EARLY WARNING AND RAPID RESPONSE:

Reinforcing MINUSMA’s Ability to Protect Civilians
October 28, 2016, Gao region, Mali:
MINUSMA peacekeepers during an operation along the border with Niger.

Credit: UN/Harandane Dicko

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ORGANIZATIONAL MISSION AND VISION

Center for Civilians in Conflict (CIVIC) is an international organization dedicated to promoting the protection of civilians in conflict. CIVIC envisions a world in which no civilian is harmed in conflict. Our mission is to support communities affected by conflict in their quest for protection and strengthen the resolve and capacity of armed actors to prevent and respond to civilian harm.

CIVIC was established in 2003 by Marla Ruzicka, a young humanitarian who advocated on behalf of civilians affected by the war in Iraq and Afghanistan. Honoring Marla’s legacy, CIVIC has kept an unflinching focus on the protection of civilians in conflict. Today, CIVIC has a presence in conflict zones and key capitals throughout the world where it collaborates with civilians to bring their protection concerns directly to those in power, engages with armed actors to reduce the harm they cause to civilian populations, and advises governments and multinational bodies on how to make life-saving and lasting policy changes.

CIVIC’s strength is its proven approach and record of improving protection outcomes for civilians by working directly with conflict-affected communities and armed actors. At CIVIC, we believe civilians are not “collateral damage” and civilian harm is not an unavoidable consequence of conflict — civilian harm can and must be prevented.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Seán Smith, CIVIC’s Mali-based Peacekeeping Researcher, authored this policy brief. The research was conducted by Smith, with support from research consultant Samba Cisse in Mopti region. It was reviewed by: Alison Giffen, Peacekeeping Director; Lauren Spink, Senior Peacekeeping Researcher; Shannon Green, Senior Director of Programs; Marc Linning, Senior Protection Advisor; Viola Giuliano, Peacekeeping Researcher in the Central African Republic; Daniel Levine-Spound, Peacekeeping Researcher in the Democratic Republic of Congo. In addition, several MINUSMA officials and subject matter experts, including some from UN headquarters, provided valuable feedback on a draft of the report. Elena Abbott copyedited the brief, Audrey Tchakirian designed it, and CIVIC’s UN and Peacekeeping Advisor Josh Jorgensen produced the map on page 25.

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ACRONYMS

AAR: After Action Review
CPAS: Comprehensive Planning and Performance Assessment System
DDR: Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration
DSS: Department of Safety and Security
EW/RR: Early Warning and Rapid Response
FAMa: Forces Armées Maliennes (Malian Armed Forces)
IED: Improvised Explosive Device
JMAC: Joint Mission Analysis Center
JOC: Joint Operations Center
MINUSMA: United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali
MSO: Military Staff Officer
POC: Protection of Civilians
QRF: Quick Reaction Force
RJOC: Regional Joint Operations Center
SLT: Senior Leadership Team
SOP: Standard Operating Procedures
STIM: Spatio-Temporal Incident Mapping
TCC: Troop Contributing Country
TOB: Temporary Operating Base
UN: United Nations
UNPOL: United Nations Police
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February 15, 2018, Gao region, Mali: MINUSMA peacekeepers during a patrol in the village of Bara.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

More civilians were killed in conflict-related violence in Mali in 2020 than in any previous year. The Malian government is primarily responsible for protecting civilians in Mali, yet, the ever-rising number of casualties highlights that the national authorities—who face myriad challenges—are largely incapable of doing so.\(^1\) In addition, the Malian armed forces (FAMa) have repeatedly been implicated in perpetrating extrajudicial killings and other human rights violations against civilians during their counter-terrorism and other operations.\(^2\)

In each of the past four years, the number of civilians killed has exceeded the previous year’s death toll.\(^3\) This alarming trend is largely the result of the relentless growth and spread of intercommunal violence across central Mali. The need for MINUSMA, the UN peacekeeping mission in Mali, to be able to accurately and preemptively identify threats to civilians and quickly intervene has never been greater.

In 2019, MINUSMA began developing formal procedures for how its early warning and rapid response system should function. The standard operating procedures (SOPs) of the UN peacekeeping mission in the Central African Republic initially served as a template. Following many months of internal consultations, MINUSMA’s Early Warning and Rapid Response SOP (hereafter referred to as “the SOP”) was signed into effect on June 15, 2020.\(^6\) The document provides Mission personnel their very first formal guidance on processing and responding to early warning information. The SOP is designed to improve peacekeepers’ ability to obtain, process, and respond to early warnings in several significant ways, as well as to track the Mission’s response rate.

This policy brief explores two core questions: why did MINUSMA develop formal early warning and rapid response procedures, and how are these new procedures intended to improve the effectiveness of MINUSMA’s early warning and rapid response system? Analyzing some of the emerging practices within
MINUSMA could inform thinking about early warning and rapid response systems in other peacekeeping missions. Furthermore, this policy brief offers several recommendations based on CIVIC’s research for how MINUSMA can ensure that the formalized system and the various new tools have the best chance of succeeding.

The brief begins with overarching recommendations to key stakeholders and the research methodology. Then, in Section IV, it provides a case study of MINUSMA’s response to an early warning in Dounapen, eastern Mopti region, at the start of 2020. This case highlights how quick intervention by UN peacekeepers can decisively protect civilians and serve as a basis for more sustained conflict resolution.

Section V provides an overview of some of the tools and processes outlined in the SOP, discusses the rationale for the new procedures, and highlights a few of the key stakeholders in MINUSMA’s early warning and rapid response system.

Section VI discusses the establishment of a toll-free emergency hotline, which is designed to reinforce the information-gathering segment of the early warning and rapid response cycle. However, in regions where MINUSMA receives large volumes of calls about potential threats, such as Mopti, these toll-free numbers require dedicated and trained staff members to ensure the best chance of success.

Section VII analyzes how the Mission seeks to enhance its ability to successfully coordinate its responses to early warnings through various elements in the SOP, including by strengthening coordination in its regional offices. The first subsection focuses on the SOP’s attempt to ensure that all parts of MINUSMA are using common terminology to distinguish between confirmed and unconfirmed threats to civilians. The second subsection details how the Mission intends to standardize and formalize the early warning and rapid response process and use an early warning tracking form (hereafter referred to as “the tracking form”) to improve coordination. The final piece of this section looks in more depth at the important coordination role that the integrated Regional Joint Operational Centers (RJOCs) play in MINUSMA’s early warning and rapid response system, drawing attention to some of the particular challenges these centers encounter.

Section VIII discusses how the tracking form established by the SOP is designed to incentivize MINUSMA’s civilian sections to contribute more to the response and to move beyond perceptions that the protection of civilians primarily involves military action. This section also identifies challenges that MINUSMA faces when seeking to use its good offices with armed groups to prevent attacks in central Mali.

Section IX posits that the tracking form should provide greater accountability with regard to actions taken or not taken by MINUSMA, and that it will help the Mission fulfill its mandated requirement to systematically track its response rate to early warnings. The section argues that the Mission should adopt a two-stage approach when calculating and analyzing the response rate to help ensure that instances where civilians derive no meaningful protection are not categorized as successes. The recording of accurate, objective, and measurable data, potentially in conjunction with the Comprehensive Planning and Performance Assessment System (CPAS), should better enable peacekeepers to learn from their mistakes and highlight the most significant obstacles preventing a rapid response to civilians in need.
RECOMMENDATIONS

To MINUSMA:

MINUSMA’s leadership should:

- Sustain support to ensure the implementation and evolution of the early warning and rapid response procedures and tools.
- Continue to improve tools, processes, and systems for gathering information, generating early warnings, and coordinating responses.
- Continue to develop and assess methods for enhancing the responsiveness of the military component of the Mission (hereafter referred to as “the Force”), such as the use of temporary operating bases and mobile task forces.
- Sustain the focus on incentivizing civilian sections to contribute to the Mission’s rapid responses.
- Dismantle information stovepipes by ensuring sections do not withhold information from their colleagues without reason, as well as by insisting that information and analysis be integrated before being channeled upwards.

Promote understanding of the SOP:

- Ensure that all incoming Military Staff Officers (MSOs), UN Police (UNPOL) officers, and civilian staff assigned to or overseeing information-gathering, operational, and liaison posts in MINUSMA’s regional offices and Mission headquarters receive training on the Early Warning and Rapid Response SOP and the importance of sharing threat information with the RJOCs.
- Translate the Early Warning and Rapid Response SOP into French for the benefit of Malians and other Francophone personnel working within the Mission;
- Sustain efforts to explain the difference between an alert and an early warning to all existing and incoming peacekeepers.

Analyze Mission performance:

- Implement a two-tiered approach when calculating the Mission’s rate of response to early warnings. The first tier should focus on whether and how the Mission responded, while the second tier should focus on assessing the impact and effectiveness of the responses provided. At this second level of analysis, only meaningful interventions that decisively protected civilians from harm should be categorized as “positive responses.”
- Explore whether the relevant data recorded in the early warning tracking form could systematically feed into CPAS.
- Evaluate the extent to which UNPOL’s ability to gather reliable alerts is attributable to its relationship with Malian law enforcement counterparts versus its regular patrols and community engagement efforts. Such an evaluation could also assess whether UNPOL’s activities represent a good practice that could be replicated elsewhere.

Individual performance assessments:

- Ensure that performance evaluations of MSOs and UNPOL officers working within RJOCs require input from the RJOC chiefs so that uniformed staff who contribute to essential integrated responses receive fair and accurate assessments and are incentivized to focus on early warning and rapid response tasks.
- Similarly, ensure that the chiefs of the Joint Operations Center (JOC) and the Joint Mission Analysis Center (JMAC) are required to feed into the performance evaluations of the JOC and JMAC police and military staff—a step that could reinforce integration within the JMACs and JOCs.
**Essential skills:**

- Ensure that military and police personnel assigned to the RJOCs have the necessary skills to succeed in these important coordination roles.
  
- Test the language skills of MSOs upon their arrival in Mali and consider repatriating those who are unable to operate in English at a level necessary to implement their responsibilities.

- Inform the UN Secretariat if individual MSOs or UNPOL officers do not have the appropriate language or other skills to implement their responsibilities. This information should inform the Secretariat’s decision to renew or redeploy the officer in question, as well as policies and practices related to subsequent recruitment, training, and deployment of uniformed personnel.

**To UN Member States (excluding the Government of Mali, which is addressed separately):**

- Support MINUSMA’s budget request for the 2021/2022 cycle to hire dedicated staff to operate early warning hotlines in regions like Mopti, where the Mission is frequently alerted to imminent threats to civilians.

- For Member States that contribute troops and police officers to MINUSMA, ensure that military and police personnel selected for analysis, information-gathering, and coordination roles have the necessary language skills to succeed.

- Contribute military helicopters and intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance aircraft to MINUSMA, as outlined in the Mission Adaptation Plan, to help close the gap between the technological needs and the existing capabilities of early warning and rapid response.

**To the UN Secretariat:**

- Work with MINUSMA to monitor the effectiveness of the various elements of the Mission’s early warning and rapid response system, and support their modification as needed.

- The Office of Military Affairs and the Police Division should issue specific terms of requirements when recruiting MSOs and UNPOL officers to staff JOCs and RJOCs in order to ensure that these individuals have the necessary skills to succeed in these important coordination roles.

- The Office of Military Affairs should also work with Member States to recruit suitably qualified Francophone officers for posts within the Force’s peacekeeping-intelligence branches (referred to as G2 units) at the sector level.

**To the Malian government:**

- Regularly engage civil society groups and community leaders to understand civilians’ security concerns, and ensure that military and political strategies address civilians’ needs.

- Inform MINUSMA and affected communities in advance of significant relocations of FAMa troops to avoid leaving civilians unprotected in highly sensitive zones.

- Regularly coordinate with MINUSMA to enable the Mission to effectively support a Malian-led strategy to protect civilians.

- Determine a coherent strategy for addressing the threats posed to civilians by “self-defense” militias, explain the strategy to MINUSMA’s leaders, and ensure it is consistently implemented.
This report is based on research conducted by CIVIC between May 2019 and February 2021. During this period, CIVIC carried out 156 interviews with 140 individual stakeholders in relation to MINUSMA’s early warning and rapid response system. These included interviews with 43 civilian officials, 23 military officials, and 6 police officials working at MINUSMA in Bamako, Mopti, Gao, Timbuktu, and Kidal. Several footnotes specify the location where interviewees are based when this is not already evident from the location of the interview. However, in some instances, CIVIC has opted to not disclose this information to protect the anonymity of the interviewee.

CIVIC’s research also included interviews with 9 humanitarian actors, 16 Malian civil society leaders, 3 Malian officials, and 40 civilians in Bamako and the regions of Koulikoro and Mopti. Citations are provided for all interviews that were directly consulted during the drafting of this paper. A draft was shared with key stakeholders for review before publication.

Source: Reliefweb®
Early warning mechanisms are vital to a peacekeeping mission’s ability to prevent violence against civilians before it occurs. Quantitative studies of public opinion in Mali show that the most common criticism of MINUSMA is that it does not protect civilians from armed actors. CIVIC’s own qualitative research with civilians and civil society leaders in Mopti region has yielded similar conclusions. MINUSMA officials are also acutely aware of the problem. As one military official commented to CIVIC, “People say to us, ‘you [MINUSMA] don’t do anything’...in Bankass, we were told ‘people are killing us—we call you, but you don’t come.’” Given the prevalence of security threats in Mali at present, MINUSMA will almost certainly never have enough resources to be able to respond to every early warning. Nevertheless, by enhancing situational awareness, effective early warning mechanisms can help decision-makers understand where civilians are most at risk and allocate resources accordingly. They can also prompt peacekeepers to intervene in order to interrupt instances of ongoing violence against civilians.

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The UN has not developed specific definitions for the concepts encompassed by “early warning and rapid response” (EW/RR), although the UN peacekeeping missions in Mali and Central African Republic do have their own working definitions. MINUSMA defines an “early warning” as “a serious and credible threat from non-state armed actors and/or State authorities that puts at risk the physical integrity of civilians.” Additionally, MINUSMA outlines “rapid response” as any measures agreed by the Regional Crisis Management Team “...to prevent, pre-empt, or effectively respond to threats against civilians...”

As explored in CIVIC’s policy brief “Early Warning and Rapid Response Takes Root in UN Peacekeeping,” the UN has, for many years, recognized the importance of improving its EW/RR approach for reinforcing its ability to protect civilians. For example, MINUSMA’s Force has undertaken numerous initiatives in recent years to improve its responsiveness. One of the most notable developments was the creation of Sector Center in June 2019 with the intention of boosting the Force’s ability to operate autonomously and quickly in Mopti region (see map on previous page). The previous system, which included a regional office comprised primarily of civilian peacekeepers reliant on military assets based in other regions, was described as “not operational” by a civilian official interviewed by CIVIC. The official added, “we were missing a complete Force element to react.”

A second notable development has been the current Force Commander’s willingness and ability to use temporary operating bases (TOBs) that enable troops to spend more time patrolling in remote areas where civilians are often more exposed to security threats. The United Nations Police (UNPOL) has also made
efforts to capitalize on the Force’s presence in more remote locations by conducting longer-range patrols in areas they had never previously been able to access. These initiatives came in response to previous criticism that MINUSMA spent too much time in its large camps in urban centers and that it prioritized protecting itself over protecting civilians.

A third initiative has been the drive to push tactical decision-making authority down to regional sectors and even down to the level of company commanders. Indeed, MINUSMA’s Adaptation Plan envisages the establishment of a forward command post in Gao to direct a planned mobile task force that will be equipped with a range of capabilities for responding to emerging threats. This forward command post would also reinforce the decision-making capacity in operational sectors beyond Bamako. These efforts remain a work in progress, as outlined in this policy brief.

A case study from central Mali illustrates how well-timed interventions, the use of TOBs, and sustained engagement can decisively protect civilians.
CASE STUDY: PROTECTING CIVILIANS IN DOUNAPEN

An effective early warning and rapid response system can make the difference between life and death, as was demonstrated in the village of Dounapen in 2020.

On January 22, 2020, armed jihadists attacked the FAMa camp in the village of Dioungani, situated in Koro cercle near Mali’s border with Burkina Faso in the remote eastern part of Mopti region. The Malian soldiers—who were the only remaining state representatives in Dioungani—were unable to defend their position and fled the area. Three days later, the assailants returned to perpetrate more violence, destroying all state buildings and forcing hundreds of civilians to flee. In the days following the first attack, over 1,000 civilians fled the village to seek refuge in the nearby village of Dounapen.

Community sources informed MINUSMA of the second attack shortly after it took place on January 25 and warned that the inhabitants of Dounapen were facing similar threats of violence. Because MINUSMA already had troops stationed at a TOB in a nearby location, it was able to quickly relocate the base to Dounapen. According to CIVIC’s interviews, this intervention protected several thousand Dounapen residents—as well as those displaced from Dioungani—in a zone abandoned by the state and increasingly threatened by radical armed groups. Numerous civilians in Dounapen told CIVIC that they would have fled the area or that they probably would have been attacked had it not been for the presence of MINUSMA peacekeepers.

Given the inability of the Malian authorities to reestablish a security presence in the area, MINUSMA decided to maintain its TOB in Dounapen for more than six months to prevent further attacks. Although this prolonged deployment placed a strain on the Force’s operations in other parts of Mopti region, the presence of the TOB enabled MINUSMA’s civilian sections to repeatedly travel to the area and undertake reconciliation activities. The Mission’s sustained engagements culminated in the signing of two peace agreements between communities in the communes of Dioungani and Madougou in September 2020. It is important to note that several other localized peace agreements in Koro cercle were brokered by community leaders, international mediators, and even jihadist groups in the second half of 2020. While extremist groups continue to operate in and around Koro cercle, it appears that the agreements that MINUSMA helped negotiate have contributed to positive trends across the area, as shown in the graph on the following page. The improvement in the security situation has allowed several important local markets to re-open, and people feel safe enough to resume cultivating their fields.
Protection of civilians incidents in the communes of Dioungani and Madougou since January 2020

Source: Data from MINUSMA’s Protection of Civilians unit

V. THE ORIGINS OF MINUSMA’S EARLY WARNING AND RAPID RESPONSE SOP

MINUSMA adopted its Early Warning and Rapid Response SOP in June of 2020. There were numerous reasons for the decision to develop formal EW/RR procedures. First, the Mission wanted to standardize certain core procedures and empower officials in its regional offices in Mopti, Timbuktu, Kidal, Gao, and Ménaka to declare and respond to early warnings. Second, it wanted to clearly determine and identify which Mission components bear responsibility for each of the different processes and actions within the EW/RR system. Committing these delineated roles to paper should make it easier for current and future peacekeepers to understand who does what and where information should be channeled. The intention was also to promote a broader understanding of protection of civilians instead of seeing it as something for which only the Force is responsible. Third, those developing the SOP sought to improve coordination between MINUSMA’s various components when planning a response to an early warning. Emphasizing and clarifying the role of the Regional Joint Operations Centers (RJOCs) in the SOP was particularly relevant to all three of these first objectives. Indeed, the SOP notes that each RJOC is responsible, under the direct supervision of the regional Head of Office, for coordinating all of the processes and activities pertaining to the EW/RR system within its geographical area. The fourth reason that the Mission developed the SOP was that it wanted to develop tools to boost its ability to respond to the very specific conflict dynamics in central Mali. And finally, MINUSMA officials identified that it was necessary to create an integrated review mechanism to document, analyze, and improve responses.
JOINT OPERATIONS CENTERS AND REGIONAL JOINT OPERATIONS CENTERS

All UN peacekeeping missions are required to have Joint Operations Centers (JOCs), which are integrated entities and shall comprise civilian and uniformed (military and police) personnel.\textsuperscript{33} UN guidelines state that JOCs have three main functions:

- Provide integrated situational awareness within the mission and to UN headquarters through routine and special incident reporting;
- Facilitate integrated operational coordination and planning within the mission;
- Support mission crisis management.\textsuperscript{34}

In addition, missions can establish Regional Joint Operations Centers (RJOCs), which are similarly staffed by civilian, military, and police personnel. RJOCs perform the same three core functions as mission JOCs, but at the regional level.\textsuperscript{35} Although RJOCs report to the Mission JOC, they work under the authority of the regional Head of Office in MINUSMA’s decentralized EW/RR system.
MINUSMA’s small team of protection of civilians (POC) advisors and officers, in collaboration with numerous other Mission sections, led the development of the EW/RR procedures. These POC advisors and officers support the implementation of the Mission’s mandate to protect civilians and work to ensure that protection-related concerns are prioritized. With the exception of Kidal, each of MINUSMA’s regional offices has a dedicated POC officer to coordinate, monitor, advise, and report on protection of civilians matters in their region. A Senior POC Advisor leads the team, coordinates the implementation of the POC mandate at Mission Headquarters in Bamako, and advises Mission leaders. Given the RJOCs’ integral role in the EW/RR system, both they and the overarching Joint Operations Center (JOC) in Bamako were also heavily involved in refining the procedures. Other Mission divisions, including Civil Affairs, Political Affairs, Mediation, and Human Rights, as well as the JMAC, the Policy and Best Practices Officer, and the Force also contributed significantly to the SOP’s development.

One of the main debates during development concerned the scope of the EW/RR system. Several sections within MINUSMA maintained that the system should also be used to process threats to the Mission and to the FAMa as part of a more comprehensive approach, but the interim Chief of Staff decided to limit the focus of the SOP and the various tools within it to the protection of civilians.

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**KEY ELEMENTS OF MINUSMA’S EARLY WARNING AND RAPID RESPONSE SOP**

- **Defining terms:** The SOP adopts specific definitions for the terms “alert” and “early warning” to distinguish between untriangulated information regarding threats to civilians and triangulated information that requires a rapid response. Information that has yet to be confirmed by two or ideally three (or more) independent sources is called an “alert.” If the Mission can triangulate and validate the threat, the “alert” is elevated to the status of an “early warning.”

- **Toll-free emergency hotlines:** The Mission will establish toll-free emergency hotlines in every regional office that the local population can call to provide early warnings. Protection of civilians officers are responsible for creating the staffing schedule for operating the designated phone.

- **Early warning tracking form:** MINUSMA will develop an early warning tracking form designed to record all actions and information updates once the early warning and rapid response system has been activated (i.e., when an initial alert has been confirmed and elevated to the status of an early warning).

- **Recording early warning data:** The SOP indicates that each RJOC “shall share weekly updates on the number of Alerts [unconfirmed reports] and EWs [triangulated, confirmed reports] collected with the JOC, to be presented at the weekly Senior Management Group meeting.” The regular collection and reporting of early warning data as outlined in the SOP should complement the new request in the 2020 mandate for the Mission to systematically record and analyze its response rate to early warnings.

- **Decentralization:** Each of MINUSMA’s five regional hubs has a Head of Office. The SOP makes clear that the decision-making authority for issuing early warnings within each region rests with the relevant Head of Office rather than with any officials at Mission Headquarters in Bamako. However, the document notes that decisions taken at the regional level will immediately be transmitted to the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) in Bamako. It continues, “The SLT may decide to convene a Crisis Management Team, that may at any time endorse or modify regional level decisions.”
VI. MAKING IT EASIER FOR CIVILIANS TO PROVIDE EARLY WARNINGS

Peacekeeping missions have a variety of sources that can generate information related to early warning. Sources may include humanitarian actors; a mission's intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance equipment; open-source data; civil society and local authorities; other international actors; and communities under threat. MINUSMA's EW/RR process is typically triggered when someone contacts the Mission to warn them of a potential threat to civilians. The Early Warning and Rapid Response SOP seeks to reinforce the Mission's information-gathering network by establishing toll-free emergency hotlines in all of its regional offices. Although MINUSMA's Human Rights Division has been operating call centers for many years to gather information about incidents that have already occurred, these lines are not toll-free and are not dedicated to receiving alerts or early warnings. Contacting MINUSMA's community liaison assistants is another commonly used avenue that exists for the local population to alert the Mission to potential threats. But these staff members work in the Civil Affairs Division and are not primarily used for protection of civilians activities. The toll-free hotlines thus represent the first channels of communication that are exclusively focused on gathering early warnings and protecting civilians.

One of the most significant obstacles MINUSMA faces is that it struggles to obtain accurate and reliable alerts before attacks occur. Several MINUSMA officials noted that Malian stakeholders do not wish to provide information to the Mission for fear of reprisals. As one military official remarked, “the willingness to share [information] has fallen because people are scared of giving us information.” Civilian officials similarly noted the difficulty of establishing Community Alert Networks in Mali because civilians fear reprisal attacks from armed groups if they are discovered to be part of such networks. Mission personnel also raised concerns about the reliability and accuracy of the information they do receive, with some noting the Force’s fear of being lured into an ambush. One military official stated that there is a tendency among some people to exaggerate the degree of threat to provoke a response, suggesting such individuals will say that “everybody is being massacred, even when it is not the case.” (See Section VII for more information on how threat information is assessed and verified.)

Other problems in the Mission relate to staffing. Several interviewees from MINUSMA identified UNPOL as a key generator of alerts and commented that the quality of these alerts was typically good. These observations were often attributed to the fact that French-speaking UNPOL personnel are able to build strong relationships and regularly exchange information with their counterparts in the Malian police and gendarmerie. MINUSMA should consider evaluating the extent to which UNPOL’s success is attributable to its officers’ ability to engage frequently with Malian law enforcement officials versus their regular patrols and community engagement activities. By contrast, CIVIC’s research found that the Force’s peacekeeping-intelligence branches at the sector level—known as G2s—frequently do not have the capacity or the appropriate language skills to gather...
To increase its capacity to gather information, MINUSMA’s Mopti office began piloting a new toll-free emergency hotline in February 2020. This hotline has the potential to make it easier for people in the region to contact the Mission.

The 24/7 hotline was intended to eliminate possible obstacles that community members might face, such as lacking credit on their phone or not being able to reach their usual interlocutor within the Mission because they are on leave. The hotline was not intended to replace the existing channels of communication that can convey information relating to threats, but to add a more dedicated method coordinated by the regional POC officer. Several MINUSMA officials told CIVIC that they

Several interviewees from MINUSMA identified UNPOL as a key generator of alerts and commented that the quality of these alerts was typically good.
believe establishing dedicated early warning hotlines in each region should improve the Mission’s ability to gather timely information. However, while the emergency hotline may make it easier and safer for civilians to alert MINUSMA to security threats, it is unlikely to generate more reliable and accurate information than the existing channels. In fact, the ability to contact the Mission anonymously and free of charge could increase concerns about the validity of information, which is why the distinction between triangulated and unconfirmed information is so vital (see Section VII).

Within weeks of becoming operational, early warning information received via the hotline triggered responses from the Mission on two occasions. On February 7, 2020, community sources used the hotline to alert the Mission to an ongoing attack in the village of Goni in Koro cercle. MINUSMA deployed a Quick Reaction Force (QRF) to the area from its nearby temporary operating base in Dounapen, and it sent an MD-500 helicopter to fly over the village for reconnaissance and deterrence. One week later, local sources in the vicinity of Ogossagou, Bankass cercle, called the emergency hotline to warn about the threat of an imminent attack on the village following the sudden withdrawal of FAMa troops. MINUSMA’s Force again deployed a QRF, but the response did not prevent an armed attack that killed 31 villagers the following morning.

Despite these initial signs of the hotline’s utility, the new system soon encountered significant obstacles—most notably the protocols related to the COVID-19 pandemic. When the emergency number was first established, MINUSMA decided against a large public launch to avoid creating unrealistic expectations among the local population that it would be able to respond to every reported threat. Disseminating the number via radio or social media into areas of Mopti region where MINUSMA knew it had a very limited ability to intervene or respond to an early warning would have been short-sighted and potentially self-defeating. Instead, the Mission decided to distribute and explain the purpose of the new emergency hotline number each time its representatives conducted a patrol or led an activity in a new location. However, because of UN measures established to prevent the spread of the coronavirus, civilian and police components were unable to engage communities for several months during 2020, which greatly hampered the distribution of the number.

Moreover, as time went on, the lack of dedicated staff members to operate the phone proved problematic. The regional POC officer was tasked with creating a roster of national and international staff responsible for answering the designated phone throughout the week. But there were numerous shortcomings to this approach in a region that experiences a very large number of POC threats. First, some of the people contacting the Mission do not speak French or English, and very few of MINUSMA’s international staff speak local languages. This means that people operating the hotline would sometimes have to run out of their offices in search of someone who spoke the required language to understand the emergency caller. This problem became even more acute at the height of the coronavirus pandemic, when every member of staff was required to work in isolation in his or her container rather than in an office with colleagues. Second, MINUSMA has not had a regional POC officer in Mopti since May 2020, which has left the roster system without proper management and caused it to become largely dysfunctional in subsequent months. And finally, the roster’s reliance on a variety of staff members to operate the phone inevitably reduces their ability...
To concentrate on their regular tasks.63

To overcome these problems and help realize the hotline’s potential, MINUSMA has decided to hire dedicated contractors to operate the phones in Mopti. The Mission’s budget proposal for 2021/2022 will request funds for the POC unit to cover the costs of the contractors.64 The SOP’s emphasis on the decentralization of powers relating to the EW/RR system should afford each regional office sufficient flexibility in determining how the hotline is used, as well as what staff are needed to support it in their specific context. In regions such as Kidal, where POC threats are far fewer or very different in nature, the roster system may well suffice. Heads of Offices in regions with very low numbers of early warnings may also find that the hotline can serve as a safe and anonymous way of discussing less immediate protection threats with the local population.65 But in regions that will likely receive large volumes of calls, such as Mopti and Gao, having dedicated local contractors to operate the hotlines is likely to improve their success and lead to increased early warning information on threats to civilians.

In the short term, the UN General Assembly, which is responsible for authorizing peacekeeping budgets, should approve funding for these contractors. In the medium term, MINUSMA will need to evaluate the effectiveness of contractors versus full-time national staff members operating the hotlines. It will also be important to assess how the information generated through hotlines compares with information collected by
ENSURING THAT RESPONSES TO EARLY WARNING INFORMATION ARE PROPERLY COORDINATED

One of MINUSMA's main assets when responding to early warnings of threats to civilians is that it is a multidimensional Mission with civilian, military, and police capabilities at its disposal. However, ensuring all of these components respond in a coordinated manner is one of the largest challenges MINUSMA faces in emergency scenarios. The Early Warning and Rapid Response SOP includes several tools to improve coordination between MINUSMA's different sections and components in crisis situations.

Establishing Common Criteria for Verifying Threat Information

Effective coordination requires the principal stakeholders within MINUSMA to have a common understanding of the criteria required for a threat to be considered credible and verified. With this objective in mind, MINUSMA has adopted specific definitions for the terms “alert” and “early warning.” Until now, these two terms have often meant different things to different people within the Mission, as well as to those in UN agencies and within the wider humanitarian domain. In the SOP, MINUSMA makes a clear distinction between the two. It defines an “alert” as information regarding threats against civilians that “has not been confirmed or has not been totally triangulated or verified.” If the Mission is able to triangulate and validate the information as “a serious and credible threat,” the information is elevated to the status of an “early warning.” Once a potential threat to civilians reaches this defined degree of credibility, the SOP states that “...it requires a rapid response to be carried out to prevent such violence from occurring.”

This distinction is important in an environment where rumor, speculation, and misinformation are rife. Similarly, it is important when different components within MINUSMA may not receive, assess, and store information in the same manner, which can sometimes raise doubts about the veracity of the information. When a threat is verified and the regional Head of Office decides it constitutes an “early warning,” all mission stakeholders are expected to respond. At this point, having specific offices or components query the information or delay in an effort to independently verify the report using their own sources is no longer a valid option. Clearly differentiating between occasions when peacekeepers need to verify information before launching a response and when they should immediately respond should help minimize the potential for confusion and delays.
Nevertheless, CIVIC’s research found that although the terms “alert” and “early warning” have been clearly defined in the SOP, many people across the Mission do not recognize the distinction and use the terms interchangeably. Training sessions could improve awareness of this distinction, but MINUSMA would also benefit from translating the SOP into French to make it accessible to all staff members, especially the Malian nationals working at the Mission. Unfortunately, the term “early warning” typically translates to “alerte précoce” in French, creating even more potential for confusion. Thus, if MINUSMA produces a French version of the SOP, it should either retain and promote the use of the English terms—accompanied by a translation of their definitions—or devise a different term for “early warning” in French that does not include the word “alerte.”

**Clarifying Roles, Responsibilities, and Actions Taken**

In many respects, the SOP describes how the Mission currently receives, triangulates, and disseminates information regarding potential threats to civilians. Yet these practices were not formally agreed upon or written down before the SOP was established, so there was too much scope for confusion, delays, and poorly coordinated responses. Now, for the first time, roles and responsibilities for every person involved in the process are formally laid out. As one official told CIVIC, “It’s always good to standardize. It allows people to focus on what they have to do. They [the procedures] are like laws and decrees—they help you avoid chaos.”

CIVIC’s research has determined that information-sharing across sections remains an acute problem within MINUSMA. Several interviewees noted that some peacekeepers choose to report alerts to their superiors to impress them or to satisfy demands for “valuable” intelligence. One particularly important feature of the SOP is that it clarifies that RJOCs, acting under the authority of the Head of Office, are in charge of coordinating the EW/RR process. Therefore, all parts of the Mission—whether civilian, police, or military—are obliged to immediately send any alerts regarding specific threats to civilians directly to the RJOC. Previously, some field-based peacekeepers would send such alerts to their section chiefs in Bamako without informing either the RJOC or the Head of Office, delaying any potential response to the threat. As one civilian official commented, “It’s the typical UN mentality—information is power.” Requiring all components to channel such alerts through the RJOCs should help overcome this challenge and prevent unnecessary delays in the Mission’s response. However, uniformed staff officers frequently rotate out of their positions after only six or twelve months (and sometimes after only four months). It is therefore essential that all incoming MSOs and UNPOL officers assigned to regional offices receive specific instructions during their induction training on the Early Warning and Rapid Response SOP that includes the importance of sharing threat information with the RJOCs.

Per the SOP, the RJOC also coordinates all of MINUSMA’s actions once the Head of Office has determined that there is a serious and credible threat to civilians. Although a Head of Office does not have authority over the Force’s Sector Commander or the regional Police Commissioner—who report to their respective superiors at Mission Headquarters—coordination between these three components of the Mission is vital. According to the SOP, the members of the regional Early Warning Response Cell—comprising civilian, military, and police chiefs—discuss the potential ways that the Mission could respond and then make recommendations to the Head of Office. The Head of Office then issues
an early warning task form outlining the actions that each component of the Mission is expected to undertake.\textsuperscript{76} MINUSMA has developed the early warning tracking form to make the overall task of coordinating easier for the RJOCs by requiring each of the relevant Mission components to record the actions they have taken following the establishment of an early warning. Actions typically include phoning local contacts to see whether they can calm tensions, as well as checking if the FAMa are aware of the threat and determining whether they are able to send a patrol to the affected area.\textsuperscript{77} Whenever someone updates the form, the RJOC and other members of the Early Warning Response Cell automatically receive a notification, which keeps them abreast of developments as the situation evolves.\textsuperscript{78}

Prior to the development of the SOP, MINUSMA began operating an Intel Fusion Cell in the form of a WhatsApp group to collect and pool all of its unconfirmed threat information.\textsuperscript{79} This tool can be useful for triangulating initial alerts, but it is not suitable for prompting people to follow up on a piece of information or for recording who has acted in response to the alert.\textsuperscript{80} The fact that most attacks on villages in central Mali occur during the night further complicates the process. As one official pointed out in regard to the lack of shared information about actions taken, “Sometimes we’d have to call people and wake them in the middle of the night because there was no shared record.”\textsuperscript{81} The new tracking form will automatically request that relevant sections take action and record it. MINUSMA has never before had an institutionalized system either for sharing updates on a threat or recording updates on the responses undertaken. The tracking form does both and is a development that could be of great relevance to other UN peacekeeping missions.

Another benefit of the SOP in terms of rapid response is that it makes clear that Heads of Offices are in charge of directing the Mission’s political outreach in response to an early warning within their respective regions. While Mission leaders in Bamako can provide support if requested, the formally established procedures emphasize that decision-making powers within the EW/RR framework are decentralized.

This is a necessary change, as there was some confusion and disagreement within the Mission about who should take on this role prior to the implementation of the new procedures. This was the case, for example, in determining who should try to apply pressure to the leader of Dan na Ambassagou’s armed wing, Youssouf Toloba, in the event of an early warning.\textsuperscript{82} Should it be the Mission’s mediation unit in Bamako, which typically interacts with armed groups? Or should it be the Head of Office in Mopti? Should it be the SRSG, or would that afford too much status to the armed group? Although MINUSMA’s ability to directly engage Toloba remains unclear, the SOP affirms that, in general, it is up to the relevant Head of Office to determine who should engage in political outreach to try and prevent a potential attack.\textsuperscript{83}

The combination of the tracking form, the tasking sheet, and the explicit decentralization of authority to
Heads of Offices should bring more order to the response and mitigate the risk of multiple MINUSMA officials calling the same people with inconsistent messages.84

**Staffing and Performance Evaluations in RJOCs**

For the early warning and rapid response system to succeed in the regions where early warnings are most frequent, the RJOCs need to be adequately staffed with suitably qualified personnel. RJOCs were already playing an integral role in the EW/RR process before the development of the SOP. The advent of the tracking form and the formal allocation of responsibility to the RJOCs for coordinating the EW/RR process should reinforce their role. However, the new requirements outlined in the SOP to record and report the number of alerts and early warnings, as well as the response rate for each region, will create additional EW/RR tasks. Some of the tasks, such as analyzing and reporting these figures, may be taken up by the POC officers, although the RJOCs would still be responsible for recording and managing the data. Furthermore, because RJOCs are the Mission’s only integrated, substantive structures comprising civilian, police, and military personnel in field locations, they are therefore critical to MINUSMA’s ability to coordinate its activities—especially in the event of an emergency.

Ensuring that RJOCs have the necessary human resources to perform these functions remains an ongoing challenge.85 To consistently function as joint operations centers, the RJOCs need an appropriate number of staff from the Force, the police, and the Department of Safety and Security (DSS) in addition to the civilian officials who manage each RJOC. Each of these sections has to assign officers to serve in the RJOCs, and they may sometimes be reluctant to do so. As one civilian official told CIVIC, “There is a lack of understanding about how important the RJOC is. Officers say ‘why should I send my staff there?’ I have to explain to them that it is not only your choice, it is required by policy. It is essential for the Mission to have an integrated approach.”86 The short deployment periods of military and police personnel to MINUSMA make it even more difficult to ensure that those responsible for assigning uniformed officials to the RJOCs understand the importance of the integrated structure. “You have to explain it to them [the Force and the police] every six months,” noted the same official.87

The RJOCs in the Mopti and Timbuktu regions are supposed to have three civilian staff members, two individuals from DSS, two MSOs, and two officers from UNPOL.88 Having an RJOC with at least two representatives from each of the sections is intended to allow one of them to go on leave at any given time without creating a gap. But, in reality, there are often periods of time when there is only one officer each from DSS, the Force, and the police who are permanently assigned to a given RJOC.89 To mitigate the temporary loss of key staff members, military and police chiefs can agree to provide the Chief RJOC with a designated replacement when the assigned officer goes on leave, but such tandem agreements are ad-hoc at best and leave important gaps within RJOCs.90

Several officials in Mopti region highlighted the consequences of having such gaps.91 One interviewee noted that “when the MSO goes on holiday for over a month, we have nobody to liaise with the TOC [Tactical Operations Center]. It affects the flow of information. There could be an ongoing attack and we could be late.”92 Another civilian staff member emphasized that having military officials from RJOCs liaise with other military colleagues in the Mission carries more weight than when civilian officials have to perform this task.93 It is similarly advantageous to always have a police officer within RJOCs to exchange information with UNPOL colleagues.94

Ensuring that MSOs and police officers with the necessary language skills are deployed to the RJOCs is another challenge.95 Beyond coordinating the EW/RR process, each RJOC serves as the Mission’s information hub in a given region. The RJOCs are responsible for producing flash reports, daily reports, and weekly reports to keep people throughout the Mission—as well as the UN Secretariat in New York—apprised of the latest situational developments in their area of operations.96 All of these reports are written in
English. Yet the Force, which officially uses English as its operational language, has many staff officers from Francophone countries. At the contingent level, it is much less of an obstacle if troops cannot speak English, as their daily activities are not dominated by interactions with other contingents or MSOs. But operational problems arise when MSOs with very limited English skills are assigned to the RJOCs, where an essential part of their role is to attend daily military briefings conducted in English, read reports written in English, bring information into the RJOC, and contribute to its reporting.57 Language-related problems within the Force have given rise to an internal joke among English-speaking MSOs: “La MINUSMA, c’est une Mission anglophone,” which translates to “MINUSMA is an English-speaking mission.”98

Meanwhile, MINUSMA’s police component has French as its working language. Thus, an UNPOL officer working in an RJOC needs to be able to read and process large volumes of information in French and synthesize the content into concise reports written in English. As one RJOC officer told CIVIC, “I can’t imagine not being bilingual in this role.”99 However, since UNPOL does not always have many bilingual officers at the relevant grade, police officials assigned to RJOCs are sometimes unable to work in both languages.100

The UN’s Force Generation Service within the Office of Military Affairs in New York selects MSOs for deployment, but troop contributing countries (TCCs) nominate their personnel for these posts and are responsible for ensuring that their nominees have the skills required to perform effectively in them. Per UN guidance, MSOs should be evaluated upon arrival in a mission to ensure they meet basic requirements, such as English proficiency.101 Thus, MINUSMA should test the language capabilities of MSOs upon their arrival in Mali. If an MSO is not proficient in English, the Mission should consider repatriating that individual to discourage TCCs from sending personnel who lack core capabilities. If this is not feasible because of the scale or cost of such repatriations, MINUSMA should work with the UN Secretariat to use data from its language evaluations as part of the decision-making process for future deployments.

Furthermore, MINUSMA should modify its processes relating to performance evaluations of military and police officials assigned to integrated sections of the Mission, including RJOCs, to ensure that performance assessments are appropriately integrated. The current performance evaluation process neglects the value of the work that uniformed officials contribute within RJOCs. Yet their work is at the very heart of MINUSMA’s efforts to be able to consistently respond to early warnings in a coordinated and integrated manner under the new EW/RR procedures. To ensure that these officials’ contributions are better reflected, CIVIC recommends that the Force and UNPOL adapt their frameworks so that RJOCs always contribute substantively to the performance evaluations of the military and police officers working in them.

“There is a lack of understanding about how important the RJOC is. Officers say ‘why should I send my staff there?’ I have to explain to them that it is not only your choice, it is required by policy. It is essential for the Mission to have an integrated approach.”

— MINUSMA civilian official
PERFORMANCE EVALUATIONS FOR STAFF IN INTEGRATED SECTIONS

CIVIC’s research has shown that RJOC chiefs do not have a formal role in evaluating the performance of the military and police officials working in RJOCs. Military and police supervisors can consult the RJOC chief when writing a performance report of a staff member assigned to an RJOC, but there is no obligation for them to do so. This means that the perspective of the person with direct supervision over the daily work of certain MSOs and police officials may be absent from the assessment. The lack of dual evaluations can occasionally make life difficult for uniformed officials working in the RJOC, as they can face pressure from the police and the military to go out on patrols and do less RJOC work despite being formally assigned to it.

CIVIC’s research did identify some anecdotal accounts of RJOC chiefs being consulted in the assessment of military and police personnel working within RJOCs. But this good practice has yet to be institutionalized and relies heavily on personal relationships. The lack of an official framework for joint evaluation extends to some of the integrated sections at Mission Headquarters in Bamako, as well, including the JOC and the JMAC. Although the chiefs of the JOC and JMAC have managed to strike agreements with colleagues to ensure they can contribute to the performance evaluations of police and military staff working in their respective sections, these arrangements are one-off rather than being grounded in formal policy. Indeed, the Force’s standard operating procedures for performance evaluations makes no mention of joint appraisals for MSOs working in integrated sections. The only military personnel who have their performance evaluated by a civilian official are the Force Commander and the Deputy Force Commander, whose performance evaluations are written or reviewed by the SRSG.
VIII. REINFORCING NON-MILITARY RESPONSES TO EARLY WARNINGS

As highlighted in Section V, one of the core objectives of the Early Warning and Rapid Response SOP is to encourage the Mission’s civilian sections to recognize that responses to early warnings are not limited to the deployment of the Force.107 This section draws attention to how MINUSMA is trying to reinforce the use of its good offices in response to early warnings, but notes some of the important challenges the Mission encounters in trying to protect civilians facing imminent threats of violence.

A civilian official in MINUSMA told CIVIC that the most important feature of the SOP is that it helps “to underline that it [the EW/RR system] is important to everybody in the Mission.”108 Several other interviewees stressed that MINUSMA should be making greater use of its good offices to protect civilians (a Tier I approach) rather than instinctively thinking in terms of physical protection (a Tier II approach).109 In some circumstances, a Tier I approach can be a more expedient, effective, and sustainable way of preventing violence against civilians than Tier II activities.110 Developing Tier I capacity also affords the Mission alternative tools to address threats in cases where military helicopters are unavailable or when the Force is unable to quickly deploy troops to a remote village. Still, this should not be seen as an “either/or” matter: MINUSMA needs to ensure that all of its POC-focused activities are fully effective and working in a mutually reinforcing way.

Indeed, there are significant challenges that MINUSMA faces when seeking to protect civilians through dialogue and engagement that are likely to persist despite the new EW/RR procedures. The most obvious is that, in many instances, the UN has neither the direct contacts nor the political leverage to compel armed actors to desist. Particularly when extremist groups such as Jama’at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin or Islamic State in the Greater Sahara perpetrate violence, the Mission’s good offices are of limited use.111 Not only does the UN lack the channels to communicate directly with extremist entities, these groups routinely cite MINUSMA’s immediate departure as a pre-condition for their participation in any dialogue with the Malian state. At present, physical protection is the only viable way MINUSMA can protect civilians from imminent jihadist threats.

“The frustrating thing in Mopti is that you don’t know who to talk to.”

— MINUSMA civilian official
THE CHALLENGES OF USING TIER I RESPONSES TO EARLY WARNINGS IN CENTRAL MALI

Although non-military approaches by peacekeepers to preventing violence can be critically important, the conflict dynamics in central Mali present specific and additional difficulties when trying to respond to an early warning through dialogue and political engagement.\textsuperscript{122} Conflict between communities frequently unfolds at a micro level, with self-defense militias often launching attacks on neighboring villages in parts of the country where state authorities are entirely absent. This can make it difficult for Mission officials to identify who to call. “The frustrating thing in Mopti is that you don’t know who to talk to,” remarked one civilian official to CIVIC. “There are no structures to engage with.”\textsuperscript{113}

This situation contrasts with what is happening in northern Mali, where Mission personnel have regular engagements with representatives of armed groups who signed a peace agreement in 2015. Thanks to their ongoing work with the signatory armed groups to support the agreement’s implementation, MINUSMA leaders typically know who to contact in response to an early warning in northern Mali. Indeed, many of these groups exert a great deal of influence in their communities, so they can be very useful interlocutors in a crisis. Moreover, the peace agreement is a political commitment to which the Mission can hold these groups accountable. While there have been many localized peace agreements signed in central Mali in recent years, there is no comprehensive peace agreement in place—and therefore no comparable framework for the Mission to work through.

Central Mali also does not have a similar collection of distinct armed groups with identifiable leaders, as is the case in northern Mali. One clear exception, however, is the presence of the Dogon self-defense group Dan na Ambassagou, which is largely comprised of Dozo hunters and operates in the eastern parts of Mopti region. Compared with other ethnic militias in central Mali, there is a much greater degree of command and control within Dan na Ambassagou. As a result, a telephone call to one of the group’s well-known and influential representatives can occasionally yield positive results. MINUSMA officials have established contact with certain figures within Dan na Ambassagou’s political wing and do frequently try to reach them when the Mission receives early warnings concerning armed militants linked to the group.\textsuperscript{114}

Nevertheless, MINUSMA has faced significant challenges in its engagements with Dan na Ambassagou because the Malian authorities have yet to adopt a coherent and consistent strategy in regard to this ethnic militia. In March 2019, the Malian government announced the dissolution of Dan na Ambassagou following the massacre of 160 civilians in the village of Ogossagou.\textsuperscript{115} But efforts to enforce the supposed dissolution have been very limited. In fact, there have been reports of FAMa soldiers continuing to conduct counter-terror operations in central Mali with the support of armed Dozo hunters.\textsuperscript{116}

This incongruous approach has put MINUSMA in a difficult position. To what extent should the Mission engage with an entity that the government of Mali has officially disbanded? It has been unclear whether the Malian state wishes to disarm Dan na Ambassagou through a credible disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) program or partner with elements linked to the group in order to eradicate jihadists. The sudden change in Mali’s government after a coup in August 2020 added yet another layer of uncertainty: would the transitional authorities maintain or change the Malian state’s strategy for dealing with ethnic militias?
ACCOUNTABILITY AND LESSONS LEARNED

The early warning tracking form established through the SOP should not only make it easier for MINUSMA to coordinate its responses in real time, it should reinforce the evaluation of responses after an event.\(^{117}\) By using a tracking form, the Mission will—for the first time—have an objective record of timestamped events to inform any after action review (AAR). The tasking form will also clearly show who was asked to perform particular activities.

Until now, AARs have not been systematic and have often suffered from personnel being unable to provide detailed accounts and timelines of events.\(^{118}\) The attack in Ogossagou in February 2020, which involved the killing of 31 civilians, was a clear example of this problem. MINUSMA was informed of the threat to civilians many hours before the attack took place.\(^{119}\) The Mission initially wanted to deploy a helicopter, but it was unable to do so because of poor visibility that night, which made it too dangerous to fly. Instead, it sent ground troops who travelled throughout the night to try and prevent an attack.\(^{120}\) But did anyone from the Mission try to reach Youssouf Toloba, the leader of Dan na Ambassagou’s armed wing? Did they manage to speak to him? A civilian official told CIVIC, “We don’t know. Because it [the response] is uncoordinated, ad-hoc and undocumented, we don’t know if it was done or not.”\(^{121}\)

While the tracking and tasking forms should help provide a greater degree of accountability, capacity within the Mission to conduct AARs remains a constraint. Given the high number of early warnings MINUSMA receives in the Mopti region, it seems unlikely that the Mission will have the time or capacity to conduct a full AAR each time the early warning system is activated.\(^{122}\) Indeed, MINUSMA did not complete an AAR of the Mission’s response to the Ogossagou early warning despite it being the single deadliest attack on civilians in 2020. Other reporting requirements and newly emerging crisis situations can make it difficult to devote time to a comprehensive review.\(^{123}\) The advent of the tracking form should make it much easier to perform reliable, lighter-touch reviews in cases where a full AAR is either unfeasible or unnecessary.

Although most interviewees expressed a sense of optimism regarding the tracking form’s potential to improve performance and promote accountability, some MINUSMA officials highlighted that political will is also essential. One civilian official noted that there is sometimes a lack of political will within the Mission to undertake AARs because people are keen to avoid “having their noses rubbed in their failure.”\(^{124}\) Another civilian official told CIVIC, “I have no confidence in this [tracking form]. You want to put people against the wall? People will just cover [themselves].”\(^{125}\) The interviewee stressed that tracking forms will have limited impact on performance and accountability if Member States, including members of the Security Council, encourage the Secretariat to prioritize political concerns over performance data when making decisions about the deployments of troop contingents.\(^{126}\)

Recording and Improving the Response Rate

In addition to helping MINUSMA more broadly analyze the efficacy of its responses, the tracking form can help the Mission record the overall response rate of field offices to early warnings, which is required by its 2020 mandate. Resolution 2531 (2020) called on the Mission “to strengthen early warning mechanisms” (as it had in previous mandates), but it added a request for MINUSMA to “systematically record and analyse MINUSMA’s rate of response.”\(^{127}\) Because the request is without precedent in UN peacekeeping mandates, there is no agreed upon understanding of how the response rate should be calculated.
As noted in Section IV, MINUSMA has made several changes in recent years to try to improve its responsiveness, including the greater use of TOBs and the creation of Sector Center. However, it remains virtually impossible to assess the impact of all of these efforts to improve responsiveness while the Mission is not systematically recording its response rate. MINUSMA’s lack of military helicopters and the fact that the Mission will never have enough troops to adequately cover a territory the size of Mali remain the biggest constraints on peacekeepers’ ability to respond to imminent threats to civilians (see map below). As one military official noted, “It’s difficult to be proactive with the size of forces that we have—we are not able to be present everywhere.” These constraints make it all the more vital that MINUSMA uses its resources in the most intelligent and efficient manner. Decisions need to be underpinned by sound data that indicates whether or not a particular approach has been successful in the past.

**POC incidents in Mali in 2020 and MINUSMA’s permanent bases**

*Source: Data from ACLED, MINUSMA (S/2020/1281), OCHA Mali / Direction Nationale des Collectivités Territoriales*
The tracking form and the regular reporting of alerts, early warnings, and response rates should help MINUSMA move to a more data-driven approach that better evaluates its efforts.\textsuperscript{130} The SOP states that the RJOCs shall provide the JOC with “weekly updates on the number of Alerts and Early Warnings collected.”\textsuperscript{131} These figures, along with the response rates from each sector, should be presented at the weekly Senior Management Group meeting. The data should encourage MINUSMA to prioritize improving its responsiveness, help it identify the key obstacles facing the Mission, and help it evaluate the impact of adopting different approaches. In the words of one official, “For the first time, we will have some evidence.”\textsuperscript{132}

MINUSMA should explore whether it would be appropriate to feed data from the tracking form into the Comprehensive Planning and Performance Assessment System (CPAS), UN peacekeeping’s tool.\textsuperscript{133} According to the United Nations peacekeeping website, “CPAS allows missions to more systematically assess their operating environment, identify what influence they aim to have, and assess progress towards these goals using data and analysis.”\textsuperscript{134} MINUSMA could potentially use CPAS to periodically review and analyze the tracking information to identify any weaknesses in the Mission’s responses to early warnings. This could be especially useful in regions where there is not enough time to conduct a full AAR even after an incident that warranted one.

There is one key element that the Mission still has to define before the response rate can be used to effectively drive improved performance: what constitutes a “positive response” when calculating the response rate? If MINUSMA informs the Malian authorities of a serious potential threat to civilians but the FAMa do not intervene, should that be recorded as a positive response for the Mission? Similarly, if MINUSMA is alerted to an ongoing attack and is only able to deploy troops to the affected area after the attack has finished, will that count as a positive response? While being unable to prevent violence is obviously sub-optimal, there is still value in a response that provides medical assistance or secures the affected zone in the immediate aftermath of an attack. Thus, CIVIC recommends that MINUSMA adopt a two-stage approach when recording and analyzing the response rate. The first stage should focus on whether and how the Mission responded. MINUSMA can use the type of data generated in the tracking form in conjunction with CPAS to measure how frequently the Mission responds to an early warning using dialogue and engagement (Tier I), physical protection (Tier II), and even programmatic activities designed to improve the protection environment (Tier III).\textsuperscript{135}

The second stage should focus on determining what prevented the Mission from acting when it did not respond, and assessing the impact and effectiveness of its interventions when it did. When assessing the former, MINUSMA could determine whether it was human or technical error, a lack of resources, or some other obstacle that prevented a response. When analyzing the latter, only meaningful interventions that decisively changed the course of an event or helped ensure that no attack occurred should be categorized as “positive responses”—in other words, responses that either prevented an attack, interrupted an attack, or provided assistance in the aftermath.\textsuperscript{136} Phone calls to local authorities or community leaders that do not prevent or stop violence would be captured in the first calculation, for example, but not in the second. Patrols in villages two days after an attack occurred would similarly not be classified as a positive response in this second calculation. Only interventions that have a tangibly positive impact on civilians’ lives matter.
Without these underlying data and assessment systems, MINUSMA’s responses are largely guided by intuition and instinct as to what works best.

This second stage of analysis can go even deeper by analyzing the subsequent level of conflict in the affected area. For example, physical protection may be the most effective immediate solution to protect civilians, but perhaps a Tier I or a Tier III approach would offer a more sustained reduction in violence. If this proved to be the case, it would suggest that the Force needs to devote more of its resources to helping the Mission’s civilian components travel to hotspots to try to resolve tensions. MINUSMA has already developed a Spatio-Temporal Incident Mapping (STIM) tool to better understand the impact that Force operations had on the number of POC incidents in a specific zone and measure how long their impact lasted (see image below). The tool could be adapted to gauge the impact of the work that MINUSMA’s civilian components undertake to reduce threats to civilians. Without these underlying data and assessment systems, MINUSMA’s responses are largely guided by intuition and instinct as to what works best.

A weekly snapshot produced using the STIM tool

Source: MINUSMA
MINUSMA faces myriad challenges in its attempts to identify specific threats and initiate timely responses to protect civilians. Obtaining reliable information ahead of time is inherently difficult, but is especially challenging in the Malian context where many civilians live in fear of reprisal attacks. The presence of extremist armed groups throughout central and northern Mali constrains the Mission’s ability to undertake non-military responses. The threat of IED attacks and gaps in MINUSMA’s air assets can considerably add to the time it takes to reach the location of a confirmed threat.

MINUSMA has also experienced its own internal obstacles. The Mission does not always have staff with the appropriate language skills to gather information, liaise with their colleagues, or build relations with their Malian counterparts. Moreover, the sharing of information regarding potential threats and the coordination of responses have not always been performed in a formalized and consistent manner. The Mission has also lacked common criteria to categorize threat information and comprehensive data to analyze its responsiveness.

Although it will not solve all problems, MINUSMA’s new Early Warning and Rapid Response SOP offers several elements that should help the Mission improve its ability to protect civilians facing imminent threats of violence. The toll-free emergency hotline should help MINUSMA increase the number of alerts it receives and the number of confirmed early warnings it generates, while also enhancing its overall situational awareness. But the Mission will need dedicated and well-trained staff to operate these phones in certain regions to ensure the system is effective.

Additionally, the SOP establishes standard definitions to enable all MINUSMA officials to more consistently distinguish between confirmed and unconfirmed threats to civilians. This is another step toward better coordination. However, CIVIC’s research found that, to have maximum impact, these definitions need to be constantly disseminated throughout the Mission and translated into French to reach all members of staff. Routine induction trainings should also include explanations of the Mission’s distinction between alerts and early warnings.

The early warning tracking form established through the SOP should also facilitate coordination, incentivize civilian sections to contribute more to responses, and provide greater accountability for actions taken or not taken. Moreover, the form should serve as the basis for MINUSMA to systematically track its response rate to early warnings, thereby enabling peacekeepers to better analyze the obstacles they face and learn from their mistakes.

Finally, for coordination to work, RJOCs, as the only truly integrated sections within the Mission’s regional offices, need to be adequately staffed by people with the necessary skills to liaise with other sections. A rapid, well-coordinated response to an early warning can make the difference between life and death. It is therefore imperative that MINUSMA and the UN Secretariat work to optimize the Mission’s developed tools and processes and that Member States contribute the necessary personnel and assets to make the system work.
ENDNOTES

1 Armed non-state actors also have a responsibility to uphold the applicable norms of international humanitarian law, including the obligation to distinguish between civilians and combatants when conducting military operations.


7 CPAS is the UN’s principal impact assessment tool, designed to enable peacekeeping missions to more systematically assess their operating environment, identify their objectives, and assess progress toward their goals.


10 CIVIC interview with civilian, #1, Zantiguila, August 2019; CIVIC interview with civilian, #2, Zantiguila, August 2019; CIVIC interview with civil society leader, #92, Sévaré, November 2019; CIVIC interview with civil society leader, #94, Sévaré, November 2019; CIVIC interview with civil society leader, #98, Sévaré, November 2019; CIVIC interview with civil society leader, #99, Sévaré, November 2019; CIVIC interview with civil society leader, #100, Sévaré, November 2019; CIVIC interview with civil society leader, #101, Sévaré, November 2019; CIVIC interview with civil society leader, #107, Sévaré, November 2019; CIVIC interview with civilian, #110, Mopti, November 2019; CIVIC interview with civilian, #111, Mopti, November 2019; CIVIC interview with civil society leader, #114, Sévaré, December 2019; CIVIC interview with local official based in Mopti region, #92, Bamako, December 2019.

11 CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #78, Sévaré, October 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #109, conducted via telephone, September 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #43, Sévaré, February 2020.

12 CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #78, Sévaré, October 2020.


16 CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #7, Bamako, August 2019.

17 While TOBs have proven effective in several instances for enabling UN peacekeepers to protect civilians in Mali, other contexts have shown that the efficacy of peacekeeping TOBs can vary considerably depending on the number of troops deployed and the quality of their equipment. CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #7, Bamako, February 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #87, Bamako, February 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #17, Bamako, May 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA police official, #119, Sévaré, October 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #1, Bamako, January 2021.

18 CIVIC interview with MINUSMA police official, #119, Sévaré, October 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA police official, #16, Sévaré, February 2020; CIVIC interview with Mopti-based MINUSMA police official, #128, Bamako, November 2020.

19 CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #104, Bamako, October 2020; CIVIC interview with former MINUSMA military official, #118, conducted via telephone, November 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #125, Bamako, November 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #1, Bamako, January 2021.

20 Following the addition of the second strategic priority in MINUSMA’s June 2019 mandate, the Mission developed an adaptation plan to
help recalibrate its efforts. In the plan, the Mission outlined various capabilities that would enable it to become more mobile and more effective at protecting civilians in central Mali. CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #132, Bamako, November 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #1, Bamako, January 2021; UN Security Council, “Situation in Mali: Report of the Secretary-General,” 20 March 2020, https://minusma.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/s_2020_223_e.pdf.

21 CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #125, Bamako, November 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #132, Bamako, November 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #133, Bamako, November 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #1, Bamako, January 2021; UN Security Council, “Situation in Mali.”

22 The militant jihadist organization Jama’at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin, which translates into English as “Support Group for Islam and Muslims”, subsequently claimed responsibility for the attack.

23 CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #122, Sévaré, February 2020; UN internal document #1, on file with CIVIC; MINUSMA internal document #2, on file with CIVIC.

24 CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #7, Bamako, February 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA police official, #16, Sévaré, February 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #122, Sévaré, February 2020; One-UN Mopti, UN internal document #1, on file with CIVIC.

25 CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #14, Sévaré, February 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #122, Sévaré, February 2020; MINUSMA internal document #2, on file with CIVIC.

26 CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #7, Bamako, February 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #14, Sévaré, February 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA police official, #16, Sévaré, February 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #122, Sévaré, February 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #33, Sévaré, February 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #34, Sévaré, February 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #37, Sévaré, February 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #39, Sévaré, February 2020; CIVIC interview with former member of ethnic militia operating in Mopti region, undisclosed location, October 2020.


28 In June 2019, the UN Security Council added a second strategic priority to MINUSMA’s mandate. It called on the Mission to “facilitate the implementation of a comprehensive politically-led Malian strategy to protect civilians, reduce intercommunal violence, and re-establish State authority, State presence and basic social services in Central Mali…” (See UN Security Council Resolution 2480 (2019), June 28, 2019, UN SC Doc. S/RES/2480, para. 16).


31 The creation of a formalized system built upon the work of MINUSMA’s Peacekeeping-Intelligence Group and the JMAC Coordination Branch, both of which had championed better information-sharing practices and more effective early warning and rapid response mechanisms. CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #87, conducted via telephone, February 2021; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #7, Bamako, February 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #111, Bamako, October 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #112, Bamako, October 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #92, Bamako, September 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA police official, #100, Bamako, October 2020.

32 CIVIC interview with MINUSMA police official, #100, Bamako, October 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #111, Bamako, October 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #112, Bamako, October 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #7, Bamako, November 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #8, Bamako, February 2021.


34 The SLT comprises the Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG), the SRSG’s chief of staff, the Deputy-SRSGs, and the heads of mission components. MINUSMA, “Standard Operating Procedure: Early Warning and Rapid Response,” 6.

35 Civilians, local authorities, religious leaders, and community groups are among the most common providers of such information. CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #2, Sévaré, October 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #7, Bamako, February 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #14, Sévaré, February 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA police official, #16, Sévaré, February 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #122, Sévaré, February 2020.

36 CIVIC interview with Mopti-based MINUSMA civilian official, #37, Bamako, September 2020; CIVIC interview with Mopti-based MINUSMA civilian official, #14, conducted via telephone, September 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #7, Bamako, November 2020.

37 CIVIC interview with Mopti-based MINUSMA civilian official, #42, Sévaré, February 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #111, Bamako, January 2021.
Community Alert Networks were pioneered by the UN peacekeeping mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUSCO) to help improve the protection of civilians. MONUSCO distributed mobile phones to focal points within communities. These focal points are in regular contact with UN peacekeepers and can alert the Mission in case of imminent threats. 

While there have been very few, if any, recorded cases of civilians being attacked because of their perceived cooperation with MINUSMA, there have been instances of Malian staff members or local partner organizations being threatened for working with MINUSMA. In addition, there have been numerous examples of local officials or civilians being kidnapped or killed by armed groups because of their perceived “collaboration” with the FAMA or Barkhane. CIVIC interview with MINUSMA police official, #16, Sévaré, February 2020; CIVIC interview with Gao-based MINUSMA civilian official, #100, conducted via telephone, October 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #111, Bamako, October 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #88, Sévaré, October 2020.

One other potential benefit of not widely publicizing the hotline number is that it may also make it lower risk for civilians to have this number saved on their phones. This is because the hotline number does not begin with the digits “94 95,” which are commonly associated in Mali with being a “MINUSMA number.” CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #2, Bamako, January 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #87, conducted via telephone, February 2021.

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MINUSMA civilian official, #15, Sévaré, February 2020; CIVIC interview with Mopti-based MINUSMA civilian official, #37, conducted via telephone, September 2020.

62 CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #87, conducted via telephone, September 2020; CIVIC interview with Mopti-based MINUSMA civilian official, #37, conducted via telephone, September 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #7, Bamako, November 2020.

63 CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #87, conducted via telephone, September 2020; CIVIC interview with Mopti-based MINUSMA civilian official, #37, conducted via telephone, September 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #7, Bamako, November 2020.

64 CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #108, conducted via telephone, October 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #109, Bamako, November 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #7, Bamako, November 2020.

65 CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #87, conducted via telephone, September 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #109, conducted via telephone, September 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #7, Bamako, November 2020.

66 CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #80, Sévaré, October 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #81, Sévaré, October 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #83, Sévaré, October 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #89, Sévaré, October 2019; CIVIC interview with Mopti-based MINUSMA civilian official, #37, conducted via telephone, September 2020; CIVIC interview with Mopti-based MINUSMA civilian official, #91, Bamako, September 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #98, Bamako, October 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA police official, #100, Bamako, October 2020; CIVIC interview with Gao-based MINUSMA civilian official, #110, conducted via telephone, October 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #111, Bamako, October 2020; CIVIC interview with Mopti-based MINUSMA civilian official, #117, conducted via telephone, November 2020; CIVIC interview with Mopti-based MINUSMA police official, #119, conducted via telephone, November 2020; CIVIC interview with UNHCR official, #120, Bamako, November 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #2, conducted via telephone, November 2020; Anna Matveeva, “Early Warning and Early Response: Conceptual and Empirical Dilemmas,” Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict, September 2006.


68 Adam Sandor, “The power of rumour(s) in international interventions: MINUSMA’s management of Mali’s rumour mill,” International Affairs 96, no. 4 (2020).

69 CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #80, Sévaré, October 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #81, Sévaré, October 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #83, Sévaré, October 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #89, Sévaré, October 2019; CIVIC interview with Mopti-based MINUSMA civilian official, #37, conducted via telephone, September 2020; CIVIC interview with Mopti-based MINUSMA civilian official, #91, Bamako, September 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #92, Bamako, September 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #98, Bamako, October 2020; CIVIC interview with Gao-based MINUSMA civilian official, #100, Bamako, October 2020; CIVIC interview with Mopti-based MINUSMA civilian official, #111, conducted via telephone, November 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #117, conducted via telephone, October 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #119, conducted via telephone, November 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #77, Sévaré, October 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #7, Bamako, February 2020; CIVIC interview with Mopti-based MINUSMA civilian official, #91, Bamako, September 2020; CIVIC interview with Gao-based MINUSMA civilian official, #110, conducted via telephone, October 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #99, Bamako, October 2020.

70 CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #112, Sévaré, February 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #7, Bamako, February 2020; CIVIC interview with Mopti-based MINUSMA civilian official, #91, Bamako, September 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #98, Bamako, October 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA police official, #100, Bamako, October 2020; CIVIC interview with Gao-based MINUSMA civilian official, #98, Bamako, October 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #109, Bamako, October 2020; CIVIC interview with Mopti-based MINUSMA civilian official, #117, conducted via telephone, October 2020; CIVIC interview with Mopti-based MINUSMA police official, #119, conducted via telephone, November 2020; CIVIC interview with former MINUSMA military official, #118, conducted via telephone, November 2020.

71 CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #122, Sévaré, February 2020.

72 CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #2, Bamako, January 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #7, Bamako, August 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #99, Bamako, October 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #98, Bamako, October 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #109, Bamako, November 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #122, Bamako, October 2020; CIVIC interview with Mopti-based MINUSMA civilian official, #91, Bamako, September 2020; CIVIC interview with Mopti-based MINUSMA civilian official, #117, conducted via telephone, April 2020; CIVIC interview with Mopti-based MINUSMA civilian official, #37, Bamako, October 2020; CIVIC interview with Mopti-based MINUSMA civilian official, #117, conducted via telephone, November 2020; CIVIC interview with former MINUSMA military official, #118, conducted via telephone, November 2020.

73 CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #2, Bamako, January 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #89, Sévaré, October 2019; CIVIC interview with Mopti-based MINUSMA civilian official, #37, Bamako, October 2020; CIVIC interview with Mopti-based MINUSMA civilian official, #117, conducted via telephone, November 2020; CIVIC interview with Mopti-based MINUSMA civilian official, #91, Bamako, September 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #7, Bamako, August 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #112, Bamako, October 2020.

74 Interviews indicated that many field-based staff work under the authority of their section chiefs in Bamako rather than the regional Head of Office. For example, the head of the Political Affairs Division in Gao would report to a senior political affairs official in Bamako rather than the head of the Gao regional office. CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #2, Bamako, January 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #7, Bamako, August 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #99, Bamako, October 2020.

75 CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #109, Bamako, November 2020.


77 CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #2, Bamako, January 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #84, Sévaré, October 2019; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #29, Sévaré, February 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #33, Sévaré, February 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #43, Sévaré, February 2020.

78 CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #87, conducted via telephone, September 2020; CIVIC interview with Mopti-based MINUSMA civilian official, #91, Bamako, September 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #7, Bamako, November 2020.

79 CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #2, Bamako, January 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #7, Bamako, February 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #34, Sévaré, February 2020; CIVIC interview with Mopti-based MINUSMA civilian official, #7, Bamako, September 2020.
CIVIC interview with Mopti-based MINUSMA civilian official, #91, Bamako, September 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #92, Bamako, September 2020.

104 CIVIC interview with Gao-based MINUSMA civilian official, #110, conducted via telephone, October 2020; CIVIC interview with Mopti-based MINUSMA police officer, #119, conducted via telephone, November 2020.

105 CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #92, Bamako, September 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #98, Bamako, October 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA police officer, #100, Bamako, October 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #116, Bamako, November 2020; CIVIC interview with Mopti-based MINUSMA police official, #119, conducted via telephone, November 2020.


107 CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #7, Bamako, February 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #34, Sévaré, February 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #87, conducted via telephone, September 2020; CIVIC interview with Mopti-based MINUSMA civilian official, #91, Bamako, September 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #98, Bamako, October 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #103, operating in Mopti, #103, undisclosed location, October 2020. In the UN’s POC handbook, protection through dialogue and engagement is designated as a Tier I approach, whereas protection through the deployment of force is categorized as Tier II. A Tier III approach concerns the establishment of a protective environment. Tier III often involves programmatic activities to build peace and prevent conflict, such as support for the criminal justice system, security sector reform, or disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration. See UN DPO, “The Protection of Civilians in United Nations Peacekeeping Handbook,” 2020, 12, https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/dpo_poc_handbook_final_as_printed.pdf.

108 CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #98, Bamako, October 2020.

109 CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #127, Bamako, November 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #7, Bamako, February 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #87, conducted via telephone, September 2020; CIVIC interview with Mopti-based MINUSMA civilian official, #91, Bamako, September 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #98, Bamako, October 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #106, Bamako, October 2020. In the UN’s POC handbook, protection through dialogue and engagement is designated as a Tier I approach, whereas protection through the deployment of force is categorized as Tier II. A Tier III approach concerns the establishment of a protective environment. Tier III often involves programmatic activities to build peace and prevent conflict, such as support for the criminal justice system, security sector reform, or disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration. See UN DPO, “The Protection of Civilians in United Nations Peacekeeping Handbook,” 2020, 12, https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/dpo_poc_handbook_final_as_printed.pdf.

110 CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #127, Bamako, November 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #106, Bamako, October 2020; CIVIC interview with Mopti-based MINUSMA civilian official, #122, conducted via telephone, November 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #123, conducted via telephone, November 2020.

111 CIVIC interview with Mopti-based MINUSMA civilian official, #17, conducted via telephone, November 2020; CIVIC interview with Mopti-based MINUSMA civilian official, #14, conducted via telephone, September 2020; CIVIC interview with Mopti-based MINUSMA civilian official, #122, conducted via telephone, November 2020.

112 There are various other non-military approaches for MINUSMA to protect civilians, including social cohesion and reconciliation projects, efforts to strengthen the justice system, etc., but these typically require sustained engagement over time to yield results. Thus, when civilians face imminent threats of violence, these methods are unsuitable as an immediate response.

113 CIVIC interview with Mopti-based MINUSMA civilian official, #17, conducted via telephone, November 2020.

114 CIVIC interview with Mopti-based MINUSMA civilian official, #17, conducted via telephone, November 2020; CIVIC interview with Mopti-based MINUSMA civilian official, #37, Bamako, September 2020; CIVIC interview with Mopti-based MINUSMA civilian official, #122, conducted via telephone, November 2020; CIVIC interview with Mopti-based MINUSMA civilian official, #14, Sévaré, February 2020; CIVIC interview with Mopti-based MINUSMA civilian official, #91, Bamako, September 2020; CIVIC interview with Mopti-based MINUSMA civilian official, #127, Bamako, November 2020. In the UN’s POC handbook, protection through dialogue and engagement is designated as a Tier I approach, whereas protection through the deployment of force is categorized as Tier II. A Tier III approach concerns the establishment of a protective environment. Tier III often involves programmatic activities to build peace and prevent conflict, such as support for the criminal justice system, security sector reform, or disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration. See UN DPO, “The Protection of Civilians in United Nations Peacekeeping Handbook,” 2020, 12, https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/dpo_poc_handbook_final_as_printed.pdf.


117 CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #7, Bamako, February 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #87, conducted via telephone, September 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #111, Bamako, October 2020; CIVIC interview with Mopti-based MINUSMA civilian official, #91, Bamako, September 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #2, Bamako, January 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #92, Bamako, September 2020.

118 CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #2, Bamako, January 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #37, Sévaré, February 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #7, conducted via telephone, September 2020; CIVIC interview with Mopti-based MINUSMA civilian official, #91, Bamako, September 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #127, Bamako, November 2020. To read more about how overseeing performance through a system of controls and reporting can reinforce accountability for the protection of civilians in UN peacekeeping, see Namie di Razza, “The Accountability System for the Protection of Civilians in UN Peacekeeping,” International Peace Institute, December 2020.

119 CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #14, Sévaré, February 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #15, Sévaré, February 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA police officer, #16, Sévaré, February 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #34, Sévaré, February 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #7, Bamako, November 2020.

120 CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #14, Sévaré, February 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #15, Sévaré, February 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA police officer, #16, Sévaré, February 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #34, Sévaré, February 2020.

121 CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #7, Bamako, November 2020.

122 CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #87, conducted via telephone, September 2020; CIVIC interview with Mopti-based
MINUSMA civilian official, #14, conducted via telephone, September 2020; CIVIC interview with Mopti-based MINUSMA civilian official, #91, Bamako, September 2020.
123 CIVIC interview with Mopti-based MINUSMA civilian official, #91, Bamako, September 2020; Written correspondence with MINUSMA military official, #78, March 2021; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #7, Bamako, November 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #127, Bamako, November 2020; ACLED Data Export Tool, January 2021.
124 CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #2, Bamako, January 2020.
125 CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #123, conducted via telephone, November 2020.
126 CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #123, conducted via telephone, November 2020.
127 UN Security Council Resolution 2531 (2020), para. 28 (c-ii); For additional analysis from CIVIC on the potential benefits of this mandate language, see https://civiliansinconflict.org/blog/recording-the-response-rate/.
129 CIVIC interview with MINUSMA military official, #33, Sévaré, February 2020.
130 CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #125, Bamako, October 2020; CIVIC interview with Gao-based MINUSMA civilian official, #110, conducted via telephone, October 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #111, Bamako, October 2020; CIVIC interview with Mopti-based MINUSMA civilian official, #117, conducted via telephone, November 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #7, Bamako, November 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #14, Sévaré, February 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #7, Bamako, November 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #92, Bamako, September 2020.
132 CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #7, Bamako, November 2020.
133 CIVIC interview with Mopti-based MINUSMA civilian official, #91, Bamako, September 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #92, Bamako, September 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA police official, #100, Bamako, October 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #108, conducted via telephone, October 2020; CIVIC interview with Mopti-based MINUSMA civilian official, #117, conducted via telephone, November 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #7, Bamako, November 2020.
135 CIVIC interview with MINUSMA police official, #100, Bamako, October 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #108, conducted via telephone, October 2020; CIVIC interview with MINUSMA civilian official, #7, Bamako, November 2020.
136 It is very difficult to categorically determine whether an intervention prevented an attack. However, if several community sources feel that a threat is significant enough to raise the alarm and MINUSMA is able to intervene in a way that reassures civilians, this could be considered as a positive response.
February 2, 2018, Timbuktu region, Mali: A MINUSMA armed helicopter unit flies over a herd of cattle. The theft of cattle by armed groups is a major threat to civilians’ livelihoods across much of central and northern Mali.