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# SITREP



# Peacekeeping

— CANADA.CA/MCPL JENNIFER KUSCHE

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**Members of the CH-147 Chinook medical team practice exiting the helicopter under the watchful eye of the force protection team in support of Operation PRESENCE—Mali around Gao, Mali**

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# Canadian Peacekeepers Urgently Needed in Mali

By A. Walter Dorn

The COVID-19 pandemic shows that global problems require global solutions. Unless all areas of the world deal with the outbreak through a concerted and centralized effort, the virus will find places to propagate and perpetuate itself. For example, polio was nearly eradicated from the planet but it has survived in some areas of Afghanistan and Pakistan where conflict and misinformation have

UN peacekeeping is a crucial way to help countries come out of conflict. Canada made a significant but brief contribution to the UN peacekeeping mission in Mali (MINUSMA) in 2018–19 through air transport and medevac support. But Mali still struggles with the above problems and the vital UN mission needs sustained help.

Armed groups are frequently attacking Malian armed forces, and the conflict has shifted from the north to the country's centre. In some towns, the civilian population is being terrorized and victimized.

The UN mission's Force Commander has proposed a bold new vision for the force. And in February, the United Nations urged its member states to provide helicopters, monitoring capabilities, and rapidly deployable units. This provides a sterling opportunity for Canada to contribute.

In 2017, Canada pledged a Quick Reaction Force (QRF) for UN peacekeeping but it has delayed for years in implementing that pledge. It is time to make good on that promise and really assist the world organization's peacekeeping in Mali. Canada also has well-proven helicopter capacity, including excellent aero-

medical teams with experience in Mali. It also has state-of-the-art intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) equipment that could benefit the mission.

There are many reasons why this is 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.

**Terrorism:** Mali is experiencing an ongoing threat from armed groups practicing terrorist tactics. Islamic extremist groups terrorize and prey upon the local population. The French operation Barkhane and the G5 Sahel Joint Force are counter-terrorism missions currently operating in Mali, but



430 Tactical Helicopter Squadron from Valcartier QC rotates in for the second half of OP PRESENCE

prevented proper medical measures like vaccination to occur. Fortunately, the last headline-making outbreak, the Ebola crisis of 2014–15, was contained and resolved in West Africa because peace had been established through UN peacekeeping in the former war-torn countries of Liberia and Sierra Leone. By contrast, conflict zones in different parts of the world currently pose a threat to our success in eradicating COVID19.

Unresolved conflicts pose not only enormous health risks, but they also spread violence, terrorism, transnational crime, arms and human trafficking, egregious human rights violations, and large refugee flows. So, it is incumbent upon prosperous and peaceful nations like Canada to help establish and sustain peace in the world's conflict zones.

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for them to be successful, there also needs to be a peaceful path for ex-combatants to follow. MINUSMA offers such a path, including through disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR).

**Protection:** The people of Mali need protection against many forms of attack, and MINUSMA has a basic capability to fulfill its protection of civilians (POC) *mandate*. The UN needs much help since Mali is larger than Ontario, yet the peacekeeping force is barely twice the size of the Toronto police service (TPS). While it costs the United Nations about the same amount as TPS (roughly \$1 billion), it is under-resourced and under-equipped for its difficult tasks and is made up mostly of developing world forces. Still, Canada can work closely with all troop contributing countries, including Germany, Norway and Sweden, all of whom would welcome a Canadian contribution.

**Health:** While Mali has not yet identified a case of the COVID-19 virus, if peace is not established, it could become and remain a centre for virus propagation for decades. The United Nations is putting in place measures to protect peacekeepers from the virus, including in MINUSMA.

**Democracy:** Mali has a praise-worthy decades-long history of multiparty democracy, having had regular elections since 1991. After a coup d'état in 2012, democracy was restored within a year-and-a-half. The most recent *election* was in 2018. Malian democracy is still fragile and needs support, which MINUSMA can provide.

**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. The Mali mission was the first peacekeeping mission to see the rotation of a Canadian unit in twenty years, but Canada has an illustrious history of UN service, having sustained contributions of about 1,000 peacekeepers for decades (from 1956 to 1996). Currently, Canada *contributes* only 5 military staff officers and 14 police to the Mali mission.

**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 over \$1.6 billion dollars since 2000. Canada has an active embassy in Bamako with many projects and investments to protect across the country. The durability of these projects depends on MINUSMA helping Mali success-

fully 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:** Some 70 Canadian mining companies operate in Mali, including Iamgold, which over decades produced roughly half of *Mali's gold*. War 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 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. In the past, Canada used its peacekeeping contributions (since it was the top peacekeeper contributor for decades) to support its candidacy to the UN's most powerful body. To boost its bid for a significant UNSC seat in 2021-22, Canada should once again show a sustained commitment to peacekeeping, an 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.

The Trudeau government's contributions to the United Nations have so far been fickle, while its contributions to NATO have been sustained. The Canadian core of the NATO battle group in Latvia is turning out to be a seven-year continuous commitment for Canada, with possibilities to extend further. The single UN mission to which Canada has deployed a unit was episodic: just 13 months since 2015. In fact, the Trudeau government has provided fewer peacekeepers (monthly average) than the Harper government. Why is Canada short-changing the world body and not living up to its pledge to re-engage in UN peacekeeping?

There is an opportunity to change the record. Canada can once again show the world that it is a committed peacekeeper. And by contributing to global governance through the United Nations, Canada will make both itself and the world safer, including against pandemics. ♣