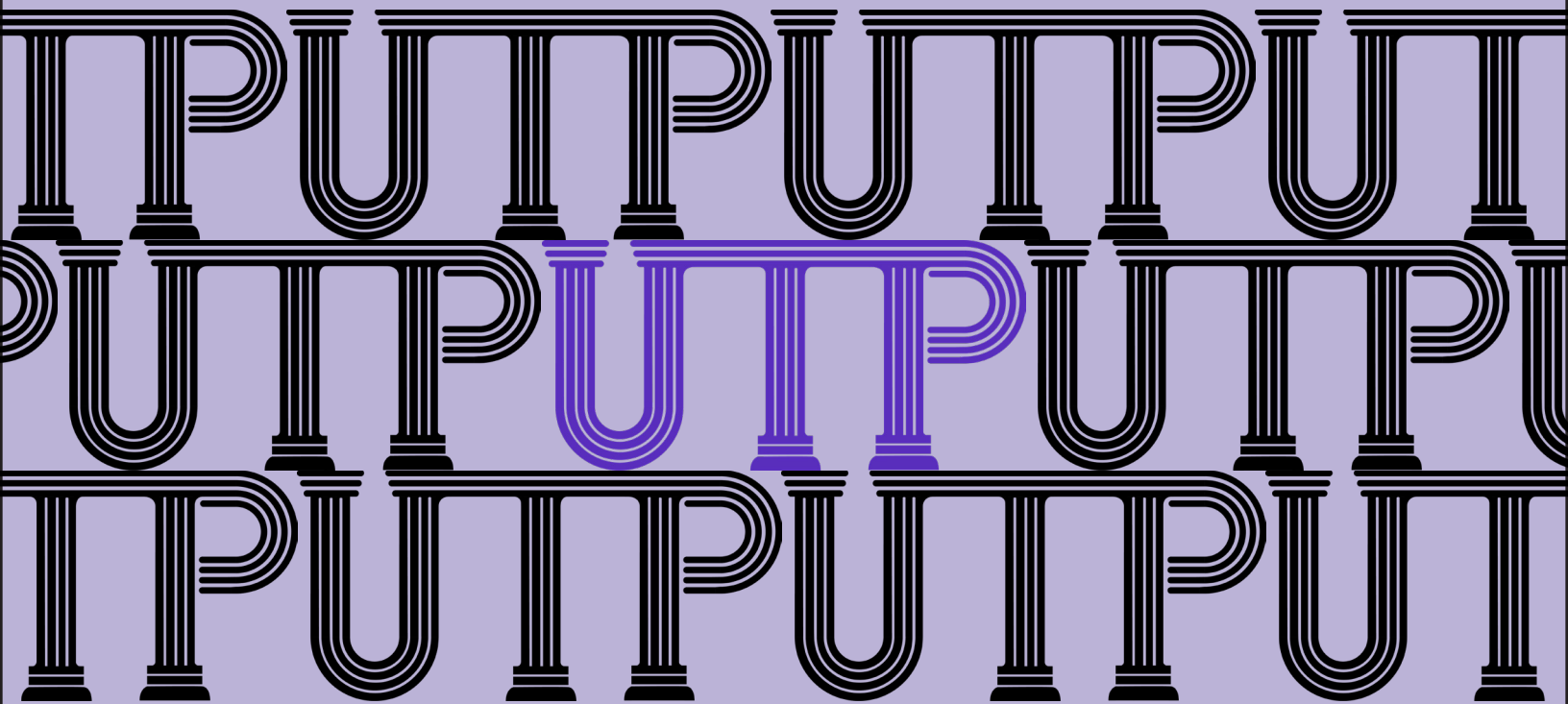


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**CANADIAN
INTERVENTION IN
AND WITHDRAWAL
FROM MALI
EAMON ROACH**

CANADIAN INTERVENTION IN AND WITHDRAWAL FROM MALI

On June 30, 2023, the UN passed Resolution 2690, ending the mandate of the Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali, MINUSMA (UN Security Council ([UNSC]), 2023). This concluded a decade-long UN peacekeeping operation in Mali and the broader Sahel region, which began a year after Mali's coup in 2012 (UNSC, 2023). This report will first examine Canada's role in MINUSMA and its efficacy, and secondly discuss Canada's broader role in West African regional security going forward.

The Canadian component of MINUSMA, Operation PRESENCE, consisted of two hundred and fifty personnel and eight helicopters, and it predominantly focused on medical evacuations (Department of National Defence, 2023). PRESENCE was active in Mali for 13 months between 2018 and 2019, and was renewed in March 2023 until Canadian troops were pulled out beginning in July (Department of National Defence, 2023). While PRESENCE only accounted for a small portion of the total sixteen thousand troops deployed in the MINUSMA operation, Foreign Affairs Canada frequently affirmed that the operation was making a significant impact in Malian stabilization. This is unlikely to be true, however, for two reasons. Firstly, the actual extent of operations was minimal. Between 2018 and 2019, PRESENCE only carried out eight medical evacuations with only four of

those being deemed as responses to "serious injuries," (Poplak, 2022). This amounted to Canada spending millions of dollars per evacuation as part of a very cost-ineffective foreign policy. Secondly, it is unclear if the MINUSMA operation in its entirety was at all effective. Since its establishment in 2013, it has produced no tangible change in the state of Malian domestic affairs, has been the second-deadliest UN engagement ever, and has cost tens of billions of dollars (Poplak, 2022). Regional Jihadist groups have been known to attack MINUSMA convoys and UN bases in towns, leading to civilians in those towns being unnecessarily embroiled in conflict (Poplak, 2022). While Trudeau has stated that Operation PRESENCE has allowed MINUSMA "to do more," it seems that the Malian situation may be a case where having boots on the ground is structurally inappropriate to begin with. (Brewster, 2023). Consequently, many characterize PRESENCE as a tokenistic attempt at Canadian reintegration into peacekeeping and cooperation with the UN, which was largely suspended under the Harper administration (Poplak, 2022).

What should Canada do in terms of stabilization efforts now that MINUSMA has pulled out of Mali? There are first- and third-sector engagements which should continue to avoid direct military engagement. At the federal level, Canada should continue its bilateral relations with Mali and continue its policy of helping to implement the 2014 Accords d'Algiers, a set of stipulations

made by the Malian government to promote regional stability and ethnic reconciliation, as well as bolster governmental administrative capacity (The Government of the Republic of Mali, 2014). Between 2016 and 2022, Canada contributed over 58 million dollars in Peace and Stabilization Operations Programs (PSOPs [Government of Canada, 2023a]). This resulted in, *inter alia*, the training of 150 female and 200 male peace ambassadors in Bamako, Mali, aiding both the peace process and gender parity within that process (Government of Canada, 2023a). PSOPs also tend to be regarded as more legitimate and palatable forms of policing at the local level, as they rely on the training of local populations and not an interfering foreign body (Poplak, 2022). While it would not be strategic to resume this level of development aid immediately and during such tense moments for the region, noting increased instability in Niger and Burkina Faso, Canada should continue to foster positive bilateral relations such that they can eventually attain that prior level of development assistance.

Regarding third-sector activity, there are multi-governmental organizations (MGOs) and civil society organizations (CSOs) operating in Mali that are producing tangible gains in stability and have been supported by Canada in the past. At the CSO level, CARE Canada, Médecins Sans Frontières, the Canadian Red Cross, and the International Rescue Committee are all currently operating in Mali, pro-

viding food, shelter, and medical assistance to those most affected by regional conflict. Prior to June 2023, Canada had implemented a freeze on the transfer of assets to Mali, even if they were sent for humanitarian purposes (Government of Canada, 2023b). While the reversal of this specific sanction is a good step, Canada can still do more to support Canadian branches of humanitarian organizations that are protecting those with no other forms of social assistance. At the MGO level, organizations such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) attempt to deter conflict by promoting regional stability through mutual security and economic integration. While Canada has not made a significant contribution to ECOWAS since 2002, where it allocated 15 million under the Canada Fund for Africa, this could be another avenue through which Canada could promote stability and development in a non-interventionist fashion (Canada International Development Agency, 2004).

This brief has argued that both Operation PRESENCE and MINUSMA were ineffective at securing Malian stability objectives. Instead of opting for military intervention, Canada should focus on approaches that recognize the ability of groups in the Sahel to self-govern. This orientation will be better for Canada and Mali's bilateral relations moving forward, and will contribute more to regional development and institution-building than initiatives that focus primarily on active conflict.

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