

# The end of the UN mission Minusma

Sunday 16 July 2023, by [MARTIAL Paul](#) (Date first published: 15 July 2023).

**Despite the many shortcomings of the Minusma, its departure, demanded by the Malian junta, risks worsening the situation of the civilian population and reflects a headlong rush by the putschists.**



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It was well known that relations between the Malian authorities and the heads of Minusma (the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in Mali) were not at their best. However, it was a surprise to hear Malian Foreign Minister Abdoulaye Diop demand “the immediate withdrawal” of the UN mission.

## **Tense relations**

Once the surprise was over, negotiations on the withdrawal took place. The Malian authorities demanded a three-month deadline, which everyone considered unrealistic, but agreement was reached on a departure date of the very beginning of 2024.

Since the second putsch in May 2021, relations between the junta and Minusma have been marred by numerous incidents: the expulsion of Guillaume Ngefa, director of the human rights division; the refusal since 11 October 2022 to authorise flights by Bundeswehr reconnaissance drones and numerous aircraft flights; the detention of 49 Ivorian soldiers mandated by the UN; administrative harassment over imports of goods for the mission, and so on.

Added to this list are the obstacles to the Minusma’s investigations into human rights violations perpetrated by the Malian army and Wagner’s mercenaries. The junta has done everything in its power to prevent the publication of the report on the massacre of nearly 500 civilians in the town of Moura, in which the army and its Russian auxiliaries are implicated.

## **Consequences for the population**

Officially, the junta blames the Minusma for its inability to curb the jihadist violence. This is not a new complaint. Back in 2016, Mali asked the UN Security Council for a more robust mandate for Minusma. Minusma tried to respond to this request, but to no avail. Indeed, it has peace-related objectives and is not structured to carry out offensive actions. Its role is to protect civilians and stabilise the country politically by promoting the presence of the State throughout the country.

With a contingent of 13,000 soldiers and a presence in more than a dozen locations across Mali, Minusma, despite its obvious shortcomings, has proved useful. It has enabled civil servants and members of the government to move around the country by providing planes and helicopters. It has acted as a facilitator between the authorities and the armed groups that signed the 2015 Algiers peace agreement. Finally, despite its limitations, it has contributed to the protection of civilians and remains a source of information on human rights violations on all sides of the conflict.

## **Headlong rush**

The French military presence with Barkhane was focused on security, preventing Malians from taking a political approach to the conflict. By getting rid of Barkhane, the junta had the opportunity to break with this policy too. It did not make that choice. Worse still, it is stepping up military operations that are costly in terms of civilian casualties, without succeeding in containing the Islamists' advances.

If the junta wants to put an end to the Minusma, it is so that it can be alone with Wagner and exclude all witnesses to the human consequences of its security headlong rush. Even if this means suffering a deterioration in logistical resources. Indeed, Prigozhin's group has nowhere near the level of the UN mission's fleet of planes and helicopters. The coup plotters are trying to make up for their failures on the ground by playing up their sovereignty, even if this is only a façade, given Wagner's growing influence in the affairs of state. The decision to put an end to the Minusma also corresponds to an accentuation of the junta's authoritarianism. The shrinking of democratic space bears witness to this, as does the latest government reshuffle. Two of the four ministers from the armed groups that signed the peace agreements were dismissed, as were those close to Prime Minister Choguel Maïga.

We can only fear for the civilian population, caught between the Malian army, accompanied by Wagner's mercenaries, and the jihadists of al-Qaeda and Daech.

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**P.S.**

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