U.S. SECURITY PARTNERSHIPS AND THE PROTECTION OF CIVILIANS

The Case of Mali and the Malian Armed Forces (FAMa)

A collaboration between Brown University, Security Assistance Monitor, and InterAction

December 2022

Summary

The August 2020 coup in Mali triggered restrictions under section 7008 of the Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Appropriations Act, 2020 and similar provisions, greatly limiting U.S. security assistance to Mali. Only limited assistance continues. Nevertheless, it is worthwhile to evaluate historical U.S. and international security assistance to Mali and understand its relationship to Mali's deteriorating security situation. The U.S. provides significantly more humanitarian assistance than security assistance for Mali. In fact, it has been a minor supplier of arms and security assistance training to the country compared to other donors. For example, in 2020, the U.S. provided $146 million in humanitarian and health assistance as compared to $16.56 million in peace and security assistance. The Biden administration's recent declaration that U.S. strategy in the Sahel is moving away from a counterterrorism focus toward addressing root causes suggests that there are serious questions about the effectiveness of the previous counterterrorism approach.

The Malian Defense and Security Forces (MDSF) and its allies are complicit in human rights and international humanitarian law (IHL) violations and abuses, including perpetrating civilian massacres, enforced disappearances, summary executions, sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), and violence against children. The Goïta Government's employment of the Russian mercenary company, the Wagner Group, appears to have correspondingly escalated cases of civilian harm. This, along with the dismal record of holding its armed forces and allied forces accountable to IHL and human rights violations and abuses suggests there is little political will on the part of the government to protect civilians. This suggests that U.S. training on IHL appears to have had little impact at the operational level, suggesting it may not be the most effective training tactic.

About the Factsheet

This factsheet is a collaboration between Brown University's Center for Human Rights and Humanitarian Studies (CHRHS), the Security Assistance Monitor (SAM) at the Center for International Policy, and InterAction. It provides an overview of key facts, data points, and analysis related to the U.S. partnership with Mali in the context of ongoing civilian protection and humanitarian assistance concerns in the country.

It is the third in a series of factsheets examining protection of civilian issues in geographies where the U.S. is a significant external security partner, following a first report published in December 2021 on Ethiopia and a second report published in May 2022 on Nigeria. The series aims to generate awareness of U.S. policies and practices on security cooperation and document their effectiveness in promoting civilian protection. Moreover, it is intended to help inform NGO advocacy and policy engagement strategies seeking to strengthen the protection of civilians, enhance humanitarian access, and minimize civilian suffering in contexts of U.S. security partnerships. In examining political and security developments in Mali, this paper focuses mainly on the policies and practices of the Malian Armed Forces (FAMa), the U.S. relationship with this actor, and leverage the U.S. may exert through this relationship to address civilian harm concerns in country.

The collaborators on this project have endeavored to provide data-driven and fact-based information on the nature of U.S. security cooperation with Mali and current civilian harm trends in the country. The information presented does not necessarily represent the institutional views of the contributing organizations. The recommendations in this factsheet reflect the assessments of InterAction and CHRHS contributors. Information collected for this factsheet stems from open-source information, including U.S. government and

NGO reports, as well as interviews with experts, including U.S. policy specialists, international and field-based NGOs, and local experts. Unless specifically cited, figures in this report are drawn from the Security Assistance Monitor databases.

Drawing on the insights and recommendations of NGO colleagues and experts working on Mali and U.S. security cooperation policy and practice, the following contributors developed this product:

- Alexandria Nylen, Civil-Military Program Coordinator, Brown University CHRHS
- Nate Marx, Research Fellow, Center for International Policy
- Hifzah Malik, Program Associate, Protection, InterAction
- Archibald Henry, Former Policy Coordinator, Protection, InterAction
- Fiona Campbell, Student Researcher, Brown University CHRHS
- Marzia Giambertoni, Student Researcher, Brown University CHRHS

CHRHS, SAM, and InterAction would like to thank all the individuals and organizations who contributed to and provided guidance for this factsheet, including InterAction staff, members, and partners.

About the Contributing Organizations:

Center for Human Rights and Humanitarian Studies: Housed within the Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs at Brown University, The Center for Human Rights and Humanitarian Studies aims to promote a more just, peaceful, and secure world by furthering a deeper understanding of global human rights and humanitarian challenges, and encouraging collaboration between local communities, academics, and practitioners to develop innovative solutions to these challenges.

Security Assistance Monitor: The Security Assistance Monitor is a program of the Center for International Policy, that tracks and analyzes U.S. security sector assistance and arms sales programs worldwide. By informing policymakers, media, scholars, NGOs, and the public (in the United States and abroad) about trends and issues related to U.S. foreign security assistance, we seek to enhance transparency and promote greater oversight of U.S. military and police aid, arms sales, and training.

InterAction: InterAction is a convener, thought leader, and voice for NGOs working to eliminate extreme poverty, strengthen human rights and citizen participation, safeguard a sustainable planet, promote peace, and ensure dignity for all people. InterAction convenes several thematic and country-specific working groups, including the Protection of Civilians Working Group (PoC WG), a coalition of 16 international humanitarian and human rights organizations working to shape U.S. policy and practice to minimize civilian harm in U.S. military operations and security partnerships.

This factsheet's cover image features Malian special forces soldiers participating in combat reload drills at Loumbila, Burkina Faso, Feb. 16, 2019. (U.S. Army photo by Spc. Peter Seidler)

Partnership Overview

Objectives and Purpose of U.S. Security Partnership

U.S. security assistance to Mali has been relatively modest by both U.S. and Malian standards, and the U.S. is only one of Mali's many international partners. Currently, in response to the 2020 and 2021 coups, the flow of U.S. security assistance to Mali has effectively ceased. Even when the U.S. did provide aid, it was neither Mali's largest arms supplier nor its largest provider of training. The Malian example is important to analyze in part because of the additional complexities introduced by this dynamic. Over the past 21 years, the U.S. provided $69 million of security assistance to Mali, $19 million of direct commercial arms sales, approximately $4 million of foreign military sales, and trained approximately 10,000 Malian military personnel. According to the State Department, the U.S. security partnership with Mali is focused on "promoting regional security by combatting terrorists and traffickers who seek to exploit ungoverned spaces in the Sahel." The Biden administration's recent declaration that U.S. strategy in the Sahel is moving away from a counterterrorism focus toward addressing root causes of insecurity suggests that there are serious questions about the effectiveness of the previous counterterrorism approach.

Type of Assistance Provided

It is important to note that unlike in some countries, in Mali the U.S. provides significantly more humanitarian assistance than security assistance. For example, in 2020, the most recent year with complete data available, the U.S. provided approximately $74 million in humanitarian assistance and $72 million in health assistance, while providing $16.56 million in peace and security assistance and $13.52 million in democracy, human rights, and governance assistance. This difference has become even starker recently as most U.S. security assistance has been severely restricted under Section 7008, a set of legal limitations on the types of security assistance that can continue after a coup.

After the 2020 coup, some limited U.S. security assistance was provided to Mali under so-called notwithstanding authorities,[1] but after the second coup in 2021 most of this aid was also cut. Though the data is incomplete, no foreign assistance to Mali administered by either the State Department or the Department of Defense has been reported in F.Y. 2022.[2]

Over the past 20 years, U.S. security cooperation with Mali took the form of security assistance (direct U.S. funding to Malian military and police units), arms sales (which included both government-to-government foreign military sales and direct commercial sales from U.S. manufacturers to the Mali government),[3] and training of Malian security personnel.

U.S. security cooperation primarily supports the Malian Armed Forces (FAMa) and National Gendarmerie, although some support also goes toward the National Police Force. According to one Sahel expert, the U.S.

1 These authorities allow certain kinds of aid to continue in some circumstances, in this instance, according to the State Department, "limited security assistance to law enforcement partners" in Mali continues under these authorities.

2 Note that humanitarian and governance assistance continues.

3 There are no notified foreign military sales to Mali in the past 20 years that meet the reporting requirement of "Major Defense Equipment (MDE) of $14M or more; any defense articles and services of $50M or more; or design and construction services of $200M or more," but it is possible FMS happened under these thresholds and thus were not reported.

usually does not focus on regular police forces in Mali due to their often-limited scope and influence.[4] In particular, the U.S. has heavily focused on the Gendarmerie, especially the Special Intervention Group of the National Gendarmerie (GSIGN), a counterterrorism force that was set up to respond to incidents like the 2015 Radisson Blu attack.[5] U.S. assistance to Malian forces is meant to strengthen Mali's ability to fight multiple insurgencies, especially in the country's north; the intensification of Islamist insurgent activity has been responsible for at least part of the recent marked increase in civilian casualties in Mali.[6]

Security Assistance

Between 2001 and 2019, the U.S. provided approximately $36 million of security aid to Mali directly, while providing $148 million of aid in direct support of U.N. peacekeeping missions in Mali.

US Security Assistance to Mali by Program, 2001-2019, UN excluded

Program	
Section 333 Building Partner Capacity	$8,545,000
Peacekeeping Operations	$7,585,000
Nonproliferation, Anti-Terrorism, Demining, and Related Prog..	$7,406,000
Section 1207 Security and Stabilization Assistance	$5,000,000
International Military Education and Training	$2,551,000
Combating Terrorism Fellowship Program	$2,065,513
Section 1206 Train and Equip Authority	$1,831,479
Foreign Military Financing	$512,000
Section 1004 Counter-Drug Assistance	$405,000
Defense Institution Reform Initiative	$274,025
Excess Defense Articles	$140,088
Regional Centers for Security Studies	$66,272
Defense Institute of International Legal Studies	$14,000

Of this aid, the largest category is Section 333 Building Partner Capacity, which focuses on building counterterrorism, counternarcotics, border security, and other capabilities. Much of the other funding comes from peacekeeping, stabilization assistance, and general training funding streams. It is important to note that some funding categories, such as peacekeeping, can include funding for a variety of different programs that may not seem connected to the category, such as counterterrorism and security sector reform. It is unclear how many Malian military personnel who received Peacekeeping Operations training courses were deployed to the U.N., African Union, or other regional peace operations, and how many are currently stationed in Mali or have been deployed in counterinsurgency or law enforcement operations domestically. Mali has contributed peacekeepers to U.N. operations consistently for years, and even as of March 31, 2022, was contributing

4 Specifically, regular police were rarely involved in investigations, generally quite focused on traffic and other minor crimes, and have limited ability to deliver on U.S. goals including counterterrorism.

5 Interview with State Department official(s).

6 Interview with State Department official(s).

small numbers of troops to the MONUSCO, MINUSCA, and BINUH missions in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Central African Republic, and Haiti respectively. The Alioune Blondin Beye Peacekeeping School (EMP-ABB) in Bamako was inaugurated in 2007 and is still operational. Because of this, it is difficult to estimate what proportion of U.S. Peacekeeping Operations funding went to peacekeeping.

As shown in the chart below, the U.S. provided significant assistance to a number of different peacekeeping missions in Mali, even before AFISMA/MINUSMA began. The scale of this aid dwarfs direct U.S. security assistance to the Malian state, especially the massive injection of funds to MINUSMA in 2012. Some have argued that relatively more U.S. support to the Malian state would be more effective than supporting peacekeeping missions given that a high proportion of MINUSMA funding goes to protecting MINUSMA troops themselves, while others argue that peacekeeping missions are necessary and support Malian stability without the difficulty of aiding the Malian state after multiple coups. After the most recent coup, the U.S. is legally prohibited from providing most security aid to the Malian state.

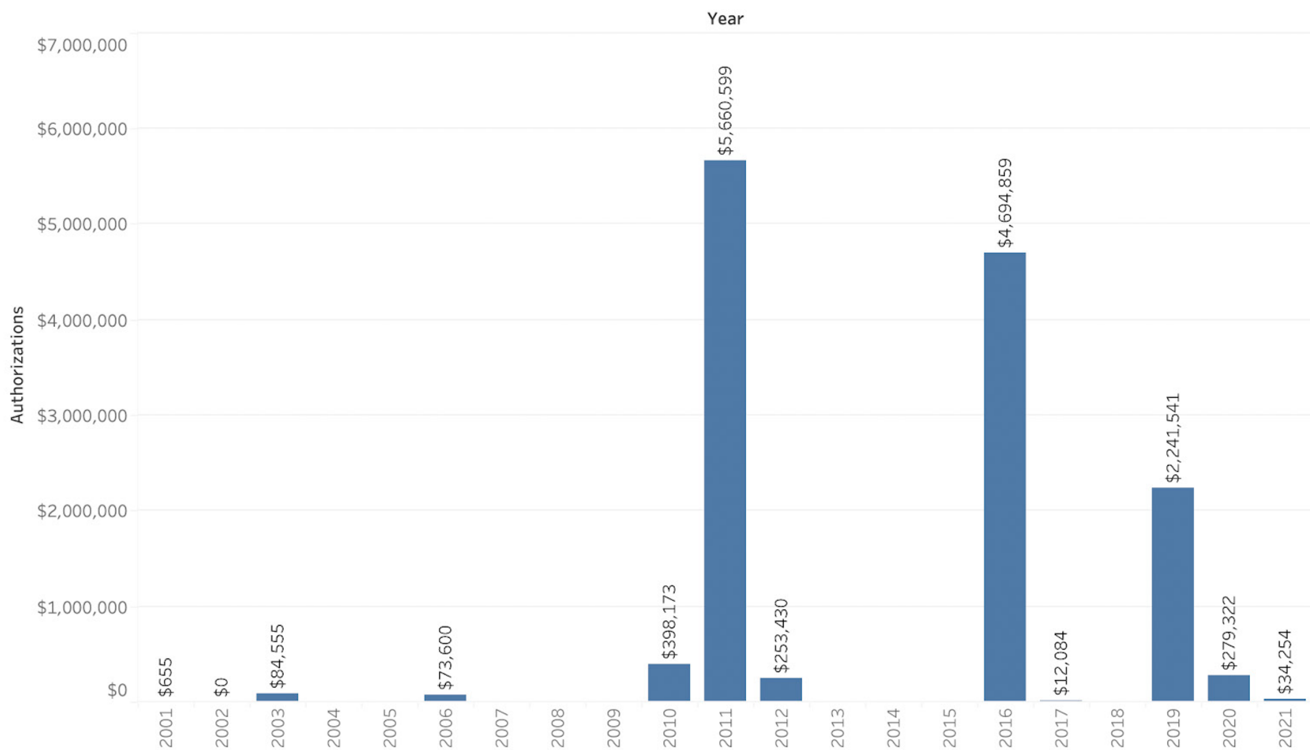
US Support to UN Missions in Mali, 2001-2019

Program	Year	Item	
Peacekeeping Operations	2009	Funds were reprogrammed from South Sudan and Liberia. To train and equip African troops deploying to the peacekeeping mission in Mali	$2,713,000
	2010	Funds were reprogrammed from South Sudan and Darfur. To train and equip African troops deploying to the peacekeeping mission in Mali.	$4,547,000
	2012	Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO- two year funds): Support training and equipping of troops deploying to Mali to participate in the peacekeepeing operation in Mali (first AFISMA and then MINUSMA). Provide logistics support to troops in Mali for the African-led International Support Mission to Mali (AFISMA).	$128,260,000
	2013	Oversas Contingecy Operations (OCO) (two year funds): Support training and equipping of troops deploying to Mali to participate in the peacekeeping operation in Mali (first AFISMA and then MINUSMA). Provide logistics support to troops in Mali for the African-led International Support Mission to Mali (AFISMA).	$5,331,000
		Support training and equipping of troops deploying to Mali to participate in the peacekeepeing operation in Mali (first AFISMA and then MINUSMA). Provide logistics support to troops in Mali for the African-led International Support Mission to Mali (AFISMA).	$7,168,000

Arms Sales

According to SIPRI, Mali has spent over 10% of its federal budget on its military since 2014, and in 2020 spent a peak of $593.87 million. The U.S. is a relatively minor supplier of arms to Mali, ranking behind Russia, Bulgaria, the United Arab Emirates, Brazil, South Africa, the Czech Republic, Spain, and France, in that order.[7] U.S. arms sales have been a comparatively small fraction of this budget, averaging $686,654 per year of direct commercial sales, or around 0.1% of Mali's peak military budget. Since 2001, this has added up to a total of $13.73 million of U.S. sales to the Malian government.[8]

7 Source: SIPRI arms transfer database. Note that this ordering includes arms donated as well as sold.
8 There were also around $2 million of sales to UN missions in Mali.



U.S. arms sales to Mali have been inconsistent over time as well, with very high inter-year variation. It is important to note that the numbers in the figure above only cover direct commercial sales, where a foreign buyer negotiates directly with a U.S. vendor on an arms sale. For foreign military sales (FMS), where the U.S. government negotiates the sale, it is only required to provide detail on transactions above certain thresholds. Thus, only very general data on sub-threshold foreign military sales is available, suggesting that since 2001, the U.S. has provided less than $4 million in FMS.

Since direct commercial sales are considered proprietary, few details are available about each sale. The largest purchases were for Category XII items, which include fire control, range finder, imaging, and guidance equipment. This category represented over 40% of total U.S. sales to Mali from 2001-2021. Military electronics made up the next largest category, accounting for over 20% of total U.S. sales.

Foreign Military Training

Since 2001, the U.S. has provided military training to 9,849 Malian military personnel.

US Foreign Military Training Provided to Malian Security Personnel

Program (Trainees)	
Peacekeeping Operations	3,908
Non-Security Assistance - Unified Command	3,204
Foreign Military Sales	1,107
Foreign Military Financing	657
Regional Centers for Security Studies	608
Section 333 Building Partner Capacity	466
International Military Education and Training	434
Combating Terrorism Fellowship Program	336
Misc Dept of State & Dept of Defense Non-Security Assistance	288
Humanitarian Mine Action	60
Regional Centers	52
Exchange Training	20
Combating Terrorism and Irregular Warfare Fellowship Progra..	15
Aviation Leadership Program	8

Before the rapid deterioration of France-Mali relations toward the end of 2021 and the beginning of 2022, the E.U. Training Mission in Mali (EUTM Mali) was the largest provider of training in the country. From 2013-2018, it trained 13,000 FAMa members.[9] For comparison, over the same time period, the U.S. trained fewer than 1,500 Malian security personnel total, including Gendarmes.

Overall, most U.S.-administered training in Mali fell into one of two categories: Train-and-Equip/ Provision of Defense Articles related programs and authorities (e.g., Peacekeeping Operations, Foreign Military Sales, Foreign Military Financing) and Education programs and authorities (e.g., International Military Education and Training, and Regional Centers for Security Studies).[10] Training was generally funded by the Department of Defense (DoD) and/or the Department of State (DoS) and was mainly executed by DoD—overseen by its Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) and implemented by U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) and military contractors. From 2017 on, the largest U.S. training initiatives for Malian personnel focused on security sector governance via the Obama-era Secure Governance Initiative, international law, and aircraft logistics and maintenance.

The majority of this training fell under the Peacekeeping Operations (PKO) funding stream, though the majority of trainees in that program were in the 2002-2008 timeframe, after which the numbers dropped significantly. It is uncertain if these trainings differ substantially in scope and content from other U.S.-provided training. Most course titles suggest that the skills taught would be applicable to both peacekeeping and non-peacekeeping

9 Denis M. Tull, “Rebuilding Mali’s army: the dissonant relationship between Mali and its international partners,” International Affairs, Volume 95, Issue 2, March 2019, Pages 405–422.

10 Note: Non-Security Assistance - Unified Command should be considered uncategorized training, and foreign military sales training is training purchased by the receiver country.

contexts, while some seem more peacekeeping-specific, such as a number of courses from the Center for Excellence for Stability Police Units (CoESPU), a peacekeeper training school in Italy. The distribution of course titles suggests that courses under this funding stream became less specific to peacekeeping as time went on, though it is possible this represents a change in the way course details are reported instead.

A Sample of Course Titles Under PKO Funding in Mali

Year	Course Title	Trainees
2000	ACRI FT-2 (African Crisis Response Initiative)	200
2001	ACRI FT-3 (Africa Crisis Response Initiative)	42
	ACRI FT-4 (Africa Crisis Response Initiative)	780
2006	ACOTA Mali 1st Bn EMI (African Contingency Operations Training and Assistance)	15
	ACOTA Mali 1st Bn PSOSST (African Contingency Operations Training and Assistance)	345
	ACOTA Mali 1st Bn TPMD,BCM, CSOS/CAX/CPX (African Contingency Operations Training and As..	103
	ACOTA Mali 2d Bn PSOSST (African Contingency Operations Training and Assistance)	616
	ACOTA Mali 2d Bn TPMD/BCM/CSOS/CPX/CAX (African Contingency Operations Training and Assi..	70
	ACOTA Mali TSC (African Contingency Operations Training and Assistance)	27
2007	ACOTA Mali 3rd Bn TPMD/CSOS/CPX CAX (Global Peace Operations Initiative)	52
	ACOTA Mali NET (Global Peace Operations Initiative)	311
	COESPU MIDDLE MANAGEMENT COURSE 07 (Global Peace Operations Initiative)	28
2008	COESPU DARFUR PREDEPLOYMENT (Global Peace Operations Initiative)	21
	COESPU HIGH LEVEL (Global Peace Operations Initiative)	11
	COESPU MIDDLE MANAGEMENT (Global Peace Operations Initiative)	19
2010	COESPU HIGH LEVEL (Global Peace Operations Initiative)	6
	COESPU MIDDLE MANAGEMENT (Global Peace Operations Initiative)	21
2011	COESPU Civil-Political-Military Relations Course (Global Peace Operations Initiative)	3
	COESPU High Level Course (Global Peace Operations Initiative)	6
	COESPU High Risk Operations Course (Global Peace Operations Initiative)	1
	COESPU Middle Management (Global Peace Operations Initiative)	15

A Sample of Course Titles Under PKO Funding in Mali

Year	Course Title	Trainees
2017	African Alumni Symposium	2
	African Chiefs of Defense Conference	1
	AFRICOM/UNDPKO Manuals & African PME Workshop	1
	ALPS III/TOEFL	9
	American Language Course General English Training and Specialized English Training	17
	Civil, Political, Military Relations	2
	MET Africa National Security Planning	2
	MET DIILS Seminars	108
	Military Justice Personnel Engagement	1
	MTT IMC Project Seminar 1 (Mali)	49
	North West African DMI Conference	1
	Protection of Civilians (POC)	3
	Seminar #3	39
	Senior Leader Engagement	18
	Senior Leader Engagement Follow Up	1
2018	Air Force Logistics and Maintenance Training	80
	Aircraft MX MTT - PDSS	52
	ALPS III/TOEFL	1
	Basler BT-67 Maintenance and Supply	57
	CoESPU Civil-Police-Military	4
	CoESPU FPU Coordinator Course	1

U.S. training to Malian forces was described by multiple experts as often IHL-focused and targeted at senior leadership. These experts raised concerns about these focuses, suggesting, among other things, that legalistic approaches are personnel-intensive and unlikely to succeed at an operational level given the relatively low numbers of security personnel in Mali. They also suggested a gap in training at the Non-Commission Officer (NCO) level, with senior staff often unable to operationalize the training they received. This means that even if the higher echelons of military leadership understand IHL, it is not getting passed down through the ranks into changed military behaviors that could practically reduce civilian harm.

Prior to the 2020 coup, members of FAMa also benefited from U.S. regional counterterrorism training in the Pan-Sahel Initiative launched in 2002 that included Mali, Niger, Chad, and Mauritania. Some military officers who participated in the coup had received training by the U.S. military. "It's clear that several participants in the mutiny...have received U.S. training or assistance," according to J. Peter Pham, the State Department's special envoy for the Sahel region of West Africa. He stressed that the United States condemned the actions by military officials to topple the government.

Protection of Civilians and Civilian Harm in Mali

Conflict Background

The Mali War began in 2012, when primarily ethnically Tuareg separatists in the north rebelled against the central government. The National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA) rose up against then-president Amadou Toumani Toure in January with support from Islamist armed groups, including al-Qaeda in the Islamic Magreb (AQIM), Ansar Dine, and others. In March of the same year, a military coup removed Toure from power.

The 2012 coup created room for the MNLA and Islamist groups to seize power in the north, declaring the independent state of Azawad by April. The ties between MNLA and the Islamist groups quickly faltered due to differing aims, and by June, AQIM and other Islamist groups seized near-complete control of the north, imposing a strict Sharia law widely opposed by the MNLA and locals in the region. Ultimately, the conflict has shifted away from its origins as a clash between Tuareg rebels and the government, and toward a prolonged fight between the government and Islamic extremist groups which have now evolved and merged into two main fronts—Jama'at Nusrat al Islam wal Muslimeen (JNIM) and the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS)—that fight among themselves as well.

Though a peace deal was signed between the government and MNLA forces, instability has grown due to the expanding presence and violence of extremist groups. A U.N. peacekeeping mission (MINUSMA) deployed in June 2013 and has operated in Mali for nearly a decade now. Peaceful presidential elections held in July 2013 brought Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta into office, but nationwide insecurity prompted protests to erupt in 2018 at the beginning of his second term. Though the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) tried to encourage a peaceful dialogue between Keïta's government and opposition groups, a military junta assumed control of the government on August 18, 2020.

Due to national and international pressure, the junta established plans for a transitional government by September 2020, but the public was widely displeased with leaders appointed in the interim period. Between late 2020 and June 2021, interim-vice president Assimi Goïta detained his fellow interim leaders, and took

over as president. Goïta had promised to stage a vote in February 2022, but as this deadline approached, the interim parliament voted to permit up to five more years of military government rule of the country, providing for no specific date for a future election and the restoration of civilian rule.

In response to this plan, ECOWAS imposed a trade embargo and closed its borders with Mali. This, along with the government's decision to hire the Wagner Group, has only heightened instability in the country and pushed out foreign aid efforts. In February 2022, France and its allies declared they would begin a coordinated withdrawal of troops aligned with Operation Barkhane (its primary counterterrorism military effort in the Sahel) from Mali. The statement explained, "that the political, operational and legal conditions are no longer met to effectively continue their current military engagement in the fight against terrorism in Mali." Sweden has followed suit, explaining that their decision lies in Mali's postponement of elections and the deployment of the Wagner Group. Mali announced on May 15, 2022 that it would withdraw from the G5-Sahel group and its joint force, leaving behind plans to work with other Sahel states on counterterrorism across the region.

In early June 2022, Goïta's administration announced a 24-month plan for transition, meaning a new civilian-led government would lead Mali by March 2024. Though initially ECOWAS was frustrated with this plan, on July 3, 2022, leaders of ECOWAS lifted the stiff economic and financial sanctions they had imposed in January following Goïta's announcement that February elections would not be held as originally planned.

This ongoing political crisis alongside increasing terrorist attacks nationwide leave Mali's citizenry in a precarious situation facing severely deteriorating security.

Civilian Harm Background

Civilian harm perpetrated by MDSF (Malian Defense and Security Forces) and non-State armed groups (NSAGs) has remained an issue from the early days of the Mali war in 2012 and has increased following the most recent coup by Colonel Assismi Goïta. Over the last 10 years, the ongoing war and insecurity has led to deliberate and unintentional civilian casualties in the thousands, displacement en masse, enforced disappearances, abuses of the rights of children, and sexual and gender-based violence, among other violations of human rights. Civil unrest, too, has led to civilian harm, as anti-government protesters in recent years have faced violence from government forces and police. The conflict has also taken a toll on civilians through mass displacement. In September 2021, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reported a record high of 401,850 internally displaced persons (IDPs) resulting from conflict in Mali. This is five times larger than the number of IDPs recorded just three years prior, and a 30% increase in recorded IDPs from the start of 2021 and 2022. Following the engagement of Russian mercenaries in Mali's conflict, many people have fled the country entirely due to the increasing death toll. Al Jazeera reported that multiple refugees residing in camps in southeast Mauritania "either cited the Russians specifically as a threat or said the security situation in Mali's decade-long war has gotten worse since Wagner mercenaries arrived."

Civilian Casualties

In many cases, civilians have been killed by soldiers meant to protect them amid government counterterrorism efforts. For example, Human Rights Watch (HRW) reported on a case wherein eight people were found dead, including a child and an elderly man in late October 2021. Villagers claimed these people had been executed in a government counterterrorism operation. Similarly, in early March 2022, the burned bodies of 35 people allegedly extrajudicially executed by government forces were discovered in Ségou region. In some cases,

attacks on civilians by Malian security forces appear to be retaliatory in nature. In Tounu, Mopti state, security forces executed 14 civilians after two soldiers died in an improvised explosive device explosion nearby. One witness reported to HRW: "The soldiers dragged two elders in their 80's and four others to where the mine exploded, and executed them on the spot."

Recent cases of violence against civilians, and ultimately civilian casualties, have been perpetrated by FAMa forces alongside foreign mercenaries working with the Wagner Group. From January to mid-April of 2022, the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) reported the killings of 456 civilians by FAMa and Wagner Group forces.

One major contributor to this number is the recent massacre in Moura, in the Mopti region of central south Mali. Between March 27 and March 31, civilians were caught in the crossfire of a FAMa and Russian mercenary engaged in a counterterrorism operation against NSAGs exchanged gunfire. After the violence took place, the Defense Ministry claimed that all casualties had been terrorists and that they had freed the people of Moura from "the terrorist's yolks"—with 203 dead and 51 arrested by armed forces. A HRW investigation found that hundreds of people had been rounded up by MDSF and mercenaries, and an estimated 300 civilian men were summarily executed. Some of these men were suspected of affiliation with armed groups, though linkages were not officially established. Witnesses to the atrocity have estimated a total 600 men, only half of which were suspected combatants, were killed by FAMa and affiliated mercenaries. Witnesses, civilians from Moura who survived this massacre, interviewed by the Washington Post described how Malian and Russian soldiers took phones from onlookers, preventing any documentation. Nearly all the bodies of those executed were burned to ashes by security forces. Mali's Army Etat-Major denied all involvement in the deaths of civilians in Moura.

Many analysts have pointed to this event—far more extreme than other events in Mali's recent history—as a sign of increasing violence and brutality as a result of the involvement of the Wagner Group, which has on multiple occasions been accused of committing war crimes. There is reason to believe that there has also been significant civilian harm in operations to combat ISGS and other extremist groups by so-called "self-defense" militias which aligned themselves with MDSF, such as Imghad, Allies Self Defense Movement (GATIA), and the Movement for the Salvation of Azawad (MSA).

Civil unrest has also led to civilian deaths, particularly as protesters have spoken out against the nation's leadership and multiple juntas. Amnesty International research contradicts government claims that recent coups have been entirely bloodless by highlighting deaths during demonstrations following the use of excessive force. An elite unit within Malian police, known as FORSAT (Force Spécial Anti-terrorist) has also been accused of killing civilians amid protests in Bamako.

Enforced Disappearances and Summary Executions

Multiple sources have recorded incidents of enforced disappearances and summary executions by FAMa soldiers in recent years. Often, these reports are challenging to prove and thus accountability for such abuses is difficult. In 2020, the U.N. expert on human rights in Mali condemned a notable cycle of impunity for human rights violations, including summary executions, perpetrated by MDSF against civilians. This call for action by the U.N. was prompted in part by data collected by MINUSMA showing that MDSF had extrajudicially executed at least 119 people in a three-month period.

HRW reported that between September and October of 2021, a minimum of 14 men being detained by FAMa had disappeared. Additionally, discoveries were made of the bodies of 3 men executed following

their detainment by FAMa soldiers in the Mopti region. A U.S. State department report notes the summary execution of 2 men, and the wounding and mistreatment of 34 more in the Mopti region. MINUSMA also found that in 2021, MDSF "were responsible for 29 forced disappearances between January and June."

Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV)

MINUSMA's 2021 report notes 6 cases of sexual violence by MDSF brought to the attention of U.N.-supported centers for SGBV survivors. Amid the attacks on Moura, mentioned above, reports arose of rape perpetrated by FAMa and aligned forces. A 2022 report notes 4 cases of sexual violence perpetrated by Malian armed forces against 4 young girls in 2021. As in many conflict situations, in Mali it is difficult to accurately enumerate SGBV cases due to stigma, general instability, as well as access challenges (which have been exacerbated by COVID-19). Still, many have been affected by such violations, though challenges remain in determining the affiliation of perpetrators. Displacement in particular increases the danger SGBV poses to women, children, and the elderly. U.S. DoS highlights 3,744 cases of gender-based violence against IDPs in a six-month period in 2021. NSAGs certainly account for a significant amount of these crimes, though attribution is often not easily determinable.

Violence Against Children

The U.N. Secretary General's 2022 report on Children and Armed Conflict recorded 352 children had been recruited by varying armed forces in Mali, 8 of which were recruited by Malian armed forces. The same report notes that 201 children were killed and maimed as a result of the conflict, with Malian armed forces as perpetrators in 12 cases.

Humanitarian Access Constraints

Humanitarians continue to face barriers to access by NSAGs to conflict-affected communities. These have included attacks on aid workers, which has made Mali the fifth most dangerous context for aid workers. MDSF has also been involved in hindering the work of humanitarians. The European Union and U.S. support to the ECOWAS' sanctions against Mali have also risked limiting humanitarian access.

Peacekeeping Restrictions

Following the UNSC's renewal of MINUSMA's mandate in Mali, which in part is to facilitate and ensure the delivery of humanitarian assistance, Goïta's administration explained that Mali would not cooperate with U.N. provisions requiring that his military guarantee freedom of movement of MINUSMA peacekeepers. This decision is critical in relation to human rights violation investigations, as movement restrictions on peacekeepers will prevent inquiries and likely encourage impunity for perpetrators of crimes such as the recent massacre in Moura.

In mid-July 2022, Mali's military government placed further constraints on humanitarian access by suspending rotations of military and police contingents of MINUSMA. A spokesman of the mission explained publicly at the time the risks of this decision, saying "the rotation of the mission's contingents is of crucial importance for its operational effectiveness and the morale of its uniformed personnel." Rotations resumed in August, though bureaucratic and procedural hurdles remain that risk undermining MINUSMA's mandate.

Government of Mali / MDSF Policies and Practices on PoC and Minimizing Civilian Harm

Civilian Harm Mitigation Policy

The Government of Mali appears not to have a civilian harm mitigation policy in place. Despite the 2021 deployment of additional peacekeepers to MINUSMA, these troops do not replace the need for the Malian government to develop and implement a coherent strategy to reduce violence against civilians, according to CIVIC's Seán Smith. The U.S. government also expressed concerns about MINUSMA's ability to enforce its Human Rights Due Diligence Policy, especially with respect to the support it provided to Malian armed forces. "An international armed intervention is likely to increase the scale of human rights violations we are already seeing in this conflict," said Salvatore Saguès, Amnesty International's researcher on West Africa. The additional troops offer short-term gains in offering protections to civilians in certain temporary operating bases within Mali.

Transparency and Accountability

The Mali government struggles to implement existing accountability mechanisms to bring justice to civilians following acts of violence or other abuse by FAMa or its affiliates, according to civil society organizations and experts interviewed on this issue. According to HRW's Corinne Dufka, "the Malian government's failure to hold its security forces to account has emboldened abusive soldiers to commit further grievous crimes." She also added that "to stop the erosion of public confidence in the security forces and provide justice for victims, the government needs to investigate and punish serious rights violations."

HRW documented 27 cases of enforced disappearance in which the Malian government provided families no information on missing relatives who had been detained. Another report in 2021 stated that Malian soldiers have allegedly killed at least 34 villagers, forcibly disappeared at least 16 people, and severely mistreated detainees during counterterrorism operations in the country's central Mopti region. In 2022, another report stated that the Malian army and armed Islamist groups have allegedly killed at least 107 civilians in central and southwestern Mali since December 2021. The victims, most alleged to have been summarily executed, include traders, village chiefs, religious leaders, and children.

Civil society actors and the U.N. have called for more transparency by Malian authorities regarding these instances, notably by conducting credible and impartial investigations. The government said it had opened investigations into incidents that took place between October 2020 and March 2021 in the towns of Libé and Kobou. HRW reported that family members of victims were not contacted by the authorities. Human rights organizations, like HRW, have called upon military prosecutors to investigate these allegations and suspend officers implicated in serious abuses. The U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights has also urged "the Malian authorities to break the cycle of impunity and establish prompt, thorough, impartial and effective investigations into all allegations of human rights violations and abuses, including those committed by the military."

Civil-Military Relations and Engagement with Humanitarian Actors

In 2020, Malian troops received civil-military cooperation training from the U.S. military. The purpose of the training was to assist troops interface civilian populations to "build community relations, enable better cooperation and improve security" toward countering terrorism and stabilizing conflict-affected populations.

OCHA's Humanitarian Civil-Military Coordination (CMCoord) is active in the country. Its objectives are to preserve the distinction between humanitarian and military actions and "protect and promote humanitarian principles, avoid competition, minimize inconsistency, and, when appropriate, pursue common goals." In Mali, the lack of effective civil-military coordination endangers aid workers and can further curtail humanitarian access. An infographic made for Mali's CMCoord shows that 162 humanitarian organizations were stakeholders, and 3,000 persons were trained, ranging from MINUSMA, civilians, humanitarians, armed groups, and FAMa. According to the infographic, CMCoord advocates for the creation of a safe and secure environment where humanitarian assistance can be delivered in order to overcome security and logistics constraints affecting humanitarian access in Northern Mali.

Key issues in the security partnership

Mali has faced persistent insecurity for years in the form of multiple sometimes-aligned insurgencies, most based in the North of the country. After a coup in 2012 caused, in part, by perceptions that the central government had responded inadequately to insurgent threats, post-coup instability allowed Islamist militants to push from the North to the center of Mali so effectively that the central government seemed to be at risk of collapse. In response, France launched Operation Serval and directly intervened, and along with Malian troops successfully halted the insurgents' advance and subsequently re-established government control of the entire country. Until recently when deteriorating relations between France and the Malian government caused the French to be expelled from Mali, France maintained a military presence in the country, providing air cover and support to Malian troops and MINUSMA. This presents an unusual situation for U.S. security assistance, since France is an ally and was heavily and directly involved in military operations.

One of the most direct challenges this poses is, in the view of one United States government official focused on Mali and security, that "the U.S. is never going to have the same national interests as France in the Sahel." The French dominate the aid space in Mali, but public opinion of France in the Sahel broadly has declined precipitously in the past few years. This is further complicated by the fact that the U.S. and France are allies and attempt to coordinate assistance to some degree. Multiple experts we interviewed suggested that in Mali, the United States was generally far more successful at local-level engagement and accountability than the French, who overfocused on relationships with elites in Bamako. The U.S. also has a comparative advantage in international military education and training (IMET), though Malian experts we interviewed suggested that U.S. training focused heavily on humanitarian law and training of the upper echelons of the military and that non-commissioned officer training was relatively neglected.[11] Fundamentally, the U.S. remains a minor Malian security partner, and though it is a preferred partner on some issues, the U.S. has a limited ability to change Malian military behavior.[12]

FAMa, government-aligned militias, and insurgent groups have for years all committed human rights abuses, including extrajudicial executions, and have faced few consequences. These abuses have escalated recently: the current period of the conflict is the most dangerous for civilians so far. Experts we interviewed suggested several factors responsible for this increase in violence, including the reduction of French pressure on insurgent groups, as well as the arrival of Wagner Group mercenaries who have been credibly accused of massacring civilians.

11 Interview with Malian experts. Since non-commissioned officers are the ones most responsible for translating command instructions into action on the ground, a civilian harm mitigation approach that does not adequately include them is unlikely to succeed.

12 Interview with a State Department Official.

While there has been a rise in civilian deaths and human rights abuses in late 2021 by all actors in the conflict, a U.N. report indicated an "exponential rise" in fatalities and human rights abuses attributable to Malian armed forces backed by "foreign military elements," with killings seeing a 324% increase. The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data project, which tracks violence around the world, reported as many as 456 civilians killed in nine incidents involving Malian and Wagner forces between January and mid-April 2022. In the first quarter of 2022, civilian fatalities in the conflict were greater than in all of 2021. Most notable, at the end of March, FAMa, assisted by Wagner troops, massacred more than 300 civilians in the central Malian town of Moura during a five-day siege, making the attack the worst atrocity in the decade-long conflict in Mali. The group falsely claimed that all individuals killed (claimed to be 203) were jihadist militants. FAMa and Wagner have continued their abuses after Moura, opening fire on a market in Hombori after a Wagner operative was killed in a roadside bomb explosion near the town. On April 22, 2022, the French military released satellite imagery and drone footage documenting an attempt by Wagner Group mercenaries to stage evidence of French atrocities near an army base in Gossi in northern Mali.

Though the introduction of the Wagner Group is sometimes portrayed as a direct consequence of a reduction in Western security aid, multiple experts we spoke to, including government officials, cast doubt on this narrative. Instead, they suggested that the Malian junta was alienating all prior partners with its behavior. One U.S. government official thought that the junta prioritized the apparent respect for sovereignty that having the Wagner Group under its military chain of command represented, as opposed to French and MINUSMA forces operating in the country with separate chains of command. Multiple experts mentioned that certain French actions and France's effective military carte blanche had consistently frustrated the Malian government. Another expert suggested instead that many of the sovereigntist complaints were not made in good faith and that Malian officials should have learned from the Central African Republic the risks that Wagner Group intervention poses to state sovereignty. Whether out of legitimate sovereignty concerns or not, it is an open question whether the continuation of the minor assistance the U.S. had previously provided would have made a difference in the decision to contract Wagner or if the Malian junta was determined to take a different route regardless.

Despite its many international partners and 10 years of capacity building, Mali is now arguably the least secure it has been in decades. In many ways it seems as if Mali has gotten the worst of both worlds as far as security assistance is concerned: its military is not responsive to civilian leadership and is powerful enough to have performed multiple coups, but it does not seem to have the capacity to bring a decisive end to the country's numerous conflicts. It remains to be seen what, if any, role U.S. security assistance will have in Mali moving forward. As one U.S. government official commented, "Mali never got to the point of being a major U.S. security assistance partner and now [the U.S. provides] no security aid at all. It's not going to be an easy switch to turn back on." What is clear is that the inputs the U.S. has made thus far have not helped keep Malian people safer.

Annex

Overarching international legal obligations and domestic policies	
International Conventions	Main Relevant Domestic Policies
1. *Geneva Conventions* 2. *Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court* 3. *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* 4. *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* 5. *International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination* 6. *International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance* 7. *Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment* 8. *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* 9. *African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights* 10. *African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa*	1. Constitution of Mali

Protection of Children and Education		
International Conventions	Main Relevant Domestic Policies	Other Provisions
1. *Convention on the Rights of the Child* 2. *Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict* 3. *Optional Protocol to the CRC on Child Trade, Prostitution, and Pornography* 4. *Convention on the Worst Forms of Child Labour* 5. *Protocol on Trafficking in Persons* 6. *African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child* 7. *Safe Schools Declaration*	1. Code on Child Protection 2. Labour Code 3. Fight Against Cross-Border Trafficking of Children 4. Code of Persons and the Family 5. List of Hazardous Work Prohibited to Children Act 6. Human Rights Defenders Act 7. Circular for Protection of Children in Rebel Groups	1. Poverty Reduction Strategic Plan 2. National Strategy to Control AIDS 3. National Strategic Plan on Nutrition 4. National Strategic Plan to Control Malaria

Arms Control		
International Conventions	Main Relevant Domestic Policies	Other Provisions
1. *Biological Weapons Convention* 2. *Chemical Weapons Convention* 3. *Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention*	1. Governing Arms and Ammunition	1. Counter Extremism and Terrorism Project

Women, Peace and Security		
International Conventions	Main Relevant Domestic Policies	Other Provisions
1. *Convention on the Elimination of the Discrimination Against Women* 2. *Protocol on Trafficking in Persons* 3. *Optional Protocol on Child Trade, Prostitution and Pornography* (CRC) 4. *Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights of Women in Africa* 5. *African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child*	1. Article 1-21 of the Malian Constitution (Equal Rights and Freedoms) 2. Article 3 of the Constitution 3. Law on Combating Trafficking in Persons and Similar Practices 4. Articles 10 15 26 of the Marriage and Guardianship Code 5. The Penal Code (miscellaneous articles)	1. Mali's National Action Plan for 2019-2023 on Women, Peace and Security 2. Mali's National Action Plan to combat trafficking in persons