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# ***A mission within a mission***

*The contribution of the Netherlands to the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) 2014-2019*

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# Executive summary

## Introduction

In 2012, an armed rebellion broke out in northern Mali that threatened the future existence of the Malinese state and compelled the national government to ask for international assistance in containing the rebellion. As a result, the existing regional stabilisation mission (AFISMA, the African-led International Support Mission in Mali) was converted into a UN mission in April 2013, viz. the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in Mali (MINUSMA). In October of the same year, the Dutch government decided to contribute a large, wide-ranging force of personnel to MINUSMA. With effect from 2014, the Dutch government dispatched a team of staff officers, military personnel, intelligence officers, police officers and civilian experts to Mali. Intelligence was the core of the Dutch contribution: a new multinational intelligence capacity was added to the mission in order to strengthen MINUSMA's intelligence chain and decision-making processes.

All missions undertaken under Article 100 of the Dutch Constitution,<sup>1</sup> and hence also the Dutch contribution to MINUSMA, must be evaluated upon their termination.<sup>2</sup> The government asked the Policy and Operations Evaluation Department (IOB) of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which is responsible for carrying out independent studies of the effectiveness and efficiency of Dutch foreign policy, to undertake a final review of the Dutch contribution to MINUSMA. IOB performed this review during the period between April 2021 and May 2022.

The present executive summary draws lessons for contributions to future UN missions, based on the findings and recommendations of this review.

## The review

The principal question that the review sought to answer was:

**To what extent were the objectives set for the Dutch contribution to MINUSMA achieved, and what lessons can be learned for future missions?**

The focus was on the intelligence capacities supplied by the Netherlands, although the review covered the entirety of the Dutch contribution, including military personnel, civilian and military police officers, and civilian experts.

The review looked at the contributions made by three ministries, i.e. the Ministry of Defence, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Justice and Security. In addition to analysing both public and internal policy documents, the reviewers conducted 128 in-depth interviews with policy planners from the three ministries, personnel deployed on the mission, UN staff, academics, policy experts, members of staff from EU member state embassies, and staff employed by international organisations in Mali, Malinese authorities and local Malinese organisations. The interviews were held in the Netherlands, some of them in the form of physical meetings and others as video calls, and in Mali, i.e. in Bamako and Gao. The full Dutch text of the review report has been posted on the IOB website ([www.IOB-evaluatie.nl](http://www.IOB-evaluatie.nl)).

The IOB reviewers made use of previous study findings in order to build up a picture of the operation and effectiveness of MINUSMA, viz. a study performed by researchers from the University of Kent, who analysed existing literature on the extent to which MINUSMA was able to deliver results. This study has also been posted on the IOB website. All findings are the result of triangulation.

<sup>1</sup> Article 100 missions are missions in which the armed forces are deployed to maintain or promote the international legal order. Article 100 of the Dutch Constitution states that the government must inform parliament about such missions in advance, unless there are compelling reasons for not doing so.

<sup>2</sup> See the letter to the Dutch parliament on the Article 100 procedure and the assessment criteria (22 January 2014), *Parliamentary Papers II 2013-2014*, 29 521, no. 226: 'Once the Dutch contribution comes to an end, a final review is undertaken that examines both the military and the political aspects of the mission.'

## The Dutch contribution to MINUSMA

In the period 2014-2019, the Dutch government contributed military personnel, civilian and military police officers, and civilian personnel. The bulk of the personnel deployed on the mission were stationed in Bamako and Gao.

The Ministry of Defence provided the following for the military component of the mission, which made up by far the largest part of the Dutch contribution to MINUSMA:

- analysts for MINUSMA's new intelligence analysis centre (known as the All Sources Information Fusion Unit, ASIFU) in Bamako;
- a company for intelligence-gathering (the Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) Company) in Gao;
- a helicopter detachment (Helidet) comprising three Chinook transport helicopters and four Apache attack helicopters, stationed in Gao;
- a special forces task force (the Special Operations Land Task Group (SOLTG)). This task force was replaced in 2017 by a Long Range Reconnaissance Patrol Task Group (LRRPTG). Although both task forces were stationed in Gao, they were capable of operating in other parts of the country, Kidal for instance.

The Ministry of Justice and Security supplied the civilian police officers (from the National Police Force) and the Ministry of Defence supplied the military police officers (from the Royal Netherlands Marechaussee). The majority of the civilian and military police officers were based in Bamako and Gao, where they were formally deployed as 'individual police officers' (IPOs) as part of the United Nations Police (UNPOL), MINUSMA's police department. The civilian component of the contribution was supplied in part by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and in part by the Ministry of Defence. Based in Bamako and Gao, the civilian personnel were experts specialising in specific topics in MINUSMA's civilian departments, plus a team of civilian advisers who focused on cementing close relations between the Dutch military forces and the local population.

## The results of the Dutch contribution to MINUSMA

The Dutch contribution to MINUSMA was high-quality, recognisable and innovative in the UN context. However, the mission enjoyed only a limited degree of success in terms of achieving the objectives set for it and did not produce a lasting result. This conclusion is explained in more detail below, in relation to each individual aspect of the Dutch contribution.

### The military contribution

The Dutch military contribution achieved its goals only to a limited degree, i.e. supporting the UN in the first stage of the mission and boosting the effectiveness of MINUSMA. The intelligence capacity helped the mission's decision-making procedure only to a limited degree and did not have a lasting impact in strengthening the intelligence chain. The main reasons for this limited effectiveness are:

- The Dutch military contribution was based on the 'attached' model, which resulted in the Dutch force operating in parallel with other members of the UN force. As a result, the Dutch contribution was not well-aligned with MINUSMA's organisational structure, and there was very little cohesion between the Dutch military components and the other UN units.
- There was a lack of clarity – and in some cases a great deal of confusion – about the role played by ASIFU and their target group. There was also a degree of duplication with the work performed by other departments, and the intelligence products supplied by the unit did not adequately meet the intelligence needs of the mission's military command.
- MINUSMA was militarily not sufficiently capable of absorbing the intelligence capacities and of acting on the intelligence supplied to it.

The secondary military objectives of making a cohesive, transferable contribution were not achieved as planned: the contribution was characterised by a lack of coherence and the hand-over proved difficult in practice. Although the contribution was self-sufficient (another key objective), this aspect was weakened when the Dutch government decided to withdraw its helicopters.

Despite these shortcomings, the various Dutch military components regularly proved of value to MINUSMA. For example, the multinational intelligence capacity (led by Dutch commanders) made valuable contributions to MINUSMA's civilian departments, particularly during the initial stages of the mission, and the Dutch helicopters supplied essential capacity for medical and other forms of transport and for escalation dominance for both the special forces and MINUSMA as a whole. The special forces and the LRRPTG performed a number of important intelligence and non-intelligence-related operations for MINUSMA.

### The contribution provided by civilian and military police and civilian personnel

The objectives set for the contribution provided by civilian and military police were achieved only to a limited extent. A large number of wide-ranging objectives were set for this aspect of the Dutch contribution. These included that the Dutch contribution should foster the development of community policing, improve access to justice,

promote cooperation between the police and the judiciary, and enhance border controls with a view to combating cross-border crime. However, the Dutch civilian and military police officers were deployed in a fragmented manner in UNPOL, MINUSMA's police department. This was due mainly to UNPOL's recruitment and deployment procedures, over which the Netherlands did not have much influence, mainly as a result of the lack of Dutch representation in strategic roles.

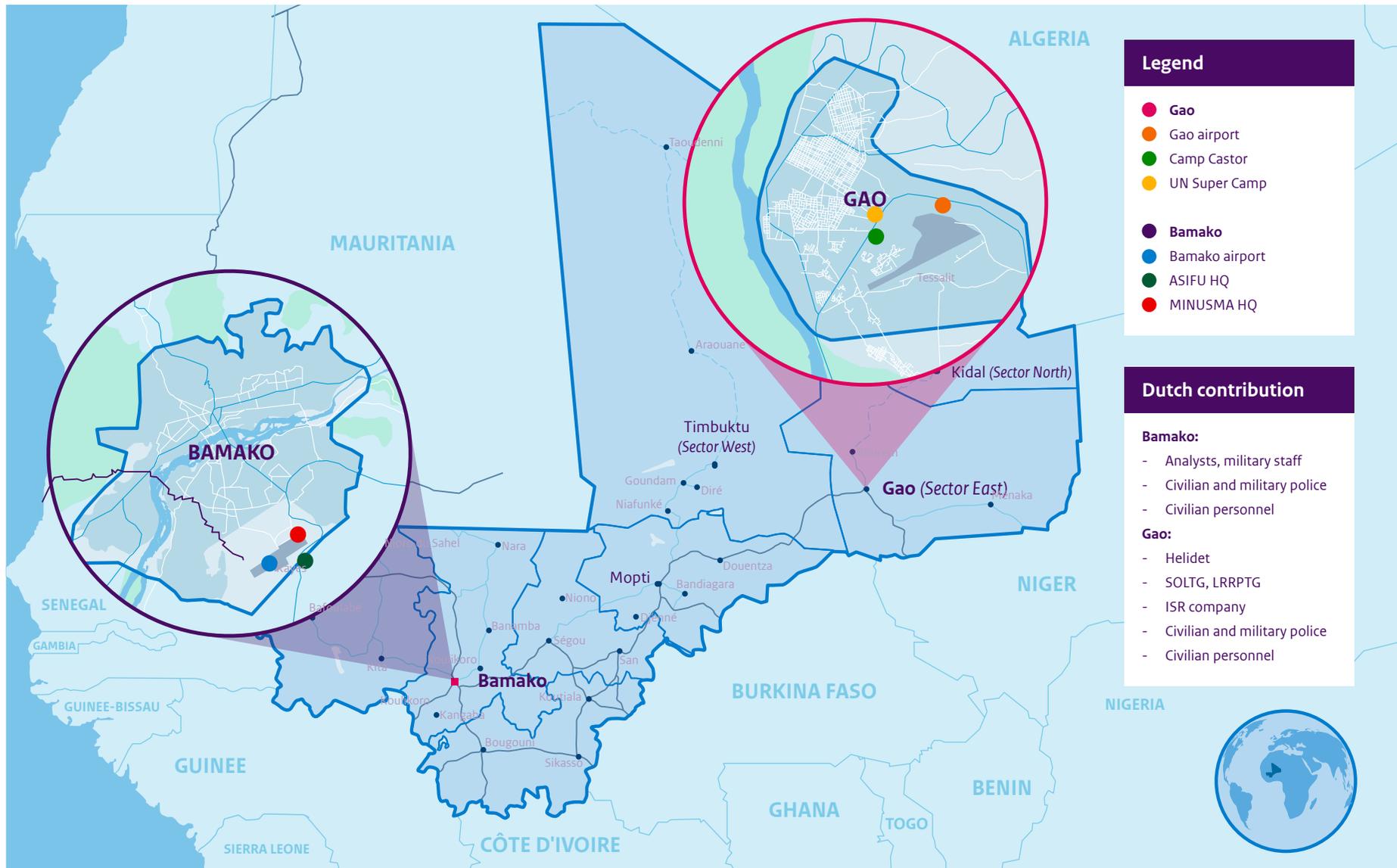
Among other constraining factors was the fact that Dutch civilian and military police officers did not have an adequate command of French, and the short tour of duty applying to members of the military police. During the later stages of the Dutch contribution, the Ministry of Security and Justice was more able to pursue its objectives by contributing to what was known as a 'specialised police team'.

No specific objectives were formulated for the civilian experts and advisers included in the mission. The areas in which the civilian experts worked included protecting civilians, fostering the rule of law, reforming the security sector, working on gender-related issues, and protecting the cultural heritage. This group consisted of a small number of individual experts, which limited the degree of interaction with other aspects of the Dutch contribution. This did not apply, however, to the civilian advisers operating as part of the military contribution. They played a valuable role in strengthening relations between the Dutch forces and the local population.

### **The lack of an integrated approach and a strategic narrative**

The objective of adopting an integrated approach in MINUSMA by making coherent use of a range of policy instruments proved problematic. This was the result of the lack of a clear definition of what an 'integrated approach' actually meant, together with the differing interpretations placed on it by policy planners on the one hand and the personnel deployed on the mission on the other. The absence of a strategic objective for the Dutch contribution as a whole meant that there was no possibility of putting an integrated approach into effect on the ground. Moreover, a large number of those engaged in the mission said that there was no clear narrative as to why the Netherlands was taking part in the mission. Interviewees frequently expressed doubts about the official reasons given for the Dutch contribution.

The Dutch contribution to MINUSMA.



## Lessons learned: findings and recommendations

### The military contribution

1. [Main finding](#): The intelligence contribution played only a limited role in supporting the mission's decision-making procedures, and did not have a lasting impact in terms of strengthening the intelligence chain.
  - 1.1 [Finding](#): The Dutch intelligence contribution was based on the 'attached' model. This had the effect of creating a parallel operating structure, which meant that it was not possible to properly embed intelligence products and operations in the mission.

The Ministry of Defence based the intelligence component on the 'attached' model. Unlike the integrated model, this involved the Dutch intelligence component operating in parallel with existing UN structures. The main reasons for adopting this model were that it was good for the contribution's self-sufficiency and that it safeguarded a (Dutch) *modus operandi* that was based on NATO principles and procedures. This also made it possible to shield and secure information, since the UN did not have a secure information system. At the same time, the model came with constraints and greatly restricted the degree of interaction between the Dutch military contribution and other UN components.

- 1.2 [Finding](#): The adoption of the 'attached' model resulted in the adjustment of ASIFU's mandate, causing confusion about the unit's role and objectives.

The Ministry of Defence adjusted ASIFU's mandate just before the start of the Dutch contribution to the mission. However, the UN did not at any stage formally adopt the new approach, which was based on the 'attached' model. Until ASIFU was incorporated into the Force Commander's existing information unit (U2), this was a source of confusion and tension and hence a loss of efficiency within MINUSMA's intelligence system. Due to the parallel (or 'attached') operating structure and the lack of clarity about the unit's mandate, ASIFU found it hard to carve out a niche for itself as part of MINUSMA. Not only was the unit's position in the organisational structure a constant topic of debate, the focus on strategic (operational) analyses in certain areas also led to overlaps with work performed by other actors.

#### [Recommendations](#):

- Before the start of a mission, analyse the actors involved and the institutional environment. In order to guarantee an effective contribution, align resources, objectives and operating methods with the results of this analysis. Knowledge of the UN and its culture and procedures is an inherent part of this process.
- Make clear arrangements, both before the start of the mission and during the course of the mission, about the objectives and how these are to be achieved, both with

those involved in the mission and with the UN. Base these arrangements on a clear strategy and provide a constant flow of information about them, so as to prevent both confusion among personnel and any loss of efficiency.

- Specifically in connection with intelligence-based contributions to UN missions, invest more in relations with the military partners in the mission, in particular the brigades operating in the field.
- Consider embedding as much capacity as possible in existing structures and avoid operating in parallel in order to achieve a lasting impact. A supply-driven contribution to relatively large-scale missions creates friction and undermines synergy, effectiveness and transferability.

- 1.3 [Finding](#): Although the intelligence products supplied by ASIFU met the intelligence needs of the mission's military command only to a limited degree, they frequently made valuable contributions to MINUSMA's civilian components.

ASIFU's main products were strategic intelligence analyses that could also be used for forecasting purposes. Due to the increasing and high level of casualties among UN forces, the main need of the military command was for short-term intelligence that could trigger an immediate response in the mission's territory, with a view to protecting both UN forces and population centres. ASIFU adjusted its operating methods at a relatively late stage and only to a limited degree. As a result, ASIFU'S intelligence products were only of limited use to MINUSMA's military branch, and this culminated in ASIFU's incorporation into the U2. ASIFU's work was more closely aligned, particularly at the start of the Dutch contribution, with the needs of MINUSMA's civilian components, including the Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) and the human rights and stabilisation departments. In the beginning, they made regular use of ASIFU's products in their work, and this temporarily increased their effectiveness.

#### [Recommendations](#):

- Carry out a thorough analysis of the information requirements of the actors involved in the mission. Identify those areas in which intelligence can make a difference and those areas in which there is a risk of a duplication of activities. Make clear to all those involved what target group is being served and how this should be done.
- Adjust the contribution if it becomes clear that there is a disparity in expectations or if the contribution is not effective in meeting the relevant intelligence needs. A monitoring and evaluation mechanism is needed.

2. [Finding: Although the Dutch contribution was of high quality, the military objectives were \(far\) too ambitious in the light of the resources committed to the operation.](#)

Within the UN context, the Dutch military units were high-quality units that were valued for their professionalism, including by the local population in northern Mali. The presence in a UN mission of special forces, well-trained intelligence personnel and scarce resources such as helicopters meant that the Dutch contribution was of high quality.

However, even taking account of the high-quality resources, the aim of producing regular analyses of an area as large as the combined surface area of France and Italy proved (far) too ambitious, right from the outset. One of the main problems was the lack of enough intelligence 'sensors', i.e. information gatherers. ASIFU had two ISR companies – a Dutch company in Gao and a Swedish company in Timbuktu. The additional intelligence sensors, such as the SOLTG/LRRPTG and Helidet, also had other, non-intelligence-related duties to perform for MINUSMA, as well as specific responsibilities of their own. Moreover, many members of the personnel deployed on the mission did not have an adequate command of French and had built up only limited political and cultural knowledge of the mission area during the induction programme. Although local interpreters were able to remedy some of the problem, it nevertheless formed a recurring barrier to the Dutch contingent's ability to forge close links with other UN battalions and other actors. It is surprising, given the nature of the mission, that the personnel did not possess this type of knowledge and skills.

As a further factor, a number of operational and equipment constraints hampered certain units in their ability to perform intelligence work and in the effectiveness of their operations. The ISR company in Gao, for example, was not adequately staffed and, especially at the start of the mission, also suffered from a shortage of usable equipment. This restricted the unit's geographic coverage and hence its ability to gather information in certain areas. Shortages of equipment and staff also hampered the other units and restricted their area of operation. The LRRPTG in particular suffered from all sorts of equipment problems. Coupled with the absence of (Dutch) helicopters, the LRRPTG was at times severely restricted in its ability to operate. Indeed, the strict rules on medical evacuations inevitably restricted the scope of operation of all units in the field. One of these rules was what was known as 'the golden hour rule', which required medical assistance to be provided within one hour. At the same time, stringent quality requirements prevented the unit from making use of certain UN medical facilities.

[Recommendations:](#)

- Either ensure that staffing and equipment capacities are more closely aligned with the objectives set, or adjust the objectives if it becomes clear that the resources are not adequate. A clear, realistic strategy is required.

- Invest in both the linguistic skills of the personnel deployed on the mission and their knowledge of the politics and culture of the mission area. A long-term investment in these areas is particularly important in relation to unstable countries or regions in which the Dutch government wishes to play an active role in the future.
- Ensure that the (rightly) stringent requirements in relation to the medical evacuation capacity are translated into realistic targets; make more medical capacity available so that the units in the field can operate effectively.
- Consider extending the length of the analysts' tour of duty, particularly if an intelligence mission is involved. Even if an analyst possesses sufficient background knowledge, it takes time to understand the dynamics of complex conflict areas such as Mali.

3. [Finding: MINUSMA was not sufficiently able to absorb the intelligence supplied by analysts and to operate along intelligence-driven lines.](#)

The intelligence objectives were overly ambitious, not just in terms of the resources deployed by the Dutch government, but MINUSMA itself did not have enough useful intelligence sensors and was able to mount only a limited response to the intelligence supplied to it. The brigades in the military sectors in which the mission area was divided proved incapable of producing high quality reports and of acting on the intelligence supplied to them. Even at higher levels of authority, MINUSMA found it hard to act on intelligence. In other words, MINUSMA's ability to absorb intelligence was extremely low, even disregarding the constraints affecting the Dutch intelligence personnel.

The fact that intelligence – particularly of the nature and on the scale in question – was new for a UN mission was a significant aspect in the mission's inability to absorb the intelligence and operate on an intelligence-driven basis. Never before had an ASIFU-like capacity been created as part of a UN mission, and there was considerable resistance to this form of intelligence-gathering, particularly at the outset. In other words, a lack of capacity was coupled with a lack of knowledge of and experience with operating on the basis of intelligence. The Ministry of Defence tried to raise the level of knowledge both within and beyond the mission. For example, Dutch personnel trained the MINUSMA brigade sectors in the field and sought to raise awareness at UN headquarters in New York of the role played by intelligence in peacekeeping missions, *inter alia* by contributing to the UN's *Military Peacekeeping-Intelligence Handbook*. The training sessions had a limited impact during a short period of time. It is not yet possible to gauge the medium-term impact on UN missions.

[Recommendations:](#)

- In part with a view to possible future contributions to UN missions, invest systematically in the ability of UN missions to absorb intelligence, so that they are more effective and achieve lasting results. The activities that were undertaken during the mission contribution provide points of departure for this.

- The following are possible means of systematically strengthening the role played by intelligence in UN missions:
  - Continuously post or fund the posting of strategic intelligence liaison officers to key positions in missions and/or supply intelligence officers to existing departments, such as the U2 or the JMAC (a civilian department that produced intelligence products for MINUSMA commanders);
  - Structurally invest in knowledge acquisition at UN headquarters. This can be achieved by adjusting the criteria applied for recruitment and selection purposes, by running and assisting with courses and workshops, and by organising expert sessions or other activities with a view to raising awareness of the issue. Another possibility would be to second personnel to UN headquarters or to provide long-term support to the Dutch military representation at the UN;
- During Dutch contributions to missions:
  - run or assist with training sessions for UN brigades on the subject of intelligence-gathering and intelligence-driven operations;
  - run or assist with workshops for UN staff from participating countries on the subject of intelligence-gathering in the countries in question, with a view to raising the standard of intelligence in UN missions on a long-term basis.

4. [Finding: While individual military units at times made valuable contributions to the mission, it was not possible to have them operate in a coherent manner.](#)

The Dutch government presented the Dutch military contribution as a coherent whole, in which the various individual units were to operate as much as possible on an integrated basis. In practice, however, these individual units were assigned a variety of roles in MINUSMA and were not able to operate as a coherent whole. No single commander was in charge of the various units. For example, the ISR company operated as part of ASIFU, while the SOLTG/LRRPTG and Helidet were under the direct command of MINUSMA's Force Commander, who was authorised to deploy the units separately from each other if he felt that it was in the interests of the mission to do so. As a result, a number of units that had been intended to operate as ASIFU'S intelligence sensors were also regularly used – and in some cases primarily used – to perform non-intelligence-related duties for MINUSMA. While the SOLTG/LRRPTG and Helidet made valuable contributions to the mission, their deployment on other tasks meant that they could not always be used as sensors. Similarly, the desire to use these units for intelligence-gathering purposes – in combination with the Dutch conditions for deployment – ruled out the possibility of making full use of their specific niche capabilities.

[Recommendations:](#)

- If a military contribution is intended to form a coherent whole, ensure that there is unity of command.
- Invest in a carefully planned, joint induction programme for Dutch personnel deployed on missions, so that they can learn from each other and so as to provide a platform for explaining the objectives of the mission and the expectations about cooperation among the units involved.

5. [Finding: The Dutch military units operated as a relatively isolated part of MINUSMA, which made it look like 'a mission within a mission'.](#)

ASIFU and the Dutch units in the field were separated from MINUSMA's other non-Western units. For example, ASIFU was not headquartered in MINUSMA headquarters, but in a separate location. And the camp where Dutch troops were stationed in Gao, i.e. Camp Castor, was separate from the larger UN camp.

The Dutch also operated along different lines. The Dutch military units were 'attached' in the mission, which meant that they operated in parallel with the other UN forces. Moreover, the Dutch units worked in accordance with NATO intelligence principles and methods, and used NATO systems. This inevitably made it very difficult for them to work together with units from non-Western countries. As a result, the Dutch contribution looked like a mission within a mission.

This *modus operandi* was not very 'UN-sensitive' and caused friction on various fronts during the years in which the Netherlands contributed to MINUSMA. It also created certain precedents in MINUSMA that persist even today: Camp Castor remains separate from the larger UN camp in Gao.

6. [Finding: Partly due to a lack of UN experience, the military personnel regularly found it frustrating to operate in a UN context.](#)

Many of the personnel deployed on the mission had never before operated as part of a UN mission. The Ministry of Defence did have plenty of experience with NATO missions, which for this reason often acted as a frame of reference. However, the procedures and methods used in UN missions are completely different and were unfamiliar to many personnel. This was a frequent source of frustration for the Dutch contingent. In particular, the civilian leadership and slow UN decision-making procedures were at times thorns in Dutch flesh. Nonetheless, the fact that the Netherlands made a genuine military contribution to the mission enabled the Dutch to gain a great deal of valuable experience with operating in a UN context.

#### Recommendations:

- Ensure that both the local and the UN contexts play a prominent role in mission preparations.
- Capitalise on the valuable knowledge and experience gained from MINUSMA and invest in familiarising personnel deployed on missions with UN procedures.

#### 7. Finding: It was hard to transfer the Dutch military component to other countries.

From the start of the mission, the Netherlands made clear that the Dutch components would operate in such a way as to pave the way for an easy handover to other countries. In practice, however, it proved more difficult than expected to effectuate the handover. One of the factors involved here was that the Netherlands had supplied high-value niche capabilities (such as helicopters) that other countries were unable or not willing to supply. The idea of agreeing on a rotation timetable with prospective partners did not come to fruition. Moreover, internal disagreement about the possibility of extending the Dutch helicopter contribution led to a sudden decision to withdraw the helicopters. This news went down badly with the UN and the partner countries, particularly Germany. Nonetheless, the ISR company was successfully transferred to Germany, ASIFU was not transferred but incorporated into the U2. A long period elapsed between the departure of the Dutch LRRPTG and the British unit that replaced it.

#### Recommendations:

- Communicate clearly and in good time to both internal and external stakeholders, and in particular to key partner countries, how and when a contribution is to end and is to be transferred to a successor country.
- Adopt the suggestion of establishing rotation timetables for the transfer of niche and other capabilities and try and make concrete arrangements with prospective successors before the contribution starts.

#### 8. Finding: Self-sufficiency was key in the deployment of Dutch military personnel on operations. The withdrawal of helicopters undermined the self-sufficient nature of the Dutch contribution and reduced both the scope of operation and hence the effectiveness of the Dutch contribution.

The Dutch contribution was initially self-sufficient. The SOLTG, and subsequently the LRRPTG, were high-quality capabilities that were highly self-sufficient. The helicopters guaranteed escalation dominance, a transport capability and a medical and general evacuation capability. The latter was vitally important in observing the 'golden hour' rule and supporting other units, both Dutch and otherwise. The basic principle was that a transport helicopter should be on stand-by every time Dutch troops left their base. It was for this reason that, in part at the insistence of the Lower House of Parliament, Chinook

helicopters were added to the Dutch contribution. The degree of Dutch self-sufficiency was subsequently reduced by the withdrawal of the Dutch helicopters. Thus, there were times when the LRRPTG was unable to operate at any great distance from the base, due to a lack of necessary evacuation capacity. This meant that the Dutch force was dependent on other UN partners whose resources were of lesser quality or designed for multiple purposes. Moreover, the absence of the Dutch Apache helicopters meant that the force was no longer able to maintain escalation dominance.

#### Recommendations:

- Evaluate the impact on ongoing operations of the withdrawal of scarce capabilities such as helicopters.
- Make arrangements for a specific replacement capability in the event of a withdrawal, so as to minimise the impact on ongoing operations, or consider the possibility of scaling down ongoing operations if replacement is not possible.

### **The police and civilian contribution**

#### 9. Main finding: The objectives set for the civilian and military police contribution were achieved only to a limited degree. These objectives were found not to be based on a realistic assessment of the institutional and operational context. Moreover, the background of the Dutch IPOs<sup>3</sup> was not compatible in all respects with the needs of the UN.

##### 9.1 Finding: It was not realistic to formulate specific objectives for the civilian and military police contribution.

The ministries in question did not take sufficient account of the unpredictability of UNPOL's posting policy, which meant that the objectives set for community policing, for example, were not achievable. In many cases, IPOs arriving in Mali were posted to different roles than those for which they had applied. For this reason, they could not all be deployed on the tasks to which they had been assigned. It was not until a later stage that the Netherlands joined a specialised police team in which it was able to better focus on its own policy objectives.

##### 9.2 Finding: Dutch IPOs did not assume enough strategic roles in UNPOL.

Only a small number of strategic roles at UNPOL were capable of influencing the police department's complex posting policy. Prior to the start of the Dutch contribution to the mission, the ministries concerned had not been insistent enough in ensuring that these roles were assigned to Dutch nationals. This made it more difficult for the Netherlands to achieve the objectives it had set itself. This is surprising, given that, in the early stages

<sup>3</sup> The abbreviation IPO stands for Individual Police Officer. This was the job title given to Dutch civilian and military police officers posted to UNPOL.

of the mission, the Netherlands supplied MINUSMA's biggest European contingent of police officers and could have played a leading role had it occupied more strategic posts. Although action was taken to alter this situation at a later stage of the mission, a shortage of Dutch personnel and French speaking staff for the mission ruled out the possibility of Dutch nationals occupying these posts on a permanent basis.

**9.3 Finding:** *Although the Dutch IPOs were valued by UNPOL, their background was not in all respects compatible with the needs of the UN.*

The Dutch IPOs were valued by UNPOL, despite the fact that their command of French was not sufficient to ensure their rapid integration into UNPOL. The ministries concerned had underestimated the importance of fluency in French prior to the start of the mission. Moreover, in accordance with regulations of the Ministry of Defense, the military police officers served only a short tour of duty (although this was extended later on during the mission). As a result they were not readily regarded as qualifying for certain (senior) UNPOL posts.

**Recommendations:**

- Invest systematically in the linguistic skills of personnel deployed on missions, for example in the form of intensive language courses.
- Before the mission starts, prepare a strategic influencing and recruitment plan based on an institutional analysis and ensure that one of the priorities set in this plan is that strategic posts should be occupied by Dutch nationals.
- Ensure that tours of duty are not too short, particularly when compared with other European countries, as to make it less likely for Dutch IPOs to be assigned to certain roles.
- Press for the formation of specialised police teams that can concentrate on certain aspects of policy that are particularly important for the Netherlands.
- Ensure that realistic objectives apply to individual or fragmented contributions. Invest in knowledge of the UN and UN procedures.

**10. Finding:** *The contribution made by civilian advisers and experts was fragmented, personal and small-scale. Valuable contributions were made on an individual level.*

Due to the disparate nature of the civilian contribution and the lack of concrete objectives, this contribution can be analysed only at an individual level. The civilian advisers seconded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs played a valuable role in raising the level of acceptance of the Dutch military forces by the local population and generating broader support for the ASIFU approach to intelligence within MINUSMA's civilian components. The external civilian experts helped to roll out the policy on gender-related issues and issues pertaining to the protection of civilians but were not formally part of the Dutch contribution.

**Recommendations:**

- Set a clear objective for civilian experts and advisers taking part in a UN mission, if the idea is that they should make a significant, coherent contribution to the mission; put their services to strategic use.
- If it is decided that UN missions need to be strengthened with civilian personnel, without their serving any greater, connected goal, do not needlessly link the civilian contribution to other Dutch components. The mere fact of strengthening an (integrated) mission with civilian personnel is sufficient (see finding 11).

## An integrated approach

**11. Finding:** *The integrated approach taken to the Dutch contribution to MINUSMA was not clearly defined and operationalised.*

The Netherlands was keen to adopt an integrated approach, i.e. the coherent use of resources and policy instruments, to its contribution to MINUSMA. In its letter to Parliament (based on Article 100 of the Dutch Constitution) prior to the Dutch contribution to MINUSMA, the Dutch government highlighted two different types of integrated approach:

- creating coherence between the Dutch contribution to MINUSMA and Dutch bilateral activities in Mali;
- linking up with other UN and EU initiatives.

These two different ways of working in an integrated manner were not properly translated into practical action for the personnel deployed on the mission. Two additional interpretations subsequently arose among involved personnel:

- strengthening MINUSMA as an integrated mission;
- ensuring that the Dutch contribution to MINUSMA operated as an integrated whole.

In the absence of an operational plan as well as a strategic objective for the various components, no clear choice was made as to how an integrated approach should be put into practice. As a result, the adoption of an integrated approach appeared to become an objective in its own right, and also served to garner support in the Lower House of Parliament, whose members were keen to promote an integrated approach as part of the Dutch contribution. The lack of a clear definition and an operational plan resulted in the principle of an integrated approach being adopted only to a limited degree and in a fragmented manner in relation to the Dutch contribution to MINUSMA.

#### Recommendations:

- Define more clearly what exactly is meant by an integrated approach; adjust the definition to the context and set clear boundaries for different interpretations.
- Take account of expectations in relation to an integrated approach in internal communications with all the ministries concerned, with the personnel deployed on the missions and with members of the Lower House of Parliament, so as to rule out multiple interpretations and definitions.
- Make a specific body responsible for coordinating or managing the operationalisation of the integrated approach in practice and for making adjustments when needed. This body or person may be a department, a special representative or an (interministerial) task force, depending on the size of the contribution and the situation.

### Objectives and strategic narrative

#### 12. Finding: No strategic political goal had been formulated, which meant that there was no strategic narrative about the Dutch contribution to MINUSMA.

It became clear, prior to the Dutch contribution to MINUSMA, that a number of disparate interests were involved in the contribution, among both ministry officials and politicians. Although these interests were not incompatible, they did cause confusion about the strategic political goals applying to the Dutch contribution. In addition, there was a tendency in the contacts with the Lower House of Parliament to paint a rather positive picture of the Dutch contribution and the developments affecting MINUSMA. It was felt to be important to build political support for the mission and the progress reports did not dwell on bad news, for example in relation to the intelligence capacity. At the same time, members of the Lower House did not always pick up on critical comments in reports and there appeared to be a lack of parliamentary interest in certain aspects of the Dutch contribution. It was also not very clear why the Netherlands was contributing to MINUSMA. Various parties and ministries, as well as personnel deployed on the mission, tended to supply their own answers to this question. Issues such as the fight against terrorism and the prevention of irregular migration thus permeated the debate, even though these were issues on which MINUSMA could not take much action.

#### Recommendations:

- Set a clear strategic political goal for large-scale contributions to missions; ensure that all the ministries and political parties involved in the mission agree on the goal; communicate it clearly to stakeholders.
- Formulate, on the basis of this strategic goal for large-scale missions, a strategic narrative that sets out the reasons underlying the contribution and its importance so that everyone clearly understands them.

