African institutions to fund and therefore, retain political leadership and ownership over their own initiatives." Francis (2013, p.11) also notes "these limitations of African states and regional organizations."

It was under this backdrop of interplay between the strategic context of the conflict, dominant interests of France, subservience of UN Secretariat and financial incapacity of African stakeholders to sustain African led mission in Mali, that was relegated to the background in the eventual adoption of the UN Security Council resolution 2100 (2013) which established the United Nations Multinational Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali.

The Character of the Mandate of UN Stabilization Mission in Mali

The nature of the mandate of MINUSMA has been a topic of debate between scholars, and even within UN, between the Secretariat and Security Council. These contentions contribute to the confusion in the practice of the stabilization in the field. Thus, we now first examine the theoretical provisions of the mandate in relevant UN resolutions and the practice in the field. The United Nations Security Council acting under Chapter VII of the UN Charter adopted Security Council resolution 2100 (2013) to established MINUSMA... authorizes to:

Support the transitional authorities of Mali to stabilize the key population centres, especially in the north of Mali and, in this context, to deter threats and take active steps to prevent the return of armed elements to those areas; ... to use all necessary means, within the limits of its capabilities and areas of deployment to carry out its mandate (UNSEC RES 2100, 2013 para. 16, (i) & para. 17).

Furthermore, the mandate authorized the existence of a parallel counter-terrorism outfit- France's Operation Barkhane which is authorized to use all necessary means to intervene and assist in protection of MINUSMA whenever the mission is under imminent and serious threat. In addition, UN Security Council resolution 2295 of June 2016, extended the mandate and authorized MINUSMA "to take robust and active steps to counter asymmetric attacks" including when protecting civilians based on the invitation of UN Secretary General. These provisions of the mandate and its context of parallel existing a counter-terrorism operations adds to the robustness of the mandate.

The Mandate in the Field

Table 2: presents the perception of respondents in the field about the character of the mandate of MINUSMA

Table 2 : Data on Character of the Stabilisation Mandate of MINUSMA.			
S/N	Emerging Themes	Freq Score	Total (%)

1	The mandate is normal	1	6.7
2	The mandate is not really robust, only in name not in the field; it was made robust in 2016 to protect civilians and peacekeepers against the dangerous context.	9	64.3
3	The mandate is robust at request of Malian Government to allow certain level of offensive operations to protect civilians	4	28.7
Total		14	100
Source: (Researcher's Interview, 2018)			

Thus, in table 2, 64.29% of the responses indicate that initially the mandate was not really as robust in the field, but only in name because the mission have not been embarking on offensive operations, though it was made more robust in 2016 and also enhanced by European states with heavy weapons and sophisticated equipment's as is contained in All Sources Information Fusion Unit [ASIFU] (Karlsrud, 2015). In the field, these stabilization tasks, parallel existence and collaboration with counter-terrorism operation and the enhancement of the capability of the mission with heavy weapons-attack helicopters, drone, etc, by European states, increase the robustness and enforcement character of the mandate of MINUSMA. Hence, many scholars point this out and sometimes associate it with increasing attacks on UN peacekeepers. Then, 28.57% observed that the mandate is really robust with some measures of offensive operations in the field, while 6.67% insisted that the mandate is normal because United Nations does not engage in enforcement operations.

Thus, those in the field assert that there is nothing to the mandate with regard to robustness, since the mission does not usually engage in offensive operations like the *Intervention Force Brigade* of the United Nations Organization Multidimensional stabilization mission in Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUSCO). This respondent articulated this point held in the field by peacekeepers as follows:

I don't think MINUSMA mandate is all that different but the *context*. No offensive operation is taking place here. It is true that in 2016 at request of Malian government they included a language especially to counter asymmetry terrorist threats, that suggested it was required that it should be robust in the name but it is not proactive in the field, they didn't really change the configuration of the mission. MINUSMA is not different from MINUSTHA 2004 in Haiti, MINUSCA in Central African Republic; it is only the MONUSCO in Congo, with its *Intervention Force Brigade* that is actually robust and proactive and that is an exception in history of UN peacekeeping operations (Respondent 12, Researcher).

This respondent's views align with the above Respondent 12: "MINUSMA mandate was made more robust in 2016 because the UN officials were taking a lot of casualties and fighting was still going on, so it was meant to protect UN officials and there is nothing to the stabilization mandate" (Respondent 11, UN Official, 2018)

Literature reviewed aligns with the mandate. For instance Karlsrud (2015) and Karlsrud (2017) assert that such mandate tends towards as enforcement mandate and is tantamount to UN being at war. Peters (2015) also conceives it as enforcement peacekeeping mission and advocates for alignment of such mandates to UN peacekeeping doctrines. de Coning, Karlsrud, Aoi (2017) advocates that UN should come up with new doctrine that explains and provide guidelines for engagement in such stabilization missions as MINUSMA.

Given these submissions from mandate, the field and literature; we conclude that the mandate is robust and stronger than the usual UN peacekeeping missions, though not excessively robust in the field as the provisions of the mandate and literature will have it. Hence, stabilization mandate of MINUSMA is increasingly moving beyond the usual UN peacekeeping mandates (Koops, Macqueen, Tardy & Williams, 2015). Therefore, the character of the mandate challenges core UN principles of peacekeeping

Principles of UN Peacekeeping and Implementation of the UN Stabilization Mandate in Mali: Emerging Challenges

Consent: This means that the UN must secure the *consent of the main parties to the conflict* before deployment of a peacekeeping mission. Status of Force Agreement (SOFA) between UN mission and host state, gives to the peacekeeping mission the acceptance and the freedom to operate. However, consent give earlier can be withdrawn later on by a party to conflict as Egypt did to UNEF in 1967. In such instances, the mission has to withdraw or it becomes an enforcement operation. MINUSMA have been deployed to a complex context with multiple armed groups that have substantial force that challenges or sometimes over powers the state. Therefore, they amount to major parties to the conflict (Peters, 2015), yet, such groups are excluded from the peace deal in Mali. Distinguishing right parties to the conflict now becomes a challenge, especially where MINUSMA is required work in support of state authorities to extend state control. This may be considered denial of consent. The violation of consent hurts the credibility.

(ii) *Impartiality:* This that UN peace missions and individual peacekeepers should be in their relations with all parties to the conflicts. During traditional peacekeeping era, impartiality meant neutrality even in the face of atrocities; but presently it serves as impartial referee and ensures that all parties to the conflict comply with peace process and appropriate international laws or be sanctioned where necessary. In this regard, MINUSMA mandate specification for support state authorities to extend or re-establish state control in territories held by armed groups, may amount to being partiality especially, where the state is the perpetrator of the gross violation of inalienable rights the citizens that caused the conflict in the first place. Again, UN was seen to be partial in the process of adoption of the mandate AS UN Secretariat became subservient in the face of France's keen push for a peculiar UN mission in Mali to advance her exit strategy in Mali to protect French national interest in Mali and the Sahel (Karlsrud, 2018). On the other hand, African stakeholders that have contributed so much to the management of the conflict were left out of the drafting and adoption UN mandate in Mali. Therefore, this wiliness of France or any other powerful state to use UN peacekeeping missions to serve its own national interest is part of the challenges of implementation of MINUSMA mandate in Mali (Karlrud, 2018). In view of this Zarb (2016, p.35) asserts, that "If the UN is deemed to be partial or to be an extension of western power over the global south, then the institution risks an existential crisis" Lack of the impartiality can constitute grounds for withdrawal of consent and malicious attacks on peacekeepers. Then, violation of impartiality mars UN credibility and legitimacy and affects all other principles of UN peacekeeping.

(iii) *Non-Use of Force by the Peacekeepers except in Self-defence and Defence of Mandate.* Generally, UN peacekeepers are not authorized to use force; however, in hostile environment based on authorization of UN Security Council, they may be allowed to "use all necessary means" as a last resort at the tactical level for self-defence and defence of mandate to protect civilians or deter threat and attack. When force is used outside this situation without consent and authorization; the mission becomes an enforcement operation which relies on force to achieve its mandate. The mandate of MINUSMA authorised use of "all necessary means" and to be robust and proactive. Again, MINUSMA exist with a counter terrorism outfight, the French Operation Barkhane that attacks specified armed groups and terrorists. In fact this was the first time UN multidimensional peacekeeping operation mission has been deployed in the context of existing counter-terrorism operation (Karlsrude, 2017). Besides, the MINUSMA's capacity is highly enhanced by

European states with heavy equipment, aerial surveillance drones and attack helicopters, many of which are painted in battle green colour instead of colour. On the other hand the mission is deployed amidst ongoing violence without effective or reliable peace to keep; this makes the use of force more likely or even inevitable. This situation sends wrong signal to armed groups; hence attracting attacks on peacekeepers and hindering achieving of the goals of the mission, especially protection of civilians and even peacekeepers. MINUSMA has performed poorly in this area because of the above challenges.

Thus, on security, the fatality rate of MINUSMA peacekeepers due to malicious incidents has been unprecedented in UN peacekeeping. Amongst existing UN peacekeeping missions from 2013 to 2017, MINUSMA recorded the highest absolute number of fatalities, with 95 deaths out of total of 202, representing 47.03%. The findings indicate that the three existing UN Stabilisation missions took: *first, second and third* positions with MINUSMA recording the highest, with 33% higher than the closest missions: MINUSCA which recorded 28 deaths -13.86% and MONUSCO, 27 fatalities, representing 13.37%. Therefore, MINUSMA record is quite unprecedented within just four (4) years of its existence from 2013-2017 (United Nations Peacekeeping 2017)

Thus, these scenarios of many challenges weakens the mandate in practice, credibility of UN and hinders the achievement of the goals of the to the mission .Given, three success factors of UN peacekeeping operations: *legitimacy, credibility and local ownership* of peace operation (UNDPKO/DFS 2008); then UN stabilization mission in Mali has performed poorly in these areas, including security of peacekeepers, because of above challenges. Its ideological and pragmatic legitimacy are under challenge in Mali, due to situati and practices that violate consent, impartiality and use of therefore, the success of the mission faces many challenges.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The findings indicate that the mandate was adopted through a process that subordinated the leading role of United Nations. The interplay of the dominance of France in pursuit of her national interests, geostrategic context of the Malian conflict and incapacity of Africa, were underlying factors behind the determination of the character and adoption of the stabilization mandate which contributes to challenges the principles of UN peacekeeping.

France contributed in major ways in determining the adoption and the character of the stabilization mandate of MINUSMA, due to the motive of protecting their national interests in the context of Malian crisis - Mali and Sahel region. The character of the mandate, its adoption or its implementation in complex context of Malian conflict wouldn't have come into place, if not the underlying interest that turned the hand of the UN Secretariat from the earlier course of staying away from deploying into an environment that is alien to the usual UN mission. It was this keen and compelling interest that created the idea of the peculiar mandate as the only option of bringing UN in the Malian crisis not primarily to Malian interests. Thus, the adoption and deployment of the MINUSMA with its peculiar mandate was not really just about the interest of the people of Mali and the Malian state; these interest and events stated above, especially France, were covered more than the interest of the local masses of Malians.

Recommendations: United Nations should uphold principle of impartiality, especially in relations with the national interests of powerful states, host states and region. Thus, they should improve bilateral relations in peacekeeping with African Union and ECOWAS and other host regions to a peacekeeping mission; buildup local security and de-emphasise stabilization operations in Mali. The peace process should be strengthened and its implementation decentralized with greater focus on tackling the root causes of the conflict. African Union's must strengthen must strengthen its commitment to peace operations, buildup and sustain a functional African Standby Force (ASF) for prompt responses and sustenance of leadership in managing conflicts within Africa.

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