

ASSESSING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF EUROPEAN UNION CIVILIAN CSDP MISSIONS INVOLVED IN SECURITY SECTOR REFORM

The Cases of Afghanistan, Mali and Niger

JAÏR VAN DER LIJN, GRETCHEN BALDWIN,
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May 2024



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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.55163/HOER2676>

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Acknowledgements

This research was commissioned and financed by Just Future, a strategic partnership that aims to strengthen the capacity of CSOs and enable their collective action to bring about more inclusive, constructive and legitimate power relations. The Alliance consists of established CSOs and networks from the Global North and South, and is funded by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The research for this work was conducted in cooperation with EUCAP Sahel Mali, EUCAP Sahel Niger, and the European External Action Service (EEAS). Sincere gratitude is extended to these organisations for enabling the research. Views expressed and information contained in this document solely reflect the authors' perspective.

Executive summary

The European Union (EU) has deployed a wide variety of civilian missions that have sought to advise, train and build the capacity of internal security sectors in host countries as part of its civilian Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). These missions constitute integral parts of broader international programmes of Security Sector Reform (SSR) in conflict-affected countries. Their strategic objective is to contribute to the development of a civilian security sector that is efficient and accountable, and enjoys the trust of the public.

This report looks at three case studies: EUPOL Afghanistan (2007–2016), EUCAP Sahel Mali (2014–) and EUCAP Sahel Niger (2012–2024). All three have engaged in civilian SSR activities amid ongoing armed conflict, and operated in broader national and international counterinsurgency contexts. Each case study reflects on the key research question: ‘What contributions have EU civilian CSDP missions involved in SSR made to durable peace?’

Mission impact

The three EU CSDP missions examined in this study have conducted important but niche SSR activities in highly complex and volatile security situations. By their very nature, these missions are small, limited in scope and dependent on the political will and interests of the host government and the Council of the EU. At best, missions help to initiate an SSR process as the start of a much longer and more fundamental process that can take decades to complete. In addition, the three missions detailed in this report operate or operated in overcrowded security arenas where a plethora of, often more influential, international actors provide security sector assistance.

Given the limited and focused mission mandates of the EU CSDP missions, and the enormity of the challenges, the sustainability of their efforts will be dependent to a large extent on developments beyond their reach. While missions may have had useful operational results, at a strategic level their impact has been limited, and the sustainability of such impacts has been affected by external developments such as coups d'état and the geopolitical maelstrom. All three operations risked mission creep, losing their ability to follow a clear strategic thread. Missions frequently failed to achieve their key objectives, and their approaches have often rested on West-centric ideas on culture and behaviour change, rather than rely on local knowledge and ownership. Nonetheless, EU CSDP missions with SSR objectives have the potential to facilitate positive SSR in states where conflict is ongoing if mandates and strategic goals remain more in line with the realities on the ground.

Explanatory Factors

Findings from these three case studies link across six explanatory factors.

1. *Political primacy*: In all three cases, the host government has had only a selective interest in the activities of the missions, and more of a focus on effectiveness and less on accountability. As advisory non-executive missions, the three missions under review have had limited ability to push for institutional change or engage past the point where national leaderships have wanted to engage.
2. *Realistic mandates and matching resources*: In all three cases, mission mandates have been overambitious, with too many ever-expanding, incoherent tasks to be conducted within an constrained time period.
3. *People-centred approach*: All three missions struggled to adopt a people-centred approach to their activities. They gained limited trust and credibility among local populations and security forces, lacked cultural and contextual awareness, and national ownership was insufficient. The limited relationships built with civil society and populations affected the sustainability of SSR and follow-up, and meant that governments have been able to close missions without much popular resistance.
4. *Legitimacy and credibility*: Internationally and nationally, all three missions are considered legally and politically legitimate. However, deficiencies in strategic communication mean that their credibility in the public eye is typically low.
5. *Coordination and coherence*: Internal coherence varied across missions. However, some issues affected all three missions, such as poor institutional memory, short deployments and a lack of smooth handover between staff, which can hugely disrupt internal coherence. Overall, aligning the myriad of international actors and their priorities proved extremely difficult in all three cases.
6. *Women, Peace and Security*: The WPS agenda seems to have been a lesser priority for the three missions. Where brought into the work of the missions, it has tended to focus on women's participation in security institutions (in absolute numbers) rather than a fuller, institutional approach to gender mainstreaming.

Recommendations

Seven recommendations arise from this study.

1. Embed missions in a broader political approach.
2. Provide missions with realistic mandates aligned with adequate resources.
3. Put more focus on the inclusion of civil society at all stages.
4. Condition support on increasing the effectiveness of the civilian security sector at increasing accountability and good governance.
5. Invest in strategic communication.
6. Place more emphasis on the gender responsiveness of missions, beyond numbers.
7. Deliver on the commitment and deliverable of the new Civilian CSDP Compact regarding independent impact evaluation of missions.

1. Introduction

JAÏR VAN DER LIJN AND GRETCHEN BALDWIN

The European Union (EU) has deployed a wide variety of civilian missions that have sought to advise, train and build the capacity of internal security sectors in host countries as part of its civilian Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). These missions constitute integral parts of broader international programmes of Security Sector Reform (SSR) in conflict-affected countries. Their long-term strategic objective is to contribute to the development of a civilian security sector that is efficient and accountable, and enjoys the trust of the public. These missions go by different names and have different areas of focus, depending on the context and mandate. Initially, the missions mainly focused on the rule of law and civilian police reform. Mission mandates were later extended to restructuring the entire security sector. CSDP missions have been deployed alongside other types of EU mission, which have sought to strengthen integrated border management strategies and the rule of law, as well as military training missions.¹

This report looks at three case studies: EUPOL Afghanistan (2007–2016), EUCAP Sahel Mali (2014–) and EUCAP Sahel Niger (2012–2024). All three have engaged in civilian SSR activities amid ongoing armed conflict, and operated in broader national and international counterinsurgency contexts. The latter two have also been part of the EU’s approach to countering irregular migration.

The objective of this report is to use the three case studies to review lessons learned and improve the feedback loop between policy and practice by identifying where and how EU civilian CSDP missions involved in SSR might be strengthened. There are many general studies on EU CSDP missions, as well as a more limited number of primarily output- and process-oriented works on individual EU CSDP missions. However, no strategic assessment has been published from a comparative perspective of the impact of EU civilian CSDP missions involved in SSR, although several member states have called for independent impact assessments. Each case study reflects on the key research question: ‘What contributions have EU civilian CSDP missions involved in SSR made to durable peace?’.

The project uses a framework developed by the Effectiveness of Peace Operations Network (EPON), a network of over 40 research partners from across the globe, to assess the impact of the three CSDP missions. The framework allows an assessment of the impact of a peace operation based on its ability to: (a) prevent armed conflict and sexual violence; (b) build confidence among local parties; (c) stabilize the area; (d) protect civilians; (e) strengthen public safety; (f) promote human rights; (g) contribute to peace dividends; (h) extend state authority; (i) support institution building and development; (j) reform the security sector; (k) promote the rule of law; and (l) support community policing and transitional justice. The framework assesses the impact of an operation with reference to six explanatory factors: the primacy of politics; realistic

¹ See e.g. EUPM in Bosnia-Herzegovina (2003), EUPOL Proxima and EUPAT (2005) in Macedonia, EUPOL Kinshasa (2005) in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, EUPOL COPPS (2005) in the Palestinian Territories, EUPOL Republic of the Congo (2007) and EUPOL Afghanistan (2007). In Guinea-Bissau in 2008, the mission’s mandate was extended to restructuring the entire security sector, including the armed forces. EUSEC DRD (2005) Congo focused on the armed forces. In part given their broader approach, such missions have been called EU capacity building missions (EUCAP) in Niger (2012), Somalia (2012) and Mali (2014). More recent missions have been called EU Advisory Missions (EUAM), in Ukraine (2014), Iraq (2017) and the Central African Republic (2020). CSDP missions have been deployed alongside other types of EU missions that have sought to strengthen integrated border management strategies (EUBAM) and the rule of law (EUJUST), as well as military training missions (EUTMs).

mandates and matching resources; a people-centred approach; legitimacy and credibility; coordination and coherence; and promoting the women, peace and security (WPS) agenda. The EPON framework was developed for use on all peace operations from large multidimensional missions to niche operations with more limited goals, such as EU CSDP missions. It is a tool that allows examination of the overall impact of EU CSDP missions involved in SSR, while keeping their more targeted aims in mind.

The case studies involved a review of relevant primary and secondary sources and 114 semi-structured interviews with stakeholders (34 on Afghanistan, 45 on Mali and 35 on Niger).² Field research was conducted in Mali in 2021–22 and in Niger in 2021. Following the Taliban's return to power in 2021, fieldwork in Afghanistan had to be cancelled and the interviews were conducted online in 2021. Interviews were conducted with local actors, such as civil society organization (CSO) representatives, researchers, officials from public authorities, civil servants and members of the armed forces. Among the international stakeholders interviewed were representatives of the EU CSDP missions and officials in the EU Delegations and the European Union External Action Service (EEAS). All the interviews were conducted on the basis of non-attribution.

Chapters 2, 3 and 4 outline the backgrounds, mandates, activities and effects of the three EU CSDP missions and use the explanatory factors to analyse the results. Chapter 5 presents some overarching conclusions. Chapter 6 makes a number of recommendations aimed at EU member states and EU CSDP missions.

²The author conducted 34 interviews for the EUPOL Afghanistan case study. With a few exceptions, he refrained from interviewing Afghan staff for ethical reasons, as most of them were going through traumatic events at the time the research was conducted.

2. EUPOL Afghanistan

ROMAIN MALEJACQ

I. Introduction

The European Union Police Mission in Afghanistan (EUPOL Afghanistan) was a non-executive European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) mission that aimed to assist and enhance the Afghan government's reform efforts in the field of policing.¹ The mission was initially set up against the background of the 2006 Afghanistan Compact. This provided the Afghan government and the international community with a framework for cooperation that emphasized Afghan ownership and donor coordination, putting the Afghan government in the driving seat in line with both the Interim Afghanistan National Development Strategy (I-ANDS) for 2008–2013 and the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).² It was established by the Council of the European Union on 30 May 2007, nearly six years after the overthrow of the Taliban regime. EUPOL Afghanistan ceased all activities almost a decade later on 31 December 2016.³

II. Context, mandate and activities

Context

In December 2001, participants in the UN Talks on Afghanistan known as the Bonn Conference officially requested the international community's assistance with 'helping the new Afghan authorities in the establishment and training of new Afghan security and armed forces'.⁴ A donor meeting was held in Geneva in April 2002, when Afghanistan's Security Sector Reform was divided into five pillars, each of which was assigned to a 'lead nation'.⁵ At the request of the new Afghan Interim Authority, Germany, which had trained Afghan police in the 1960s, was appointed lead nation for police reform.⁶

Germany's vision of the police as a 'civilian law and order force' was advanced through the German Police Project Office (GPPO).⁷ The GPPO took a relatively modest, top-down, long-term and progressive approach that focused on training senior officers.⁸ In contrast, the US Department of Defense soon engaged in a wider effort to provide basic military training to the rank and file of the Afghan police, which it contracted out

¹ Council Joint Action 2007/369/CFSP of 30 May 2007 on establishment of the European Union Police Mission in Afghanistan, *Official Journal of the European Union*, L139, 31 May 2007. Following the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty on 1 December 2009, the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) became the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP).

² UK House of Lords, European Union Committee, *The EU's Afghan Police Mission: Report with Evidence*, HL Paper no. 87 (House of Lords: London, 2011), p. 9.

³ The mission formally closed in 2017 but from 1 January that year the remaining staff only worked on its closure.

⁴ Agreement on Provisional Arrangements in Afghanistan Pending the Re-establishment of Permanent Government Institutions (the Bonn Agreement), S/2001/1154, 5 Dec. 2001.

⁵ Responsibilities for the five pillars were assigned to the United States (military reform), Germany (police reform), Italy (judiciary reform), United Kingdom (counter-narcotics) and Japan (disarmament, demobilization and reintegration).

⁶ Suroush, Q., *Assessing EUPOL Impact on Afghan Police Reform, 2007–2016*, EUNPACK Working Paper (Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit: Kabul, 2018), p. 8.

⁷ Gross, E., *Security Sector Reform in Afghanistan: The EU's Contribution*, Occasional Paper no. 78 (EU Institute for Security Studies: Paris, 2009), p. 28.

⁸ Dirkx, T., *State-building in the Shadow of War: EU Capabilities in the Fields of Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding in Afghanistan* (Utrecht University: Utrecht, May 2017), p. 11.

to DynCorp, a private sector military security company.⁹ By 2003, US engagement in police training already dwarfed that of Germany and other nations, making the United States de facto the lead nation on police reform.¹⁰

By 2006, the security environment was rapidly deteriorating and the Afghan police forces were gradually engaging in combat operations against a fast-growing insurgency.¹¹ The USA was pressing for better burden sharing at the international level but the GPPO lacked resources and failed to achieve results.¹² In the autumn of 2006, the EU launched a joint assessment mission to Afghanistan to consider a potential contribution to strengthening the rule of law, which would increase European cooperation and provide the EU with leverage in Afghanistan's SSR.¹³ Following the recommendations of that mission, a subsequent fact-finding mission was sent to explore the feasibility of launching a civilian EU police mission to support the Afghan police. The European Council approved the Crisis Management Concept for a police mission on 12 February 2007. It adopted a Concept of Operations for an EU police mission to Afghanistan 'with linkages to the wider rule of law' on 23 April.¹⁴ EUPOL Afghanistan's planning phase was officially launched on 30 May and it commenced operations on 15 June 2007.¹⁵

Mandate

EUPOL Afghanistan was designed to build on the GPPO's efforts but with more resources and a more strategic and comprehensive vision. It was much more ambitious than its German predecessor and aimed to improve coordination between the police and the justice sector.¹⁶ The mission's original mandate, as detailed in the European Council Joint Action of 30 May 2007, was for a three-year period until 30 May 2010, subject to six-monthly reviews. The mission's objectives were set out as:

EUPOL Afghanistan shall significantly contribute to the establishment under Afghan ownership of sustainable and effective civilian policing arrangements, which will ensure appropriate interaction with the wider criminal justice system, in keeping with the policy advice and institution building work of the Community, Member States and other international actors. Further, the Mission will support the reform process towards a trusted and efficient police service, which works in accordance with international standards, within the framework of the rule of law and respects human rights.¹⁷

These objectives were soon translated into three 'lines of operation': LO1, advancing institutional reform in the Ministry of the Interior; LO2, professionalizing the Afghan National Police (ANP); and LO3, connecting the police to the justice sector.

EUPOL Afghanistan was renewed for a further three years in May 2010, until 31 May 2013; another 18 months in November 2012, until 31 December 2014; and then for a final two-year period on 17 December 2014, until 31 December 2016. Each time, there were amendments to the specific tasks set out in the mandate. The Mission's Operational Plan, intended to further elaborate 'on the operational details necessary for

⁹ Giustozzi, A. and Isaqzadeh, M., *Policing Afghanistan* (Hurst: London, 2013), p. 49.

¹⁰ Suroush (note 6), p. 10. For a complete overview of US police training efforts in Afghanistan, see Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR), *Police in Conflict: Lessons from the US Experience in Afghanistan* (SIGAR: Arlington, VA, 2022).

¹¹ Suroush (note 6), p. 10.

¹² Pohl, B., "But we have to do something": The drivers behind EU crisis management operations', Unpublished PhD dissertation, Leiden University, 2012, pp. 142–43.

¹³ Dirckx (note 8), p. 37.

¹⁴ A Concept of Operations is 'a planning document that translates political intent into direction and guidance by indicating what action is needed to accomplish a mission'. See European Court of Auditors, *The EU Police Mission in Afghanistan: Mixed Results* (European Union: Luxembourg, 2015), p. 5.

¹⁵ European Court of Auditors (note 14), p. 12.

¹⁶ UK House of Lords (note 2), p. 9.

¹⁷ Council Joint Action (note 1).

implementation of the objectives set out in the [Concept of Operations]’, was revised even more frequently—in 2008, 2010, 2013 and 2014—to reflect the new commitments and priorities.¹⁸

That said, EUPOL Afghanistan’s general objectives and lines of operation remained virtually unchanged until the end of 2014 when, in the light of the closure of NATO’s International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and the transition of full security responsibilities to the Afghan security forces, EUPOL began a process of ‘gradual and sustainable transition’ of activities to the Afghan authorities and other multilateral actors, to be completed by the mission end date.¹⁹ The mission was progressively downsized throughout 2015 and 2016 to focus explicitly on ‘institutional reform of the Ministry of the Interior and on the professionalization of the Afghan National Police’.²⁰ Activities under LO3 on developing police/justice linkages were discontinued.

Activities

EUPOL Afghanistan was set up as a non-executive mission designed to support rather than conduct policing activities.²¹ Until the end of 2014, it focused on training, mentoring and advising, in accordance with its three lines of operation, at both the central level and in the select provinces in which field offices were set up (and gradually closed for security reasons).²² The mission’s modus operandi fundamentally changed in its final two years. Most training activities were transferred to the Afghan authorities, mentoring was abandoned and advising was limited to the strategic level.²³

Training

EUPOL Afghanistan’s primary instrument for professionalizing the police (LO2) and improving civilian policing skills was training senior and mid-ranking police officers, for instance on intelligence-led policing, forensic science or gender-related violence. These activities were supplemented by the construction of new facilities, such as a Police Staff College and a Crime Management College, as well as the provision of new equipment (desks, computers and fingerprinting apparatus).²⁴

Training was also one of the main tools for connecting the police to the justice system (LO3). Residential training on police-prosecution cooperation, for instance, was provided in all provinces with field offices to help develop a common understanding of criminal discovery, filing legal claims and other relevant matters.²⁵ Specific training was also provided throughout the Attorney General’s Office, the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Justice and the ANP on gender and human rights, Afghan law and fighting corruption, among other things.²⁶

¹⁸ European Court of Auditors (note 14), p. 6.

¹⁹ Council Decision 2014/922/CFSP of 17 December 2014 amending and extending Decision 2010/279/CFSP on the European Union Police Mission in Afghanistan (EUPOL Afghanistan), Official Journal of the European Union, L363, 18 Dec. 2014, p. 152.

²⁰ European Union External Action Service, EU Police Mission in Afghanistan, Factsheet, Jan. 2016.

²¹ Council Joint Action (note 1).

²² By 2009, EUPOL Afghanistan had deployed field offices in 16 of the 34 provinces, including Kabul. The majority of these offices were gradually closed, leaving 3 (Mazar-e Sharif, Herat and Kabul) in 2013, and just Kabul in 2015. For more detail, see European Court of Auditors (note 14), p. 42.

²³ European Union External Action Service, EU Police Mission in Afghanistan, Factsheet, Dec. 2016.

²⁴ European Union External Action Service (note 23); former EUPOL Afghanistan official no. 24, Interview with the author, 29 Oct. 2021; former EUPOL Afghanistan official no. 2, Interview with the author, 8 Oct. 2021; and former EUPOL official no. 19, Interview with the author, 26 Oct. 2021.

²⁵ House of Lords (note 2), p. 12.

²⁶ Former EUPOL Afghanistan official no. 8, Interview with the author, 14 Oct. 2021; former EUPOL Afghanistan official no. 15, Interview with the author, 21 Oct. 2021; former EUPOL Afghanistan official no. 10, Interview with the author, 15 Oct. 2021.

Mentoring

Mentoring was EUPOL Afghanistan’s main instrument for advancing institutional reform in the Ministry of the Interior (LO1), as well as a way to further professionalize the ANP. Mentors were deployed throughout all levels of the two organizations, as well as in the Ministry of Justice and the Attorney General’s Office, and with the Minister of the Interior and his deputies, their advisers, provincial and district police chiefs, the chiefs of relevant police units and departments at the central and provincial levels, chief prosecutors, and so on.

Mentoring officially consisted of a ‘structured transfer of knowledge, ideally based on trust and mutual respect, between a mentor and a mentee, aiming at achieving individual and/or organisational changes in accordance with a strategy and/or plan established at various levels—strategic, operational and tactical’.²⁷ What this meant was subject to interpretation. In the words of a former mentor: ‘The job description was very generic, you had to figure out what your job was’.²⁸ Mentoring activities therefore took a variety of forms, often involving the development of small projects such as organizing conferences, printing leaflets or providing small-scale supplies.²⁹ Mentoring was also a way of mainstreaming the mission’s own priorities on gender balance and fighting corruption.

Advising

EUPOL Afghanistan’s advisory function was most visible in the legislative drafting process, for which the mission offered critical support to the Ministry of Justice and the Attorney General’s Office, for instance, with revising the criminal procedural code, the Law Countering Abduction and Human Trafficking or the Afghan penal code.³⁰ Another area of work was institutional reform. Advice was offered to the Ministry of the Interior on the revision and drafting of key policies and strategies such as the ANP code of conduct, as well as on implementation of anti-corruption practices and policies.³¹ Advisers were also involved in promoting access to justice or supporting specific police units.³²

III. Effects

In theory, EUPOL Afghanistan’s training, mentoring and advising activities could have contributed to the following EPON Framework categories of effects: protecting civilians, promoting human rights, preventing conflict-related sexual violence and sexual and *gender-based violence* (SGBV), strengthening public safety, promoting the rule of law, supporting community policing, the extension of state authority, supporting institution building and development, and reforming/developing the security sector. As a non-executive mission, the activities of which represented only a small fraction of the international community’s efforts in the field of policing, however, the effects of its activities are extremely difficult to measure. In this context, and since none of the actors involved truly attempted to conduct post-course evaluation, it is almost impossible to attribute any long-term systemic impact to the mission’s activities.

²⁷ European Court of Auditors (note 14), p. 5.

²⁸ Former EUPOL Afghanistan official no. 28, Interview with the author, 8 Nov. 2021.

²⁹ For concrete examples of such projects, see European Court of Auditors (note 14), p. 27.

³⁰ Former EUPOL Afghanistan official no. 8, Interview with the author, and 14 Oct. 2021; former EUPOL Afghanistan official no. 4, Interview with the author, 11 Oct. 2021.

³¹ Former EUPOL Afghanistan official no. 4, Interview with the author, 11 Oct. 2021; and former EUPOL Afghanistan official no. 18, Interview with the author, 26 Oct. 2021.

³² Former EUPOL Afghanistan official no. 6, Interview with the author, 13 Oct. 2021; and former EUPOL Afghanistan official no. 4, Interview with the author, 11 Oct. 2021.

Nonetheless, interviews and desk research reveal effects (both positive and negative) in three specific areas: individual capacity development, ‘female policing’ and institution building.

Individual capacity development

For most of the interviewees, the mission’s most tangible effects were not at the systemic, but at the individual level: ‘Even if you are not successful’, a former staff member confided, ‘you might be able to plant the seeds of change in a society like Afghanistan’.³³ Although driven partly by the now blatant failure of the post-2001 state-building project and partly by a certain degree of wishful thinking, such *ex post facto* justification also results from the type of activities that were conducted, as training, mentoring and advising implicitly aim to ‘shape [people’s] thinking’ as a precondition for systemic effects.³⁴

Even the most disillusioned staff members stressed that, of the thousands of police officers trained by the mission between 2007 and 2014, at least some had learned new policing skills that they might use in the future: ‘People’s lives were touched, a lot of people did receive training that they otherwise wouldn’t have’.³⁵ Similar comments were made about mentoring and advisory activities.³⁶ In 2015, the European Court of Auditors found ‘evidence that EUPOL Afghanistan’s mentoring and advising did contribute to improving the professional skills of individuals employed at the relevant Afghan institutions’.³⁷ For those aiming to build the kind of organization that EUPOL Afghanistan aimed to build, receiving training, or having ‘someone they can turn to for professional advice’, was certainly seen as useful.³⁸ Nonetheless, EUPOL Afghanistan’s activities cannot be said to have had an impact on all trainees, mentees and advisees. A former staff member explained that the mission’s activities only benefited the most capable and motivated ‘agents of change...Those whom [one] would still definitely have a lot of hope for’ should they be in influential positions again.³⁹ These, many interviewees admitted, actually numbered very few. They were only ‘the pearls, the rough diamonds’, according to one respondent.

That is not to say that these people were later capable of using or willing to use their newly acquired skills to achieve sustainable change.⁴⁰ In fact, none of the interviewees could confidently identify any tangible, long-term, sustainable impact that the mission would have had beyond the ‘change in [people’s] thinking’.⁴¹ This is understandable in the light of subsequent events. In the words of one former staff member: ‘We spread out seeds, but it didn’t rain’.⁴² Others at least highlighted limited but concrete behavioural change: ‘We talked so much about civilian policing that, in the end, people understood.... We saw that in the police districts in Kabul, yes, people, the police [were] more focused in the end on the community’.⁴³

³³ Former EUPOL Afghanistan official no. 11, Interview with the author, 15 Oct. 2021.

³⁴ Former EUPOL Afghanistan official no. 12, Interview with the author, 15 Oct. 2021; former EUPOL Afghanistan official no. 3, Interview with the author, 11 Oct. 2021; and former EUPOL official no. 2, Interview with the author, 8 Oct. 2021.

³⁵ According to the European Court of Auditors, EUPOL ‘developed and delivered roughly 1400 training courses for about 31 000 trainees’ between 2007 and 2014. See European Court of Auditors (note 14), p. 24; and former EUPOL Afghanistan official no. 12, Interview with the author, 15 Oct. 2021.

³⁶ Former EUPOL Afghanistan official no. 28, Interview with the author, 8 Nov. 2021.

³⁷ European Court of Auditors (note 14), p. 25.

³⁸ Former EUPOL Afghanistan official no. 5, Interview with the author, 13 Oct. 2021.

³⁹ Former EUPOL Afghanistan official no. 3, Interview with the author, 11 Oct. 2021. See also Giustozzi and Isaqzadeh (note 9), p. 53.

⁴⁰ Former EUPOL Afghanistan official no. 1, Interview with the author, 7 Oct. 2021.

⁴¹ Former EUPOL Afghanistan official no. 11, Interview with the author, 15 Oct. 2021.

⁴² Former EUPOL Afghanistan official no. 10, Interview with the author, 15 Oct. 2021.

⁴³ Former EUPOL Afghanistan official no. 14, Interview with the author, 20 Oct. 2021.

‘Female Policing’

A specific area in which the effects of externally led reform have been observed that can, at least in part, be attributed to EUPOL Afghanistan’s actions is ‘female policing’.⁴⁴ Although not mentioned in the mandate before the December 2014 revision, the recruitment, training, protection and retention of policewomen soon turned into a ‘flagship’ of the mission.⁴⁵ Driven by the Ministry of the Interior, but strongly encouraged by international donors, increasing the number of women police officers rapidly became ‘a key benchmark of police reform in Afghanistan’.⁴⁶ EUPOL Afghanistan was particularly active in this regard. It organized training sessions for women police officers, set up women-only professional networks, advocated improved working conditions for women police officers and, along with other international donors, pushed for the recruitment and promotion of women in the police force.⁴⁷

These activities—and the international community’s efforts to increase women’s participation in policing more generally—had mixed results at best. The number of women recruited and trained increased significantly, in Kabul in particular, but most of the new hires were illiterate, assigned secretarial and menial jobs or underused, especially outside the capital.⁴⁸ More women were promoted in the upper echelons of the relevant organizations.⁴⁹ Women police officers also became more vocal and proactive in defending their rights.⁵⁰ However, little progress was made beyond mere tokenism. As a former staff member put it: ‘One of the challenges of being a female police officer in Afghanistan is that every international community member wants a piece of you; every brochure has that woman...the same woman, sitting in the front row of any class’.⁵¹ The working conditions of women police officers did improve through the creation of separate toilets and changing rooms, but only marginally and rarely outside Kabul.⁵²

International efforts to increase women’s participation in the security sector came at a high cost for these police officers. Many interviewees stressed that the mission, like the rest of the international community, became too focused on gender in general and on ‘female policing’ in particular, without people fully understanding the local context and the potential consequences of their actions. As one respondent put it: ‘The “do no harm” principle was not...fulfilled, or respected, in this case’.⁵³ High-profile policewomen showcased by the international community became moving targets who, in many cases, had no choice but to accept promotion.⁵⁴ The international community’s actions increased the vulnerability of women police officers at all levels of the organization. Many were harassed, threatened or sexually abused due to their increased visibility and lack of protection.⁵⁵ A former staff member regretted that: ‘That

⁴⁴ European Union External Action Service, EU Police Mission in Afghanistan, Factsheet, Jan 2016

⁴⁵ Suroush (note 6), p. 12.

⁴⁶ Giustozzi and Isaqzadeh (note 9), p. 147.

⁴⁷ Former EUPOL Afghanistan official no. 28, Interview with the author, 8 Nov. 2021; former EUPOL Afghanistan official no. 5, Interview with the author, 13 Oct. 2021.

⁴⁸ Former EUPOL Afghanistan official no. 6, Interview with the author, 13 Oct. 2021; former EUPOL Afghanistan official no. 13, Interview with the author, 19 Oct. 2021. See also Giustozzi and Isaqzadeh (note 9), pp. 147–48.

⁴⁹ Former EUPOL Afghanistan official no. 8, Interview with the author, 14 Oct. 2021.

⁵⁰ Former EUPOL Afghanistan official no. 8, Interview with the author, 14 Oct. 2021; and former EUPOL Afghanistan official no. 14, Interview with the author, 20 Oct. 2021.

⁵¹ Former EUPOL Afghanistan official no. 18, Interview with the author, 26 Oct. 2021.

⁵² Former EUPOL Afghanistan official no. 13, Interview with the author, 19 Oct. 2021.

⁵³ Former EUPOL Afghanistan official no. 3, Interview with the author, 11 Oct. 2021.

⁵⁴ Former EUPOL Afghanistan official no. 13, Interview with the author, 19 Oct. 2021; former EUPOL Afghanistan official no. 23, Interview with the author, 29 Oct. 2021; and former EUPOL Afghanistan official no. 3, Interview with the author, 11 Oct. 2021.

⁵⁵ Former EUPOL Afghanistan official no. 3, Interview with the author, 11 Oct. 2021; former EUPOL Afghanistan official no. 32, Interview with the author, 11 Nov. 2021; former EUPOL Afghanistan official no. 13, Interview with the

was the price for our aggressive reform...we created women police who were victims'.⁵⁶ Following the Taliban takeover, nearly all lost their jobs and went into hiding or sought asylum abroad.⁵⁷

Institution building

Progress with institution building cannot be attributed to specific activities. As one interviewee put it: 'You have to look at it as much more about building blocks, as about institution building from the ground up'.⁵⁸ In this regard, the mission certainly participated in the process of building Afghan state institutions by contributing to the delivery of at least three types of output: infrastructure, legal texts and oversight mechanisms.

The construction of brand new training facilities was certainly EUPOL Afghanistan's most visible legacy. Inaugurated in 2014, the Police Staff College and the Crime Management College—together with the development of numerous training curricula—were EUPOL's best attempts to ensure a smooth transition to sustainable local ownership.⁵⁹ The Police Staff College was considered by many one of the mission's biggest achievements, a 'milestone in the transfer of the police education system to Afghan leadership'.⁶⁰ Similar comments were made about the Crime Management College. The EU Special Representative for Afghanistan at the time, Franz-Michael Mellbin, referred to it as 'a significant contribution to prepare the leadership of the Afghan National Police to maintain security, prevent and investigate crimes'.⁶¹ EUPOL's then-head of mission talked of 'a milestone in the history of the partnership between the EUPOL and Afghanistan'.⁶²

EUPOL Afghanistan also actively participated in legislative drafting to help 'translate international standards into domestic standards'.⁶³ The mission supported the development and revision of core legal texts, such as the penal code and the criminal procedure code, as well as more specific pieces of legislation, such as the law on the elimination of violence against women and the law to combat people trafficking and the smuggling of migrants.⁶⁴ The direct impact of these laws is difficult to measure. 'In places like Afghanistan', according to one former staff member, 'you cannot assume that you are going to create some legislation and then measure...the learning effects of that'.⁶⁵ Opinions differed as to whether these new pieces of legislation were ever implemented. One interviewee found solace in the fact that the new criminal procedure code was being used.⁶⁶ Others were much more sceptical.⁶⁷

The mission applied a similar modus operandi to the drafting of Ministry of the Interior and ANP internal procedures and monitoring mechanisms. These efforts had

author, 19 Oct. 2021; former EUPOL Afghanistan official no. 26, Interview with the author, 5 Nov. 2021; and former EUPOL Afghanistan official no. 30, Interview with the author, 9 Nov. 2021.

⁵⁶ Former EUPOL Afghanistan official no. 26, Interview with the author, 5 Nov. 2021.

⁵⁷ Kumar, R., 'We had 4000 policewomen in Afghanistan: Let them get back to work', *The Guardian*, 21 Apr. 2022.

⁵⁸ Former EUPOL Afghanistan official no. 18, Interview with the author, 26 Oct. 2021.

⁵⁹ Former EUPOL Afghanistan official no. 3, Interview with the author, 11 Oct. 2021.

⁶⁰ European Court of Auditors (note 14), p. 24.

⁶¹ EUPOL Afghanistan, 'EUPOL: Serving Afghanistan', Newsletter of the European Union Police Mission in Afghanistan, 02/14 (Mar.–Apr. 2014), p.11.

⁶² European Union, 'Official Ground Breaking Ceremony starts the Construction of a Crime Management College within the Afghan National Police Academy funded by the European Union', Press release, Kabul, 8 May 2013.

⁶³ Former EUPOL Afghanistan official no. 27, Interview with the author, 5 Nov. 2021.

⁶⁴ Former EUPOL Afghanistan official no. 4, Interview with the author, 11 Oct. 2021; and former EUPOL Afghanistan official no. 8, Interview with the author, 14 Oct. 2021.

⁶⁵ Former EUPOL Afghanistan official no. 18, Interview with the author, 26 Oct. 2021.

⁶⁶ Former EUPOL Afghanistan official no. 8, Interview with the author, 14 Oct. 2021.

⁶⁷ Former EUPOL Afghanistan official no. 4, Interview with the author, 11 Oct. 2021.

limited results. For instance, while the police code of conduct that EUPOL Afghanistan helped to draft was considered one of the building blocks for professionalizing the police, whether it was used by police officers throughout the country remains questionable.⁶⁸ The same can be said, for example, of the various procedures and oversight mechanisms adopted to prevent corruption and patronage-based appointments within the Ministry of the Interior and other relevant institutions.⁶⁹ In the end, ‘the management of human resources within the MoI [Ministry of the Interior] remained weak’, as the mission and the rest of the international community continued to ‘invest in strong individuals rather than in the system’.⁷⁰

IV. Explanatory factors

Using the EPON framework, EUPOL Afghanistan’s lack of effectiveness can be analysed with reference to the following explanatory factors: political primacy, realistic mandates and matching resources, a people-centred approach, legitimacy and credibility, coordination and coherence, and promotion of the WPS agenda.

Explanatory factor 1: Political primacy

In the early days following the invasion of Afghanistan, ‘[t]he broadness of the peace-building agenda and the scope of the challenge...led to a bewildering number of actors—with multiple leads, separate chains of command, and their own constituent interests—and a multitude of potentially conflicting agendas’.⁷¹ The Afghanistan Compact of 2006 aimed to change all that by providing a roadmap for cooperation between the Afghan government and the international donor community.⁷² However, none of the actors involved ever truly agreed on either what this shared vision of the future entailed or how to implement it. More specifically, consensus could not be reached on how to rebuild Afghanistan’s security sector.

It is in this context, and as ‘the outcome of a complex set of factors’, rather than the result of a substantive needs assessment, that EUPOL Afghanistan was created: ‘Do not compare CSDP missions with development work’, warned one interviewee, ‘we are conducting EU foreign policy’.⁷³ Another pointed out that: ‘We use [CSDP engagement] more and more as a tool to sort of preserve our own interests’.⁷⁴ The resulting mission was a large, donor-driven, civilian police mission, fundamentally at odds with the shared Ministry of the Interior and US priority of training police to fight the insurgency. ‘If you just have a hammer in the toolbox’, explained a former staff member, ‘you see nails all over; so, then you see there is a problem there, alright, then put in a really big police mission’.⁷⁵

⁶⁸ Former EUPOL Afghanistan official no. 4, Interview with the author, 11 Oct. 2021.

⁶⁹ Former EUPOL Afghanistan official no. 18, Interview with the author, 26 Oct. 2021.

⁷⁰ Giustozzi and Isaqzadeh (note 9), p. 150; and former EUPOL Afghanistan official no. 31, Interview with the author, 10 Nov. 2021.

⁷¹ Van Bijlert, M., ‘Imaginary institutions: State-building in Afghanistan’, eds M. Kremer, P. van Lieshout and R. Went, *Doing Good or Doing Better: Development Policies in a Globalizing World* (Amsterdam University Press: Amsterdam, 2009), p. 163.

⁷² The Afghanistan Compact, Signed 1 Feb. 2006, p. 2.

⁷³ According to Dirx, these factors included ‘[transatlantic] pressure on EU governments to do more, some EU actors wanting to gain more visibility in Afghanistan, European electorates that were generally averse to more military engagement, and disagreements among EU Member States over the appropriate strategy’. See Dirx (note 8), p. 36; and former EUPOL Afghanistan official no. 10, Interview with the author, 15 Oct. 2021.

⁷⁴ Former EUPOL Afghanistan official no. 3, Interview with the author, 11 Oct. 2021.

⁷⁵ Former EUPOL Afghanistan official no. 25, Interview with the author, 5 Nov. 2021.

Against this backdrop, interviewees were frustrated by the ‘lack of appetite’ for structured, evidence-based, post-course evaluation emanating from the Head of Mission Office, the Civilian Planning and Conduct Capability (CPCC) in Brussels or even the EU member states.⁷⁶ Instead, the mission relied on positive, mainly quantitative and activity-based reporting, which is the ‘easiest way to look good’.⁷⁷ As a former EUPOL Afghanistan official phrased it: ‘Numbers are the easiest [boxes] to tick’.⁷⁸ Since ‘failure [was] not an option’, no evaluation was better than delivering an ‘embarrassing answer’.⁷⁹ For the European Union, on-the-ground presence was at least as important as the mission’s activities and results: ‘All the people really wanted’, according to a former staff member, ‘was to be able to chink the glasses at the top table and say “we’ve got good people on the ground doing great things”’.⁸⁰

Explanatory factor 2: Realistic mandates and matching resources

From its inception, EUPOL Afghanistan faced an immensely challenging task. The ANP was marred by illiteracy, high attrition rates, and a general lack of trust among the population as the security situation quickly deteriorated. In this context, EUPOL Afghanistan’s mandate to work towards sustainable civilian policing arrangements was overly ambitious. As a former staff member put it: ‘Expectations were just too high; this end-state was not achievable, not in 50 years’.⁸¹ This is not specific to Afghanistan: ‘The process of creating a mandate with 28, now 27, different political entities putting in their own words’, explained one respondent, ‘[results in] a mandate that is very rarely implementable’.⁸² Another added that an end-state was ‘never very realistically formulated’.⁸³ In Afghanistan, the mandate and the job descriptions were so broad and vague that people were often ‘lost [and] didn’t know where to start’.⁸⁴ The mandate aligned with neither on-the-ground realities nor Ministry of the Interior priorities, which, combined with the mission’s relative lack of resources and slow procurement procedures, reduced its leverage and influence over local counterparts. ‘The MoI [Ministry of the Interior] was so dominated by NATO’, according to a former EUPOL Afghanistan official, ‘that it was sometimes hard for us to work on our mandate’.⁸⁵

Many interviewees also identified staffing as one of the most important obstacles to implementing the mandate. Police officers seconded by their members states—who made up most of the staff—were often singled out by their non-uniformed colleagues for lacking a clear understanding of development issues and practices—in particular regarding assessment and evaluation. As one put it: ‘We think that they don’t know what they’re doing, they think that we have no idea what we report on’.⁸⁶ In many cases, police officers did not have the necessary skills or experience to complete their tasks—from training police to mentoring ministers. Many interviewees reported that these issues, combined with short rotations, lack of interest from seconding member states and headquarters’ lack of political will to confront states about their secondees, led to a general lack of accountability among staff members. These problems were further amplified by the sheer number of rotated staff and the specificity of the

⁷⁶ Former EUPOL Afghanistan official no. 1, Interview with the author, 7 Oct. 2021.

⁷⁷ Former EUPOL Afghanistan official no. 1, Interview with the author, 7 Oct. 2021.

⁷⁸ Former EUPOL Afghanistan official no. 16, Interview with the author, 22 Oct. 2021.

⁷⁹ Former EUPOL Afghanistan official no. 1, Interview with the author, 7 Oct. 2021.

⁸⁰ Former EUPOL Afghanistan official no. 1, Interview with the author, 7 Oct. 2021.

⁸¹ Former EUPOL Afghanistan official no. 10, Interview with the author, 15 Oct. 2021.

⁸² Former EUPOL Afghanistan official no. 12, Interview with the author, 15 Oct. 2021.

⁸³ Former EUPOL Afghanistan official no. 3, Interview with the author, 11 Oct. 2021.

⁸⁴ Former EUPOL Afghanistan official no. 14, Interview with the author, 20 Oct. 2021.

⁸⁵ Former EUPOL Afghanistan official no. 14, Interview with the author, 20 Oct. 2021.

⁸⁶ Former EUPOL Afghanistan official no. 25, Interview with the author, 5 Nov. 2021.

skills and experience required, leading to a mission that was both poorly staffed and understaffed.⁸⁷

Explanatory factor 3: People-centred approach

As mentioned above, the mission's mandate and activities were never really aligned with Ministry of the Interior priorities. Making assumptions about rather than assessing domestic needs, EUPOL Afghanistan promoted civilian and people-centred community policing, which 'focuses on building ties and working closely with the citizens' in the long term.⁸⁸ The Afghan government and NATO, however, favoured a paramilitary approach to police training for immediate counterinsurgency purposes.⁸⁹ The Ministry of the Interior was never in the driving seat to 'steer the process'.⁹⁰ It therefore had little choice but to pay lip-service to international demands: staff members at EUPOL Afghanistan were advising their ministry counterparts but, as one former mission official explained, 'often it was also pushing them because the mandate we had from Brussels [The Council of the European Union] was different from the expectations that the Afghans had'.⁹¹

The lack of national ownership was also evident from the mission's daily activities. Lack of local input of any kind often resulted in procedures, policies and legal texts that were donor-driven and of no use to Afghan counterparts. The first police training curricula developed by EUPOL Afghanistan, for instance, were patchworks of European practice.⁹² Gathering local input and conducting needs assessments were often considered 'too complicated' and time-consuming.⁹³ The priority was to get 'boots through' and produce visible, quantifiable outputs.⁹⁴ The difficulty getting things done, combined with the often implicit but widespread assumption that Afghans might not 'know what's best for them', frequently led people to 'do the stuff themselves', in the hope they would 'make a difference' before returning home.⁹⁵ The logic was simple: 'You just want to get the job done and it's faster to just point and do'.⁹⁶

Another impediment to the development of real local ownership at the community level was the mission's—and the international community's—excessive focus on the Afghan capital and lack of outreach to the provinces. One former EUPOL Afghanistan official regretted that: 'We have made the *huge* mistake of thinking that Kabul is representative of Afghanistan'.⁹⁷ Another reported, for instance, that 'all the law-making was...done in isolation, without too much of a reach out to the rest of the country'.⁹⁸ This was made worse over the years by the rapidly deteriorating security

⁸⁷ Several interviewees reported working in a different position from the one for which they were initially hired. Quite a few others mentioned that many mission staff members were either unqualified and unmotivated or there for the wrong reasons (e.g., money, adventure, dead-end career). On staffing issues, particularly in the early days, see Chivvis, C., *EU Civilian Crisis Management: The Record So Far* (RAND Corporation: Santa Monica, CA, 2010), pp. 25–26; and European Court of Auditors (note 14), p. 24. pp 15–18.

⁸⁸ European Court of Auditors (note 14), p. 22.

⁸⁹ Giustozzi and Isaqzadeh however point out that Mohammad Hanif Atmar, during his short-lived tenure as Minister of the Interior (2008–2010), was a big proponent of civilian policing. See Giustozzi and Isaqzadeh (note 9), pp. 146–47.

⁹⁰ Former EUPOL Afghanistan official no. 6, Interview with the author, 13 Oct. 2021.

⁹¹ Former EUPOL Afghanistan official no. 14, Interview with the author, 20 Oct. 2021.

⁹² Former EUPOL Afghanistan official no. 1, Interview with the author, 7 Oct. 2021.

⁹³ Former EUPOL Afghanistan official no. 1, Interview with the author, 7 Oct. 2021.

⁹⁴ Former EUPOL Afghanistan official no. 1, Interview with the author, 7 Oct. 2021.

⁹⁵ Former EUPOL Afghanistan official no. 12, Interview with the author, 15 Oct. 2021; and former EUPOL Afghanistan official no. 11, Interview with the author, 15 Oct. 2021.

⁹⁶ Former EUPOL Afghanistan official no. 12, Interview with the author, 15 Oct. 2021.

⁹⁷ Former EUPOL Afghanistan official no. 7, Interview with the author, 14 Oct. 2021.

⁹⁸ Former EUPOL Afghanistan official no. 4, Interview with the author, 11 Oct. 2021.

situation in most of the country and EUPOL Afghanistan's lack of engagement with local partners and relevant security actors. Ignoring non-state armed groups was "one of [the mission's] Achilles' heels," one former staff member confided, "[w]e were too western thinking".⁹⁹ In the end, many interviewees stressed that a lack of cultural understanding and cultural awareness was one of the mission's main weaknesses.

Explanatory factor 4: Legitimacy and credibility

Drawing from the UN Capstone doctrine, the international legitimacy of a peace operation is derived in part from its legality in international law.¹⁰⁰ In this regard, EUPOL Afghanistan's legitimacy was never in question: the European Union was officially invited to launch a police mission by the Government of Afghanistan, and welcomed to do so by the UN Security Council.¹⁰¹ In addition, since EUPOL Afghanistan was a non-executive mission, fostering legitimacy and credibility among the population was neither an issue nor a priority.¹⁰² 'To be honest', a former staff member noted, 'I don't think any Afghan you asked would say they have experienced the presence of the EUPOL'.¹⁰³ That said, the way the mission was perceived by local and international counterparts severely reduced its effectiveness.

An important problem raised by respondents that affected EUPOL Afghanistan's credibility and legitimacy was the general culture of the mission. According to a former EUPOL Afghanistan official, 'the bigger issue was the cultural aspect: what kind of culture do you project? A culture where people are heavily armed...is not conducive to building relationships'.¹⁰⁴ The mission was staffed predominantly by male police officers who carried weapons they would not have access to in their home countries, and who were, in the words of a former staff member, 'very, very chauvinistic'.¹⁰⁵ Interviews with former mission officials reveal that, combined with the general lack of accountability of EUPOL Afghanistan personnel, this highly specific organizational culture not only fostered internal misconduct such as drunken behaviour, sexual harassment and abuse of resources, but also seriously harmed the mission's credibility and legitimacy in the eyes of its counterparts.

In addition, people with the right skillsets were often in short supply.¹⁰⁶ A former EUPOL Afghanistan official pointed out: 'We send police officers. We call them trainers but they're not trainers'.¹⁰⁷ The same can be said of mentors and advisers who often had tremendous operational experience but no understanding of development concepts and practices or were not experienced at advising at the strategic level. Asking a general and seasoned mujahideen 'to accept advice from somebody who patrols the streets of Barcelona' harmed the mission's credibility and legitimacy.¹⁰⁸ One interviewee was highly critical: 'It's an insult....It's almost neo-colonial'.¹⁰⁹ Another explained that it sends the message that 'you feel superior'.¹¹⁰

⁹⁹ Former EUPOL Afghanistan official no. 2, Interview with the author, 8 Oct. 2021.

¹⁰⁰ United Nations, Department of Peacekeeping Operations/Department of Field Support, *United Nations Peacekeeping Operations: Principles and Guidelines* (United Nations: New York, 2008), pp. 36–37.

¹⁰¹ UN Security Council Resolution 1746, 23 Mar. 2007; and Council Joint Action (note 1).

¹⁰² Most of EUPOL Afghanistan's communication activities were geared to the member states. Former EUPOL Afghanistan official no. 30, Interview with the author, 9 Nov. 2021.

¹⁰³ Former EUPOL Afghanistan official no. 5, Interview with the author, 13 Oct. 2021.

¹⁰⁴ Former EUPOL Afghanistan official no. 16, Interview with the author, 22 Oct. 2021.

¹⁰⁵ Former EUPOL Afghanistan official no. 30, Interview with the author, 9 Nov. 2021; former EUPOL Afghanistan official no. 16, Interview with the author, 22 Oct. 2021.

¹⁰⁶ European Court of Auditors (note 14), p. 17.

¹⁰⁷ Former EUPOL Afghanistan official no. 16, Interview with the author, 22 Oct. 2021.

¹⁰⁸ Former EUPOL Afghanistan official no. 14, Interview with the author, 20 Oct. 2021.

¹⁰⁹ Former EUPOL Afghanistan official no. 7, Interview with the author, 14 Oct. 2021.

¹¹⁰ Former EUPOL Afghanistan official no. 16, Interview with the author, 22 Oct. 2021.

With the tightening of security restrictions, staff freedom of movement became extremely limited, which over time severely hampered the mission's ability to function. The problem became even more acute after two EUPOL Afghanistan staff members were killed in an attack on a restaurant in January 2014: 'That was quite a game changer. After that, it went down the drain'. Leaving the EUPOL compound to meet counterparts, visit police districts and observe police officers at work, for instance, became virtually impossible, which severely hampered the monitoring and reporting of activities.¹¹¹ The situation was even worse in the countryside, where the mission had to rely on the cooperation of the various Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) to establish and maintain a presence, or even circulate.¹¹² 'We gave the illusion that we were dynamic in the provinces but EUPOL staff would hardly ever leave the PRTs'.¹¹³ For many, the field offices were simply about 'flying the flag'.¹¹⁴

Explanatory factor 5: Coordination and coherence

Although it improved over time, the lack of coordination and coherence within the mission was a major impediment to EUPOL Afghanistan achieving its goals.¹¹⁵ One interviewee explained how the Mission was a 'tower of Babel' in which none of the national contingents spoke 'the same language' in terms of policing.¹¹⁶ The lack of hand-over, follow-up and institutional memory, combined with the extremely high turnover rate and the absence of clear guidelines, severely hampered the mission's effectiveness. With each new hire came a new understanding of the mandate and its implementation and no choice but to build new relationships and 'reinvent the wheel'.¹¹⁷ As a former staff member put it: "The Mission was really like an entity on its own...like being on this island".¹¹⁸ The same was true of the field offices: 'We were doing our own thing in the province', one interviewee recalled.¹¹⁹ To make it worse, field offices were generally staffed with people from the same nationality as the PRT, often leading to overlapping projects and loyalty issues. Secondees whose base salaries were paid by their home member states were still seen as 'very much part of [their] national contingent'.¹²⁰

Many interviewees identified a lack of coherence in EUPOL's activities and recalled pushing for a more programmatic approach, which eventually led to some improvement over the years. For instance, to improve project selection and overall coherence, the project cell, which aimed to support mandate implementation, became a programme cell.

¹¹¹ Former EUPOL Afghanistan official no. 16, Interview with the author, 22 Oct. 2021.

¹¹² The Provincial Reconstruction Teams were 'small teams of military and civilian personnel working in Afghanistan's provinces to provide security for aid works and help humanitarian assistance or reconstruction tasks in areas with ongoing conflict or high level of insecurity'. Maley, W., 'Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Afghanistan: How they arrived and where they are going', NATO Review, 1 July 2007. On how EUPOL Afghanistan's inability to ensure its own security in the provinces and obligation to sign agreements with PRT countries affected the mission activities and limited EUPOL Afghanistan outreach, see European Court of Auditors (note 14), p. 17.

¹¹³ Former EUPOL Afghanistan official no. 33, Interview with the author, 12 Nov. 2021.

¹¹⁴ Former EUPOL Afghanistan official no. 7, Interview with the author, 14 Oct. 2021. The European Court of Auditors reported that 'most field offices were poorly manned and only two of them (in Herat and Mazar-e Sharif) [three if counting the Kabul office] were consistently staffed by more than 10 persons'. See European Court of Auditors (note 14), p. 17 (and Annex IV, p. 42).

¹¹⁵ According to the European Court of Auditors, it was 'common practice for individual EUPOL mentors to propose projects in a particular field of interest without applying an approach based on a systematic needs assessment'. European Court of Auditors (note 14), p. 27.

¹¹⁶ Former EUPOL Afghanistan official no. 7, Interview with author, 14 Oct. 2021.

¹¹⁷ Former EUPOL Afghanistan official no. 10, Interview with author, 15 Oct. 2021.

¹¹⁸ Former EUPOL Afghanistan official no. 3, Interview with author, 11 Oct. 2021.

¹¹⁹ Former EUPOL Afghanistan official no. 2, Interview with author, 8 Oct. 2021.

¹²⁰ Former EUPOL Afghanistan official no. 3, Interview with author, 11 Oct. 2021.

External coordination and coherence were also poor. EUPOL Afghanistan’s main problem in this regard was that it was ‘a very small bit player’ with an agenda that did not align with US and Ministry of the Interior priorities. EUPOL and NATO could not have been more at odds. The EU mission trained senior and mid-ranking police officers in civilian policing while the NATO Training Mission-Afghanistan (NTM-A) was aiming to turn the ANP into a large, insurgent-fighting paramilitary force: ‘We’re training people for “community policing” [air quotes] knowing the next day they will be out on an operation to kill Taliban’.¹²¹ On the NTM-A side, ‘the feeling that never escaped [us] was: what EUPOL was doing was either not kind of the right thing at the right moment or [not] enough’.¹²² The lack of coordination between external actors also meant that ‘too many competing demands’ were made of the Ministry of the Interior.¹²³ It was asked to provide counterinsurgents, form a functional civilian police corps and to reform itself, while higher ups in the ministry had to make time for the plethora of foreigners ‘calling themselves their mentors’.¹²⁴ Things were no better at the EU level: cooperation between EUPOL Afghanistan and the EU Special Representative’s Office was poor and member states continued to pursue their own national interests. The International Police Coordination Board (IPCB), set up in 2007, was meant to correct the general lack of coordination but, despite a last push for donor coordination ahead of the 2014 drawdown and some minor successes (such as the development of a ‘vision’ for the ANP), ‘trying to impose some sort of order on that ad hocery did not work’.¹²⁵ In the end, as a former staff member speaking in 2021 put it: ‘We do a lot of disparate projects, but we are not building a sustainable system’.¹²⁶

Explanatory factor 6: Women, Peace and Security

The WPS agenda—established by UN Security Council Resolution 1325 of 31 October 2000—was never mentioned as a core principle guiding EUPOL Afghanistan activities. A former staff member even confided that they only heard of Resolution 1325 after returning from Afghanistan, even though they had worked on gender issues.¹²⁷ As noted above, only the 2014 mandate revision mentioned gender mainstreaming, women’s rights and women police officers, while the EUPOL Afghanistan ‘female police roadmap’ was only adopted in 2015. In the words of the same interviewee: ‘When we turned out the lights, we were just [starting to examine the issue of]...female police officers’.¹²⁸

There was also a tendency throughout EUPOL Afghanistan’s existence to reduce gender to the recruitment, retention and promotion of women police officers. Given that the male/female ratio among EUPOL Afghanistan staff was around 70/30 at best, this seemed rather hypocritical. In addition, as noted above, this was done with little concern for unintended consequences and the principle of ‘do no harm’. Other issues, such as emphasizing women’s agency and preventing SGBV, were mainstreamed in the mission’s training, advisory and mentoring activities, but not in a systematic fashion.

¹²¹ Former EUPOL Afghanistan official no. 2, Interview with the author, 8 Oct. 2021. On the debate over paramilitary or civilian policing, see also Giustozzi and Isaqzadeh (note 9), pp. 145–47.

¹²² Former EUPOL Afghanistan official no. 5, Interview with the author, 13 Oct. 2021.

¹²³ Former EUPOL Afghanistan official no. 3, Interview with the author, 11 Oct. 2021.

¹²⁴ Former EUPOL Afghanistan official no. 12, Interview with the author, 15 Oct. 2021.

¹²⁵ Former EUPOL Afghanistan official no. 32, Interview with the author, 11 Nov. 2021.

¹²⁶ Former EUPOL Afghanistan official no. 32, Interview with the author, 11 Nov. 2021.

¹²⁷ Former EUPOL Afghanistan official no. 27, Interview with the author, 5 Nov. 2021.

¹²⁸ Former EUPOL Afghanistan official no. 27, Interview with the author, 5 Nov. 2021.

V. Conclusions

While it is not true that EUPOL Afghanistan's activities had no effect at all, the effects it did have were marginal at best and at times even counterproductive, for instance, on the recruitment, training, protection and retention of women police officers. In either case, these effects were rarely if ever measured in any significant or systematic way. When asked about the potential long-term, positive effects of the mission, a former staff member responded: 'I want to hope'.¹²⁹ After mentioning positive attitude change at the individual level, another confided: 'It is perhaps also something that I have been telling myself, to sort of say, well, not everything has been in vain'.¹³⁰ In hindsight, even EUPOL Afghanistan's most visible outputs, such as construction of the Police Staff College, once 'a flagship project for the EUPOL Mission', were negated by the Taliban takeover in August 2021, at least when it comes to achieving the mission's original objectives and supporting a specific regime.¹³¹

There are, as described above, numerous reasons why EUPOL Afghanistan failed to achieve its stated objectives, but it may have been doomed from the very beginning. In the end, the mission only played a small part in a broader, uncoordinated international state-building project marked by the multiplication of overlapping, contradictory or redundant programmes and a cacophony of actors pushing a variety of political agendas. As one former mission official put it: 'The foundation of being in Afghanistan, all of us... that [was] a little bit shaky, with different rationales and motives and, in the middle of it, EUPOL [trying] to build something that we want[ed] to call sustainable'.¹³² With no shared end-state in mind, no coherent, overarching plan and no political consensus on the road to a peaceful political settlement in Afghanistan, this was mission impossible.

In fact, as became clear from the interviews that, despite the good intentions and dedication of most mission staff, EUPOL Afghanistan was never primarily geared to achieving its stated objectives or even long-lasting effects in Afghanistan: 'We went there with a mission and that mission was not primarily, I think, the elevation of the Afghans'.¹³³ Another interviewee stressed that promoting EU and member state interests is 'sometimes hidden...as a sort of subsidiary objective for a mission when it is actually the primary objective'.¹³⁴ Most of EUPOL Afghanistan's flaws and shortcomings, from staffing issues to the vague and overambitious mandates, to the lack of proper assessment, evaluation and accountability mechanisms, stem from the political nature of CSDP missions. The CSDP is first and foremost a foreign policy tool 'fully in the hands of the member states'.¹³⁵ As a former EUPOL Afghanistan official explained: 'It's throwing stuff at [the situation], politically and diplomatically, to show the politicians that our country is doing our bit, because we've sent [our] people to Kabul, and they're there, in uniform, working with Afghans'.¹³⁶

¹²⁹ Former EUPOL Afghanistan official no. 12, Interview with the author, 15 Oct. 2021.

¹³⁰ Former EUPOL Afghanistan official no. 3, Interview with the author, 11 Oct. 2021.

¹³¹ Former EUPOL Afghanistan official no. 1, Interview with the author, 7 Oct. 2021.

¹³² Former EUPOL Afghanistan official no. 2, Interview with the author, 8 Oct. 2021.

¹³³ Former EUPOL Afghanistan official no. 7, Interview with the author, 14 Oct. 2021.

¹³⁴ Former EUPOL Afghanistan official no. 3, Interview with the author, 11 Oct. 2021.

¹³⁵ Former EUPOL Afghanistan official no. 3, Interview with the author, 11 Oct. 2021.

¹³⁶ Former EUPOL Afghanistan official no. 1, Interview with the author, 7 Oct. 2021.

3. EUCAP Sahel Mali

ADAM SANDOR

I. Introduction

Mali faces remarkable political and security challenges. The European Union Capacity Building Mission in Mali (EUCAP Sahel Mali) was established by the European Council on 15 April 2014 and launched in the country by 15 January 2015. This Common Security and Defence Policy mission has as its overall objective ‘to allow the Malian authorities to restore and maintain constitutional and democratic order and the conditions for lasting peace in Mali, and to restore and maintain State authority and legitimacy throughout the territory of Mali by means of an effective redeployment of its administration’.¹

II. Context, mandate and activities

Context

While the root causes of the armed conflict in Mali are linked to several interlocking historical factors, the proximate causes of the conflict date back to 2010–11. Frustrated by the central government’s marginalization of Mali’s northern regions, the Mouvement National de l’Azawad (MNA), a movement created by young students in 2010, and members of the National Alliance of Mali Touaregs (Alliance Nationale des Touareg du Mali, ANTM) armed group merged to create the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (Mouvement National de Libération de l’Azawad, MNLA) with the objective of establishing an independent sovereign state through the use of force. The group’s creation occurred in the shadow of the NATO operations that toppled the regime of Muammar Qaddafi in Libya in 2011, in which several hundred Tuareg and Arab fighters who had fought for Qaddafi returned to Mali, many with sophisticated weaponry pillaged from Libyan armouries.²

To accomplish their objectives, the MNLA joined forces with local armed Islamist groups: al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), the Mouvement pour l’Unité et le Jihad en Afrique de l’Ouest (MUJAO) and a local group, Ansar Dine, led by an influential member of the Tuareg rebel elite, Iyad Ag Ghaly. Hundreds of Tuareg and Arab deserters also joined the rebel coalition, which routed Malian military positions, taking control of northern cities within three months of its first attack in January 2012. Observing these losses from the capital, Bamako, Malian soldiers grew frustrated with how the government of President Amadou Toumani Touré was handling the rebellion. In March 2012, non-commissioned officers and disgruntled soldiers mutinied, leading to Touré’s overthrow. The rebels took advantage of the chaos in Bamako to declare independence for the Azawad region of northern Mali.

However, the alliance between the MNLA and the armed Islamist groups quickly broke down and by July 2012 AQIM and MUJAO had chased most of the MNLA battalions out of the country. Once they had occupied all northern Mali’s largest towns, the Islamist armed groups quickly increased the harshness of their rule and implemented violent punishments as a means of disciplining local communities, resulting in a drastic loss of their initial local support.³

¹ Council Decision 2014/219/CFSP of 15 April 2014 on the European Union CSDP mission in Mali (EUCAP Sahel Mali), *Official Journal of the European Union*.

² Lecocq, B. et al., ‘One hippopotamus and eight blind analysts: A multivocal analysis of the 2012 political crisis in the divided Republic of Mali’, *Review of African Political Economy*, vol. 40, no. 137 (2013), pp. 343–57.

³ Bouhlel, F. and Guichaoua, Y., ‘Norms, non-combatants’ agency and restraint in jihadi violence in northern Mali’, *International Interactions*, vol. 47, no. 5 (2021), pp. 855–72.

The French government intervened in January 2013 to oust the armed Islamist groups and to ensure Mali's territorial integrity. The French military intervention (Operation Serval) quickly retook control of northern cities, killing several of the Islamist group's commanders, but failed to destroy the organization. Fighters managed to flee across regional borders or to rejoin their communities in rural areas. After French operations cleared the field, the Malian Armed Forces followed, re-establishing their presence across the territory. In doing so, however, the military targeted groups such as the Fulani in punishment for the support provided by some in the community to Islamist groups.⁴ In response to the military's human rights abuses, many young men from the Fulani and other communities, frustrated by their marginalized social position and the history of abuse by corrupt local administrators, joined armed Islamist groups.⁵

A degree of stability returned to the country in the wake of Operation Serval. Separatist rebel groups had signed a ceasefire with the government by June 2013. Supported by the establishment of the United Nations Stabilization Mission for Mali (MINUSMA), presidential elections were held in August 2013, resulting in the election of President Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta. Following a failed attempt by the Malian military to retake Kidal in May 2014, however, armed combat recommenced in many northern areas. The government, pro-government militias and pro-independence rebel groups eventually entered peace talks facilitated by the Algerian government, resulting in the signing of the Accord for Peace and Reconciliation in Mali on 20 June 2015. Nonetheless, violence involving armed groups continued.

While the signatory armed groups of the 2015 Algiers Agreement continued to fight each other, armed Islamist groups reorganized and recommenced violent attacks against anyone they viewed as challengers. New armed movements such as the Katiba Macina had organized by 2015, bolstered by high levels of recruitment in central Mali. In January 2017, the Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM) was formed by the merger of Ansar Dine, AQIM, Al-Mourabitoun and the Katiba Macina, led by Iyad Ag Ghaly. Complex attacks involving improvised explosive devices and ambushes increased markedly, spreading throughout Mali's central regions (Mopti and Segou). The JNIM has proved incredibly resilient and capable of regularly harassing international forces, and of militarily defeating the Malian forces. JNIM forces were successfully embedded in several areas close to Bamako, including in the garrison city of Kati in July 2022.

Rocked by military losses and accusations of corruption, the Keïta regime faced mass protests in mid-2020, which were harshly repressed by the regime. These protests led to a new military coup d'état, which ousted Keïta on 18 August 2020. The coup leaders quickly established a national transitional council and, at the insistence of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), agreed to an 18-month transition period led by a civilian president. When transitional president Bah N'Daw attempted to dissolve the government and select a new cabinet that would have replaced some of the coup leaders, however, they launched another coup on 24 May 2021. Having ousted N'Daw, Colonel Assimi Goïta, one of the masterminds of the first coup, was declared president. Diplomatic relations with Mali's traditional international partners have hit a new low as Goïta and current Prime Minister Choguel Kokalla Maïga insisted on the need to delay presidential and legislative elections. Several pro-transition protests were organized in Bamako, in which protesters called for the departure of French forces to

⁴ Carayol, R., 'Entre massacre et lutte antiterroriste: L'armée malienne à l'épreuve du feu' [Between massacre anti-terrorism: Malian army put to the test], *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, vol. 53, no. 3 (2019), pp. 495–503.

⁵ Benjaminsen, T. and Ba, B., 'Why do pastoralists in Mali join jihadist groups? A political ecological explanation', *Journal of Peasant Studies*, vol. 46, no. 1 (2019), pp. 1–20; and Tobie, A., *Le Centre Mali: Violences et Instrumentalisation Croisées* [The Mali Centre: Violence and instrumentalization crossed], SIPRI Insights on Peace and Security no. 5 (SIPRI: Stockholm, Dec. 2017).

be replaced by Russian military actors, including private military companies such as the Wagner Group, to fill the country's security vacuum. Wagner fighters arrived in Mali in late 2021, sparking a further degradation in Mali's diplomatic relations with western security and military partners. The French government finally withdrew its counterterrorism intervention, Barkhane, in August 2022 and in June 2023 the Malian authorities asked MINUSMA to withdraw. MINUSMA officially ended on 31 December 2023.⁶ The withdrawal of some MINUSMA bases in the north of the country, however, became a matter of fierce contention between the transitional government and several signatory armed groups, sparking another round of fighting and new allegations of atrocities committed by Wagner Group fighters against civilians in northern Mali. EUCAP Sahel Mali now finds itself in a precarious and unstable political and diplomatic environment.

Mandate

The broadly formulated mandate of EUCAP Sahel Mali in the Council Decision is publicly available, but its precise operationalization, the Operation Plan (OPLAN), is classified.⁷ However, three overarching pillars structure EUCAP Sahel Mali's activities: training, advice, and coordination and cooperation with the Malian Police, Gendarmerie and National Guard.⁸ The mission's strategic objectives include increasing the operational efficiency of the internal security forces, supporting the forces' leadership structures through organizational reform, reinforcing the legal basis for the forces' administrative and judicial prerogatives and providing support to the Malian administrative authorities to redeploy throughout the national territory. Importantly, the mandate does not include an executive function, meaning that the mission's experts and staff have no direct policing or security responsibilities in Mali.

The focus and operational objectives outlined in the mission's mandates have evolved over time as the organization has developed experience in the country and fostered relationships with Malian partners, and in response to the trajectory of the armed conflict. Given the institutional, resource and capability deficiencies of the Malian forces and the country's multiple security concerns, however, each mandate renewal has resulted in an expansion of the mission's responsibilities. The initial mandate for the period 2015–16 focused much of the mission's efforts on improving the internal security forces' human resource management systems and training policies. The mission's second mandate (2017–18) added a focus on providing support with counterterrorism, fighting transnational organized crime and border security. The third mandate renewal (2019–20) added the need to support the government of Mali's logistical challenges and deployment of the integrated security plan for the central regions (Plan de sécurisation intégrée des régions du centre, PSIRC) to these responsibilities. It also extended mission activities to areas of the country with a G5-Sahel presence. The 2019–20 mandate also facilitated the deployment of a mission mobile unit to the Mopti Region to conduct training in areas outside the capital. Finally, the 2021–2022 mandate, which came to a close on 31 January 2023, added to these responsibilities the tasks of supporting the internal security forces to enhance their respect for human rights, in order to tackle impunity and increase accountability, as well as mission support to the transitional government to implement the return of state authority throughout the

⁶ United Nations, Conseil de sécurité: le Mali demande le retrait sans délai de la MINUSMA [Security Council: Mali calls for the immediate withdrawal of MINUSMA], Press release, 16 June 2023.

⁷ Even mission staff require authorization to access physical copies of the mandates. EUCAP Sahel Mali Official, Interview with the author, 2 Oct. 2021; and EUCAP Sahel Mali Official, Interview with the author, 6 Oct. 2021.

⁸ In French, the National Police, Gendarmerie and National Guard are generally called the *forces de sécurité intérieure* (FSI). This chapter calls these institutions the 'internal security forces' when referring to them as a group.

country.⁹ EUCAP Sahel Mali has therefore experienced a significant degree of mission creep throughout its lifetime.¹⁰

Activities

The activities of EUCAP Sahel Mali are primarily focused on training and providing advice to the Mali Defence and Security Forces (MDSF).¹¹ While specialized tactical training has been a significant focus, such as training on riot control, ambush reaction, counterterrorism rapid response, tracking/following criminal suspects, and drug trafficking detection and interdiction, more holistic, people-centred training in law enforcement, for example on community policing, is also regularly provided. The mission has also embedded law enforcement counsellors/advisors in the Ministry of Security and Civilian Protection, who work with Malian ministerial officials on a daily basis. Embedded advisors develop an inside view of the MDSF's institutional challenges, enabling them to target key issues for the mission to help to improve. Improving the human resource management of the MDSF, for example, has been an important focus of the mission. In May 2017, the mission was instrumental in helping the Malian government to update and develop its national border policy and action plan, the previous plan having been finalized in October 2000.¹²

Within two years of the mission's establishment, a majority of the mission's activities were concentrated on providing capacity-building support for the Malian internal security forces in Mali's southern regions of Bamako, Sikasso, Ségou and Kayes. During this time, the then Head of Mission, Albrecht Conze, stated that 2000 Malian internal security force cadres had enhanced their competencies through EUCAP Sahel training.¹³ By mid-2018, some 11 000 trainees had completed EUCAP Sahel Mali training courses.¹⁴ The mission has also provided the internal security forces with various types of equipment, such as computers and office materials, order maintenance or rapid-response equipment, anti-riot protective gear or bullet-proof vests, shields and batons, and drug identification equipment, as well as printed materials, such as printed copies of the Malian Penal Code, to help Malian law enforcement carry out its operations and responsibilities.¹⁵ While the mission does not tend to provide vehicles for the MDSE, it exercises an important convening power that helps to coordinate with other international donors that provide vehicles or other necessary equipment.

III. Effects

Despite impressive levels of training in terms of the number of police, gendarmerie and national guards trained by EUCAP Sahel Mali, the mission has only contributed minimally to the establishment of a durable peace in the country. Most of the advances

⁹ EUCAP Sahel Mali officials, interviews with the author, 10 Sep. to 6 Oct. 2021.

¹⁰ The EUCAP Sahel Mali mandates are not public and are often not shared in their entirety with mission staff. Given that data collection for this chapter was conducted between June and November 2021 and the mission's mandate was renewed in February 2023, it is difficult to indicate what changes the new mandate has undergone, notably in the context of heightened diplomatic distance between Mali's transitional government and most European and other western partners.

¹¹ It is estimated that over 90% of the training activities target agencies of the Ministry of Security and Civilian Protection (MSPC). EUCAP Sahel Mali Adviser, interview with the author, Bamako, 5 Oct. 2021.

¹² See Meeting of the National Borders Commission in Bamako, Facebook post, 18 May 2017.

¹³ Coulibaly, B., 'Mission civile de l'Union européenne: EUCAP Sahel Mali fête ses 2 ans de soutien' [European Union civil mission: EUCAP Sahel Mali celebrates 2 years of support], *Notre Nation*, 30 Jan. 2017.

¹⁴ Marsh, N. and Rolandsen, Ø., 'Fragmented we fall: Security sector cohesion and the impact of foreign security force assistance in Mali', *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, vol. 15, no. 5 (2021), p. 622.

¹⁵ The EUCAP Sahel Mali Facebook page provides information on many of the mission's activities.

made by the mission have been oriented towards placing the MDSF on a solid legal and organizational basis, supporting the extension of Malian state authority to key geographic areas of concern, notably in the centre of the country, and latterly on increasing accountability.¹⁶

Mali's deteriorating security context has seriously challenged how state security and justice actors implement the rule of law. Mali is a signatory to almost all international and regional treaties and legal instruments in relation to terrorism and organized crime.¹⁷ However, its own national legal corpus in matters related to key aspects of the security crisis is often outdated or absent.¹⁸ For example, the Malian Code of Military Justice was created in April 1995 and has not been amended since.¹⁹ Weak government administrative capacities make collating and compiling legal texts from the country's Official Journal (Mali's registry of laws) a serious challenge, which restricts the ability of justice actors to access written documentation.²⁰ As a result, Malian justice actors find themselves ill-equipped to effectively pursue prosecutorial actions in connection with the crisis. In response to this legal deficit, EUCAP Sahel Mali's work has supported the government by writing and revising many executive decrees and laws to be sent to the National Assembly for parliamentary validation. This has included crafting laws on human trafficking, trafficking in irregular migrants and cyber-criminality, as well as a national criminal records act and a law on the role of customary authorities, among other things. At the request of Mali's transitional authorities, the mission is also redrafting the Code of Military Justice to respond to high levels of impunity in the MDSF, and updating Mali's Penal Code and Criminal Procedure Code.²¹ The mission's technical expertise on crafting legal texts is often restricted by the need for Malian partners to ensure that proposed texts match the provisions established in the conventions of the regional organizations, such as ECOWAS, of which Mali is a member.²² Nonetheless, the mission's work provides the Malian government with an important juridical baseline for its work and the practice of legal drafting.

The mission has also been called on to address the MDSF's organizational deficiencies in order to ensure the longevity of Mali's security institutions. Human resource management in the security sector has been a significant cause for concern among the international donor community, given the high levels of dysfunction within the MDSF revealed at the start of the 2012 crisis. Strengthening the competencies of individual police, gendarmes and national guard personnel through various forms of training is a crucial requirement to help strengthen the rule of law. However, mission officials have recognized since its initial mandate that significant levels of skills-loss are likely if training occurs but the security forces remain incapable of undertaking routine procedural and administrative tasks, such as identifying and paying employees, undertaking recruitment campaigns, providing career advancement or ensuring that leave can be taken. The mission has repeatedly advised its Malian partners of the need to modernize the MDSF's human resource management.²³ Nonetheless, the Keita government consistently resisted calls for reform, arguing that questions

¹⁶ Interviews with EUCAP Sahel Mali Officials, June, Sep. and Oct. 2021.

¹⁷ Cissé, H. and Ngari, A., *Garantir un procès équitable aux présumés terroristes au Mali [Guarantee of fair trial for suspected terrorists in Mali]* (Dakar: Institute for Security Studies, 2020).

¹⁸ EUCAP Sahel Mali Official, Interview with the author, Bamako, 5 Oct. 2021.

¹⁹ See Bagayoko, N., *Le processus de réforme du secteur de la sécurité au Mali [The security sector reform process in Mali]* (Centre Franco Paix en Résolution des Conflits et Missions de Paix: Montréal, 2018), p. 36.

²⁰ Malian Magistrate, Interview with the author, Bamako, 29 Sep. 2021.

²¹ Email communication, EUCAP Sahel Mali Official, 5 Oct. 2021.

²² EUCAP Sahel Mali Official, Interview with the author, 30 Sep. 2021.

²³ EUCAP Sahel Mali Official, Interview with the author, 30 Sep. 2021.

on the size and budget of the MDSF are matters of sovereignty and secrecy.²⁴ At the time, regime elites were widely reported to have fostered patron-client relations with MDSF officials, allowing them to exploit human resource irregularities, for example by enrolling fake soldiers and creaming off associated salaries or paying operational expenses in exchange for loyalty to the government.²⁵ Following the August 2020 coup d'état, however, transitional authorities (including the coup leaders) demonstrated a high degree of willingness to reform the MDSF, including its faulty human resource management. A digitalized human resource system has been established at the behest of Minister of Defence Colonel Sadio Camara. According to mission officials, 'it has been more than 10 years that the international community has been asking the Malian government to implement a modern human resources system for the security forces. Minister Camara unblocked that issue and was himself registered in the system in September 2021'.²⁶ That is not to say that implementation of such a system will root out corruption in the MDSF, or that new human resource processes have strengthened the organizational capacities of the MDSF. The example demonstrates, however, both the constructive relationship between the mission and the transitional authorities, and a willingness by some in the transitional authorities to improve the degree of oversight of the country's security forces.

The mission has facilitated the return of state officials to some areas of the country that they had previously had to leave due to the armed Islamist insurgency. EUCAP Sahel Mali is arguably Mali's primary partner in implementing the Integrated Security Plan for the Central Regions (Plan de Sécurisation Intégrée des Régions du Centre, PSIRC). The PSIRC, which was drafted in 2017 under Prime Minister Abdoulaye Idrissa Maiga but implemented by Prime Minister Soumeylou Boubeye Maiga, is arguably one of Mali's premier security strategies. Its objective is to help central government administrators, security forces and basic state services such as health and education to return to central Mali, especially the Mopti Region which was the epicentre of the insurgency in 2016. The PSIRC's most significant modality for facilitating the return of Malian state actors is the creation of several Secure Poles of Development and Governance (Poles Sécurisés de Développement et de Gouvernance, PSDG), which are administrative spaces where new physical infrastructure is designed and built to house public servants intended to provide law enforcement, administrative and development services. EUCAP Sahel Mali's efforts have been central to the physical design and implementation of several PSDGs in central Mali.²⁷ Members of the Malian security forces stationed at PSDGs attest to the quality of the physical infrastructure and how it supports stabilization efforts in central Mali.²⁸ In particular, the PSDGs increase the capacity of the security forces to protect their positions against insurgent attacks. For example, the National Guard unit stationed at the PSDG in Konna repelled an attack by JNIM militants in April 2021. EUCAP Sahel Mali's support to the MDSF within the

²⁴ See Tull, D., 'Rebuilding Mali's army: The dissonant relationship between Mali and its international partners', *International Affairs*, vol. 95, no. 2 (2019), pp. 410–15.

²⁵ FAMA Sergeant, Interview with the author, 27 Sep. 2021; EUCAP Sahel Mali Advisor, Interview with the author, 5 Oct. 2021. See also the ARTE-TV documentary, 'Mali: une armée dans le collimateur' [Mali: An army in the crosshairs], Nov. 2020.

²⁶ EUCAP Sahel Mali Official, Interview with the author, 30 Sep. 2021.

²⁷ The Mission had helped to open PSDGs in Konna, Tominian, Timissa and Sayes, and was committed to implementing others over the course of the next year in Mougna, Macina, and Monimpébougou. The mission was also studying the possibility of supporting the creation of PSDGs in Korientze, Koro and Mondoro. Discussion, 4 EUCAP Sahel Mali Officials, 30 July 2021; and EUCAP Sahel Mali Counsellor, Interview with the author, 2 Oct. 2021.

²⁸ Malian National Guardsman, Interview with the author, 18 Sep. 2021; and Malian National Guardsman (FORSAT), Interview with the author, 20 Sep. 2021.

framework of the PSIRC has helped to increase the ability of Malian forces to counter threats from insurgents.

Finally, in line with its 2021 to 31 January 2023 mandate, EUCAP Sahel Mali has also pursued efforts to make the MDSF more accountable and to address impunity. Three areas have received primary attention: (a) strengthening the role of Inspectors General in the security forces; (b) supporting the Military Police; and (c) supporting military justice actors and processes.²⁹ Since 2013, the international community's attempts to ensure that Mali's Armed Forces are held accountable in the context of counterinsurgency operations have faced significant resistance from government officials. EUCAP Sahel Mali officials recognize that previous mandates only 'marginally' addressed impunity in the MDSF, a serious handicap in the task of building the security forces as legitimate institutions. Like the difficulties reforming MDSF human resource management, mission officials argued that Malian military officials under the Keita regime adamantly refused to entertain ideas on reforming military justice.³⁰ For example, in previous years the Malian armed forces insisted they did not want the Gendarmerie 'harassing them during their operations'. Similarly, the Gendarmes did not want to be involved in policing soldiers.³¹ Supported by French diplomatic efforts, and by maintaining the need for increased security forces accountability, mission officials managed to garner the support of Mali's transitional authorities (the Minister of Defence and the Minister of Justice) to implement a strategy of Gendarmes accompanying the armed forces, and provided key ministries with a draft of a new military justice law. As one interviewee pointed out, the mission reports show that by October 2021, Malian Gendarmes were accompanying the armed forces and investigations had commenced: 'We had to convince the ministries that members of the Malian armed forces are accountable to justice as well. They should be investigating bad soldiers as well as terrorists'.³²

Mission officials admit that fighting impunity in Mali is a significant uphill struggle. Administrative, legal and institutional reform must counter historical practices that have become deeply rooted in the fabric of law enforcement and the security field in Mali. As one mission advisor explained, 'there are no risks for public servants in Mali in not doing what they are supposed to do. They pursue impunity for self-enrichment and sometimes out of violent force because if they do so they simply won't be sent to prison'.³³ Nonetheless, compared to the previous regime, the transitional government's visible shift in terms of receptiveness to the mission's advice on accountability and justice has led to modest gains in addressing impunity and corruption within the MDSF. In November 2021, the country's first ever criminal case commenced against members of the security forces, resulting in guilty verdicts against members of the security forces.³⁴ While these initial cases only involved 'small fry', such actions are salutary for ordinary Malians who regularly criticize the level of impunity in Mali.³⁵

IV. Explanatory factors

While EUCAP Sahel Mali's activities have led to important advances in strengthening the competencies of individual MDSF members, the mission has made only a minimal contribution to advancing a durable peace in Mali more broadly. If the spread of the

²⁹ EUCAP Sahel Mali Counsellor, Interview with the author, 2 Oct. 2021.

³⁰ EUCAP Sahel Mali Counsellor, Interview with the author, 2 Oct. 2021.

³¹ EUCAP Sahel Mali Official, Interview with the author, 30 Oct. 2021.

³² EUCAP Sahel Mali Counsellor, Interview with the author, 5 Oct. 2021.

³³ EUCAP Sahel Mali Counsellor, Interview with the author, 5 Oct. 2021.

³⁴ Maillard, M., 'Au Mali, un pas en avant contre l'impunité des crimes militaires' [In Mali, a step forward against impunity for military crimes], *Libération*, 12 Nov. 2021.

³⁵ EUCAP Sahel Mali Counsellor, Interview with the author, 19 Nov. 2021.

Islamist insurgency provides a measure of the degree to which Mali is moving in the direction of ‘peace’, most observers, including the mission’s leadership, see the current security situation as nothing short of ‘catastrophic’.³⁶ Several factors explain why Mali’s security has continued to deteriorate. The parties to the Accord for Peace and Reconciliation failed to implement the reforms outlined in the treaty.³⁷ There was a lack of definitive security progress by French counterterrorist interventions, resulting in a widening gulf between French military policy and public opinion in Mali and the Sahel more broadly.³⁸ The arrival of Wagner forces in the country and their involvement alongside the Malian armed forces has drastically increased human rights violations in central Mali. This section uses the EPON framework to explain the mission’s limited successes in establishing a durable peace with regard to political primacy, realistic mandates and matching resources, a people-centred approach, legitimacy and credibility, coordination and coherence, and the WPS agenda.

Explanatory factor 1: Political primacy

As the unwillingness of many Keïta regime officials to undertake organizational change in the security sector demonstrated, Malian government and security officials view reforming the security forces as a highly political exercise, since reforms would necessarily alter the distribution of power and resources in the security sector. For example, should human resources reform result in all Malian police, gendarmes and guardsmen being successfully identified, and their salaries being deposited directly into individual bank accounts, MDSF officials and commanders would no longer be able to claim the salaries of fictitious ghost soldiers or pocket that part of the salary previously distributed in cash.³⁹ Such a result would drastically reduce individual reliance on commanding officers, and therefore on patron-client relationships and networks within the security forces. Even the selection of trainees involves a potent form of micro-politics, since trainees often lobby the MDSF leadership to be involved in training activities in order to benefit from training activity per diems.⁴⁰

Apart from the redistribution of resources, perhaps the most political aspect of how the MDSF dealt with the crisis involves the question of their counter-insurgency approach and the conditions in which MDSF members should use armed violence. More often than not, EUCAP Sahel Mali trainers and counsellors and the members of the MDSF they train or advise hold incommensurable understandings of when and to what degree coercive force should be used in Malian law enforcement or defence. In European contexts, law enforcement more often than not abides by precise rules and codes of proportionality that condition the use of force, albeit with some notable exceptions as recent police violence in France demonstrates. In Mali, however, such conditions might exist on paper but tend not to be applied in practice. Malian human rights organizations have consistently argued that ‘there is a culture of repression and intimidation which has always characterized the behaviour of our internal security forces’.⁴¹ International analysts and Security Sector Reform NGOs based in Mali also insist that the mission

³⁶ EUCAP Sahel Mali Official, Interview with the author, 30 Sep. 2021; Malian security analyst, Interview with the author, 20 Nov. 2021.

³⁷ See Carter Center, ‘Report of the Independent Observer: Observations on the implementation of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali, Resulting from the Algiers Process, August’, Aug. 2021.

³⁸ Guichaoua, Y., ‘The bitter harvest of French interventionism in the Sahel’, *International Affairs*, vol. 96, no. 4 (2020), pp. 895–911.

³⁹ EUCAP Sahel Mali Counsellor, Interview with the author, 5 Oct. 2021; and EUCAP Sahel Mali Officer, Interview with the author, 5 Oct. 2021.

⁴⁰ Malian gendarmes and National Guard, Interviews with the author, Sep. and Oct. 2021.

⁴¹ Malian national human rights organization official, Interview with the author, 14 Oct. 2021.

and its Malian partners operate on competing ‘value registers’, whereby respect for human rights receives inadequate attention or is simply ignored: ‘In the field, no matter the rank of the individual, most have been trained by EUCAP Sahel Mali at some point, if not multiple times in human rights. But they know that in the field, they can do what they want and know there will not be any consequences for their actions’.⁴² In this way, EUCAP Sahel Mali faces a serious uphill battle to mainstream human rights values and to put associated tools and mechanisms into practice in the MDSF. When questioned about the need to honour human rights, individual MDSF members, as well as increasing numbers of transitional government supporters in Bamako, argued that the country is at war, and thus human rights abuses are excusable, or that ill-treatment of suspects by the security forces is warranted in the context of Mali’s rural Islamist insurgency.

The advisory nature of EUCAP Sahel Mali’s mandate means that the mission cannot place conditionalities on the Malian security forces to change either institutional or individual practices. As a result, the mission’s political influence is very limited and it has to follow directives from Brussels and EU member states on carrying out its activities. Instead of suspending its activities following the 18 August 2020 coup d’état that ousted President Keïta, for example, the mission only paused them while awaiting directives from Brussels. The mission nonetheless maintained a ‘lower profile’ in publicizing its efforts to support the MDSF than it had during the Keïta regime.⁴³ Moreover, instead of itself denouncing MDSF behaviour, the mission has to rely on Brussels to make statements on human rights abuses against civilians.

Explanatory factor 2: Realistic mandate and matching resources

As explained above, EUCAP Sahel Mali’s mandate is extensive. It must not only to build up the MDSF as a coherent set of organizations, but also help to build its capacity to respond to terrorism and organized crime, improve the country’s weak border enforcement, assist with the restoration of state authority and the deployment of the administration in central Mali, work to tackle impunity within the MDSF, increase respect for international human rights, and subsequently work with the transitional authorities to help them hold credible democratic elections at the end of the transitional period. This ever-growing mandate reduces the extent to which mission objectives can be achieved in the context of Mali’s post-war reconstruction.

According to mission officials, several with experience of other similar EU-CSDP capacity-building initiatives, for many reasons ‘the mission mandate is much broader and much more complex to implement in practice than other missions. Threats here are much more widespread’.⁴⁴ First, in many ways the mission is seeking to build Malian institutions where none existed before. The mission’s work is therefore not that of ‘reconstruction’ but of ‘construction’. Second, the mission’s mandate is not ‘executive’, which means that EUCAP Sahel Mali’s advisors and trainers cannot oblige their Malian partners or trainees to enact or adopt any of the advice they are given. This limits the mission’s work to that of persuasion, which lacks the ability to establish ‘conditionalities’ on the Malian government or MDSF counterparts.⁴⁵ For example, if the Malian government does not wish to divulge the size of its security forces to its EU partners in order to help the latter improve the MDSF’s human resource management,

⁴² International Analyst, Interview with the author, 24 Sep. 2021; and SSR NGO representative based in Mali, Interview with the author, 29 Sep. 2021.

⁴³ EUCAP Sahel Mali Officer, Interview with the author, 30 Sep. 2021.

⁴⁴ EUCAP Sahel Mali Official, Interview with the author, 30 Sep. 2021.

⁴⁵ EUCAP Sahel Mali Counsellor, Interview with the author, 5 Oct. 2021.

it will not—and until recently it had not.⁴⁶ The non-executive characteristics of the mandate make it difficult for the mission to accompany members of the MDSF in the field to monitor and, where relevant, correct trainees' practices in situ. Several officials argued that the mission's lack of 'accompaniment' is a serious deficit in the mandate, which is in part tied to its scale: 'we can't and don't really do accompaniment of the forces. The accompaniment that we do is very weak'.⁴⁷ Finally, given the enormity of the mission mandate, officials insisted that the resources provided pale in comparison to the scale of the multiple tasks the mission has been given.⁴⁸

That is not to say that the mission's successive mandates have misdiagnosed the problems that the MDSF faces. Indeed, the MDSF's levels of dysfunction and weakness in many ways mimic the challenges of all Malian institutions: they are more often than not cash-strapped and dependent on external sources of funding, and plagued by large-scale corruption, while bureaucrats are often unwilling to implement or simply incapable of implementing necessary reforms. In such circumstances, observers have asked a central question: 'If the current approximate \$3 billion a year Mali is receiving in aid is proving insufficient to rebuild the state or even provide it with basic security, how can Mali ever be expected to do enough on its own for its security and development?'⁴⁹ A similar question could be asked of the EUCAP Sahel Mali mission, which is expected to ameliorate so many of the MDSF's challenges. Adequately meeting the scale of the objectives would require a decades-long presence in Mali, a massive influx of resources and a more condition-driven and executive mandate that would never be acceptable to Mali's leaders.

In addition to the high degree of mission creep within its mandate, the intervention has been hobbled by several operational shortcomings that reduce its efficiency. First, the mission is often short staffed and unable to fill all of its positions. As a result, organizing activities, providing training and simply 'running the mission' become less effective and this increases the workload of existing mission staff.⁵⁰ Second, in addition to not being able to fill all the positions, the duration of deployments is generally only one to two years. Given the complex and political nature of the MDSF's challenges, time is required to develop an effective understanding of the context in which the intervention is situated, and the nature of the problems that it is seeking to address. Not taking that time increases the risk that interveners will view their activities as mere technical exercises, instead of recognizing the deeply political environment and contested interests and practices of diverse Malian stakeholders that inform the intervention's objectives and rationale. In many cases, members of the mission fail to acquire the level of contextual knowledge necessary to effectively develop solid relationships with Malian partners, or to adapt mission activities in a way that is both effective and conflict sensitive.⁵¹ Finally, institutional/ organizational learning is hampered by an operational policy that makes it impossible for newly deployed members of the mission to meet or work with the person they are replacing. This lack of handover reduces the ability of new staff to learn from the experiences of those officials who have been directly involved in the work

⁴⁶ EUCAP Sahel Mali Counsellor, Interview with the author, 5 Oct. 2021.

⁴⁷ EUCAP Sahel Mali Advisor, Interview with the author, 2 Oct. 2021; and EUCAP Sahel Mali Adviser, Interview with the author, 5 Oct. 2021.

⁴⁸ EUCAP Sahel Mali Advisor, Interview with the author, 2 Oct. 2021. In 2016, the mission's budget was €15.5 million. European External Action, Common Security and Defence Policy: The EUCAP Sahel Mali Civilian mission, Updated June 2016. The budget for the mandate was increased to over €89 million. European External Action, Common Security and Defence Policy: Civilian mission Mali EUCAP Sahel Mali, Updated July 2021.

⁴⁹ Craven-Matthews, C. and Englebort, P., 'A Potemkin state in the Sahel? The empirical and the fictional in Malian state reconstruction', *African Security*, vol. 11, no. 1 (2018), p. 13.

⁵⁰ EUCAP Sahel Mali Officials, Interviews with the author, 30 July 2021.

⁵¹ EUCAP Sahel Mali Adviser, interview with the author, 30 Sep. 2021.

that new arrivals will be undertaking.⁵² As a result, the mission in many cases suffers from brain drain. This is especially the case when the few advisors who have worked for several years in the mission and developed close relationships with Malian partners leave the mission.

Such operational shortcomings can have an important and negative effect on the ground since they increase the probability that mission officials will not know how to adapt their activities to fit local realities, and fail to recognize the political impacts the intervention can have on internal MDSF dynamics.⁵³ During the first several years of the mission, for example, training and advice conducted by the mission followed an urban and south-Malian bias. While the majority of the MDSF's workforce is located in southern Malian cities, most of the country's violent conflict dynamics and organized criminal activity are concentrated in central and northern regions, in primarily rural spaces. Thus, in rural areas, order maintenance functions are not a primary security concern. Nonetheless, in 2017, the mission donated riot gear to Gendarmerie units based in Mopti, Timbuktu and Gao. At the time, these cities and surrounding areas were regularly affected by terrorist ambushes, not the violent protests which tended to be concentrated in Bamako. The local Gendarmes accepted the equipment but asked themselves: 'why didn't EUCAP give us bullet-proof vests instead?'⁵⁴ Such situations lead some MDSF members to question the relevance of EUCAP training when their understanding of the problems Mali faces is at odds with their European partners: 'Mali's security problems are not like those in Europe where the internal security forces fight terrorists in cities through intelligence. Here, terrorists are in the bush, and the country needs military means to fight against them'.⁵⁵ Mismatches between the understandings of mission members and conditions on the ground can lead to frustration with mission activities among Malian partners. This could be reduced if mission staff developed deeper understandings of Mali's law enforcement and security context, which would mean spending longer periods of time in the country.

Explanatory factor 3: People-centred approach

As stated above, the mission's successive mandates have been primarily operational in character and have focused on increasing MDSF capacity. Addressing crucial weaknesses embedded in the practices and mindsets of MDSF institutions, for example by increasing accountability and respect for human rights or reducing impunity, were only introduced to the mission mandate in 2021–22. Most of the mission's officials have therefore tailored their individual activities to operational concerns that strengthen MDSF capacity.⁵⁶ According to several mission officials, a more human rights and civil society centred approach has been seriously neglected, if not directly marginalized.⁵⁷ Moreover, mission officials argued that the guidance required on implementing such an approach is either lacking or absent, which means that they had to improvise.

This does not mean that civil society actors have been totally neglected by the mission's activities. EUCAP Sahel Mali has an important convening power that can assemble different types of authorities in the country, including civil society organ-

⁵² EUCAP Sahel Mali Advisor, interview with the author, 2 Oct. 2021.

⁵³ See Marsh and Rolandsen (note 14), p. 624.

⁵⁴ Malian Gendarme, interview with the author, 2 Oct. 2021.

⁵⁵ Malian Gendarmerie Official, interview with the author, 15 Oct. 2021.

⁵⁶ EUCAP Sahel Mali Counsellor, Interview with the author, 5 Oct. 2021.

⁵⁷ In 2021, current mission officials recognized the validity of these claims but maintained that past mission leaderships had paid scant attention (if not exhibited outright indifference) to the need to emphasize the role of human rights in training the MDSF. EUCAP Sahel Mali Counsellor, Interview with the author, 30 Oct. 2021; and EUCAP Sahel Mali Adviser, interview with the author, 6 Oct. 2021.

izations (CSOs). For two years, for example, the mission fostered the efforts of an ‘Exchange and Activities Platform’ to bring civil society organizations and members of the MDSF together to foster trust in national security institutions.⁵⁸ The mission cannot directly support civil society organizations financially, however, which reduces CSO members’ willingness to participate in mission-sponsored activities, especially those organizations that lack sustainable levels of donor funding to participate. As a result, MDSF members remain the primary recipients of the mission’s efforts and training. The initial total neglect of a people-centred approach therefore meant that the MDSF failed to tackle a crucial problem—the severe lack of trust in Mali’s security institutions among citizens, which CSOs have a major part to play in ameliorating.

Explanatory factor 4: Legitimacy and credibility

The mission has both legitimacy and credibility. However, the MDSF’s human rights record and rampant corruption have significantly whittled away its own. In the context of Mali’s need for stabilization, the MDSF’s general lack of respect for human rights demonstrably affects the protection of civilians. In July 2020, for instance, Ministry of Security and Civilian Protection officials deployed the anti-terrorism special forces (FORSTAT) to quell anti-government protests throughout the capital.⁵⁹ Over the course of 10–12 July, FORSTAT killed at least 14 civilians.⁶⁰ The unit’s deployment was illegal, given that it is only to be used in a counterterrorist capacity rather than to maintain order. The disproportionate violence used against protesters followed a logic of regime security rather than people-centred security, service to the public good and the rule of law. Prior to this incident, FORSTAT had received a considerable amount of EUCAP training.⁶¹ In addition, as mentioned above, members of the National Guard successfully repelled an insurgent attack against the EUCAP Sahel Mali designed and supported PSDG base in April 2021. In the weeks following the attack, however, local reports circulated that MDSF soldiers based at the Konna-PSDG had harassed local Fulani herders in the surrounding area and conducted dozens of arbitrary arrests.⁶² In 2020, Fulani herder associations accused the same MDSF members of forced disappearances of scores of local herders.⁶³ There are frequent accusations that the MDSF regularly commits reprisal violence following insurgent attacks in Mali.⁶⁴ EUCAP Sahel Mali officials admit that this is the case. Cases where the MDSF releases official communiqués that its forces have ‘detained suspected terrorists’ following an insurgent attack on one day, but then release a ‘correction communiqué’ the following day stating that the forces had simply ‘miscounted’ the number of insurgents killed in the attack give serious cause for concern to mission officials.⁶⁵ In terms of building respect for human rights in the MDSF, however, EUCAP staff can only rely on ‘pure persuasion’,

⁵⁸ Malian member of an international security governance NGO, Interview with the author, 29 Sep. 2021.

⁵⁹ At the time, FORSTAT followed institutional/organizational commands in line with the organizational components of Mali’s internal security forces: the police, gendarmerie and National Guard.

⁶⁰ Jeune Afrique, ‘Mali: le commandant de la Forsat inculpé pour « meurtres » mais libéré sous la pression des policiers’ [Mali: FORSTAT commander charged with ‘murder’ but released under pressure from police], 4 Sep. 2021.

⁶¹ Malian National Guard Corporal, FORSTAT member and previous EUCAP Sahel Mali trainee, Interview with the author, 19 Sep. 2021; Malian Senior Police Official, Interview with the author, 29 Sep. 2021; and Malian Senior Police Official, Interview with the author, Bamako, 20 Oct. 2021.

⁶² Western journalist, interview with the author, 27 Sep. 2021.

⁶³ Fulani activist, Interview with the author, 29 July 2021; Fulani leader, Interview with the author, 10 Sep. 2021; and western Journalist, interview with the author, 27 Sep. 2021.

⁶⁴ See e.g. Baché, D., ‘Mali: l’armée accusée de nouvelles exactions’ [Mali: The army accused of new abuses], RFI, 7 Jan. 2022.

⁶⁵ EUCAP Sahel Mali Advisor, interview with the author, 2 Oct. 2021; and EUCAP Sahel Mali Advisor, interview with the author, 6 Oct. 2021.

which involves a process of norm adoption that requires years of relentless work to alter local security understandings.

A crippling effect of many MDSF members' disdain for human rights is the low level of legitimacy and credibility of the security forces. Malian citizens tend to view the MDSF as acting on behalf of regime security, or simply in support of the individual interests of MDSF members, instead of the public good. The fact that Malian citizens lack trust in the security forces is not lost on them. After nearly three years of EUCAP Sahel Mali activities, law enforcement officials in the Segou region insisted at the end of mission-led training on professional ethics that citizen trust in internal security forces remains low since 'our actions do not correspond' to the ethical codes taught in EUCAP Sahel Mali training: 'The internal security forces must significantly change their behaviour in order to be accepted by the population and for trust, a key element, to be restored'.⁶⁶ It is incredibly difficult for EUCAP Sahel Mali advisors and counsellors to help the MDSF restore that trust, since the MDSF must first demonstrate an increase in *trustworthiness*. Trust-building activities organized by the mission that bring together civil society actors and members of the security forces ring hollow, since members of the MDSF are viewed by Malian citizens on a daily basis as being routinely corrupt and often predatory actors.⁶⁷

Institutional confusion also contributes to low levels of citizen trust in the MDSF. In a context of high levels of illiteracy and low levels of formal education, most people do not differentiate between the multiple types of formal defence and security actors—police, civilian protection officers, gendarmes, members of the National Guard or army personnel.⁶⁸ Thus, if traffic police (Compagnie de Circulation Routière, CCR), the most visible members of the MDSF in Bamako, routinely extort motorists or refuse to respond to armed criminality happening in the vicinity of their posts, most Malians will tend to lump these forms of predatory or negligent action together with those of Malian soldiers or gendarmes. Similarly, in Mopti or Segou, de facto war-fighting areas, the Malian Gendarmerie and National Guard are commanded by military officials even though they are intended for law enforcement rather than military action. In such cases, rural Malian populations will more often than not fail to differentiate a soldier from a gendarme in the context of insecurity and insurgency, which can further degrade local trust in the MDSF.

Explanatory factor 5: Coordination and coherence

EUCAP-Sahel Mali is deployed alongside several international interventions seeking to shore up Malian state institutions.⁶⁹ There are several coordination mechanisms in Mali but, according to conversations with members of the mission, this increases the risk of coordination fatigue among national and international stakeholders. The mission's main international partners are MINUSMA (notably UNPOL), the European Union (military) Training Mission (EUTM), the European Union Delegation, the Government of France and other donors. While coordination between EU-connected partners is consistent and effective, for example, through participation in meetings of the EU Heads of Cooperation, the Team Europe Initiative coordination and between

⁶⁶ EUCAP Sahel Mali, 'Rencontre avec les autorités locales sur les questions sécuritaires de la région de Segou' [Meeting with local authorities on security issues in the Segou region], 16 Oct. 2017. h

⁶⁷ EUCAP Sahel Mali Advisor, Interview with the author, 30 Sep. 2021; and SSR NGO Official, Interview with the author, 29 Sep. 2021.

⁶⁸ Malian Gendarmerie Official, Interview with the author, 15 Oct. 2021; SSR NGO Official, Interview with the author, 29 Sep. 2021; and International Analyst, Interview with the author, 28 Sep. 2021.

⁶⁹ Cold-Ravnkilde, S. and Jacobsen, K., 'Disentangling the security traffic jam in the Sahel: Constitutive effects of contemporary interventionism', *International Affairs*, vol. 96, no. 4 (2020), pp. 855–74.

the mission and the EUTM, coordination with other international actors has proved highly challenging. One official even spoke of a ‘complete absence of coordination’ with other international stakeholders.⁷⁰

In part, coordination challenges are linked to the mission’s mandate. Unlike the EUCAP-Sahel Niger mission, the Mali mission is not mandated to lead in matters of international actor coordination, a task allocated to MINUSMA.⁷¹ However, for reasons such as the Covid-19 pandemic and the August 2020 coup d’état, as well as MINUSMA’s own organizational challenges, several coordination efforts have not been active since early 2020.⁷² Given the large number of actors and ongoing initiatives to strengthen the MDSF, coordination on training has become increasingly complex, which increases the risk that training efforts might be duplicated even where training schedules are shared, which could have a negative effect on the effectiveness of the mission and reduce its credibility with its Malian partners.⁷³

That said, coordinating with Malian partners is the mission’s biggest challenge. The mission has very little leverage to ensure that MDSF officials follow the coordination advice offered by mission officials. In addition to an understanding of coordination that focuses narrowly on deconflicting the activities of diverse stakeholders, which is essentially calendaring, the mission hopes to instil a more comprehensive understanding of coordination into their Malian partners. Coordinating mission activities necessarily requires the MDSF leadership to accept the mission’s advisory guidance and expertise in order to advance national training routines, career professionalization and the security forces’ human resource management. This relies almost entirely on persuading MDSF officials, but the mission has little influence over the selection of particular individuals for training from specific units to ensure that Malian trainees are not repeating training courses, that career advancement is evaluated based on merit and not by patron-client relationships, or that the individuals who receive EUCAP training are not transferred to areas of the country or MDSF units that will not benefit from the training received.

Explanatory factor 6: Women, Peace and Security

The WPS agenda in Mali faces important challenges with regard to gender equality and increased women’s representation to help foster a durable peace, such as the lack of inclusion of women in the Malian peace process or lacklustre recruitment and inappropriate treatment of women in the MDSF.⁷⁴ As with its efforts to promote the adoption of human rights processes or the difficulties it has experienced in implementing a people-centred approach, the mission also struggles to support the WPS agenda.

As mentioned above, EUCAP Sahel Mali does not have an executive mandate but is instead based around advisory and support functions. The mission’s counsellors and advisors must rely on persuasion when working with their MDSF counterparts, including over matters of gender equality and inclusion. The question of gender equality is heavily politicized in Mali, however, and most of the country’s influential religious elites contest western interference in the country’s religious and societal norms in

⁷⁰ EUCAP Sahel Mali Counsellor, Interview with the author, 5 Oct. 2021.

⁷¹ United Nations Security Council Resolution 2480, 28 June 2019.

⁷² EUCAP Sahel Mali Officials, Interviews with the author, 24 Feb. 2022.

⁷³ EUCAP Sahel Mali Official, Interview with the author, 5 Oct. 2021; and EUCAP Sahel Mali Officials, Interviews with the author, 24 Feb. 2022.

⁷⁴ Lorentzen, J., ‘Frictional interactions on Women, Peace and Security in Mali’, *Journal of Modern African Studies*, vol. 59, no. 4 (2021), pp. 463–83.

connection with gender.⁷⁵ This context complicates the mission's gender advocacy with the MDSF. Mission-supported activities are carried out but, among MDSF officials, women's involvement frequently reflects more of a 'box-ticking exercise' than something that might shape gender norms at the organizational level or in everyday practice.⁷⁶

The mission has supported the MDSF in some aspects of Mali's WPS agenda. For example, gender advisors have supported development of the country's National Action Plans and have implemented projects to construct female dormitories for the Police and National Guard to ensure increased access and opportunities for female recruitment to the MDSF.⁷⁷

That said, practicing persuasion becomes an even more formidable task when associated levels of time, attention and resources do not adequately match stated gender objectives. The mission's gender focus reflects this mismatch. For example, prior to 2021, instead of staffing three advisors, the mission's gender advisor was required to carry out the mission's civil society and human rights pillars in addition to gender advisor tasks.⁷⁸ At the time, since the mission had just one over-stretched gender advisor, and the majority of mission staff understood that their primary objectives were to train MDSF members in law enforcement tactics and help change the MDSF at the organizational level, supporting aspects of the WPS agenda tended to take a back seat to these seemingly more pressing priorities.⁷⁹ This finding confirms the findings of other recent examinations of the EU's preventing/countering violent extremism and WPS merged agendas: 'Within the mission [EUCAP Sahel Mali] itself, there is the same feeling. Nobody really cares about gender, but it has to be done. If they [the EU] were serious about gender, they would create a unit on gender, and not get one or two people to do the whole job. For them [the EU] it's enough to think that there is one person 'doing' gender. There is a need for a unit with a clear mandate'.⁸⁰

V. Conclusions

According to a senior EUCAP Sahel Mali official speaking in 2021, 'This mission is like fixing a car while someone is still driving it. The country is facing an insurgency and we are the ones trying to fix the institutions that provide security against the insurgency. It is a very difficult task'.⁸¹ In some ways, this simile is apt: the mission has been tasked with supporting reform of Mali's internal security institutions while the targeted recipients of that reform are facing significant military pressure from a resilient set of Islamist armed groups. In other ways, however, the simile is misleading: in many cases the mission is not only reforming, but overhauling or even creating new institutions or laws from the ground up. Given the enormity of the task and the ill-balanced nature of the resources at the mission's disposal, it is arguable that the mandates allotted to EUCAP Sahel Mali turn its activities into exercises in futility, which makes the mission's limited successes all the more surprising and positive.

⁷⁵ See De Jorio, R., 'Between dialogue and contestation: Gender, Islam, and the challenges of a Malian public sphere', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, vol. 15, no. S1 (2009), pp. 95–111.

⁷⁶ Malian Gendarmerie Official, Interview with the author, 30 Oct. 2021.

⁷⁷ Berlingozzi, L., 'O sister, where art thou? Assessing the limits of gender mainstreaming in preventing and countering violent extremism in Mali', *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, vol. 15, no. 3 (2022), pp. 659–80, at p. 664.

⁷⁸ EUCAP Sahel Mali Counsellor, Interview with the author, 4 Oct. 2021.

⁷⁹ EUCAP Sahel Mali Official, Interview with the author, 6 Oct. 2021. While beyond the scope of the explanatory factors described here, interpersonal difficulties between previous senior mission officials and advisors in more 'human-centred' roles such as supporting gender advocacy also seem to have resulted in a marginalization of the mission's gender advocacy and mainstreaming focus and activities.

⁸⁰ Quoted in Berlingozzi (note 77), p. 665.

⁸¹ EUCAP Sahel Mali Senior Official, Interview with the author, 30 Sep. 2021.

Nonetheless, the value registers of Malian security actors' current understandings of how best to deal with the crisis and those of the EU and its partners, as institutionalized and implemented by the mission, stand in stark contrast. The ways in which the transitional authorities have implemented their vision of how to achieve stability since late 2021 have masked the few impacts the mission had thus far had in helping Mali to achieve a durable peace. Human rights abuses committed by the Malian armed forces (and their Wagner partners) reached their apogee during the period when EUCAP Sahel Mali's mandate placed a heightened emphasis on strengthening human rights norms and processes in the MDSF. In this same period, tensions between the government and the armed group signatories to the peace accord reached new levels, and most observers wondered not if the peace agreement would be completely broken, but when. Throughout this period, Mali's transitional authorities also strengthened their partnerships with security actors such as Russia and Turkey, which impose fewer human rights or good governance conditionalities than EU partners. The transitional government's purposeful security partnership diversification has only alienated the EU and other western states. Taken together, while the mission has undoubtedly supported Malian security institutions and actors, this does not mean that a durable peace is anywhere on the country's horizon.

4. EUCAP Sahel Niger

PAULINE POUPART, OUMAROU MAKAMA AND OUMAROU SAIDOU

I. Introduction

The original aim of the European Union Capacity Building Mission in Niger (EUCAP Niger) was to enhance the capacity of Nigerien security actors to fight terrorism and organized crime through the provision of training, strategic and technical advice, and equipment. However, implementation of the mission's objectives faced challenges connected to the progressive expansion of its mandate, the lack of strategic guidance in a volatile security environment and the proliferation of international actors and overlapping security mechanisms in the region for over a decade. On 4 December 2023, the junta announced that it was withdrawing consent for the EU security and defence missions—both EUCAP Sahel Niger and the yet-to-be-deployed EU Military Partnership Mission (EUMPM)—and gave them six months to wind down.¹ All EU personnel had left Niger by early 2024. Nonetheless, an analysis of its activities might help to inform future EU security engagement in the region.

II. Context, mandate and activities

Context

Following President Mahamadou Issoufou's inauguration in 2011, the NATO-led coalition military operation in Libya, the deterioration in the security situation in northern Mali and the overthrow of President of Mali Amadou Toumani Touré, Niger positioned itself as the go-to interlocutor for the European Union. In 2012, when the first EUCAP Niger mandate was drafted, Niger faced significant instability in neighbouring countries: the fall of Qaddafi's regime increased the flow of armed combatants and illicit weapons, and other types of trafficking and smuggling from Libya to the central Sahel region, while Islamist groups—AQIM, Ansar Dine and MUJAO—were expanding their territorial control over the main cities in northern Mali.² Fear of Boko Haram intrusions in the south-east also increased fear of a post-9/11 'domino effect' in the Sahel. The region became a new international 'hotspot of concern'.³

Two aspects can explain the centrality of Niger in the EU's strategy in the Sahel. On the one hand, the increasing Islamist threat in Mali was seen as a direct threat to Europe, hit by several terrorist attacks claimed by the Islamic State group. On the other hand populations fleeing attacks by civilian governments turned Niger into a 'transit country'. The arrival in Europe of migrants and refugees fleeing the war in Syria initiated political change in Brussels. The Valletta Summit of November 2015 designated Niger a transit country where mechanisms and partnerships should be implemented to address the

¹ Euractiv, 'Niger ends security and defence partnerships with the EU', 5 Dec 2023.

² Ansar Dine or 'defenders of the faith' was founded in December 2011 by Iyad ag Ghali. This jihadist group was initially linked to AQIM, which was formed in Algeria in 1998 as the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC). It became affiliated with Al Qaida in 2006 and expanded to the Sahel in 2010. It played an important role in the war in Mali in 2012, along with the 'Mouvement pour l'Unification et le Jihad en Afrique de l'Ouest' (MUJAO), which was created in 2011 from a splinter group from AQIM. The three groups occasionally developed joint strategies, especially in 2012.

³ Colomba-Petteng, L., The Common Foreign and Security Policy Tested in Niger, Fondation Robert Schuman Policy Paper, European Issues, no. 536, 19 Nov. 2019, p. 1., p.1.

‘root causes’ of irregular migration—controversially, by externalizing the management of European borders.⁴

Porous borders allowed an increase in militant Islamist activities by Boko Haram in the area close to Nigeria and the Lake Chad Basin, and by the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) and Jama’at Nusrat Al Islam Wal Muslimin (JNIM), along the border with Mali in the region of Tillabéri.⁵

Islamist armed groups that rely on a transnational capacity for action also succeeded in entrenching themselves in the local context, notably by fuelling intercommunal tensions leading to an increase in violence between pastoralist communities in Tillabéri and Tahoua in 2017 and 2018.⁶ These Islamist armed groups progressively extended their geographical scope to add to the rampant banditry across Niger.

In 2019, Islamist armed groups became more active in targeting the Nigerien security forces, and 2019 and 2020 were bloody years for the national armed forces as attacks on military camps in Inatès killed more than 70 soldiers and in Chinogoda a further 89 just weeks later.⁷ This targeting of military positions, particularly in the Liptako-Gourma region, led to the strategic withdrawal of government troops, which left space for Islamist armed groups to expand their territorial control and abuse of civilian populations.⁸ These abuses led to ‘retaliation’ by elements of the national security forces in a context of heavy mistrust and defiance of neighbouring populations. In 2020, a counterterrorism operation near Inatès and Ayorou, following attacks against Nigerien security forces’ positions, resulted in the killing or disappearance of 102 civilians who were arrested by the Nigerien security forces.⁹

Civilian populations were also targeted by Islamist groups: villagers in bordering regions were exposed to high ‘taxation’ on land or cattle presented as *zakat* by armed groups.¹⁰ In addition, village representatives and community leaders believed to maintain close relations with the state have been assassinated. Finally, civilians have formed vigilante groups to address security vacuums and oppose Islamist armed groups, often using limited means.¹¹ These localized armed groups exacerbate the complexity of everyday violence. A major consequence of this entanglement of violent actors is persistent internal displacement in the country and villagers seeking refuge in urban centres.

⁴ Lopez Lucia, E., *The European Union Integrated and Regionalised Approach Towards the Sahel: A Stabilizing Mali Project Report* (Centre FrancoPaix, UQAM: Montreal, 2019), p. 15.

⁵ The Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims is a jihadist group formed in 2017 that brought together four groups affiliated with AQIM initially present in northern and central Mali: Al-Mourabitoun, the Sahel branch of AQIM, Ansar Dine and the Macina katiba. Nsaibia, H. and Duhamel, J., ‘Sahel 2021: Communal wars, broken ceasefires and shifting frontlines’, *Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED)*, 17 June 2021.

⁶ Nsaibia and Duhamel (note 5).

⁷ International Crisis Group, ‘Sidelining the Islamic State in Niger’s Tillabéri’, *Africa report no. 289*, 3 June 2020, pp. 13–14.

⁸ Nsaibia, H., ‘State atrocities in the Sahel: The impetus for counterinsurgency results in fuelling government attacks on civilians’, *Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED)*, 20 May 2020.

⁹ *Mission d’Enquête, d’Investigation, de Vérification et d’Etablissement des Faits en cas de Violation des Droits Humains dans la Commune Rurale d’Inatès, Département d’Ayorou, Région de Tillabéri* [Mission of investigation, verification and establishment of the facts of a case of a violation of human rights in the Rural Commune of Inatès, Department of Ayorou, Region of Tillabéri]; Commission Nationale des Droits Humains (CNDH) Niger, 2020; and International Crisis Group, ‘Murder in Tillabéri: Calming Niger’s emerging communal crisis’, *Briefing no. 172*, 28 May 2021, p. 40.

¹⁰ International Crisis Group, ‘South-western Niger: Preventing a new insurrection’, *Africa Report no. 301*, 29 Apr. 2021, p. 7.

¹¹ Referred to in Niger as ‘comités de vigilance’ and not recognized or supported by the state authorities.

Mandate

In 2012, the first EUCAP Niger mandate established its primary goal as strengthening the capacities of the internal security forces—the Police, the Gendarmerie and the National Guard—to help them interact and consolidate their cooperation with the national army in the fight against terrorism and organized crime. The second (2014–2016) and third (2016–2018) mandates broadened the mission’s tasks to: (a) ‘helping the Nigerien authorities to define and implement their National Security Strategy’; (b) ‘contributing to developing an integrated, multidisciplinary, coherent, sustainable, and human rights-based approach among the various Nigerien security actors in the fight against terrorism and organized crime’; and (c) ‘assisting the Nigerien central and local authorities and security forces in developing policies, techniques and procedures to better control and fight irregular migration’.¹²

The focus on irregular migration led EUCAP Niger to become involved in the north of the country, as the Agadez region was at the time facing the ‘highest number of security threats’ and seen as the ‘door’ to Libya.¹³ Illegal trafficking of drugs, weapons and people had made the area ‘a major regional transit hub for irregular migration’.¹⁴ The mission tailored its activities to help collect and share intelligence between the forces and directly trained the municipal police, especially with regard to banditry.¹⁵ A new EUCAP base, called an antenna or antenna office, was established in Agadez in 2018.¹⁶ The mission’s overall budget grew from €18.4m in 2012 to €26.3m in 2018 when the permanent Agadez presence was established.¹⁷

This period also saw the start of the development of ties with geographically close missions. EUCAP Sahel Niger served as the secretariat for international coordination of the security sector in Niger and set up monthly meetings with other international stakeholders in Niamey, and collaborated with missions such as EUBAM Libya (2013) and EUCAP Sahel Mali (2015).¹⁸ Increased attention from Brussels to the mission’s needs and shortfalls did not lead to a specific reorientation of activities. The focus on irregular migration was maintained throughout 2018–2020, as well as on capacity-building, procurement and training, into which a focus on human rights issues was systematically integrated.¹⁹

On the ground, following the integrated approach of the EU, the mission worked with the G5 Sahel countries through the Coalition for the Sahel and the Partnership for Security in the Sahel.²⁰

The fifth (2020–2022) and sixth (2022–2024) mandates prioritized concerns in the ‘three borders’ of the Liptako-Gourma region, in addition to maintaining a focus on the situation in Agadez.²¹ Training focused on terrorism-related arrests, detention and trial, respect for human rights and judicialization, as well as respect for the rule of law in ‘all the actions carried out by the defence forces, provost marshals, specialized unit

¹² European Court of Auditors, *Strengthening the Capacity of the Internal Security Forces in Niger and Mali: Only Limited and Slow Progress* (European Union: Luxembourg, 2018), p. 44.

¹³ European Court of Auditors (note 12), p. 44.

¹⁴ Council of the European Union, ‘EUCAP Sahel Niger: Mission extended, budget agreed, mandate amended’, Press release, 18 July 2016.

¹⁵ EUCAP official no. 4, Online interview with the author, Sep. 2021.

¹⁶ Council of the European Union (note 14).

¹⁷ Lebovich, A., ‘Halting ambition: EU Migration and Security Policy in the Sahel’, ECFR Policy Brief, Sep. 2018, pp. 6–7.

¹⁸ EEAS official no. 1, Online interview with the author, Aug. 2021.

¹⁹ Council of the European Union, ‘EUCAP Sahel Niger: Council extends the mission for two years’, Press release, 18 Sep. 2018.

²⁰ Coalition for the Sahel, ‘Providing a more collective and inclusive response to the Sahel crisis’, [n.d.].

²¹ EUCAP Sahel Niger: Fifth mandate 2020–2022, Factsheet, [n.d.] (in French); and EUCAP Sahel Niger: Sixth mandate 2022–2024, Factsheet, [n.d.] (in French).

investigators and magistrates to ensure the judicial prosecution of the perpetrators of terrorism and organized crime—from the initial preservation of evidence in the field to specialized investigations to transfer those arrested to the competent courts'.²² The most recent mandate renewal also paid particular attention to relations between the Nigerien forces and local populations, advocating for the inclusion of trust-building activities.

Moreover, a focus was put on strategic advice at the ministerial level, signifying a shift in attention from the bottom to the top of the chain of command, from training recruits to the security forces to instructing their Nigerien trainers and finally trying to directly advise force commanders, in addition to the follow-up and support processes put in place in 2018. The goal was to engage with the ministers of the interior, defence and justice or their cabinet members. The development of a legal and regulatory framework for the structure and internal organization of the internal security forces (ISF), especially on planning and coordination, was also discussed.

Activities

Main goals at the operational and strategic levels

EUCAP Niger's primary activities were centred on its goal to support the capacity building of Nigerien security actors to fight terrorism and organized crime.²³ In 2015, significant activities were added to promote these global aims by providing training in 'key sectors' such as forensics, and tactical and technical interventions, with the aim that the ISF would ultimately design and organize its own courses to deliver by itself from within its own ranks.²⁴ Equipment delivery, ranging from maps of remote areas to human resources software, all-terrain vehicles, police forensics kits and mobile garages, were also intended to strengthen national ownership.

An additional long-lasting core element of the mandate was building the capability of the ISF to work together and coordinate to ensure interoperability. The mission's activities were expected to reinforce internal force capacities at the operational and strategic levels. In 2021–2022, EUCAP Niger promoted mobile security units for the Police and the Gendarmerie as a 'flagship' activity.²⁵

An orientation towards strategic advice at the highest level was emphasized in the mission's activities after 2020. Strategic elements were added to 'reinforce Nigerien command and control, interoperability and planning capacity'. The mission, for example, assisted with 'the development of a National Security Strategy and related border management strategies in coordination with other relevant actors', but also 'developing policies, procedures and techniques to better control and manage migration flows, to fight against irregular migration and to reduce the level of associated crime in support of the [European] Union's objectives in the area of migration'.²⁶

Finally, a broader geographic agenda was proposed to reinforce coordination at the national, regional and international levels in the fields of counterterrorism and the fight against irregular migration and organized crime, and to explore a possible contribution to regional cooperation, such as in the G5 Sahel, as appropriate.²⁷ In parallel, throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, the mission maintained its training activities using

²² EUCAP Sahel Niger official no. 3, Online interview with the author, Sep. 2021.

²³ International Crisis Group (note 9), pp. 13–14.

²⁴ International Crisis Group (note 9), pp. 13–14.

²⁵ EEAS official no. 1, Online interview with the author, Aug. 2021.

²⁶ International Crisis Group (note 9), p. 40.

²⁷ EEAS official no. 1, Online interview with the author, Aug. 2021; and EU Regional Advisory and Coordination Cell for the Sahel, 'The RACC's engagement for the re-dynamisation of the G5 Sahel Cooperation Platform for Security', 17 Oct. 2022.

its established networks of Nigerien partners to maintain contact and provide material supplies—even though the core team in Niamey was reduced from 120 to 23 personnel.²⁸

Training

According to the mission, 3218 men and women from the Nigerien security sector were trained in criminal intelligence, human resource management or scientific police procedures in 2019.²⁹ The mission also provided an additional range of training on arrest techniques, crime scene management, forensics, evidence analysis, criminal investigation, vehicle maintenance and the detention of irregular migrants. Members of the ISF were the first beneficiaries of this training, although training on themes such as human rights also benefited magistrates or soldiers in the armed forces.³⁰ More recently, training had also been given to lawyers and civilian defence staff with the aim of promoting the judicialization of procedures for terrorism-related trials.³¹ The mission's aims then shifted away from 'mass training' to transferring responsibility from EUCAP to Nigerien trainers who had previously been trained by EUCAP.³² Among the 213 training events provided by the mission in 2019, 83 were by Nigerien trainers.³³ This transfer of responsibility corresponded with an initial objective set in previous mandates. However, while training activities are the most visible and best known mission activity, their long-term impact is difficult to evaluate. Assessments were conducted at the end of every training session, albeit not systematically.³⁴ However, these did not address the knowledge acquisition of the trainees.³⁵ Trainers also had low expectations of the results.³⁶ Similarly, an absence of follow-up to assess post-training implementation made it difficult to assess the durability of the skills transmitted.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, online training on Zoom and messaging groups on WhatsApp were developed to maintain interactions with Nigerien counterparts.³⁷ This way of working is considered an additional tool for developing workshops and training with regional partners, such as the internal security forces in Burkina Faso.³⁸ Despite the pandemic, essential activities and material support for mobile units in vehicles and on motorbikes continued to be provided in the Liptako-Gourma area.³⁹

Material support

Provision of materials was one of the main activities of the mission. The budget for this in the period 2014–2024 was €254 million.⁴⁰ Examples of purchases to support training and projects range from forensics kits and night vision binoculars to 'vehicles, detection equipment, computers and printers, generators, the renovation of training and operational centres and the construction and equipment of mobile garages'.⁴¹ An

²⁸ EEAS official no. 2, Online interview with the author, Aug. 2021; and Former EUCAP Sahel Niger official no. 2, Interview with the author, Oct. 2021.

²⁹ EUCAP Sahel Niger, 'Facts and figures', [n.d.].

³⁰ European Court of Auditors (note 12), pp. 27–28.

³¹ Former EUCAP Sahel Niger official no. 3, Online interview with the author, Oct. 2021

³² EU CPCC official no. 2, Online interview with the author, Aug. 2021

³³ EUCAP Sahel Niger (note 29).

³⁴ EUCAP Sahel Niger official no. 3, Online interview with the author, Sep. 2021.

³⁵ EUCAP Sahel Niger official no. 1, Online interview with the author, Aug. 2021

³⁶ Researcher, Online interview with the author, Sep. 2021; and EUCAP official no. 9, Online interview with the author, Sep. 2021.

³⁷ EUCAP Sahel Niger official no. 2, Online interview with the author, Sep. 2021.

³⁸ EUCAP Sahel Niger official no. 4, Online interview with the author, Sep. 2021.

³⁹ EUCAP Sahel Niger official no. 4, Online interview with the author, Sep. 2021.

⁴⁰ This figure includes shared costs covered by the EU and excludes the salaries of seconded staff and other costs falling on the member states. Montanaro, L., *Insecurity in the Sahel: Rethinking Europe's Response, Peace and Security*, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Mar. 2022, p. 6.

⁴¹ Montanaro (note 40).

illustration of more limited support in connection with promotion of the rule of law was the distribution of 60 copies of the Nigerien penal code and the criminal procedure code to the High Commander of the National Guard.⁴²

Essential infrastructure investment to construct bases for Police Mobile Border Control Companies (Compagnie Mobile de Contrôle des Frontières, CMCF) in Birni N’Konni, on the border with Nigeria, was provided by Germany and the Netherlands in the amount of €6 and €4 million respectively, along with investment by the International Organization for Migration (IOM).⁴³ This funding guaranteed the police material support for three years to ensure proper command approaches and operational effectiveness.

Strategic advice

EUCAP’s experts engaged in providing both operational and strategic advice. In the field, the focus of EUCAP Niger’s later activities was on enhancing the mobility of the ISF with regard to regional migration control and the fight against organized crime. Cooperation techniques were introduced between the Gendarmerie and the Agadez region National Guard to put joint patrols in place. This kind of security deployment was necessary to target highway bandits more efficiently and traffickers of drugs, weapons and migrants active in neighbouring Libya and on the Algerian border.⁴⁴

Strategic advice was provided at different institutional levels to reinforce ISF capacities for coordination, planning and collaboration. From 2012 until its closure, the mission assisted the Nigerien authorities with drafting a National Internal Security Strategy. Adopted initially in 2017, a revised version of this strategy was published in June 2022.⁴⁵ This strategy was operationalized in a ‘threefold plan of action’ on the adaptation to security challenges, consolidation of the overall security system and improvement of the quality of the services provided to the public by the internal security forces.⁴⁶ An additional aim of the mission’s final mandate was to advise at a higher level than it had done previously in order to directly address force commanders and the ministers of defence, the interior and justice.

Even when the Nigerien authorities were open to the mission’s advice, allowing a foreign actor access at the operations level without impairing state sovereignty over protection proved difficult.⁴⁷ The mission and its appointed officers had trouble finding the right ‘proximity’. A proposal to install EUCAP representatives in the force’s headquarters and in ministries, for example, was rejected.⁴⁸

III. Effects

The effects of EUCAP activities on the ground were usually described and communicated through quantitative criteria such as the number of training sessions and lists of materials provided. This perspective allowed the mission to communicate quantitative data to EU member states and external partners. However, it could not address the long-lasting impacts of activities on the security situation in Niger. This would require a focus on the mission’s intended or unexpected direct and indirect effects on the extension of state authority, SSR, trust-building between the forces, the population and civil society organizations, and the promotion of human rights and the rule of law.

⁴² EUCAP Sahel Niger public communication, EUCAP Sahel Niger Facebook page, 25 Oct. 2020.

⁴³ EUCAP Sahel Niger, ‘Police Mobile Border Control Companies’, Factsheet, Oct. 2019.

⁴⁴ EUCAP Sahel Niger official no. 4, Online interview with the author, Sep. 2021.

⁴⁵ Government of Niger, *Synthèse de la Stratégie Nationale de Sécurité Intérieure, Phase II, 2022–2026 [Summary of the National Internal Security Strategy, Phase II, 2022–2026]* [n.d.] (in French).

⁴⁶ EUCAP official no. 3, Online interview with the author, Sep. 2021.

⁴⁷ EUCAP Sahel Niger official no. 3, Online interview with the author, Sep. 2021.

⁴⁸ Former EUCAP Sahel Niger official no. 1, Online interview with the author, Sep. 2021.

Extending state authority

Prior to the 2023 coup, the mission helped to extend state authority by improving the presence and visibility of the internal security forces through the promotion of mobile units. Nonetheless, capacity for action was constrained in geographical terms and by the number of elements involved.

EUCAP promoted the implementation of CMCFs in the sensitive areas of Maradi in May 2017 and Birni N’Konni in 2020. The ultimate goal was for each force to have mobile units, as was the case with the Gendarmerie’s Groupes d’Action Rapides–Surveillance et intervention au Sahel (GARSI). These units aimed to support or maintain security in areas that are difficult to access or where the presence of the state is weak. EUCAP described CMCF projects as ‘multipurpose’.⁴⁹ On the ground, they were expected to focus on ‘terrorism, organized crime, drug and arms trafficking, human trafficking and irregular migration’. They broadened the police force’s geographical capacity for action through improved mobility, and enhanced intra-police cooperation and capacity for long-range engagement.

This initiative was considered a success by the police after the first company was deployed to the Maradi region in 2017. A second CMCF was established in Birni N’Konni, in the Tahoua region, and testimonies from the population and civil society actors were generally positive, particularly with regard to daily banditry.⁵⁰ The units were visible patrolling along the border and in rural villages.⁵¹ They proved their worth and were trusted by the local population, who did not fear calling on them to report suspicious behaviour or individuals.⁵² The increased confidence of the population was built progressively through a sensitization campaign conducted by the police and EUCAP using television and local radio, roundtables and theatre to explain the role of the CMCF and its ‘black ninjas’, as they were initially dubbed by local people.⁵³ A third police mobile unit was planned in Téra, in the region of Tillabéri, to use its mobility to tackle transnational Islamist armed groups on the border more effectively.⁵⁴ However, this was yet to be installed when the junta government withdrew its consent for the mission.

These initiatives enabled EUCAP to be more instrumental in the capacity-building of long-term force management. The establishment of the CMCF barracks and the installation of units led to the constitution of five mixed working groups on broader aspects of infrastructure, human resource management, logistics, trust-building and training, in which the mission and military staff also participated.⁵⁵ This involvement was designed to encourage long-term planning and budget follow-up at the management level. The funds allocated by the mission over three years were intended to decrease gradually over time to enable the Nigerien Police to take the lead.⁵⁶

These projects strengthened relations and interoperability between police regional directors. They also improved the legitimacy of the mission in other projects involving regional governors. Successful implementation of the mission’s CMCF projects worked as ‘a foot in the door for other activities’.⁵⁷ The National Guard was also assisted with the establishment of eight Regional Operational Centres (Centres opérationnels régionaux, CORs) designed to support mobile unit creation and coordination mechanisms. The first two opened in Niamey in 2016 and Agadez in 2018.

⁴⁹ EEAS official no. 2, Online interview with the author, Aug. 2021.

⁵⁰ SIPRI-LASDEL security perceptions survey, Nov. 2021 and Nov 2023; and CSO representative no. 8, Interview with researcher no. 1, Niamey, Nov. 2021.

⁵¹ CSO representative no. 8, Interview with researcher no. 1, Niamey, Nov. 2021.

⁵² CSO representative no. 1, Interview with researcher no. 1, Niamey, Nov. 2021.

⁵³ CSO representative no. 8, Interview with researcher no. 1, Niamey, Nov. 2021.

⁵⁴ EU CPCC official and EEAS official no. 2, Online interview with the author, Aug. 2021

⁵⁵ EUCAP official and EEAS official no. 4, Online interview with the author, Sep. 2021.

⁵⁶ EUCAP Sahel Niger official no. 3, Online interview with the author, Sep. 2021.

⁵⁷ EU CPCC official and EEAS official no. 1, Online interview with the author, Aug. 2021.

Nonetheless, these responses to the strategic needs of Nigerien forces were limited in their daily functioning and procurement, which constrained their capacity for action in a deteriorating environment. Not all the CORs were fully operational prior to the mission's closure.⁵⁸ Moreover, while an initial tendency to provide materials such as laptops with no possibility of connecting them to an electricity supply, to the network or shared software was corrected, adapted devices were still needed.⁵⁹ Mobile units, for example, require mobile methods of connecting and communication, such as effective and secure radios or portable computers. These were lacking in operations, pushing forces to use phone applications such as WhatsApp to coordinate their moves, with all the possible security breaches this entails.⁶⁰

A reluctance among some of the Nigerien forces interviewed to expose themselves to risk could be explained, for example, by the feeling among GARSI elements that, despite the special training given by EUCAP, their level of materiel and role tended not to differentiate them from 'ordinary Gendarmes'.⁶¹ Contrary to what was expected of the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa (EUTF), which helped the mission fund this particular project, the aim of gathering the best elements to build a national unit dedicated to counterterrorism was not achieved. This objective remains a primary task of the Nigerien armed forces.⁶²

Finally, GARSI units were shocked by the violence of the attack they experienced in Abarey, near Abala and the Malian border, in October 2019, in which five Gendarmes died in a patrol ambush by around 60 Islamists fighters.⁶³ Internal security forces subsequently worked in a volatile environment that required empowerment through material and combat strategies similar to those of the national army.

The extension of state authority through an extended range of actions by the police and Gendarmerie mobile units was weakened by the small number of elements involved and their lack of specialization to enable them to respond effectively to daily threats. The mission provided specialized training on counterterrorism but the trained elements made slow progress.⁶⁴

Reforming the security sector

One of the mission's initial objectives was to advise the Nigerien authorities and forces on Security Sector Reform. EUCAP played a role in the communication around this process. However, the discussions around the drafting of the National Internal Security Strategy demonstrated difficulties around buy-in by Nigerien actors and minimal knowledge of the issue among the population. The mission's central involvement since 2017 was its supporting role in the establishment of that strategy. In addition to setting up national emergency and intervention plans, the text was instrumental to reform of the armed forces.⁶⁵ The absence of such a text was, for example, an obstacle to the sustainability of the CORs, which were not followed-up by the creation of a national coordination centre to integrate them all.⁶⁶

⁵⁸ EUCAP Sahel Niger official no. 4, Online interview with the author, Sep. 2021.

⁵⁹ EUCAP official no. 4, Online interview with the author, Sep. 2021.

⁶⁰ European Court of Auditors (note 12), pp. 31–32.

⁶¹ Member of the Gendarmerie, Interview with researcher no. 1, Niamey, Nov. 2021.

⁶² Member of the Gendarmerie, Interview with researcher no. 1, Niamey, Nov. 2021.

⁶³ RFI, 'Niger: cinq gendarmes tués dans une attaque à Abarey', [Niger: Five gendarmes killed in an attack in Abarey], 13 Oct. 2019.

⁶⁴ European Court of Auditors (note 12), p. 27.

⁶⁵ Former EUCAP Sahel Niger official no. 1, Interview with the author, Niamey, Nov. 2021.

⁶⁶ European Court of Auditors (note 12), p. 34.

EUCAP was directly involved as a technical partner in the strategy drafting committee. Twelve mission experts participated in mixed working groups with their Nigerien counterparts. The capacity to give targeted advice from their own experience and their closeness to partners helped the text move forward through regular validation workshops sponsored by the mission.⁶⁷ A consolidated draft was then submitted to the technical committee.⁶⁸ The strategy was presented to the national institutions at the end of 2021, reviewed by the National Assembly in 2022 and published in June the same year.⁶⁹

The strategic advice had a mixed impact on Nigerien partners. Some counterparts experienced these interventions as ‘dictation’ while others valued the ‘experience sharing’. This creates a risk that the model might be poorly adapted to the Nigerien forces in the long term.⁷⁰ This lack of full approval reflects internal debates on reform orientation within the mission, in connection with the differences in the ‘national cultures’ of the forces. This is notable in the differentiated roles expected of the National Guard and the Gendarmerie. Thus, the dominant attachment to the French model of force organization calls into question the relevance of Niger following this path without further interrogating the model. Moreover, some experts in the mission felt like they were asking Nigerien counterparts to build ‘utopias’, creating concern about the sustainability and efficiency of future ISF organization.⁷¹

Finally, in addition to its legal work, the mission supported popularization of the strategy through public meetings and discussions with forces, governors, mayors and civil society organizations in six regions.⁷² However, the population’s understanding of the concept and purpose of SSR was limited, even in regions such as Maradi where EUCAP was particularly active in its communication around the issue.⁷³

Building trust between the forces, the population and civil society organizations

Trust-building was presented as a central element of the mission’s mandate from 2020. This required creating trust within the ISF through interoperable activities but also helping to enhance relations between troops, the population and civil society organizations. Visible efforts were made in this direction by the mission but these were constrained by a lack of specialized personnel and the limited duration of dedicated activities.⁷⁴

At the time of the research, the internal armed forces enjoyed a positive reputation overall among the population. Nonetheless, a lack of reciprocal trust could be experienced in the most insecure areas of the country, such as in the Tillabéri region. In such situations, forces tend to be suspicious of the population as potential informers for Islamist armed groups. In turn, the people fear reprisals if they are seen as communicating or collaborating with the forces. Moreover, the forces are not always visible in isolated rural areas. Their absence or inaction makes the population feel

⁶⁷ Former EUCAP Sahel Niger official no. 4, Interview with the author, Niamey, Nov. 2021.

⁶⁸ Member of the Police no. 1, Interview with the author, Niamey, Nov. 2021.

⁶⁹ Agence Nigerienne Press, ‘Niamey: Atelier de validation des travaux du comité de développement de la Stratégie Nationale de Sécurité de Proximité (SNSP)’ [Niamey: Workshop to validate the work of the development committee on the National Internal Security Strategy], 20 Oct. 2022.

⁷⁰ EUCAP Sahel Niger official no. 3, Online interview with the author, Sep. 2021

⁷¹ Former EUCAP Sahel Niger official no. 1, Online interview with the author, Sep. 2021.

⁷² Colonel-Major, Centre national d’études stratégiques et de sécurité [National Center for Strategic and Security Studies], Niger, Interview with researcher no. 1, Niamey, Nov. 2021.

⁷³ SIPRI-LASDEL security perceptions survey (note 50).

⁷⁴ Former EUCAP Sahel Niger official no. 2, Online interview with the author, Oct. 2021.

unprotected and ignored by the state.⁷⁵ Even in towns, patrol ranges can be seen as too limited and not reaching sensitive neighbourhoods far from main roads.

While trying to tackle the recurrent need for greater mobility, the internal forces took the initiative to the population through workshops or sports competitions with the youth.⁷⁶ However, regaining complete confidence requires long-lasting exchange and a presence that creates a viable space for the protection of the people. The mission was aware of this and was responsive in integrating this question into its training. The importance of improving relations with the population was included as a specific aspect of programmes. The time allocated was limited to two hours, however, so it appears to have been more of a continuation of sensitization efforts towards forces rather than teaching a change in practice on the ground.

In addition to this focus, the mission developed several types of connection with civil society organizations and community leaders to address issues linked to its activities, be that to explain the CMCF presence or sensitize people around migration. These actions improved EUCAP's visibility, legitimacy and credibility for target audiences. A dedicated unit was put in place in 2020 that actively promoted and supported activities to better understand local expectations in terms of security, ensuring buy-in from people around its projects and connecting the elements of forces involved with the population.

These efforts were noted locally during establishment of the mobile police force in Birni N'Konni. In addition to material and management support, EUCAP organized seminars and dialogue workshops to assess the perception of insecurity among populations, detail the goals of the new unit and introduce some of its members. Moreover, the CMCF presence was enhanced through direct initiatives with the population, such as a direct telephone number to call the force or get access to medics during patrols.⁷⁷ The Birni N'Konni CMCF was designed as a 'test case' for this kind of trust-building activity.⁷⁸ It received an overall positive response from the populations near the camp.⁷⁹

Connections made with civil society actors were also influential in Agadez. The antenna office there ensured the long-lasting presence and visibility of the mission, which was regularly invited to meetings with regional and local authorities, such as the governor, the regional council and the mayor, as well as security actor leads.⁸⁰ Women's and youth organizations were also frequently consulted to assess their expectations around the mission and lead complementary activities, such as roundtables and public discussions on migration and its risks.⁸¹ Finally, traditional authorities, such as the Sultan of Agadez, were involved in external communications about 'Plan Adou', the security plan devised by the Nigerien authorities to fight local banditry and trafficking, involving support by EUCAP mobile units. These relations began a successful 'dialogue process' between the mission and Nigerien actors in Agadez.⁸²

The mission favoured working with certain international NGOs, such as Search for Common Ground and Promediation, on the local dialogues around the CMCF bases.⁸³ It had fewer ties and connections with civil society organizations outside of those

⁷⁵ CSO representative no. 7, Interview with researcher no. 1, Niamey, Nov. 2021.

⁷⁶ Member of the Police no. 2, Interview with researcher no. 1, Niamey, Nov. 2021.

⁷⁷ EUCAP Sahel Niger official no. 1, Online interview with the author, Aug. 2021; and EUCAP Sahel Niger official no. 6, Online interview with the author, Oct. 2021.

⁷⁸ EUCAP official no. 1, Online interview with the author, Aug. 2021.

⁷⁹ CSO representative no. 1, Interview with researcher no. 1, Niamey, Nov. 2021.

⁸⁰ Former EUCAP Sahel Niger official no. 3, Online interview with the author, Oct. 2021.

⁸¹ EUCAP Sahel Niger official no. 3, Online interview with the author, Sep. 2021.

⁸² Former EUCAP Sahel Niger official no. 3, Online interview with the author, Oct. 2021.

⁸³ Former EUCAP Sahel Niger official no. 6, Online interview with the author, Oct. 2021.

known at the national level.⁸⁴ The mission's activities outside Niamey were, towards the end of its life, restricted to identifying relevant actors.⁸⁵ A trust-building action plan was being drafted prior to withdrawal of consent for the mission.⁸⁶

By mainly focusing on certain actors and dialogue activities, the mission developed some blind spots in terms of target audiences experiencing collateral damage from the security situation. Youth, for example, were consulted through workshops and occasional support for 'Youth councils'.⁸⁷ However, engagement at this level was not a priority, despite its demographic weight and the long-lasting security concerns caused by the targeted recruitment of youth by non-state armed groups.

Finally, building trust through engagement between the force and the local population requires proper follow-up on the part of the mission. Follow-up can help to identify where resources, education or practical knowledge on civil-military issues might be absent for civilians. Trust building is an issue that touches the core of force organization and how forces relate to their environment, making it a much more political question than it first appears to be and a sensitive one for EUCAP.

Promoting human rights and the rule of law

The mission raised issues around better promotion of human rights and the rule of law among the force members it trained.⁸⁸ While the impact was visible in terms of additional specialization by Gendarmes around these questions, overall respect for guidelines in the field was jeopardised by the intensity of the threat from Islamist armed groups.⁸⁹ EUCAP's capacity to generate substantial change within the forces on the ground was questioned by the increase in the frequency of attacks on the ISF. There was also a tense atmosphere between the forces and the local population. There are allegations of disappearances of civilians by elements of the armed forces while on mission in Ayorou, in the Tillabéri region, in April 2020.⁹⁰

In an attempt to introduce a code of conduct for the ISF, EUCAP security force training included aspects of judicialization related to illegal migration, such as ensuring fair treatment while in detention or allowing pursuit of legal routes to claim asylum, and, for the army, ensuring good cause for the arrest of terrorist suspects.⁹¹ In its daily interactions with the population, and mainly in the case of banditry and identity control, the forces' methods improved with clearer protocols for arrest and checks.⁹² Dedicated units of the Gendarmerie (gendarmerie prévôtale) were put in place by EUCAP to serve this purpose. One interviewee summarized the perception of this new position as 'an appropriate step towards further specialization among the force members, opening up the possibility for career evolution within the police, as it can enable you to reach the "officer grade"'.⁹³ Training in judicial processes is therefore seen as a potential route

⁸⁴ Former EUCAP Sahel Niger official no. 5, Online interview with the author, Oct. 2021.

⁸⁵ EUCAP Sahel Niger official no. 5, Online interview with the author, Sep. 2021.

⁸⁶ EUCAP Sahel Niger official no. 6, Online interview with the author, Oct. 2021.

⁸⁷ CSO representative no. 11, Interview with researcher no. 2, Niamey, Nov. 2021.

⁸⁸ EUCAP Sahel Niger official no. 3, Online interview with the author, Sep. 2021.

⁸⁹ EUCAP Sahel Niger official no. 1, Online interview with the author, Aug. 2021; Researcher, Online interview with the author, Sep. 2021; and EUCAP Sahel Niger official no. 5, Online interview with the author, Sep. 2021.

⁹⁰ Amnesty International, 'Mali: « Ils en ont exécuté certains et emmené d'autres avec eux ». Péril pour les populations civiles dans le Sahel' [They executed some and took the rest with them: Human rights violations by Security Forces in the Sahel], 10 June 2020.

⁹¹ Member of the Scientific Police, Interview with researcher no. 1, Niamey, Nov. 2021.

⁹² CSO representative no. 3, Interview with researcher no. 1, Niamey, Nov. 2021; CSO representative no. 8, Interview with researcher no. 1, Niamey, Nov. 2021; and CSO representative no. 11, Interview with researcher no. 2, Niamey, Nov. 2021.

⁹³ Member of the Gendarmerie, Interview with researcher no. 1, Niamey, Nov. 2021.

to promotion. However, the lack of general knowledge of penal and legal procedures among soldiers remains a recurring criticism.⁹⁴

The mission also dealt with the forces' poor daily living conditions, sleeping on the ground for weeks at a time when deployed in the Madama base with no access to proper food, and with the frequent lack of 'prioritization' of respect for the physical integrity, legal and sanitary conditions of arrested suspects.⁹⁵

Overall, rather than provide theoretical law references, the gravity of the security situation required the mission to assess the failures of rules of engagement more precisely and adapt its situational training accordingly.

IV. Explanatory factors

Following the framework developed by EPON, an operation's positive or negative impact can be explained by a number of factors: the primacy of politics, the existence or absence of realistic mandates and matching resources, a people-centred approach, legitimacy and credibility, and coordination and coherence, as well as promotion of the WPS agenda.

Explanatory factor 1: Political primacy

The strategy set for EUCAP in Niger was the result of discussions in Brussels, but EU member states struggled to foster a consensual interpretation of the assigned objectives in terms of shared definitions and political involvement. Diverging definitions of the nature of engagement arose when states such as Finland or Malta objected to EUCAP Sahel Niger training the police units in the G5 Sahel force, arguing that civilian CSDP missions should not get involved in activities that resemble military components.⁹⁶ Some differences of understanding were caused by vested political interests more connected to the national level than the European one. This was the case with the focus on the fight against illegal migration, on which the Italian authorities wanted to maintain the visibility of their engagement at both the national and the European level and refused to agree a change of name for EUCAP's unit dedicated to this purpose, even though the Nigerien authorities requested it. Niamey wanted the 'migration unit' to be called a 'border control unit' to portray a better sense of national sovereignty.⁹⁷

Even so, disagreements between the EU member states, Brussels and Niamey tended to be downplayed in public and within the mission. The political direction of the mission was depicted by interviewees as relying on the EU Delegation in the country, which has primacy in political and diplomatic terms. As a former EUCAP official in Niamey described it, 'the European Union controls political aspects like a political elder brother', meaning that Brussels tends to maintain overwhelming influence over interpretation of what the mission should do, while coordination and mutual consultation between political advisors at EU headquarters and the EUCAP offices in Niamey were lacking.⁹⁸ The political aspects and implications of EUCAP's activities tended to be outsourced directly to the European level, whereas to be impactful they required more local analysis and political tailoring.

⁹⁴ EUCAP Sahel Niger official no. 1, Online interview with the author, Aug. 2021; Researcher, Online interview with the author, Sep. 2021; and EUCAP Sahel Niger official no. 4, Online interview with the author, Sep. 2021.

⁹⁵ EUCAP Sahel Niger official no. 4, Online interview with the author, Sep. 2021; and EUCAP Sahel Niger official no. 5, Online interview with the author, Sep. 2021.

⁹⁶ Researcher, Online interview with the author, Sep. 2021.

⁹⁷ Researcher, Online interview with the author, Sep. 2021.

⁹⁸ Former EUCAP official no. 2, Online interview with the author, Oct. 2021.

Explanatory factor 2: Realistic mandate and matching resources

EUCAP Sahel Niger’s final mandate had too many aims and time constraints to be realistic in the rapidly evolving security context. After 2012, the mandate was broadened to include considerations that were piled on top of original expectations that were only slowly being met. Extension of the scope of the mandate was detrimental to its initial goals as the allocation of resources remained comparatively small.

Identification of the exact needs of the forces was blurred by the urgent need to gather resources even if they were not entirely appropriate for the situation. This is connected to context volatility and the multiplicity of geographic and strategic front-lines that Niger’s authorities continue to deal with. This led to a tendency to ‘say yes to every proposal’, in order to maximize the number and types of projects designed by external actors;⁹⁹ or for the Nigerien authorities to ‘go shopping’ for specific but ever-changing materials.¹⁰⁰ This created confusion regarding the fine tailoring of the mission’s activities. The needs expressed were sometimes ‘basic’ but pressing, such as provision of a regular fuel supply for the forces, which was a recurring issue.¹⁰¹ These immediate needs could conflict with the mission’s perspective on ‘higher’ activities such as providing strategic advice. They also challenged Brussels’ capacity for adaptation in terms of budget changes and swiftness of funding for ‘unplanned’ needs as the procurement process for new material could take up to eight months.¹⁰² At the same time, this attitude allowed the Nigerien authorities to reallocate the support received at their own discretion; for example, vehicles provided for the fight against illegal migration being used for counterterrorism initiatives.¹⁰³ Prior to the 2023 coup and subsequent decision to close EUCAP Sahel Niger, the Nigerien leadership had developed an excellent understanding of how to use EU strategic goals and processes to serve national political goals. The European focus on penalizing migration after 2015 brought additional resources for the National Guard in its fight against road banditry, therefore increasing the sustainability of the plan initiated by Mohamed Bazoum as interior minister under the presidency of Mahamadou Issoufou.¹⁰⁴

The mission mobilized a relatively small number of personnel.¹⁰⁵ Among these, half worked on security, leading experts to consider any ‘expectation of change’ in the country ‘unrealistic’ even before the withdrawal.¹⁰⁶ The progressive shift in mandate from training to strategic advice required profiles that differed from existing recruitment. The personnel seconded by member states were mostly from their security forces and few had civilian backgrounds. However, solid experience and behavioural knowledge of high-level political and security environments were necessary to carry out this new and sensitive activity.¹⁰⁷ More importantly, an understanding of African contexts was not systematically set as a prerequisite, leading to miscommunication, lack of attention to detail and lack of knowledge of local expectations—and sometimes of local prejudices.¹⁰⁸

These gaps in the recruitment process led to a strict focus on daily technical activities, which highlights a substantial discrepancy between what was expected and what could

⁹⁹ EU CPCC official no. 1, Online interview with the author, Aug. 2021.

¹⁰⁰ Former EUCAP Sahel Niger official no. 1, Online interview with the author, Sep. 2021.

¹⁰¹ EU CPCC official EEAS official no. 1, Online interview with the author, Aug. 2021.

¹⁰² Former EUCAP Sahel Niger official no. 1, Online interview with the author, Sep. 2021.

¹⁰³ EUCAP Sahel Niger official no. 4, Online interview with the author, Sep. 2021.

¹⁰⁴ EU CPCC official EEAS official no. 1, Online interview with the author, Aug. 2021.

¹⁰⁵ EUCAP Sahel Niger, ‘En chiffres’ [In numbers], Factsheet, [n.d.].; and EUCAP Sahel Niger, ‘Faits et chiffres’ [Facts and figures], [n.d.].

¹⁰⁶ EU CPCC official no. 2, Online interview with the author, Aug. 2021.

¹⁰⁷ Former EUCAP Sahel Niger official no. 1, Online interview with the author, Sep. 2021.

¹⁰⁸ Former EUCAP Sahel Niger official no. 3, Online interview with the author, Oct. 2021.

be achieved. There was a clear realization among experts inside the mission, expressed with a degree of frustration, that while EUCAP's mandate execution was 'contributing to the professionalization of the armed forces' and 'supporting processes and reforms in place', it should not be stretched further than these 'basics' of CSDP missions.¹⁰⁹ Reorienting to strategic advice, for example, would have required the setting up of a dedicated fact-finding unit that could shed daily light on conflict drivers to enable the mission to react swiftly to its volatile environment.¹¹⁰

Explanatory factor 3: People-centred approach

Its 12-year presence on Nigerien soil made EUCAP a well-known actor among the security forces and higher political authorities. There were regular contacts and discussions, but also discrepancies between interlocutors regarding Niger's needs given the context complexity. The mission was located in Niamey but its geographic and social impacts were constrained by the priority given to security considerations. Connections with civilians were constrained and any effects on their everyday lives were generally indirect.

The mission's ability to engage successfully with the internal security forces on the main objectives of its mandate on training, advice and equipment was assessed positively by its Nigerien counterparts. Apart from daily interactions with the troops, this mutual knowledge was nurtured by regular and 'open' meetings with the heads of the Police, Gendarmerie and National Guard, and the highest political authorities such as the prime minister and the president. They met regularly with the mission's leadership through a 'steering committee' presided over by the prime minister, which enabled the mission to make its proposals in an atmosphere described as 'very receptive'.¹¹¹

Strong working relationships with traditional authorities had also been established individually through repeated interactions and personal relationships, notably in Agadez headquarters. On a more symbolic basis, the fact that EUCAP often offered available seats in the mission's aircraft for flights between Agadez and Niamey was highly appreciated and helped nurture ties with the local authorities.¹¹²

Personal involvement in the work and curiosity about the country were essential to relations between EUCAP trainers and their trainees or EUCAP 'focal points' and their counterparts.¹¹³ By contrast, a lack of listening capacities and of willingness to understand local complexities were also described as a potentially significant limitation, based on individual behaviours witnessed among mission personnel.¹¹⁴ The regularity and diversity of contacts between Nigerien security and political authorities did not prevent misunderstandings, differences in approach or mutual instrumentalization.

The mission was aware of the power relations and networks among Nigerien authorities in Niamey and Agadez. It took a more distanced approach to community-level needs, which also played a part in the Nigerien security context. Contact with the most affected communities would typically be made possible by organizing meetings in towns and urban settings. However, the mission did not address the communities directly, privileging the invitation of professional associations of farmers or herders that could relate to the local situation.¹¹⁵ Moreover, in regions where there are local

¹⁰⁹ EU CPCC and EEAS official no. 2, Online interview with the author, Aug. 2021.

¹¹⁰ Former EUCAP Sahel Niger official no. 1, Online interview with the author, Sep. 2021.

¹¹¹ EUCAP official no. 1, Online interview with the author, Sept. 2021; EUCAP official no. 4, Online interview with the author, Sep. 2021; and EU CPCC official no. 2, Online interview with the author, Aug. 2021.

¹¹² Former EUCAP Sahel Niger official no. 1, Online interview with the author, Sep. 2021.

¹¹³ Researcher, Online interview with the author, Sep. 2021.

¹¹⁴ Former EUCAP Sahel Niger official no. 3, Online interview with the author, Oct. 2021.

¹¹⁵ EUCAP Sahel Niger official no. 5, Online interview with the author, Sep. 2021.

tensions, such as in the Tillabéri region, NGOs were contracted to conduct dialogues prior to the deployment of the security forces. Direct engagement with communities on local issues was seen as too political and too risky for a mission whose primary concern was the security forces.

Highly educated, and socially and politically connected Nigeriens from the capital tended to be overrepresented in the mission as local staff.¹¹⁶ Mastery of French was privileged as it was the working and exchange language with national counterparts.¹¹⁷ This had consequences for the recruitment process as the mission therefore attracted fewer staff from the countryside. If this represented a limitation in terms of representation and diversity, it nonetheless enabled the mission to navigate the Nigerien political scene by benefiting from informal and individual connections.

Explanatory factor 4: Legitimacy and credibility

The mission always connected its presence to the request made by the Nigerien authorities to the EU. Mission personnel often repeated that they were engaged in Niger as ‘guests’ and working in ‘support’ of existing security structures.¹¹⁸ This narrative was shared by the Nigerien forces that at the time viewed EUCAP as a partner in the provision of material and advice. Outside of political and military circles, however, the reasons for the mission’s presence and the details of its activities were less clear to civil society and the general population.

The mission tended above all to be perceived by the population as ineffective in terms of the changes it could make. Other critics questioned the possible vested interests behind its local security concerns. These misperceptions can be linked to a lack of strategic communication between the mission and its Nigerien counterparts.

The general population did not witness many tangible results from EUCAP Sahel Niger’s efforts. They still faced a precarious security situation. The armed forces also raised concern that the mission’s results did not reflect the material capacities invested, and that the benefits for the armed forces were too small and not concrete enough with regard to the security situation.¹¹⁹ The predominant message was that the presence of EUCAP did not prevent the multiplication of Islamist attacks.¹²⁰ This apparent discrepancy led to accusations about the ‘real interests’ behind EUCAP’s presence in the country, using security as an indirect way to achieve its goals. Rumours spread that ‘foreign actors are accomplices of terrorists’ or have come to ‘plunder natural resources’.¹²¹

EUCAP’s involvement in tackling illegal migration also crystallized questions and criticism. It was often depicted as direct ‘border control’ or a ‘violation of the human right to mobility’.¹²² For many Nigeriens, but also some European personnel, the orientation towards regional migration control in 2016 responded to European concerns more than Nigerien expectations. The decision to incarcerate smugglers and impose fines led to ill-designed policies that could not address the spillover effects on the local economy, notably in the Agadez region. The failure to provide an efficient

¹¹⁶ EUCAP official no. 3, Online interview with the author, Sep. 2021.

¹¹⁷ Researcher, Online interview with the author, Sep. 2021. On this issue, see also Colomba-Petteng, L., ‘La maîtrise des langues comme enjeu politique: Le cas des organes de représentation de l’Union européenne au Niger’ [Language mastery as a political issue: The case of the representative bodies of the European Union in Niger], *Critique Internationale*, vol. 90, no. 1 (2021), pp. 131–49.

¹¹⁸ EUCAP Sahel Niger official no. 1, Online interview with the author, Aug. 2021.

¹¹⁹ CSO representative no. 10, Interview with researcher no. 1, Niamey, Nov. 2021.

¹²⁰ EUCAP Sahel Niger official no. 6, Online interview with the author, Oct. 2021.

¹²¹ CSO representative no. 4, Interview with researcher no. 1, Niamey, Nov. 2021.

¹²² CSO representative no. 7, Interview with researcher no. 1, Niamey, Nov. 2021.

and effective ‘substitute economy’ deepened local misunderstanding and frustration. EUCAP training activities for the forces in Agadez were seen as an integral part of this repressive trend and weakened the legitimacy of the mission in the area. This part of the EUCAP mandate was interpreted as bringing ‘African solutions’ to ‘European problems’ rather than the expected development and response to basic needs.¹²³ In November 2023, the junta revoked the migration arrangement with the European Union and reopened the migration route.¹²⁴

The EUCAP and EU stance often appeared prejudicial to socio-economic conditions to public opinion formed by media coverage or social media, where available.¹²⁵ These perceptions reduced the mission’s public legitimacy and its credibility as assisting in the improvement of Niger’s situation. Expectations and misrepresentations were often connected to a lack of understanding of the mandate, which in turn was derived from a lack of effective strategic communication.¹²⁶

In a context where it is often complex for the population to differentiate between the international security actors present, the mission intensified its visibility in the local media, from newspapers to national television.¹²⁷ Even where its existence or name was known, however, its specific role was difficult to describe for people who had not taken a direct part in its activities.¹²⁸ In the lead-up to withdrawal, communication was focused on activities such as training and the provision of materials, and events linked to SSR and capacity-building for civil society in connection with the mission. The emphasis was therefore put on security, while people might have expected to learn more about the other benefits outside of material support that the mission had the capacity to bring.¹²⁹

There was a need to reach illiterate populations through radio or other media, as the set-up and actualization of a website and Facebook pages could not reach beyond the ‘francophone elite’ in Niamey.¹³⁰ The inability to reach all communities using different languages and to cope with the lack of internet access presented consistent challenges for increasing visibility and understanding of the mission.

Moreover, the forces themselves were not keen on communicating publicly about the activities implemented by EUCAP or its presence more generally. Niger’s different languages were an issue for commanders and officers deployed to reach the people affected by their activities.¹³¹ EUCAP strategic communication was limited in content and transmission capacity, and was not directed well enough at the population in all its diversity.

¹²³ Former EUCAP Sahel Niger official no. 1, Online interview with the author, Sep. 2021.

¹²⁴ Peltier, E., ‘Remote African hub reopens for migrants headed towards Europe’, *New York Times*, 23 Jan. 2023.

¹²⁵ CSO representative no. 3, Interview with researcher no. 1, Niamey, Nov. 2021; CSO representative no. 4, Interview with researcher no. 1, Niamey, Nov. 2021; CSO representative no. 5, Interview with researcher no. 1, Niamey, Nov. 2021; CSO representative no. 8, Interview with researcher no. 1, Niamey, Nov. 2021; and Nigerien institutional actor, Interview with researcher no. 2, Niamey, Nov. 2021.

¹²⁶ CSO representative no. 2, Interview with researcher no. 1, Niamey, Nov. 2021.

¹²⁷ CSO representative no. 3, Interview with researcher no. 1, Niamey, Nov. 2021.

¹²⁸ CSO representative no. 3, Interview with researcher no. 1, Niamey, Nov. 2021; and Local politician in Diffa, Interview with researcher no. 2, Niamey, Nov. 2021.

¹²⁹ EUCAP Sahel Niger official no. 6, Online interview with the author, Oct. 2021.

¹³⁰ EUCAP Sahel Niger official no. 1, Online interview with the author, Aug. 2021.

¹³¹ EUCAP official no. 1, Online interview with the author, Aug. 2021.

Explanatory factor 5: Coordination and coherence

The mission managed to play a central role in the expanding international landscape of security actors in Niamey. It created a regular space for discussion and possible cooperation and received credit from external partners for its ability to ‘gather like-minded people’.¹³² While close exchanges nurtured collaboration, however, they did not build proper coordination between external actors. Bilateral interests remained strong when it came to security and also sometimes competed. Outside of Niger, the regional role of EUCAP was limited by the long-standing difficulties experienced in EU internal coordination between the different CSDP antenna offices in the Sahel.

EUCAP acted as a secretariat for other international actors, coordinating and enabling mutual sharing of information around security as a ‘common topic of interest’.¹³³ One of the main strengths of the mission was its ability to mobilize technical aspects that enabled discussion without colliding with political issues. Being part of the EU sphere and sharing themes of action also puts EUCAP at an effective junction between multi-lateral and bilateral relations. The IOM is one of its closest partners, as EUCAP was the first international actor to settle in Agadez. A shared interest in training on biometrics connected the two, as well as specific shared activities such as repair of the border post at Assamaka on the border between Niger and Algeria.¹³⁴

Regular coordination meetings took place every two or three months at the technical level, including with the UNDP and UNODC representatives, and at the diplomatic level every two weeks with the ambassadors of EU member states and partners.¹³⁵ This mutual knowledge sharing and interaction did not prevent ‘institutional competition’, including with the EU Delegation, which promoted the impression that ‘the EU is doing a lot in security, but it is hard to tell what exactly’.¹³⁶ These regular meetings did not prevent a form of competition and the duplication of activities, including with UNODC, involving the provision of similar training programmes on judicialization of the armed forces or the organization of conferences on trafficking that constituted ‘non-useful’ duplication.¹³⁷

These overlapping projects sometimes led to ‘national flag-waving’ among international cooperation actors.¹³⁸ They could also call into question, as with the fight against terrorism, the coherence of the ‘combined offers’ made by partners.¹³⁹ The need to rationalize international activities was acknowledged by the establishment of a ‘steering committee’ on counterterrorism.¹⁴⁰ The highest level of Nigerien authorities took an active part in defining priorities as well as defining exact needs.¹⁴¹

Among these international actors, some were more discrete in their influence and activities. The USA assisted with coordinating meetings and shared information on or concerns about Islamist radicalization with the mission. However, it refrained from joining projects that were not US-designed, planned and financed.¹⁴² Other mission

¹³² EUCAP official no. 1, Online interview with the author, Aug. 2021; EUCAP official no. 3, Online interview with the author, Sep. 2021; and Researcher, Online interview with the author, Sep. 2021.

¹³³ EU CPCC and EEAS official no. 1, Online interview with the author, Aug. 2021.

¹³⁴ EUCAP Sahel Niger official no. 4, Online interview with the author, Sep. 2021.

¹³⁵ EUCAP Sahel Niger official no. 3, Online interview with the author, Sep. 2021.

¹³⁶ EUCAP official no. 3, Online interview with the author, Sep. 2021.

¹³⁷ EUCAP Sahel Niger official no. 4, Online interview with the author, Sep. 2021.

¹³⁸ Former EUCAP Sahel Niger official no. 1, Online interview with the author, Sep. 2021.

¹³⁹ Former EUCAP Sahel Niger official no. 2, Online interview with the author, Oct. 2021.

¹⁴⁰ EUCAP Sahel Niger official no. 3, Online interview with the author, Sep. 2021.

¹⁴¹ Former EUCAP Sahel Niger official no. 2, Online interview with the author, Oct. 2021.

¹⁴² Researcher, Online interview with the author, Sep. 2021; and EUCAP Sahel Niger official no. 5, Online interview with the author, Sep. 2021.

relations were also quite distant, such as with Turkey, or non-existent, such as with China or Saudi Arabia.

On regional cooperation, there was generally little connection with the Regional Advisory and Coordination Cell for the Sahel (RACC). That structure's mandate lacked the clarity and autonomous funding to achieve its goal of coordinating CSDP mission activities in the Sahel.¹⁴³ The head of the RACC theoretically has the status of a head of mission but in reality reports to EUCAP Sahel Mali's head.¹⁴⁴ For this reason, the RACC was considered a 'sub-branch' of EUCAP Sahel Mali.¹⁴⁵ The missions in Mali and Niger were not connected except for individual exchanges between their respective personnel.

Finally, cooperation with the G5-Sahel force, which also came to an end when Niger announced its withdrawal from the organization in December 2023, suffered from the long-standing absence of a G5 advisor within the mission. Some direct relations were established with counterparts based in Mali and Burkina Faso through training in judicialization and custody chain procedures. Its partners often described the complexity of the G5 Sahel architecture as a significant difficulty.¹⁴⁶ EUCAP played a visible and active role in Niger among international stakeholders in security while being unable to engage in detailed coordination, given the sensitivity of this domain which is closely tied to states' identities and objectives.

Explanatory factor 6: Women, Peace and Security

The issue of gender equality and women's participation in decision making in the mission and within the various Nigerien forces became a growing concern for EUCAP.

Internally, two women occupied senior positions as Head of Mission and Chief of Staff at the time of the research. Their involvement and contacts with Nigerien counterparts were often broadcast on television and radio.¹⁴⁷ Nonetheless, the number of women EUCAP personnel was deficient, according to a mission employee speaking in 2021, at 'less than 20 per cent of women in total and 10 to 15 per cent in operations'.¹⁴⁸ A EUCAP official attributed this deficiency to the security constraints in Niger and the predominance of military and police profiles over civilian ones, which restricted the recruitment pool. The level of attention paid to this specific issue by the EU was also questioned.¹⁴⁹

At the country level, the participation of women was limited by recruitment issues and reluctance on the part of the Nigerien forces. References to gender, particularly gender discrimination, were systematically included in every EUCAP training session. Improvements in gender-based responses by troops were also observed in the region of Diffa.¹⁵⁰ However, women remained barely visible among the ranks of trainees and officers.¹⁵¹ This was linked to 'the security degradation in the country' that does not make 'parity...a concern', particularly when it comes to deployment in the field.¹⁵² Moreover, where women are in a position of authority, career progression is not always

¹⁴³ Former EUCAP Sahel Niger official no. 4, Interview with the author, Niamey, Nov. 2021.

¹⁴⁴ EUCAP officials, Interviews with the author, Niamey, Oct. 2021.

¹⁴⁵ EUCAP Sahel Niger official no. 4, Online interview with the author, Sep. 2021.

¹⁴⁶ Researcher, Online interview with the author, Sep. 2021.

¹⁴⁷ EUCAP Sahel Niger official no. 3, Online interview with the author, Sep. 2021.

¹⁴⁸ EUCAP official no. 6, Online interview with the author, Oct. 2021; and EUCAP official no. 4, Online interview with the author, Sep. 2021.

¹⁴⁹ EUCAP Sahel Niger official no. 6, Online interview with the author, Oct. 2021.

¹⁵⁰ Local politician in Diffa, Interview with researcher no. 2, Niamey, Nov. 2021.

¹⁵¹ EUCAP Sahel Niger official no. 6, Online interview with the author, Oct. 2021.

¹⁵² EUCAP official no. 4, Online interview with the author, Sep. 2021.

a concrete priority for Nigerien commanders.¹⁵³ In addition, their role tends to be ‘pre-formatted’ and they seem ‘not to share the same responsibilities as their male colleagues’.¹⁵⁴

In the security field, women are more integrated as civil society actors, such as the ‘women leaders of Agadez’.¹⁵⁵ Women have the capacity to have their voices heard, their presence is felt in several associations and they play a critical role in sensibilization among youth, whether on matters of trafficking or potential radicalization.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵³ EUCAP official no. 3, Online interview with the author, Sep. 2021.

¹⁵⁴ EUCAP official no. 4, Online interview with the author, Sep. 2021.

¹⁵⁵ EUCAP official no. 6, Online interview with the author, Oct. 2021.

¹⁵⁶ EUCAP official no. 5, Online interview with the author, Sep. 2021.

5. Conclusions

JAÏR VAN DER LIJN AND GRETCHEN BALDWIN

Overview

The three EU CSDP missions examined in this study have conducted important but niche SSR activities in highly complex and volatile security situations. By their very nature, these missions are small, limited in scope and dependent on the political will and interests of the host government and the Council of the European Union, on which every EU member state government has a power of veto. At best, missions help to the initiate an SSR process as the start of a much longer and more fundamental process that can take decades to complete. Previous research has found that a detailed understanding of local political dynamics and expectations is critical to effective SSR work, as such efforts are not merely technical but have profoundly political consequences. Successful SSR also requires national ownership, civil society engagement and durable political support from its mandating body. These requirements are formidable and perhaps overwhelming. In addition, the three missions detailed in this report operate or operated in overcrowded security arenas where a plethora of international actors provide security sector assistance. In the cases of Afghanistan and Mali, the missions had limited influence and leverage locally, as the NATO and US, and UN and French presences in those countries, respectively, were the senior security partners. For missions to be effective, coordination and collaboration—or at least compatibility—among the various initiatives is essential.

EUPOL Afghanistan

From its inception in 2007 to its closure in 2016, EUPOL Afghanistan was a non-executive civilian CSDP mission to assist and enhance the Afghan government's reform efforts in the field of policing.¹ The mission pursued three main objectives: advancing institutional reform of the Ministry of the Interior, professionalizing the ANP and connecting the police to the justice sector. Despite extensive, near decade-long involvement, it did not achieve any of these objectives satisfactorily. Its mandate was excessively ambitious to begin with, while its *modus operandi*—training, mentoring and advising—rested on staff members' presumed ability to shape the minds, cultural practices and behaviour of their Afghan counterparts as a precondition for systemic institutional change. Mission personnel, however, were over reliant on West-centric ideas about culture and behaviour change, resulting in a 'social engineering project' by the international community.² Ultimately, there was a general 'delusion' around state-building in Afghanistan.³ The mission and the international community as a whole lacked coherence and vision. In the broader context, EUPOL Afghanistan was only a drop in the ocean. Its limited achievements were largely lost after the return of the Taliban in 2021, following the USA's implementation of its decision to withdraw its military presence from the country.

¹ Council Joint Action 2007/369/CFSP of 30 May 2007 on establishment of the European Union Police Mission in Afghanistan, *Official Journal of the European Union*, L139, 31 May 2007. Following the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty on 1 December 2009, the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) became the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP).

² Suhrke, A., 'Reconstruction as modernisation: The "post-conflict" project in Afghanistan', *Third World Quarterly*, vol. 28, no. 7 (2007), p. 1291.

³ Malejacq, R., *Warlord Survival: The Delusion of Statebuilding in Afghanistan* (Cornell University Press: Ithaca, 2019).

EUCAP Sahel Mali

The EUCAP mission in Mali has supported SSR and strengthening the governance and accountability of the Malian internal security forces since its inception in 2014, alongside its focus on counterterrorism. In January 2023, its mandate was extended until January 2025. The mission is intended to support the restoration and maintenance of order, state authority and legitimacy. These goals have been complicated by the regular expansion of its mission responsibilities, which has tended to follow mandate renewal, and the subsequent mission creep and lack of strategic focus. Despite EUCAP Sahel Mali's impressive levels of training of the Malian internal security forces, the complexity of the conflict and its myriad actors mean that the mission has only contributed minimally to the establishment of a durable peace in the country. Most of the advances made by the mission have been oriented towards placing the MDSF on a solid legal and organizational footing, supporting the extension of Malian state authority to key geographic areas of concern, notably in the centre of the country, and more recently increasing accountability. However, external factors are also central to determining the mission's impact. The nullification of the Algiers peace process and the decision by the junta to end most multilateral security assistance and turn to the Wagner Group for military assistance has left EUCAP Sahel Mali in a precarious position.

EUCAP Sahel Niger

The EUCAP mission in Niger, founded in 2012, is set to leave the country by June 2024, according to a recent statement by the EU's High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy, Josep Borrell.⁴ Initially set up in a counterterrorism context, the mission became increasingly linked to the EU's often criticized anti-migration policies. As a result, it faced challenges in relation to executing its bloated mandate, a lack of strategic guidance and public perceptions. As in Mali, the temptation to broaden its scope and size, and to move progressively to a more executive-style mission without providing it with adequate resources, proved detrimental to the CSDP mission. The mission was also limited by its range and capacity for action compared to the security assistance offered by Niger's bilateral partners. The EU has in the past had the potential to be a trusted, reliable interlocuter, and EUCAP Sahel Niger held a secure place in Niger as an external partner acting as an enduring provider of material and infrastructure support. However, recent events in Niger have shown more than ever how tenuous longstanding security partnerships are, as the junta government has also broken ties with the G5-Sahel. Like the other two missions, the impact of EUCAP Sahel Niger has largely depended on conditions beyond its scope. The July 2023 coup and the recent turn to Russian security assistance are likely to be detrimental to the results of the mission following its departure.

Mission impact

Given the limited and focused mission mandates of the EU CSDP missions with SSR activities, and the enormity of the challenges, the sustainability of their efforts will be dependent to a large extent on developments beyond their reach. As a result, while missions may have had useful operational results, at a strategic level their impact has been limited, and the sustainability of such impacts has been affected by external developments such as coups d'état and the geopolitical maelstrom. At the same time, despite their limited mandates, all three operations also risked mission creep. Mandate

⁴ Agence Europe, 'EUCAP Sahel Niger mission to leave country by June', 1 Feb. 2024.

expansion led to a point where the missions lost their ability to follow a clear strategic thread. In addition, missions frequently failed to achieve their key objectives, and their approaches have often rested on West-centric ideas on culture and behaviour change, rather than rely on local knowledge and ownership. Nonetheless, EU CSDP missions with SSR objectives have the potential to facilitate positive security sector reform in states where conflict is ongoing if mandates and strategic goals remain more in line with the realities on the ground.

Explanatory factors

Following the EPON framework, findings from these three case studies link across six explanatory factors.

Explanatory factor 1: Political primacy

In all three cases, the host government has had only a selective interest in the activities of the missions, and more of a focus on effectiveness and less on accountability. As advisory non-executive missions, the three missions under review have had limited ability to push for institutional change or engage past the point where national leaderships have wanted to engage. The missions have tended to be reliant on directives from Brussels and on EU political interests. Their non-executive status further complicates the missions' political influence on the ground because missions have to wait for Brussels to make statements, such as denouncing human rights abuses, while their inability to go into the field to accompany and mentor trainees limits their political clout. In all three host countries, some of the interviewees went so far as to characterize the missions as primarily pursuing EU foreign policy and the preservation of EU interests rather than achieving a shared, evidence-based vision for the intervention. EUCAP Sahel Niger, for example, had its mandate adjusted to deal with migration, which is essentially a challenge for Europe. Regardless of the correctness of this claim, substantive needs assessments tend to be eschewed in pursuit of donor-driven 'quick fixes' that do not necessarily serve national needs.

Explanatory factor 2: Realistic mandates and matching resources

In all three cases, mission mandates have been overambitious, with too many ever-expanding, incoherent tasks to be conducted within an overly constrained time period. In each case, tasks and responsibilities have grown each time a mandate is renewed, even if earlier objectives have not yet been achieved. In Afghanistan, this issue was exacerbated by the fact that security institutions needed to be built from scratch; EUPOL Afghanistan supported construction rather than reconstruction, which is significantly more difficult. This was not essentially different in Mali and Niger. In all three missions, the resources allocated to achieve these ambitious tasks—including staffing—were found to be inadequate. Contextual knowledge among mission personnel was cited as an additional hurdle in all missions; when staff rotate quickly or are overburdened with work, building cultural and contextual understanding of the complexity of a conflict and mission environment, solid relationships with local and national partners, and sustainable activities or institutions is almost impossible.

Explanatory factor 3: People-centred approach

All three missions struggled to adopt a people-centred approach to their activities. Trust building with local populations and security forces has been limited by insecurity, lack of cultural understanding and awareness, the concentration of mission personnel in capitals and inadequate engagement with civil society at the earliest planning stages. Inadequate staffing and too much focus on capitals have also resulted in a lack of cultural and contextual awareness among mission personnel, and led to over-simplification. In EUPOL Afghanistan, for example, many of the mission's issues were exacerbated by a Kabul-centric mindset. In the case of Niger, strong relationships with traditional authorities were useful for building trust. However, EUCAP personnel's engagement with local populations often ended at this level, as direct engagement with communities was seen as too political and too risky.

Insufficient national ownership of and attention to the relationship and engagement with populations, and the inclusion of civilian inputs, have damaged the credibility of both the missions and the national forces they partner with, and undermined mandate delivery and sustainability at the national level. Civil society has a role to play in ensuring the sustainability of SSR and follow-up. The limited relationships built with civil society and populations also meant that governments have been able to close missions without much popular resistance. Moreover, in contexts where lack of trust in security institutions is a significant issue, being seen to be engaging primarily with those security institutions rather than the broader population exacerbates issues with the mission's credibility.

Explanatory factor 4: Legitimacy and credibility

Internationally and nationally, all three missions are considered legally and politically legitimate. However, deficiencies in strategic communication mean that their credibility in the public eye is typically low. There is generally a lack of awareness of the missions and understanding of their mandates among the general population. Missions generally do not see this as a priority issue, as their focus is on their partner government organizations. However, the poor human rights records and rampant corruption of these partner security institutions may eventually affect the legitimacy of the missions, especially if they are perceived to be working only with these institutions. In addition, some mission cultures, such as in Afghanistan, have been perceived as overly paternalistic, which affects public perceptions and thus the credibility of the missions.

Explanatory factor 5: Coordination and coherence

Internal coherence varied across missions. However, some issues affected all three missions, such as poor institutional memory, short deployments and a lack of smooth handover between staff, which can hugely disrupt internal coherence. Overall, aligning the myriad of international actors and their priorities proved extremely difficult in all three cases. In Afghanistan, there were reportedly loyalty issues between the mission and national contingents, and different actors provided different non-aligned training courses that were poorly adapted to the local context. In Mali, some interviewees mentioned a sense of 'coordination fatigue', while others claimed that coordination was absent and that there were overlapping activities. In Niger, EUCAP Sahel Niger was seen as acting as a 'secretariat' for other external actors, particularly on information sharing. In all three cases, approaches such as regular meetings between international actors' coordination teams were found to improve overall communication and reduce duplication, although such meetings do not prevent institutional competition.

Explanatory factor 6: Women, Peace and Security

The WPS agenda seems to have been a lesser priority for the three missions. Where brought into the work of the missions, it has tended to focus on women's participation in security institutions (in absolute numbers) rather than a fuller, institutional approach to gender mainstreaming. In Afghanistan, for example, once the mandate evolved to consider gender, it focused largely on the inclusion of women police officers and recruitment. Efforts to mainstream gender issues were not systematically maintained, and tended to stop at increasing women's nominal participation in security institutions or simply recognizing gender inequality (gender sensitivity) rather than taking action to address that inequality (gender responsiveness). Similarly, in Niger the main gender focus of security institutions seems to have been on tackling discrimination and increasing the number of women recruits, despite the appointment of gender advisors. While encouraging women's participation is important, doing so without concrete, contextualized reasons as well as institutional support structures for those women in both the mission and national security structures is often detrimental in the long run. In all three country contexts, women have tended to play a role in civil society that does not look the way western interveners might expect. However, their roles are often pivotal in both political decision making at the local level and for a fuller understanding of in-country conflict and political dynamics. This underpins the importance of including women in engagement and decision making, as per WPS agenda priorities, but also once again highlights the importance of people-centric and civil society engagement.

6. Recommendations

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Seven recommendations arise from this study:

1. Embed missions in a broader political approach

Given the limited scope of the EU CSDP missions with an SSR focus, it is particularly important that they are embedded in a broader political approach by the EU and the broader international community. SSR is not a merely technical effort, but highly political at its core. On their own, given their size and the limited political interest of partner governments, missions have little political clout to push for accountability and human rights. A better anchoring of missions in a broader carrot-and-stick approach by the EU—the European External Action Service, the European Commission, its delegations and member states—and the international community is likely to have much more effect. At the same time, this requires missions to be mandated as a partner in support of dealing with the problems of the host country, and not used as an African solution to the European problem of migration, as has happened in the case of EUCAP Sahel Niger.

2. Provide missions with realistic mandates aligned with adequate resources

There is often a mismatch between mission mandates and resources from the outset and this is further exacerbated when mandates subsequently expand without commensurate expansion of resources. Expansive mission mandates and mission creep have become a serious problem. The inability of missions to accomplish everything in their bloated mandates undermines their credibility over time, which in turn becomes a feedback loop. In reviewing mission mandates based on a needs assessment, the Council of the European Union must seriously consider what missions can realistically accomplish given the resource constraints, including on staffing. They should then mandate accordingly.

3. Put more focus on the inclusion of civil society at all stages

Missions need to involve civil society at all stages of the process, including in needs assessments. In essence, all efforts are intended to benefit local communities, either directly or indirectly. Including their representatives at the table rather than working only through security counterparts has various benefits. Given the high rates of violence against civilians and other human rights abuses in mission environments, this is an area that is in need of improvement. It would also increase situational awareness, as well as engagement with the general population and civilian needs. In turn, as missions are seen as more active and responsive, this will increase their legitimacy. Moreover, in order to ensure sustainable results, missions need to work in partnership with civil society organizations, as these will eventually need to be positioned to ensure the accountability of the security sector. However, effective inclusion requires staff to be better trained on cultural awareness issues and missions to reflect on their internal culture, not least of paternalism and militarism.

4. Condition support on increasing the effectiveness of the civilian security sector at increasing accountability and good governance

The accountability and human rights aspects of SSR are essential to the process and should not be ignored. Public perceptions and the credibility of missions can also be significantly undermined by perceptions of impunity or by misconduct, including grave human rights violations, committed by the security institutions that are trained and supported. Supporting the effectiveness of these institutions, including training and the provision of lethal and non-lethal assistance, therefore need to be conditioned on improvements in the accountability mechanisms of the security sector.

5. Invest in strategic communication:

The limited awareness of missions and their mandates among local populations makes them vulnerable to the whims of partner governments and to disinformation by other actors. Where the visibility of missions among the general population is insufficient, presence on public and social media should be intensified and diversified in terms of type and language. Partners in national armed forces should also help to publicize joint activities, explain their role as part of their deployment and detail mission mandates whenever possible. Particularly given how rumours can spread and intensify during conflict, populations should be easily able to access simple and reliable information from missions and their partners. In the absence of strong strategic communication, missions will lack the support of and a partnership with the local population, leaving them vulnerable to obstruction by governments or even closure.

6. Place more emphasis on the gender responsiveness of missions, beyond numbers:

If SSR activities and missions as a whole are to be successful, inclusive and sustainable, they will need to be gender responsive. However, too often gender responsiveness is limited to increasing the participation of women and dealing with sexual and gender-based violence. In addition, the resources allocated to the topic are often limited to one resource person ‘doing gender’. Missions as a whole need to be gender responsive, which includes, for example, providing consistent resources for gender expertise, conducting gendered analyses of conflict which include the perspectives of all members of society, and an active commitment from the leadership to recognize and address gender inequality. To this end, the importance of engagement with civil society cannot be overstated.

7. Deliver on the commitment and deliverable of the new Civilian CSDP Compact regarding independent impact evaluation of missions:

Evaluations are essential in order to strengthen internal learning in missions and to learn across missions. At times, the findings might not be pleasant. However, only objective and independent evaluations will deliver the lessons that strengthen decision making and mandate implementation.

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