

Building a world community



## Canada and the situation in Mali by Corey Levine

*The following is a summary of Corey Levine's contribution to the Africa Studies Group's panel discussion on "Canada's Contribution to the UN's Peacekeeping Mission in Mali (MINUSMA): From Risk Taking to Being a Responsible Global Player" that was held April 25, 2018 in Ottawa. Corey Levine is a human rights and peacebuilding policy expert, researcher and writer who worked as the International Humanitarian Law, Human Rights and Gender Advisor for the European Union Military Training Mission in Mali. She is also a member of the World Federalist Movement – Canada. She is based in Victoria B.C. and worked in Mali in 2017.*

The conflict in Mali has its roots in colonialism and the legacy of underdevelopment and weak state institutions, but is also the result of the ongoing impact of globalization, as well as the current global war on terror.

Tensions between the Arab north and the African south have resulted in a civil war. As well, there are fundamentalist Islamic groups and criminal armed gangs. Although MINUSMA's mandate allows for the use of force, there is no peace to keep. In reality, MINUSMA is a military mission and the international community has not yet figured out how to respond to this kind of modern warfare.

MINUSMA has the tragic distinction of being the UN's deadliest peacekeeping mission, 166 people killed as of March 31. The resulting need to prioritize the safety of peacekeepers has impacted their ability to deliver security and the reduced contact between the international community and the local population breeds resentment.

There are also competing international interests. The Chinese are in Mali for resource exploitation; the Europeans because they want to shut off the human pipeline of refugees and migrants; and the Americans because of the war on terror. It is not quite as simplistic as this, but we need to understand the reasons why various players are in Mali and how their interests may be in competition.

Canada has a lot to offer Mali as a French-speaking middle power country with few vested interests. But while there is good faith, implementation remains hard, in part because of competing interests, in part because the government of Mali is uninterested

in changing the status quo, and in part because sustained engagement doesn't fit with a 4-year election cycle in Canada.

The Canadian commitment to MINUSMA of 6 helicopters and 250 personnel is low risk for a dangerous mission, while allowing for Canada to claim to be back on the international stage when it comes to peacekeeping.

We need to decide what we want to achieve in Mali and understand the economic, social and geo-political threads that are pulling Mali in a cycle of violence. The G5 Sahel Force, which includes Mali, Mauritania, Chad, Burkina Faso, and Niger, as a transnational security force, is a step in the right direction. Many of the issues facing Mali can only be solved at the local/regional level. But the Sahel deployments impacting Mali are currently focused on combating the threat of terrorism and drug trafficking, while the Europeans see the force as an ally to help stem the flow of people into Europe.

Investments need to be made in civil society and in local peace and reconciliation initiatives. For now, building infrastructure – health, education, local economy -- is most important. A functioning democracy cannot be had if a state barely exists. Yet the international community continues to emphasize elections, spending millions of dollars that could otherwise go to the delivery of basic services.

Finally, we need to push for a UN Emergency Peace Service, a permanent, standing rapid reaction peacekeeping capability, that would include civilians, military and police and be able to respond to a variety of emergencies. This would help address issues around competing national interests, chains of command, operating procedures, and differences in resources and training. If a force like this had been deployed after the coup in 2012, Mali would not be the quagmire it is today.