

**Barefoot soldiers and skiing nations:
Incoherence and coping strategies in the UN mission in Mali**

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1. INTRODUCTION

The policy and academic debates on peace and stability operations have at length advocated the importance of coherence in peacekeeping operations, in which all actors involved would work functionally and logically to achieve a common goal (Campbell, 2008; de Coning & Friis, 2011; Metcalfe, Haysom, & Gordon, 2012; "OCHA Orientation Handbook on Complex Emergencies, United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)," 1999). Several toolboxes were developed for this purpose. In UN circles these tools were embedded within the concept of coordinated effort or the integrated approach, whilst similarly the notion of the comprehensive approach was developed to address the decade-long multinational NATO efforts in Afghanistan. Coherence was understood as the panacea that would make missions turn successful or that, to a minimum, when strongly present, would make success more likely. Allegedly, coherence would strongly be supported by greater coordination among all actors involved. When coordination was absent, the lack of coherence would become the key to explain lack of coordination among a complex set of political, humanitarian and military actors (Baumann, 2008; Friis, 2012; Ruffa & Vennesson, 2014a). In sum, this virtuous circle between coherence and coordination was the only key to achieve success.

While recently the debate seems to have lost traction, the UN is still launching peacekeeping operations that implicitly assume coherence as an important condition for keeping peace. The fact that more than 100,000 blue helmets originating from over 100 different countries were

deployed in 2015 underscores the importance of making sure that the many contributing nations ensure or at least strive for some degrees of coherence. Moreover, the recent call for ‘complex peacekeeping’ often emphasizing the protection of civilians is likely to lead to command structures and compositions that require some form of coordination among the diverse set of actors, which would then lead to coherence. Finally, in the absence of a sizeable NATO mission, several European countries such as The Netherlands, Sweden and Germany have recently committed specialized capacities to UN peacekeeping missions in Africa (Karlsrud & Osland, 2016; Nilsson & Zetterlund, 2016; van Willigen, 2016). Integrating these capacities in a coherent fashion within the UN missions is of great importance. In sum, it seems that understanding coherence is more pressing than ever.

The coherence literature has overwhelmingly studied the structural and organizational barriers that prevent a mission from being successful. For instance, Friis (2012) studied variations across the understanding of civilian governmental, humanitarian and military actors. Yet, the literature has neglected to explore the consequences of incoherence for peacekeepers’ deployed in the field. We argue that incoherence across the structure, composition and mandate of a mission has consequences not only for the broader political objective, as previous literature has shown, but directly for the conduct of peacekeeping and, in an exploratory fashion, we explore which consequences this has for peacekeepers on the ground at the individual level. We conducted an inductive, micro-level study to map some of the underlying reasons and consequences of incoherence. Our empirical investigation consists of two steps. First, we systematically review (in)coherence as it plays out on the ground. As a second step, we trace the reactions to perceived incoherence. In order to do so, we rely on the sociological literature on coping strategies and meaning making, which have studied how soldiers during or after war make sense of the realities around them (Eisenstadt, 1995; Gustavsen, 2016; Lomsky-Feder, 2004; Ruffa & Sundberg, 2017). We inductively identified four distinct, yet intertwined mechanisms: Voltaire’s garden, normalization, building bridges and othering. We explicitly focused on peacekeepers because they are the most important actors involved in peacekeeping missions. They have margins of maneuver for how they interpret their mandate and how they behave (Ruffa, 2014; Ruffa, Dandeker, & Vennesson, 2013). Understanding sociological practices and operational experiences seems crucial for peacekeeping success. It seems crucial to open up the ‘blackbox’ of the peacekeeping mission to explore dimensions of coherence and incoherence at different levels of the organizations.

Our research has an inductive, theory-development approach. Because of the site-intensive nature of this project, we picked a most likely case, based on the inversed Sinatra

inference, "if I cannot make it there, I cannot make it anywhere" (Levy, 2008). We selected the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission (MINUSMA) deployed to Mali from 2013. Within MINUSMA we focused specifically on the UN Headquarters as well as Swedish and Dutch ISR units (Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance). Our data relies on more than 120 semi-structured interviews, two observation sessions on the ground and participation in pre-deployment exercises as well as evaluation sessions, conducted between 2014 – 2016. The data were controlled for across rotations and sample selection was selected randomly across ranks, although European officers are over-represented. In sum, we studied the sociological practices that arise from the way in which soldiers cope with incoherence in the UN mission in Mali

We contribute to existing scholarship in three ways. First, we contribute to the ongoing debate on peacekeeping operations. Quantitative literature has analysed conditions for peacekeeping effectiveness at the aggregate level (Bove & Ruggeri, 2017; Fortna, 2008; Hultman, Kathman, & Shannon, 2013, 2014). Such literature has neglected micro-level dynamics both within peacekeepers and between peacekeepers and peacekept. This begs the question how coherence or the lack thereof influences practices. As a complement to those approaches, we follow Autesserre's call for an empirical shift (Autesserre, 2014) and adopt a micro-level focus. Ultimately, we suspect that incoherence across different levels matters for peacekeeping success. Persistent and key sources of incoherence could for instance undermine some important dynamics at play and we hope to start to be able to shed light on those mechanisms. To a lesser extent, we also contribute to the literature on coherence in international organizations by developing a micro-level focus that takes into account the stakes, interests and cultures of those of implement peacekeeping mandates (Campbell, 2008; Campbell & Kaspersen, 2008; Ruffa, forthcoming).

Our paper proceeds in three steps. First, we discuss theory. Second, we delve into the empirics and discuss the findings. Third, we draw some conclusions on future research and contribution.

2. THEORY

Our paper brings together two strands of literature that while topically related have remained separate. We are interested in reviving the existing debate on incoherence by developing a micro-level study on incoherence and its effects. We think, however, that this could be relevant for the literature on peacekeeping as well because understanding the potential consequences of incoherence on the ground could make peacekeeping more effective. Our

theory departs from the recent call in the literature on peacekeeping for an empirical shift, that focuses on micro-level dynamics for better understanding under what conditions peacekeeping can become more effective. In contrast to a large wealth of literature on peacekeeping, these studies require a micro-level qualitative approach, making use of site-intensive method or interviews to access the relevant information.

We follow this approach to disentangle an important phenomenon with potential important ramifications at the micro-level, incoherence. Following recent work in the coherence literature, we understand coherence as an empirical category. Hence, “coherence should not be understood as an effort aimed equally at all partners towards unity of purpose, nor should all partners be expected to achieve the same level of unity of effort. Instead, coherence should be seen as a scale of relationships” (de Coning & Friis, 2011: 272). Trying to move beyond “politically correct calls for ever more coherence”(de Coning & Friis, 2011: 245), we rely on the etymology of the term coherence, which comes from the Latin word *cohaerentia* and refers to a ‘logical arrangement of parts’. Incoherence is therefore a situation in which there is no logical arrangement of the parts and structures constituting an operation. Yet, for ensuring peacekeeping effectiveness, it is important to make sure that all possible elements of frictions on the intervening side have been addressed.

Little empirical research has been devoted to disentangle how we can study coherence in practice, how it can be operationalised and how it expresses itself in the practice of UN peacekeeping operations (Campbell, 2008; Campbell & Kaspersen, 2008). We build on Campbell’s call for bottom up coherence. Campbell points at “the complexity and unpredictability of war-to-peace transitions and discusses the need for selective ‘bottom- up’ coherence”(Campbell, 2008). In particular, she reflects on how the UN difficulty at achieving coherence is connected to its “two conceptually separate, but operationally interdependent, components”(Campbell, 2008), namely its very character as international organization tasked with the protection of individual and collective interests and its bureaucratic nature.

As a bureaucracy, the UN pursues “socially valued goals such as protecting human rights, providing development assistance, and brokering peace agreements’, which member states may not be able to pursue alone” (Barnett & Finnemore, 2004). Campbell reminds us of Halperin’s understanding of bureaucracies, which have their own incentives to maintain its autonomy, organizational morale, organizational essence, roles and missions, and budgets. As a result, ‘options which involve cooperation between organizations and which would require an organization to alter its structure or perform extraneous missions are unlikely to be advanced.” (Halperin, Sharvit, & Gross, 2011) Instead, ‘decisions are not made after a

rational decision process but rather through a competitive bargaining process over turf, budgets, and staff that may benefit parts of the organization at the expense of overall goals (Barnett & Finnemore, 2004: 37). The bottom up approach can therefore be useful when studying a bureaucratic organization.

This holds true also for the peacekeepers deployed on the ground in field missions. Notwithstanding the lively debate on how to improve a peacekeeping mission and the policy urgency on how to make it better, we still know very little about what peacekeepers do and why. Part of the issue is related to a widely held assumption within the literature on peacekeeping according to which soldiers deployed as peacekeepers are mere executors of missions' mandates. More recent work within the field of security studies suggest that soldiers have margins of maneuver for how they interpret their mandate and how they behave. Therefore, understanding sociological practices and operational experiences is crucial for peacekeeping success (Ruffa, 2017). It seems crucial to open up the 'blackbox' of the peacekeeping mission to explore dimensions of coherence and incoherence at the lower levels of the mission. Also within the coherence literature, studies specifically focusing on the military have been neglected. A growing number of studies focused on incoherence and tensions "between humanitarian and political actors, which has been referred to as the humanitarian dilemma" (Campbell, 2008; Donini, 2011; Metcalfe et al., 2012; Ruffa & Vennesson, 2014b). Yet, very little attention has been paid to incoherence within the military mission itself. While peacekeepers are deployed along national lines, they have important interactions with other contingents at different levels of the chain of command. Because of the complexity of these missions, we assume some levels of coherence and we ask how soldiers at the individual level cope with such incoherence. We focus in particular on Western soldiers deployed in the intelligence component of the UN mission.

In order to study such coping, we rely on the literature on meaning-making, which has a long tradition in social psychology. As Bartone puts it, "military operations always entail stressors of various kinds for the troops involved" (Bartone, 2006:246). We contend that incoherence is one of these 'stressors' and that stress is dealt with by meaning making coping strategies. "Meaning making is a cognitive process that enables service members to connect their experiences to something greater, to comprehend and organize their understanding of both ordinary and dramatic events" (Gustavsen, 2016: 24). While well-established in military sociology for studying veterans in their reintegration processes, it is not used in other fields (Gustavsen, 2016; Lomski-Feder 1995; Bartone, 2005). We focus instead on situational meaning making, in which soldiers try to make sense of the operational situation they are

embedded in. In our empirical study, we inductively identified four types of recurring meaning-making processes. The first is 'Voltaire's garden' in which soldiers try to focus on narrowly defined terms of the mission. We call the second 'normalisation' in which peacekeepers have a notion of the incoherence but normalise it through narratives. The third that we call 'building bridges' entails that coherence is dealt with by activating a number of informal connections with other troops. Finally, 'othering' entails the distancing from a group to the rest of the mission, hence making it less likely to overcome incoherence.

The next section first introduces MINUSMA and the intelligence components of the mission. Subsequently it analyses the (in)coherence that took place and the underlying causes that influenced such (in)coherence.

3. EMPIRICS

Case introduction¹

The establishment of MINUSMA by the UN Security Council in Resolution 2100 on 25 April 2013 was the result of a number of intertwined events. The northern regions of Mali had long complained of a lack of democratic power-sharing, leading to resentment and a loss of state control. The region became increasingly unstable due to illicit trafficking of arms, drugs and people, with heavily armed Tuareg fighters returning from Libya after the fall of the Gaddafi government in 2011. This explosive cocktail led to mutinies in the country and a military coup in March 2012 before some democratic order was restored and a marginalization of the Armed Forces of Mali (FAMA), which constantly lacked ammunition and reinforcements to fight in the North. At the invitation of the government, France deployed forces to push back the rebels, who were based in the North, and by some other groups widely labelled as "terrorists." A peace process was fostered with the rebels. An African Union mission was temporarily deployed in early 2013² before the United Nations took over the peacekeeping duties. In broad terms, it was MINUSMA's task to promote a stabilization of key population centers and guide the political/peace process. It also carries the mandate for 'protection of civilians,' which has become standard in twenty-first century peacekeeping operations.

¹ This section is partly based on Rietjens & Dorn, 2017

² The African-led International Support Mission to Mali (AFISMA) was authorized by the UN Security Council in resolution 2085 of 20 December 2012. It was a military mission of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), led by Nigeria. The first forces arrived on the ground in January 2013.

By 2015, MINUSMA consisted of close to 9,000 military personnel, 1,000 police, 500 international civilians, and 120 UN volunteers, along with many local hires.³ The military troops originated from 41 different countries including European countries (e.g., Denmark, Germany, Sweden, and The Netherlands), African countries (e.g., Egypt, Gambia, and Niger) and others, notably China. In addition to the Force Headquarters (FHQ) in the capital Bamako, MINUSMA had three sector headquarters (SHQs) that commanded approximately 4,000 military personnel each, mostly from the developing world. SHQ-West was headquartered in Timbuktu, whereas SHQ-East operated from Gao. A SHQ-North was created in 2014, based in Kidal and covering a smaller but very turbulent region. African forces contributed the majority of troops on the ground, conducting patrols and seeking to maintain security. By contrast, European countries contributed key enabling forces such as a Special Forces unit labeled the Special Operations Land Task Group (SOLTG), a helicopter detachment consisting of Apache and Chinook helicopters and an intelligence unit that was named ASIFU, the All Sources Information Fusion Unit.

On the civilian side of MINUSMA, many different agencies were active at the country as well as the regional levels. These included the United Nations Department for Safety and Security (UNDSS), Protection of Civilians, Political Affairs, Civil Affairs, the Human Rights Division and the Stabilization & Recovery section. In the information realm, a Joint Mission Analysis Centre (JMAC) was established to produce mission-wide and longer-term analysis for the senior management.⁴ Also a Joint Operations Centre (JOC) kept track of the situation on the ground, focusing on unfolding events and the immediate future.

The next sections focus on the coherence between the organizations that were involved in MINUSMA's information and intelligence gathering. In doing so, we try to open the black box of coherence and unravel in which ways coherence manifests itself and what underlying causes can be identified that influence coherence. In organizing the issues that emerged we used the fit-model that was originally developed for strategic alliances (see e.g. Douma, 1997). The basic assumption underlying this model is that coherence requires a sufficient degree of fit in several key areas, namely (1) strategic and organizational fit, (2) cultural and human fit, (3) resource complementarity and (4) operational fit. We add to these dimensions something

³ "MINUSMA Facts and Figures," United Nations, [Susanna P. Campbell, "\(Dis\)integration, Incoherence and Complexity in UN Post-Conflict Interventions," *International Peacekeeping* 15, no. 4 \(August 1, 2008\): 556–69, doi:10.1080/13533310802239881.](#) (accessed April 15, 2015). The site gives currently authorized figures (August 2016) figures of 13,300 military personnel and 1,920 police.

⁴ For an elaboration on JMAC, see Ramjoué, M. (2011). "Improving UN Intelligence through Civil–Military Collaboration: Lessons from the Joint Mission Analysis Centres." In: *International Peacekeeping*, Vol. 18, No. 4, p. 468–484.

we call sociological processes of meaning making. These areas are addressed in the next sections.

Incoherence in MINUSMA ⁵

Strategic and organizational fit

From the start the UN had formulated an integrated strategy for MINUSMA. This strategy included components of security and stabilization, the re-establishment of state authority, cultural preservation as well as humanitarian assistance. To implement it, MINUSMA had a formal hierarchical structure with most power centralized in the higher levels (see figure 1). Looking at this structure, one observes several issues that influenced the level of coherence between the different actors. As figure 1 shows both the civilian and military units operated in different stovepipes. While MINUSMA's force commander focused at the security aspects of the mission and directed all the military assets, the civilian actors within MINUSMA emphasized the political and reconstruction processes. These civilian actors were being directed by the two deputy SRSGs, the chief of staff (in case of JMAC, JOC and UNDSS) or the police commissioner (in case of UNPOL).

Each of these different stovepipes had formulated its own objectives and strategies. In many cases it was however not at all clear how these related to each other. And as a result of these separate lines of authority, the actors involved emphasized the intelligence that their own leadership favored. Initially, the intelligence efforts were however hardly coordinated, which led to great duplication of effort as well as irritation. As one of the JMAC officers remarked:

Little information came from the Special Forces and the ISR Company. Their reports went to the U2 [intelligence staff of the force commander] and ASIFU, but not to the wider mission. If we asked for it, we would be helped, but then you would have to know about it.

To improve this situation and better coordinate all intelligence related activities MINUSMA installed a Joint Coordination Board in 2015. The chief of JMAC chaired this board, which included representatives of JMAC, ASIFU, U2, UNDSS, U3, UNPOL, JOC and the office of the SRSG. The weekly meetings of the JCB facilitated communication and increased

⁵ We are using a referencing system to refer to all our coded material but we do not have it ready yet, Apologies for inconvenience.

information sharing between the actors involved. However, as the JCB was a coordinating body only, it had no directive powers, which clearly limited its effectiveness.

Zooming in on MINUSMA's force structure (see figure 2) one discerns several units that were closely involved in obtaining intelligence. First, MINUSMA's force contained the typical military intelligence units (designated by the number 2, according to standard military staff convention) within its battalions (S2), Sector headquarters cells (G2) and Force Headquarters cell (U2). These units were tasked to provide MINUSMA's commanders with current intelligence, especially relating to security.

In response to the many intelligence deficiencies that confronted the UN in earlier missions (see e.g. Dorn, 2010), Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Hervé Ladsous requested that MINUSMA be enhanced by an additional military intelligence unit that was coined the All Sources Information Fusion Unit (ASIFU). It was ASIFU's task to "contribute especially to traditionally non-military intelligence analysis, such as illegal trafficking and narcotics-trade; ethnic dynamics and tribal tensions; corruption and bad governance within Mali and MINUSMA area of interest".⁶ This wide range of topics was often referred to as X-PMESII, indicating that information was to be gathered and analyzed on Political, Military, Economic, Social, Infrastructure and Information domains (following NATO conventions). The X (cross) implied that these domains were interconnected and could not be seen separately. Doing this, ASIFU's role is

to improve the processing and production of MINUSMA broad information and intelligence in order to have accessible and useable information on time. This will support the decision-making processes on the operational (force headquarters) and tactical (sector headquarters) level. But ASIFU should also be able to support the strategic level: the special representative of the secretary-general through the JMAC and UNDSS.⁷

To carry out its tasks ASIFU consisted of headquarters in Bamako as well as two subunits: (1) a multinational Intelligence Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) company of

⁶ PowerPoint presentation by representative of UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations, Carlisle Barracks, United States, 28 January 2015.

⁷ First Commander ASIFU, Col. Keijsers, cited in Karlsrud, J. and A.C. Smith (2015). *Europe's Return to UN Peacekeeping in Africa? Lessons from Mali*. Providing for Peacekeeping, No. 11. New York: International Peace Institute, p. 11.

approximately 65 people under Dutch command in sector East (Gao) and (2) a Swedish ISR Taskforce of approximately 200 people in sector West (Timboektoe).

During the build-up of the mission it was decided to position ASIFU as a separate organizational unit under direct hierarchical control of the Force Commander, rather than integrating ASIFU within the main force's intelligence structure. The reason for this was to strictly separate the western intelligence capabilities from the other UN contributors' capabilities. Doing this should strengthen (information) security and counterintelligence. For the Netherlands, one of the main suppliers of ASIFU capabilities, separating ASIFU from the main intelligence structure was also deemed to facilitate a smooth transfer to other nations once The Netherlands would withdraw from the mission.

This organizational differentiation approach did however not work out in practice and led to great incoherence between the military intelligence organizations. During large periods MINUSMA's Force Commander and his sector chiefs lacked adequate current intelligence on crucial safety and security issues such as the threat along MINUSMA's main supply routes and the whereabouts of armed groups. This was largely to the ineffectiveness of the regular intelligence branches. This pushed ASIFU to fill this gap, although its original task was to provide comprehensive intelligence at the mid- and long-term. When ASIFU largely maintained its original focus, its intelligence products became rather detached from the Force Commander's main interest.

Apart from ASIFU and the regular intelligence branches, two other military units were tasked to obtaining intelligence. These were the SOLTG and the helicopter detachment. Since both units were under direct command of MINUSMA's Force Commander, ASIFU did not have the authority to send out data collection tasks to these units. The information flow from the SOLTG and the helicopter detachment to ASIFU was thus not self-evident and heavily relied on informal agreements and relationships. With the Force Commander's increasing focus on current intelligence this situation proved to be detrimental to the intelligence structure's effectiveness as decisions on whether and when to share information with ASIFU were made on a case-to-case basis.

Cultural and human fit

With 41 countries participating in MINUSMA, it comes as no surprise that personal and cultural differences greatly affected the level of coherence. These differences were rooted in

the languages, beliefs, and values, personalities, levels of training and education as well as in the mental models among of the people involved.

The most prominent issue in this regard was the frustration that many European respondents expressed towards the African troops. They indicated that most soldiers in African units were illiterate and not used to writing reports (e.g., after a patrol). Also, their view on intelligence turned out to be different as one of the European respondents argued:

It seems that in the West African military culture the role of intelligence is very different from ours. The role of intelligence is to find out little things for the commander when asked, often focusing on events that have already occurred, but not to present information proactively because that would imply that the commander did not have the right information or that he should act which, both of which are not desirable for these commanders.

The critique of the European soldiers on their African counterparts seemed however a luxury they could not afford. First, while European forces mostly deployed in strategic and supportive roles, African soldiers were based permanently in the dangerous areas of the mission such as Kidal (DIIS, 2017). Secondly, although a few European representatives spoke fluent French or Arabic and had extensive cultural knowledge through e.g. working experience in African countries, in many cases, European soldiers lacked awareness of the complexity of the conflict, the history of Mali and the ethnic sensitivities. This negatively influenced their effectiveness, as they were not fully able to unravel the dynamics of the environment and address the information requirements they were tasked with. Improved coherence with the African troops was therefore deemed inevitable since they mastered many of the local languages and had in-depth socio-cultural intelligence.

One of the initiatives to pursue this was sending liaison officers to the African battalions and the sector headquarters. The information that these officers brought back was received with mixed feelings. One of the Dutch liaison officers reflected on this as follows:

I think we judged very quickly about NIGERBAT (i.e. the battalion from Niger). There is an enormous cultural difference in the way they practice intelligence, and it is not possible to say if our way is better than theirs. [...] I have never witnessed a planning process, the commander just decided, this could take as little as fifteen minutes. We gave them village assessment formats, and the assessments they brought

back weren't bad at all. [...] The difference with these African battalions is that they really have to be tasked, if you do not specifically ask them to produce a village assessment they will simply go there, drive around a bit and come back.

Cultural differences did not only affect the interactions between units of different nations, but also the interaction between units of a single troop contributing nation. Coherence between the Dutch special forces and the Dutch ISR company was a case in point. Several respondents of the ISR company accused the special forces of feeling superior to them and having the wrong mindset, one focused on chasing terrorists instead of collecting intelligence.

To address part of these challenges and to improve coherence between the military units, The Netherlands Armed Forces organized an international intelligence preparation before deployment. Participants from several different European nationalities gathered in The Netherlands and during one week received briefings on Mali and carried out several joint exercises. Doing this improved the mutual understanding and respect between the people involved.

Apart from the differences within the force, personalities and cultural backgrounds also influenced the coherence between MINUSMA's military and its civilian organizations. During the observations at MINUSMA's headquarter in Bamako as well as during many of the interviews great differences between military and civilian personnel emerged. These differences were very much in line with the literature on civil-military interaction (see e.g. Rubinstein et al, 2008; Lucius & Rietjens, 2016) indicating that most military units applied a short time horizon and reduced the peace process towards a technical fix instead of a process of reshuffling state-society relations and power. In doing this, many of the military units tended to leave Malian actors out of the equation. On the other hand, many civilian organizations such as JMAC and UNDSS emphasized long-term planning, Malian participation and stressed the difficulties of reconstructing a war-torn country such as Mali. This led to low levels of incoherence between the organizations involved.

Resource complementarity

Within MINUSMA's intelligence realm many different organizations brought relevant resources to the table. Most of the western European countries contributed high-tech and innovative resources to MINUSMA. These resources were mostly embedded within the ASIFU units, the SOLTG and the helicopter detachment and included advanced information systems, unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) and apache helicopters.

To the contrary, the African and Asian troop contributing countries mainly deployed low-tech capabilities. Most of these units did not use (advanced) information systems and lacked sophisticated technological systems to support their operations. Most respondents believed that the integration of both types of resources (i.e. high-tech and low-tech) was essential for effective command and control and sharing of information between the organizations involved. Such integration however turned out to be very challenging.

With regard to the information systems in place, most respondents considered MINUSMA's general information system to be "UN-classified," meaning that the system was unsafe and had no classification at all. One of ASIFU's respondents voiced this concern as follows:

The UN system is very unsafe, but as we are obliged to share our information, we do so. Except in cases in which the information is very sensitive; we do not share it as it can have negative consequences. In those cases we keep the information within our own unit, but that only happens seldom.

The limited security within the UN system also directly impacted the helicopter detachment as well as ASIFU's unmanned aerial vehicles. Both units were not allowed to share the metadata (e.g., time, location) of their images because this could reveal operational details. As long as the images were internally shared with other Dutch units, this was not considered to be a problem. However, as some of the information was directly sent to other MINUSMA units, there was a risk that the information became public due to the low security standards of these other units. In response, the information of the UAVs and the helicopters was first analyzed, and the intelligence reports (INTREPs) that came out of these analyses were then shared with external units.

Although the lack of interoperability between the organizations' resources was most prominent between European and African countries, also European countries faced mutual challenges integrating their own resources. From 2015 an Estonian human intelligence got embedded within the Dutch ISR company in Gao. According to regulations, the Estonians were not allowed to operate the FM9000 radios that the Dutch used in their vehicles. However, since the Estonians did not bring their own vehicles, they depended on Dutch transport and as a result at least one Dutch soldier was required to join the Estonian patrols. The Dutch respondents considered this as extremely distrustful towards their Estonian colleagues, but they were forced to because of the regulations.

These observations echo Dorn's (2016) observations on *smart peacekeeping*. In his study he distinguishes between technology-contributing countries versus traditional troop-contributing countries. Increased coherence between both types should stimulate the proliferation of new technology within the UN and thereby create new options to support peace and stability.

Operational fit

The extent to which the operational activities of the intelligence organizations matched was first of all influenced by the different operational procedures that were in place. Many of the European countries used procedures that were largely based on the NATO operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. Their intelligence procedures were often strict and prescribed in handbooks and doctrines. African units to the contrary were largely unfamiliar with western-style intelligence gathering. Rather than processing the incoming information within intelligence branches, many African troop contributing countries considered intelligence to be a matter for commanding officers only. A western respondent of the force commander's intelligence staff formulated this as follows:

As soon as a patrol discovers something, they immediately tell their chief. This chief reports it to his commander – even if he is the battalion commander. This commander immediately calls the commander of the sector headquarters. And if you are unlucky the Sector commander reports it to the Force Commander. And when the Force Commander sits in the daily morning briefing and listens to the U2 he might say: “no way, because I heard this and that.”

In particular ASIFU put much effort into training the UN battalions. These initiatives had mixed results as one of the ASIFU members recalls:

We have provided many units with [intelligence] training. Together with the French G2 of SHQ East in Gao we went to Nigerbat [the battalion from Niger], and provided the entire intelligence section as well as the platoon commanders with a basic intelligence training. Doing this we hoped that Nigerbat started to report since they didn't do that at all. Unfortunately, this training did not help either. We also provided training

to the Bangladesh Riverine Unit. They do report and asked us for [intelligence] formats when they navigate the rivers. We gave these to them and this improved the quality of the incoming information.

In aligning operational procedures within MINUSMA, the UN bureaucracy turned out to be challenging. A clear example in this respect were the Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) that both the Swedish and Dutch-led ISR units had at their disposal. As the UN had very limited experience deploying UAVs within peacekeeping operations (See Dorn, 2016), the incorporation of UAVs in the MINUSMA mission suffered from the bureaucratic regulations that the UN enforced. According to these regulations the Dutch and Swedish Ministries of Defense got reimbursed for deploying the UAVs only after they had been thoroughly checked and approved by the UN. However, in the course of 2014 when the Dutch had just deployed their Scaneagle UAV, the UN checked them as if they were standard flying platforms. Questions that were asked included: does the pilot of the UAV fulfill his training requirements? Or, does the rear wheel of the UAV function properly? Although the Scaneagle UAVs did not have a pilot or a rear wheel, it took the Dutch contingent almost half a year to get the UAVs accredited. When the Scaneagle eventually became operational the system was able to collect many hours of imagery information that supported many of the units.

A second issue that influenced the operational fit were the competing interests between the intelligence actors involved. Within the intelligence domain of MINUSMA's force competing interests were clearly visible between ASIFU and the force commander's intelligence staff (i.e. U2). While the intelligence staff consisted of 15 soldiers of whom only one had experience with intelligence, ASIFU soon expanded to a total of 70 persons. Most of these were trained intelligence personnel. However, according to MINUSMA's organizational force structure (see figure 2) the intelligence staff was supposed to functionally direct the work of the ASIFU. This resulted in much friction between the intelligence staff and ASIFU as both units believed to be in charge of MINUSMA's intelligence activities. For ASIFU this was because of its qualitative and quantitative advantage, while the intelligence staff believed to be in charge because of its position in the hierarchy.

At the level of the overall MINUSMA organization, there was rivalry between ASIFU and JMAC and to a lesser extent also with UNDSS. Since 2005, the UN had included JMACs in several missions to inform UN leadership about the situation and the progress that was being

made (Shetler-Jones, 2008). Until ASIFU entered the stage in 2014, JMAC was the primary actor with such responsibilities. From then on both organizations competed for the favors of MINUSMA's leadership. The close ties between the first Dutch ASIFU commander and the then Dutch Special Representative of the Secretary General (SRSG) Bert Koenders further fuelled JMAC's wariness of ASIFU. As a result of this rivalry, much stovepiping remained, undermining the relationship between the two actors. JMAC representatives illustrated this as follows:

Instead of sharing intelligence, most people keep information to themselves, due to the competition to bring the most accurate information to the senior management of the mission.

And

Influential people or key leaders use the different UN intelligence organizations, sometimes ASIFU, then JMAC, then U2, pitting them against each other.

Finally, also the national political interests trickled down to the field level in MINUSMA. Both the Netherlands and Sweden were running for a temporary seat in the United Nations Security Council. Partly to strengthen their candidacy they deployed troops to MINUSMA. Both countries deemed it necessary to impress the UN leadership with their contribution.

4. INCOHERENCE AND COPING STRATEGIES

When facing incoherence at the tactical and operational levels, we inductively identified four coping strategies, which are analytical distinct but empirically intertwined. The first strategy we identified we called 'Voltaire's garden'.

In this strategy the peacekeepers focused on the narrow tasks and mission of their own contingent and focused on how they were ordered and structured. They hardly paid attention to the different aspects of incoherence that might have become apparent. To illustrate, an officer told us:

Do you want to know what is going on in Sector West? And I say we have no clue; we have no idea, but I know that that rebel leader has blue pants today.

The mandate could be broader but this is not what we are here for. We miss out a lot of the picture.

And this is connected with an overall positive understanding of the intelligence mission as another officer put it:

We have a good intelligence community, good ISR.

Even those officers that relate to other aspects of the mission are careful to not go beyond what they strictly have to do:

Mission statement was to deliver intelligence to UN commanders in general but more specifically to ASIFU. ISR is not a blunt instrument. Do you want to know what is going on in that area? We work with high accuracy and high reliability. A lot of sources to confirm each other we have layers of sensor upon each other. We are Listening into electronic signals, You try to direct all these sensors into a specific target.

We found this coping strategy at the tactical as well as the operational level. In particular at the latter we would have expected to find more significant attempts to connect the intelligence domain with other aspects of the mission.

A second coping strategy that surfaced we labeled “normalization”. By employing this strategy peacekeepers notified incoherence but normalised it through narratives and reflected on how there are different interpretations of the same mandate. For instance, an officer told us that

How the mandate is interpreted and executed depends very much. You should see for instance the difference between DPKO and the HQ in Bamako: NYC had a harsh interpretation that you could be harder than in Bamako.

Another officer involved in ISR tried to define its mission in a very broad way as if it was like any other kind of mission:

The only thing we do not do is CIMIC.

Similarly, this officer made a clear distinction between contingents conducting intelligence activities and those that did not:

We are all dependent on each other. All contributing countries have different specialties. Every contingent conducts intelligence gathering. Less educated personnel in intelligence matters would rather conduct peacekeeping operations to show of force. Possibly or even probably that would result in a patrol report within intelligence.

The third coping strategy that we call "building bridges" entails that coherence was dealt with by activating a number of - mostly informal - connections with other contingents. For instance, an officer told us that

But there was another thing that made things even more complicated. We were an operational unit with a commander in Bamako but we were conducting intelligence operations where the commander was from Burkina Faso and had absolutely no authority over us. So we were in the area but the commander did not have authority over us! But there is room for argument and discussion between me and the sector commander if we have a good relationship. If we are briefing each other. That was another reason for building a good relations (...). So we invited them to look at some of our equipment, we had a little display, we engaged with other UN units socially we are still in the same UN team.

Other officers developed even more comprehensive explanations:

We are all dependent on each other. All contributing countries have different specialties. Every contingent conducts intelligence gathering. Less educated personnel in intelligence matters would rather conduct peacekeeping operations to show of force. Possibly or even probably that would result in a patrol report within intelligence.

The perception of difference is perceived very strongly by some peacekeepers:

Here different contingents were very different for several reasons. In other contexts we share the same culture jominian same doctrines. We do things the same way. We have a common denominator in terms of language. But here we did not share a culture. We did not share a language nor doctrines we had a military wealth in their eyes. We had very little commonalities. You also have to add the postcolonial perspectives we were white they are not. We realized that the only way we could create all those commonalities we had in those theaters was to create relations. The only thing was to create relations and a bit of an acceptance for us being there. Particularly as an intelligence unit we would like to stick to ourselves but in this case we really could not.

A fourth and final coping strategy we identified has to do with meaning-making by reinforcing differences. We labeled this strategy “othering” and it entailed the distancing a group from the rest of the mission, hence making it less likely to overcome incoherence. For instance, an officer told us that

Intelligence is a trust sport, which you only play with those you trust.

Within this mechanism, we found reflections on what was introduced to us as a distinction between skiing nations from Western European countries and African countries:

The skiing nations was the only personnel that was allowed to access that information. The rest of these guys were Africans and it was like divided information and divided race, that is how we managed it.

Similarly, an officer told us that

Skiing and non skiing nations have different kinds of risk management.

Similarly another officer told us that

We have to educate them to write reports, educate them in how the flow of information should be. This is a big challenge for MINUSMA.

In some cases, we also found that this reinforcing the differences could also take a negative twist as one of the respondents remarked

They only care about their own assessment. What happens if you do not care about what actually happens. They do not care about the operation. If you have all these units you are only making your assessment. You are chasing your own tale!

5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Our article suggests that incoherence has consequences for the practices of peacekeeping. In our empirical material, officers seemed to perceive incoherence and reacted to it through different mechanisms, ranging from reinforcing differences to building bridges. Even though further research is needed, individual-level coping strategies are important as they are likely to affect military behaviour in operation, restraint, trust, coordination. More specialised kinds of interventions address some of the previous concerns but raise other concerns (trust, lack of communication) that can severely undermine the effectiveness of the mission. While it is commendable to note the reinforcement of European contributors to UN peacekeeping, whether this is not recreating preexisting distinctions and hierarchies remain to be seen.

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Figure 1: Organisational structure of MINUSMA (Abilova & Novosseloff, 2016)

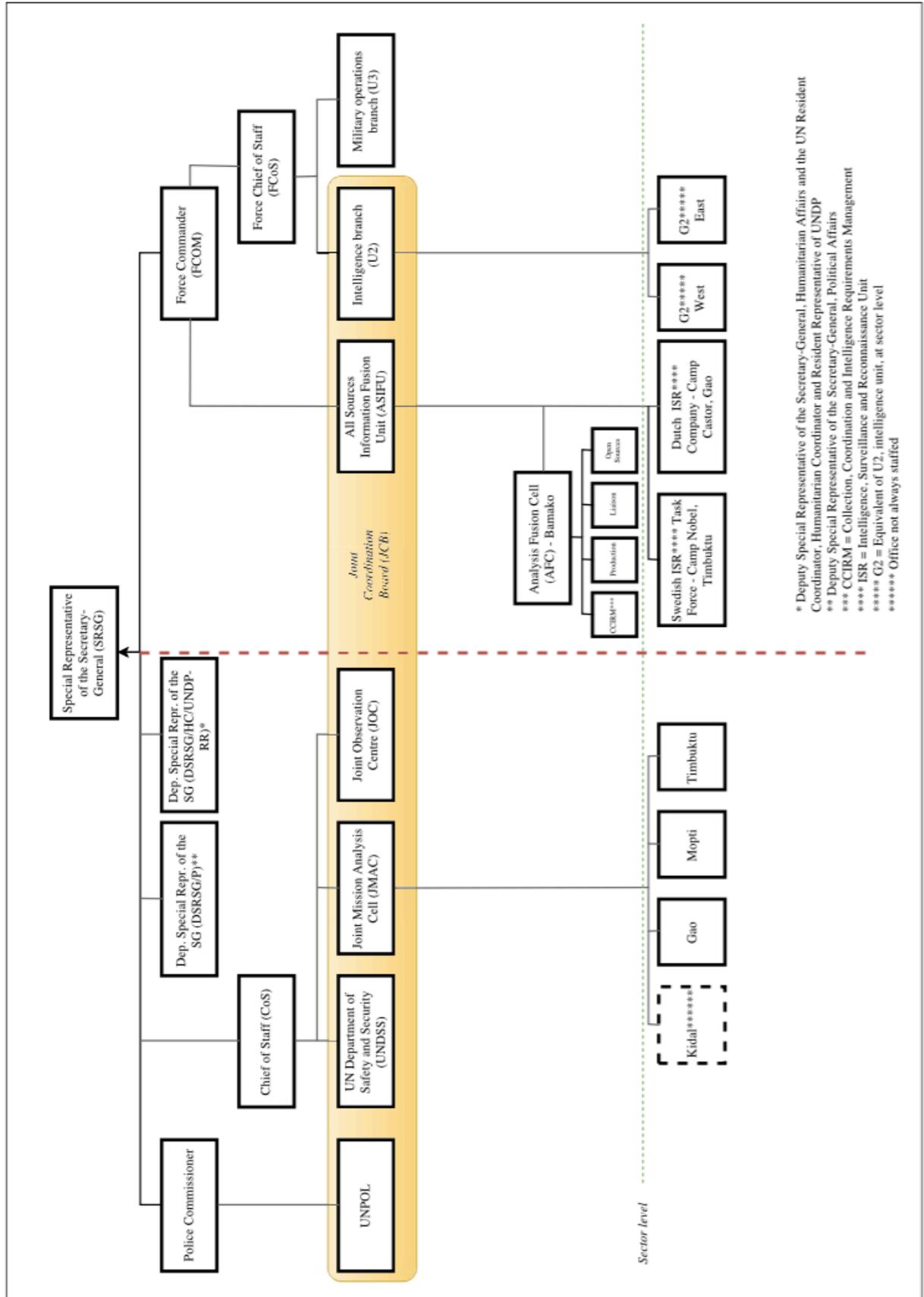


Figure 2: Organizational structure MINUSMA Force

