

# MALI: THE CASE FOR A PERMANENT UN INTERVENTION FORCE?

Matthew Willis



Royal United Services Institute

OCCASIONAL PAPER

**About RUSI**

The Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) is an independent think tank engaged in cutting edge defence and security research. A unique institution, founded in 1831 by the Duke of Wellington, RUSI embodies nearly two centuries of forward thinking, free discussion and careful reflection on defence and security matters.

For more information, please visit: [www.rusi.org](http://www.rusi.org)



Occasional Paper, July 2013

# **Mali: The Case for a Permanent UN Intervention Force?**

Matthew Willis

The views expressed in this paper are the author's own, and do not necessarily reflect those of RUSI or any other institutions with which the author is associated.

---

Comments pertaining to this paper are invited and should be forwarded to: Matthew Willis, Research Analyst, International Security Studies, Royal United Services Institute, Whitehall, London, SW1A 2ET, United Kingdom, or via e-mail to [mattheww@rusi.org](mailto:mattheww@rusi.org)

Published in 2013 by the Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies. Reproduction without the express permission of RUSI is prohibited.

**About RUSI Publications**

Director of Publications: Adrian Johnson  
Publications Manager: Ashlee Godwin

Paper or electronic copies of this and other reports are available by contacting [publications@rusi.org](mailto:publications@rusi.org).

## Mali: The Case for a Permanent UN Intervention Force?

---

*January's French-led intervention pulled Mali back from the brink, but the crisis that precipitated it could have been avoided. In the ensuing months, diplomats spoke of the need for a well-armed and well-trained force that could consolidate gains and finish the job. In its absence, the UN peacekeeping mission that took responsibility for Mali's security on 1 July is likely to be of the usual sort – adequate for preventing a complete backslide but inadequate for achieving much more.*

For close to seven decades, the idea of a military force belonging to the United Nations and able to prevent or smother armed conflict has exercised the imaginations and pens of politicians, statesmen, generals and academics alike. Despite the many obstacles to its establishment, a 'UN army' retains its appeal because the supply of conflicts which the international community struggles to resolve appears far from exhausted. Some, such as the civil war in Syria, are too complex for any external humanitarian intervention, but others would be candidates for a rapid-response mission if the means of mounting an effective one existed.

A wide range of force models has been put forward. Some have envisaged an all-arms force, 500,000 strong, semi-autonomous from the UN and able to stare down recalcitrant governments in contexts of inter-state aggression.<sup>1</sup> Others have envisioned contingents of 10,000 or 15,000, designed for a different range of tasks, but essentially spanning peacekeeping-type missions in permissive environments to robust peace-making in intra-state conflict scenarios.<sup>2</sup> The trait they all share, and which sets them apart from every experiment to date, is permanence: personnel would be recruited straight into a standing force in the same way that civilians are recruited into the UN's civil-service system. Compared to the 'standby' model, according to which national contingents are 'loaned' in advance but ultimately require the case-by-case approval of their governments before being deployed, 'direct recruitment' is thus highly ambitious.

The purpose of a standing intervention force would be to remedy key weaknesses in the international community's traditional approach to emergency interventions. These include, among others, delays in deployment; contingents' inadequate kit, armament, transportation and logistics capabilities; conflicts of doctrine and ethos; uneven (and, too often, low) levels of professionalism; and cumbersome command-and-control arrangements. The crisis in Mali has underscored several of the challenges in putting together emergency interventions from scratch and will, accordingly,

be used throughout this piece as a lens through which to evaluate the utility of a new model of UN force.

Proponents of the idea contend that it would bring with it other advantages as well: eliminating the obstacle posed by inadequate collective will or governments' politically motivated refusal to offer support; preventing governments from supplying contingents as a means of influencing strategy and operations, sometimes by threatening to withdraw them; diminishing the risk of terrorist reprisals against those countries furnishing troops (in the case of a directly recruited force); deterring further aggression through its own strength as well as the follow-on force it represented; and, last but by no means least, providing an alternative to unilateral or coalition options whose legitimacy – both in the eyes of the potential host country and the court of world opinion – might be insufficient.

Several of the obstacles to a UN-owned intervention force will be examined as well, including the UN's internal intellectual predilections and the limits of Responsibility to Protect (R2P). That these barriers continue to prevent more than 'academic' discussion of the subject must of course be acknowledged, and in this short space this paper does not propose ways of breaking them down. Nevertheless, the value of keeping discussion on this subject going is threefold. First, a good idea is worth keeping in mind, even if it cannot come to fruition now. Second, as part of evaluating whether an idea is still 'good', its applicability must continually be measured against events in the real world. This paper charts the idea of a force able to suppress conflict against the trajectory of conflict's changing character. Third, ideas that act as a counterweight to orthodoxy are crucial to any healthy debate.

### **The Crisis in Mali: A Slow-Motion Train Wreck**

By now, the political, economic and societal forces that eventually combined to create insurgency in Mali are well known. For the better part of the last decade, regional and Western governments were keenly aware of the dangers of leaving the problems in Mali, and across the Sahel, to fester. Indeed, in parallel with a substantial international aid programme, the US spearheaded efforts to provide the Malian military with the training and means to suppress the spread of radical Islamism. In Washington, it was believed that the Malian army was going to be a rare regional success story, but the Tuareg uprising in January 2012 put paid to the idea. The (Tuareg) commanders of three of the four units deployed against the rebels defected, taking 1,600 soldiers with them and leaving the government impotent in the face of the rebel advance.<sup>3</sup>

The presidential coup following this military collapse plunged the government into even deeper trouble, even as the uneasy alliance between the secular Tuareg rebels and Ansar Dine, their Malian Islamist partners,

began to disintegrate. It was soon clear that the backbone of the insurgency was neither the Tuaregs nor Ansar Dine, but the well-armed, -trained and -financed international jihadis (affiliates of Al-Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghreb – AQIM). This faction was also in control of a substantial portion of the arsenal of heavy weaponry and equipment that Muammar Qadhafi had accumulated before his demise. Before long, northern Mali was being called the 'Afghanistan of the Sahel' and 'Sahelistan'.

### **The International Community: Busily Accomplishing Little**

It was not until mid-November 2012 that a 'strategic operational framework' was finally drawn up by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the African Union (AU). It called for the deployment of 3,300 troops from West African countries, mainly Nigeria, Niger and Burkina Faso, to train the Malian army, establish bases and, finally, take the fight to the Islamists together. The AU would provide political and strategic leadership. The EU agreed to supply logistical, financial and planning support, along with 200 experts to train the Malian army and tighten up its command-and-control network.<sup>4</sup>

This was an accomplishment of sorts but hardly noteworthy. It had taken more than half a year just to develop a plan, and the plan's timeline was itself unrealistic. Despite loose talk of launching the intervention in the first quarter of 2013, the more realistic timeframe was always September or October. That meant giving the insurgents almost a year more to mass and entrench themselves, train, strengthen their networks, and stockpile arms, munitions and fuel. The longer a territory is under the sway of a usurping power, the more the 'facts on the ground' favour it, and the international community was giving the usurpers all the time they could hope for.

The size of the planned force also looked suspect. As the West learned in Afghanistan, size of footprint does not relate directly to success, and too large a footprint can be self-defeating (as can having the wrong strategy or not matching the size of the force to the strategic goals). However, 'economy of force' has its limits. Despite northern Mali's considerable area, the intervention force of 3,300 envisaged by the ECOWAS/AU framework was no larger than the initial British deployment in 2006 to Helmand, which is much smaller in terms of territory. Granted, northern Mali contains far fewer urban centres than Helmand, and ECOWAS would have been supporting a Malian force, but Mali's ragged army (numbering few more than 7,000 in total) could hardly have been counted on to carry much of the burden. Without much more European support than had been intimated at that point, the African troops would have lacked the airlift, intelligence, surveillance and other vital enabling capabilities to make their small numbers really count.<sup>5</sup>

Moreover, the troops provided under this operational concept would not comprise any sort of elite force. Mali's army was going to require at least six months of training before being anywhere near ready for war. The ECOWAS forces were not used to fighting in desert conditions, and thus lacked the training and equipment required for a Saharan campaign. Neither Algeria nor Chad, experienced in desert warfare, was at that point expected to join the mission. And the Nigerian army, whose contingent would have made up a large part of the force, had earned itself a reputation for inflicting gratuitous violence on civilians and flouting human rights, both when deployed internationally under UN auspices and at home in the government's fight against Boko Haram. The ECOWAS/AU plan may therefore have been better than nothing, but it hardly inspired confidence.

### **The UN: Sticking to the Margins**

One of the striking aspects of the talks surrounding the possibility of an international intervention in Mali was the UN's relatively low profile. Granted, the Security Council was supportive from the start and made favourable noises about legitimating some form of intervention as early as the summer of 2012.<sup>6</sup> In October, it virtually offered to rubber-stamp a plan if the AU and ECOWAS could pull one together.<sup>7</sup> In late December, it passed a resolution authorising the use of 'all necessary measures' – which is to say military force – in the retaking of Mali's northern territory by an 'African-led International Support Mission in Mali' (AFISMA). It made its expertise available throughout the process in consultations with the parties concerned, including the Malian government and ECOWAS. Otherwise, however, it remained largely on the sidelines. There was no serious discussion of a UN-led mission, nor was the organisation willing to fund an international initiative.

As if to underscore the UN's seeming reticence, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's report to the Security Council in late November, expected to endorse the ECOWAS/AU plan, was in fact cautious to the point of being tepid. After stating that the UN was not best placed to intervene in Mali using force, Ban underscored the risks of a botched intervention and observed that the African plan thus far lacked important details, including 'how the force would be led, sustained, trained, equipped and financed.'<sup>8</sup> The assessment provoked the ire of some African politicians and diplomats<sup>9</sup> (and, according to *Reuters*, a number of Security Council representatives too<sup>10</sup>) yet Ban was not wrong. More discouraging than the report's tone was its veracity: the international community is still not adept at mounting well-timed, -planned, -resourced and -led intervention missions.

### **Filling the Collective Capability Gap**

The rebels' 10 January offensive, resulting in the capture of the strategic city of Konna and precipitating a French-led counter-attack, exposed what is perhaps the international community's greatest weakness when it comes

to carrying out interventions in crisis situations: the inability to freeze deteriorating political situations long enough to agree on a course of action and follow through. Thus, despite quickly concluding that intervention was required, the UN, the AU, ECOWAS and the rest had no way of ensuring that the situation they were preparing to respond to would still obtain when they were finally ready. There was a political process but nothing guaranteeing its viability. In essence, the international community lacks a means of seizing the initiative – not so that it can act quickly (speed will probably never be among its prime attributes) but so that it can prevent others from pulling the rug out from under it.

The obvious question, therefore, is whether a permanent, rapidly deployable intervention capability, presumably under UN authority, could not have made a contribution here. Opportunities for its use were not lacking. Had it existed last summer, it would have been available to backstop the Malian forces in their initial showdown with the Tuareg-Islamist alliance, which violated the terms of the 2006 Algiers Accord.<sup>11</sup> Had the force existed in the autumn, it might have been dispatched, under a customised temporary mandate, as soon as an in-principle agreement was reached on the need for international intervention. Had it existed in spring 2013, it could have helped to hold the line while France pulled out and the ECOWAS forces prepared to take over.

Traditional arguments favouring a 'UN army' focus on the speed and reliability with which it could deploy and its superior capabilities and internal functioning. There is little doubt that a force with a 'self-contained' command structure – one that did not have to make allowances for commanders' divided loyalties or contributing governments' attempts to influence it – would be more effective. Exactly how and at what points the military chain of command would tie into the political hierarchy is an open question, but by insulating it from at least some of the politics being played out in New York, it could be made shorter, tidier and more responsive to in-theatre realities. Strategic aims would still be set at the political level, but interference in the military leadership's pursuit of those aims and in the initial generation of a force could be significantly reduced. It is also a fair assumption that a permanent force of regulars – trained, equipped, enabled and led to the highest standards – would be more effective than many of the national contingents that the UN currently relies on, even though sound leadership goes some way towards making them effective. Furthermore, since the force – as most proponents envision it – would have its own strategic and tactical lift capabilities, it could deploy to, and within, a given theatre in a matter of days.

The French-led EU deployment to the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) in 2003 shows that limited tasks can be accomplished by a small contingent of professional troops. After militia-on-militia fighting spiked suddenly in the DRC's eastern district of Ituri in May 2003, the UN approached France about

leading a 'short-term rapid response operation'.<sup>12</sup> The resulting force of roughly 2,000, modelled loosely on the EU Battlegroup concept, entered the theatre within a month and stayed for two, at which point it was relieved by a reinforced MONUC (UN Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo).<sup>13</sup> Known as Operation *Artemis* and executed under a Chapter VII mandate, the mission stabilised the district capital, Bunia, oversaw the distribution of humanitarian aid, and ensured the safety of citizens and refugees. Key aspects of its success were its ability – under appropriate rules of engagement – to dominate the militias' attempts at escalation, and the willingness of its commanders to exercise that ability. It also collaborated effectively with humanitarian organisations.<sup>14</sup>

That all this was accomplished by a force assembled ad hoc as opposed to one operated by the UN raises the question why the UN would benefit from having its own capability. The advantage would be the dependability of an 'in-house' force. In the case of Operation *Artemis*, the UN was fortunate that France saw intervention at that particular time as congruent with its own interests; had it not, it is doubtful that the operation could have been mounted. One need look no further than the DRC's neighbour, Rwanda, for a reminder of the risks of relying on good fortune.

An emergency force could also provide human intelligence for the planners of a potential follow-on mission. In the Congo, where MONUC had been established four years prior, a detailed on-the-ground picture was available. In Mali it was not – even though as the former colonial power, France did benefit from a certain familiarity with the country. In such circumstances, an early and detailed understanding of the strategic geography of key areas, relevant political, religious and ethnic dynamics, formal and informal power relationships, and popular attitudes towards key actors would be invaluable. Equally so would be information concerning the political machinations among the host state's military, government and civil service – organs that frequently contribute to political instability. A force that could take the heat out of a developing crisis and, without 'stirring the pot', simultaneously relay intelligence back to UN planners seeking the best way to approach the problem through a larger mission would improve the odds of that mission's success.

But what the international community is currently lacking is not just a force capable of *rapid* action, but also one capable of highly specialised *kinds* of action. Deployable for a relatively short period of time – perhaps two to six months – an emergency force would not usually be intended to do the 'heavy lifting', but rather to create or maintain the requisite conditions in which a larger mission could be implemented – a job liable to be complex. Two main scenarios can be envisioned. In an incipient crisis such as that in Mali, its fundamental purpose would be to dissuade the belligerents from further military action. In a scenario more closely resembling that in Rwanda

in 1994, where the violence ramped up quickly (despite warning signs), its purpose would be to slow or stop it. In both cases, the ultimate goal would be to create the conditions for political stabilisation while buying the international community time to respond. Managing this challenge would require the force to carry out its tasks without getting dragged into the fray itself or, indeed, causing an escalation.

An emergency intervention capability would therefore be designed to carry out a range of 'buttressing' activities. Some would be identical to those already carried out by UN multidimensional peacekeeping missions: monitoring population centres; preventing the establishment of illicit roadblocks; creating and enforcing weapons-free zones and 'safe areas'; supporting local authorities in their constabulary duties; and ensuring the free passage of aid groups and food supplies. Other activities might include the oversight of infrastructure projects, the monitoring and promotion of press and broadcast freedoms, and the mentoring of civil service officials. The campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan over the last decade have taught international militaries much about these tasks.

### **Thinking about Force Models**

What is under discussion here is thus a capability far more multifaceted than a traditional Chapter VII peacekeeping force and one that, without meaning to draw tight parallels, might more closely resemble an Afghan Provincial Reconstruction Team: a substantial stabilisation component, similar to existing UN peace-building operations, but also with a robust manoeuvre force. A detailed proposal for such an instrument already exists in the form of *A United Nations Emergency Peace Service* (UNEPS), a book published in 2006 and sponsored by three civil-society advocacy groups.<sup>15</sup>

It advocates the creation of a 15,000-strong standing force consisting of 'carefully selected, expertly trained, and coherently organized and commanded ... civilian, police, judicial, and military personnel.'<sup>16</sup> Its explicit purpose would be to 'complement existing UN and regional arrangements by filling the critical gap of managing the initial six months of demanding operations.'<sup>17</sup> As initially conceived, UNEPS was intended to assist the UN in preventing genocide and crimes against humanity, rather than as a standing UN rapid-intervention force, but Peter Langille, an authority on peacekeeping and a supporter of the service, has recently made the obvious point that the concept is flexible. A force along UNEPS lines could be trained and equipped to provide protection for civilians, ensure prompt start-up of demanding peace operations and address human needs in circumstances in which no other support was forthcoming.<sup>18</sup>

Both UNEPS and a 2008 scoping paper by RUSI envisioned a force built through direct recruitment rather than the contributions of national contingents

### **Force Model Options**

Visions of what a permanent UN intervention force might look like range widely. The three examples here, inspired by the same challenges but reflecting different visions, illustrate the breadth of the spectrum.

#### ***The Shield Concept***

- Designed to enforce UN laws and prevent war between sovereign states
- Governed by a supranational council of elected monitors, independent of the UN General Assembly and Security Council
- Numbering perhaps 500,000 individually recruited volunteers from around the world
- Equipped with air-, seaborne and nuclear-strike capability
- Funded by the world's fifty most-developed economies
- Able to react immediately
- Eliminates the risk of retaliatory attacks, given its status as a non-national force.

*Source: Paul Stonor, 'Shield: The Elimination of War between Sovereign States', Army Quarterly and Defence Journal (Vol. 127, No. 1, 1997).*

#### ***The UN Emergency Peace Service (UNEPS)***

- Capable of responding to and quelling an emergency within forty-eight hours of UN authorisation
- Geared especially towards preventing genocide and crimes against humanity, but with wider applicability to humanitarian, health and environmental crises
- Numbering 12,000 to 15,000 individually recruited volunteers from around the world
- Comprising military but also police and civilian personnel (for example, mediation specialists, human-rights educators, peace-building advisers)
- Designed to remain in theatre for six months, after which the UN would step in with a more substantial follow-on mission.

*Source: Robert C Johansen (ed), A United Nations Emergency Peace Service to Prevent Genocide and Crimes against Humanity (New York, NY: World Federalist Movement, 2006).*

#### ***The UN Military Intervention Unit (UNMIU)***

- Intended for rapid insertion into developing crises, with the ability to dominate any escalation in violence
- Based on the US Marine Corps' Marine Expeditionary Unit, and thus built around a specialist infantry battalion, but deployable in conjunction with civilian, police and judicial personnel
- Reliant on the Security Council for initial authorisation, but controlled upon deployment by a military strategic headquarters
- Directly recruited and totalling 10,000 (allowing for deployment of roughly 2,200 personnel per rotation)
- Funded through national contributions to the UN.

*Source: Michael Codner, 'Permanent United Nations Military Intervention Capability: Some Practical Considerations', RUSI Journal (Vol. 153, No. 3, June 2008).*

by UN member states.<sup>19</sup> The main argument favouring a direct-recruitment model is that it would reduce the UN's reliance on its member states, whose cumbersome decision-making processes, obstructionism or simple lack of will frequently impede decisive action. A second argument, made by the advocacy group UN-Shield, is that a directly recruited force would leave contributing countries less vulnerable to reprisals since no country *per se* would have contributed to the intervention. (The question arises, however, whether actors could not simply shift their retaliation to *symbols*: the country of the secretary-general, perhaps, or, as in the case of Mali, an actor like Nigeria that facilitated the intervention.)

Direct recruitment has a certain resonance today. Though fighting, or, indeed, advocating solutions to, 'the last war' should be avoided, it is probably safe to assert that the campaigns of the past decade have created soldiers more attuned to the exigencies of emergency intervention than their predecessors. Those who witnessed the successes and failures of the campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan belonged to some of the world's most professional militaries, and their experiences have turned them into genuine experts in many of the areas crucial to intervention: cultural awareness; engagement with local populations; the uses and limits of military force; military training and mentoring; governance; infrastructure management; and civil-military relations to name but a few. Such soldiers could be used to train new recruits to a standing UN force; they might also be recruited from their own downsizing militaries to form an initial cadre.

Where authority for deploying an intervention force would rest is a question this paper does not propose to answer. Without major reforms to the existing UN structure, the Security Council would presumably be responsible for granting final approval for deployment. It might then delegate command to the secretary-general, who would effectively top the chain of command and communicate with the in-theatre military commander through a UN special representative. A military headquarters within UN Headquarters, reporting to the secretary-general, would oversee the campaign at a strategic level. Other set-ups can also be envisioned, including – as advocated by UN-Shield – one in which authority for a deployment resided with a supranational council set up under the supervision of the UN but not answerable to it. Such structures would require major reforms to the current system.

### **Still a Way to Go**

The concept of a UN rapid-intervention capability has stiff challenges to overcome before it can be implemented. The first, ironically, is posed by the UN itself. After a surge in interest following the Rwandan genocide and the fiasco of Bosnia, the organisation's enthusiasm for an in-house intervention force waned. Recent UN publications, notably 'United Nations Peacekeeping Operations: Principles and Guidelines' and 'A New Partnership Agenda:

Charting a New Horizon for UN Peacekeeping', published in 2008 and 2009 respectively, are clear on two points. First, past impulses aside, the UN sees its role *vis-à-vis* warfare as a post-conflict one. The 'New Horizon' document states explicitly that peacekeeping is a 'provider of post-conflict security'.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, this January, in the first debate on peacekeeping to be held at the UN in a decade, the emphasis on the post-conflict character of such operations was reiterated by several countries, including France and China.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, although the UN intends to improve its ability to engage in peacekeeping as it itself defines the term, it recently remarked that, in active conflict, 'multinational coalitions of forces or regional actors operating under UN Security Council mandates may be more suitable.'<sup>22</sup>

Second, and equally problematically, the UN intends to stick with national standby contingents as its means of assembling intervention forces. This is a particularly serious problem for most advocates of a standing force, who believe that standby contingents are one of the key reasons for delays in deployments. Whereas direct-recruitment advocates view reducing reliance on member states as a logical step, the UN believes that it must embrace its members. They are necessary because 'UN peacekeeping can only succeed as part of a wider political strategy ... and with the will of the parties to implement the strategy.'<sup>23</sup> The parties in question are not only the belligerents but the members of the Security Council and wider UN. The UN's insistence on this point is not unreasonable: few things could be worse than to dispatch a force into a crisis zone anticipating a follow-on mission, only to find none was forthcoming.

The question of consent follows on closely, first as regards the force's creation, second in relation to its deployment. This has always been among the most insuperable obstacles: developing a standing force under UN control would mean creating a non-state – even a supranational – entity with military capacity, challenging not only modern norms of international law but also the 'natural instincts' of many states. No matter what the precise command arrangements proposed, it is hard to imagine how the consent of the UN's members – and those of the Security Council in the first instance – could be obtained.

In some measure, the need for state consent – particularly that of the organisation's most powerful members – ties into an old philosophical debate over the balance to be struck in international affairs between order and justice. Today, talking of spheres of influence may be unfashionable, but they exist and the powers at the centre of them still guard their ability to 'manage' what goes on within them. Indeed, the powers that established the UN, and which still hold the permanent seats on the Security Council, had every interest in not undercutting their own ability to impose order on a basis other than what might be considered 'just'. The UN embodies this

tension by design, and the point is that a kind of peace – real, if not ideal – is sometimes more easily achieved if the prerogative of a regional or global power is respected than if the rest of the international community attempts to create it bearing the standard of ‘justice’.

Supposing, though, that consent were obtained and the force created, could it ever be deployed? The Security Council’s tendency to seize up whenever intervention is being considered would, of course, need to be reckoned with. Yet there is also the question of host-nation consent, which has usually been a *sine qua non* of any UN intervention. A rapid-reaction force’s utility would be restricted if it were beholden to such a principle. UN-Shield, among other groups, advocates a force that could be sent in without the consent of the host government, and in its 2008 scoping paper, RUSI outlined a force capable of such an insertion. There is some logic to this view. In today’s conflict environments – and Mali is a case in point – a government’s consent (or refusal) does not always hold much meaning, because state structures can be fissured and dysfunctional. The emergence of the R2P concept has also made interventions without consent more justifiable, at least among those who subscribe to it.

The Australian-led INTERFET (International Force for East Timor) of 1999 was a successful example of such an intervention. Numbering roughly 7,000 and deployed to halt an Indonesian government-backed militia campaign against the population, the robust force operating under a Chapter VII mandate swept away the militia, confiscated weapons and secured the capital, main towns and roads. Over five months, it facilitated humanitarian operations by providing protection as well as logistical and reconstruction support.<sup>24</sup>

However, even a strong force with a UN mandate could not override an unco-operative central government with impunity. In East Timor, the militias were weak and the theatre was on a small island, relatively insulated from external interference. In other cases, deploying troops uninvited could be asking for trouble. Even if there were no central authority with the power to grant or withhold consent, neighbours would remain a key constituency – both for the help they could offer and the obstructions they could create. The Malian intervention would have been very tricky politically and logistically, for instance, had Algeria not shifted its position to allow France to use its airspace.

A final and related point concerns the UN’s willingness to see a mission through. Though the purpose of the intervention force would not be to resolve an incipient conflict, but merely keep it from spinning out of control, the basic premise is that a follow-on force would be in the pipeline. There is some question, however, particularly among military leaders who have dealt with the UN before, as to whether the political leadership has the stomach

for Chapter VII operations. All too often, be it in Rwanda or Srebrenica in the 1990s or in Goma more recently, lack of faith in the military option in theatre has led to back-tracking on agreed strategy and decisions not to give the forces deployed permission to do their jobs. In the absence of political determination to follow up an emergency intervention force with the necessary full-scale mission, and to see *that* mission to completion, the initial deployment would achieve little other than to discredit the UN – and the intervention force.

### **Conclusion**

The practical, institutional and even international legal challenges to the establishment of a standing, UN-owned rapid-reaction force are thus substantial. Nonetheless, if one accepts that Mali is the sort of crisis which such a force would exist to minimise, and that the challenges it comprises are generally representative of political crises in fragile states, it seems clear that an emergency intervention capability would be useful. In the first instance, its utility would be in freezing a degenerating political situation. It would deter belligerents not by engaging them directly, but by demonstrating both its ability to inflict damage if opposed and the international community's commitment to action. It would thus help to keep the international community in the driver's seat while it prepared a more robust response. (It bears noting that as France prepared to withdraw its troops from Mali, Western diplomats began talking of the need for a heavily armed rapid-reaction force to take up the slack.<sup>25</sup>) Of equal value would be the human intelligence such an intervention force would relay to the planners of the follow-on mission.

It follows that this force would be designed for more than purely peace-making. In keeping with the UN's emphasis on multidimensional peace operations, it would need to comprise a strong security-provision component supported by a range of experts with specialist knowledge in humanitarian assistance, infrastructure management, governance and security-sector reform. The historical record shows that such interventions, if conducted by well-designed forces – properly trained, equipped and supported – can succeed in bringing crises under control. The notion that the present battlespace has become 'congested, cluttered, contested, constrained and connected' has some truth to it, but the temptation to exaggerate the complexity of conflicts, and thus argue that emergency interventions have become too dangerous to undertake, is an unhelpful intellectual conceit. A specialised UN force, if it saw the light of day, would be fit for purpose more often than not.

Mali also suggests that there is a set of scenarios that can elicit consensus on the need for action from the members of the Security Council. These scenarios are characterised by Security Council members' agreement that

an intervention is necessary, their unwillingness to act promptly themselves, and their willingness to let others do so under the right conditions. Obtaining consent for deployment of the force – if it existed – might therefore not be as inconceivable as is sometimes argued, although the issue is sure to remain a thorny and multifaceted one.

In the near term, the path of least resistance is likely to be to create a rapid-reaction capability incrementally, as a kind of experiment over which member states would have full control. Twenty years after UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali's landmark *An Agenda for Peace* helped to shift the focus of peacekeeping towards the 'back end' of operations – post-conflict peace-building – prevention may be regaining some of its lustre. In these straitened times, and in view of the last decade's gruelling military campaigns, the human and financial savings to be gained from resolving conflicts before they begin are attracting strategists' attention. In the UK, 'upstream engagement' has become a key national-security pillar. In the round, it means supporting allies in developing the governance, human-rights and legal structures that will make them more resilient to shocks and better able to adapt to change.<sup>26</sup> The military dimension involves, among other things, training allies' militaries to Western standards, both as fighting organisations and functional elements contributing to a healthy society.

Current experiments with regional rapid-reaction capabilities – the NATO Response Force and the EU Battlegroup concept being two – are also positive signs. They imply the pooling of resources and acceptance of the need for rapidly deployable contingents. Because NATO and the EU are both, loosely speaking, regional analogues to the global UN, these experiments could also, in time, bring governments around to the notion of a military force under some kind of shared 'state-collective' authority, the principle of which could be transferrable to the larger UN theatre.

*Matthew Willis is a Research Analyst in RUSI's International Security Studies Department. His research in 2012–13 has encompassed security in the South Caucasus, the politics of the Arctic and the Arab Spring in the Persian Gulf. Matthew completed his Bachelor's at the University of Toronto, studied at the Sorbonne and completed his Master's at the London School of Economics. In 2013, he was awarded the Marvin Gelber Prize for his research into Canada's 2005 deployment to Afghanistan, published in the International Journal.*

### Notes and References

1. See Paul Stonor, 'Shield: The Elimination of War between Sovereign States', *Army Quarterly and Defence Journal* (Vol. 127, No. 1, 1997).
2. See, for example, William R Frye, *United Nations Peace Force* (New York, NY: Oceana Publications, 1957) and Government of the Netherlands, 'A UN Rapid Deployment Brigade: A Preliminary Study', revised version, April 1995.
3. Adam Nossiter, Eric Schmitt and Mark Mazzetti, 'French Strikes in Mali Supplant Caution of U.S.', *New York Times*, 13 January 2013.
4. Laurence Norman, 'Europe's Response to Mali Threat', *WSJ Blogs*, 31 October 2012. A *TIME* magazine article in December 2012 spoke of 400 EU instructors and 150 troops for force-protection purposes. See Bruce Crumley, 'Mali's Crisis: Is the Plan for Western Intervention "Crap"?', *TIME*, 18 December 2012.
5. Within a week of the insurgents' advance in January 2013, there were 2,500 French troops in the country, the ECOWAS complement of 3,300 was on its way, and the dispatch of a further 2,000 Chadians had been announced, making for a combined force of almost 8,000 on top of Mali's contribution. By February, the French had deployed 4,000 troops.
6. UN Resolution 2056, 5 July 2012, <<https://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2012/sc10698.doc.htm>>, accessed 7 May 2013.
7. UN Resolution 2071, 12 October 2012, <<http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2012/sc10789.doc.htm>>, accessed 7 May 2013.
8. *Agence France Presse*, 'UN Leader Backs Mali Intervention with Conditions', 29 November 2012.
9. Bakari Gueye, 'African Union, UN Disagree over Mali Plan', *Magharebia*, 4 December 2012, <[http://www.magharebia.com/cocoon/awi/xhtml1/en\\_GB/features/awi/features/2012/12/04/feature-03](http://www.magharebia.com/cocoon/awi/xhtml1/en_GB/features/awi/features/2012/12/04/feature-03)>, accessed 7 May 2013.
10. Louis Charbonneau and Michelle Nichols, 'U.N. Chief Recommends "Offensive Military Operation" in Mali', *Reuters*, 28 November 2012.
11. The Algiers Accord had brought an on-again, off-again Tuareg rebellion to an uneasy end.
12. See Jan-Gunnar Isberg and Lotta Victor Tillberg, trans. Stephen Henly, *By All Necessary Means* (Stockholm: Swedish National Defence College, 2012).

13. MONUC never left Ituri but, unable to handle the escalation in violence, was temporarily relieved of its role by the *Artemis* force.
14. It should be observed, nonetheless, that the theatre was small (about 15 km<sup>2</sup>) and lasting solutions were not found. 'Weapons-invisible' zones were established and enforced, but the area remained awash with stockpiled arms and ammunition, and atrocities continued outside of the tightly defined operating area. See Kees Homan, 'Operation Artemis in the Democratic Republic of Congo', in European Commission, *Faster and More United? The Debate about Europe's Crisis Response Capacity* (Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 2006), pp. 151–55.
15. The groups were Global Action to Prevent War, the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation and the World Federalist Movement. See Robert C Johansen (ed), *A United Nations Emergency Peace Service to Prevent Genocide and Crimes against Humanity* (New York, NY: World Federalist Movement, 2006).
16. *Ibid.*, p. 22.
17. H Peter Langille, 'A UN Emergency Peace Service?', *Open Democracy*, 14 May 2012, <<http://www.opendemocracy.net/opensecurity/h-peter-langille/un-emergency-peace-service>>, accessed 7 May 2013.
18. *Ibid.*
19. For RUSI's paper, see Michael Codner, 'Permanent United Nations Military Intervention Capability: Some Practical Considerations', *RUSI Journal* (Vol. 153, No. 3, June 2008).
20. United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) and Department of Field Support (DFS), 'A New Partnership Agenda: Charting a New Horizon for UN Peacekeeping', July 2009, p. v.
21. 'United Nations Peacekeeping: A Multidimensional Approach', UN Security Council open debate, 6903<sup>rd</sup> meeting, New York, 21 January 2013.
22. UN DPKO and DFS, 'A New Partnership Agenda', p. 22.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 9.
24. See Taylor B Seybolt, *Humanitarian Military Intervention: The Conditions for Success and Failure* (Oxford: Oxford University Press and the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 2007), p. 93.

25. See Eric Schmitt, 'Terror Haven in Mali Feared after French Leave', *New York Times*, 17 March 2013.
26. See Department for International Development, Foreign Office, Ministry of Defence, 'Building Stability Overseas Strategy', July 2011, <<http://www.dfid.gov.uk/Documents/publications1/Building-stability-overseas-strategy.pdf>>, accessed 7 May 2013.

# RUSI Membership

RUSI membership packages provide privileged networking opportunities and benefits tailored to meet the needs of both individuals and large organisations.

## **Individual Memberships**

Individual memberships are suitable for those individuals who wish to join RUSI's growing network of policy-makers and practitioners. Benefits include regular updates from RUSI, including invitations to members' lectures and seminars, subscription to the *RUSI Journal* and *RUSI Defence Systems*. This package also offers members access to our renowned Library of Military History.

## **Corporate membership**

RUSI's Corporate Level Membership packages, offering discounts to all RUSI conferences, are open to all organisations concerned with defence and security matters, and can be tailored to meet the business interests of both public and private sectors.

## **Concessions**

Discounted student and young persons rates are available for those who are in full time education or under the age of 25. Concessions are also available for Military Personnel under the age of 35 and those over the age of 65. We also offer Online Membership to those wishing access to RUSI's content of analysis and commentary.