

Strategic cultures and contemporary peace operations in transformation: The test case of Mali

Abstract proposal submitted for presentation in the Working Group
Defence Management and Economics

Research Topic: European strategic cultures of foreign engagement and their impact in Mali; the stabilisation agenda and diverging resources for civilian and military approaches in Mali; structural change management for peace operations; coordination challenges in the theatre; Whole of Nation Approaches to crisis management

Abstract:

After the harsh lessons and highly questionable results from the international engagement in Afghanistan, European actors are focusing on Mali that finds itself in a severe political and humanitarian crisis since 2012. In 2013, the establishment of MINUSMA represented Europe's return to UN Peacekeeping.¹ In 2018, the international engagement in Mali is considered as a test-case for a variety of peace support operations, other state and non-state actors and organisations present in the theatre (e.g. MINUSMA, EUTM Mali, EUCAP Sahel Mali, G5-Sahel, Operation Barkhane, etc.). The impacts of this multidimensional and quite heterogeneous engagement on local security architectures yet appear to be massive and often unintended.

Several strategic „cultures of intervention“ (Michael Daxner)² are involved in Mali with their own specific interests and approaches that fit more or less under the umbrella of a UN mandate to support the ongoing peace process. Representing a tool kit to identify the transformation of peace operations, strategic culture is defined as the compilation of specific ideas, opinions, intentions, attitudes, assumptions, values, norms and beliefs of an intervening actor. Sources of strategic culture are historical experiences, geopolitical parameters, the civil society system or norms on different levels (Thomas Pankratz).³

¹ Signe Cold-Ravnkilde, Peter Albrecht & Rikke Haugegaard: Friction and Inequality among Peacekeepers in Mali. The RUSI Journal, Volume 162, 2017 - [Issue 2](#), Pages 34-42, here: Abstract.

² <http://www.culturesofintervention.org/about-us/members/michael-daxner>

³ Vgl. Thomas Pankratz: Überlegungen zum Begriff „Strategische Kultur“ – Bestandsaufnahme, Problembereiche und Ideen für eine Weiterentwicklung - Beitrag zur Wiener Strategiekonferenz 2017. In: Wolfgang Peischel (Hg.): Strategie neu denken. 2. Wiener Strategiekonferenz, Miles-Verlag, Berlin 2018 (forthcoming).

As a consequence, the question arises if and how peace operations and civilian crisis management are adapting and transforming to support a peace process that finds itself in a „no peace to keep“-situation in Mali.

As the various players are differing in their respective strategic culture to implement security and development policies abroad, the main research question is: What relevance do the strategic cultures of European intervening countries have for their engagement in Mali?

Do specific strategic cultures have a comparative advantage to understand a conflict better than other interveners and act more adequately in terms of a population centric approach in Mali? Does one country have a better entry point to interact with the local population and can this be referred to its respective strategic culture?

The civilian and/or military engagements of Germany, Austria, Denmark and Switzerland and the Austrian Red Cross serve as a test case to research the impact of strategic cultures in the field of Mali and will be examined in this paper.

Starting point is the (1) discussion of the respective definition of strategic culture for each troop contributing nation and organisation, followed by (2) the impact of the respective strategic intervention cultures in the theatre of Mali and (3) the impact on interaction procedures with other international and local actors in Mali.

I argue that, in order to avoid a militarisation of the whole Sahel region, sustainable civilian contributions to crisis management, to peace operations and to the stabilisation efforts in Mali and its strategic environment should be substantially reinforced to avoid a further socio-economic destabilisation.

A new approach to a more balanced civilian-military effort embedded in a long-term strategy (like the Sahel strategy of Switzerland) is another topic to be explored in the paper. Military capacity building efforts have to be balanced with the fostering of political dialogue and development cooperation. The diverging approaches of the four intervening countries highlighted above will be put to test in order to shed some light on the importance of various strategic cultures impacting and interacting in the theatre of operations in Mali. One thing is certain – the more actors involved, the more coordination is needed to achieve results. And: the resource and change management is crucial for future European engagements in the whole Sahel, not only in Mali.

By abstracting the findings from the respective conceptual, governmental, non-governmental, cultural and systemic levels, the aim is to define future centres of gravity, niches, limitations and options for armed forces, peace operations and other relevant actors for security policies, defence management and development policies.

Key words: Strategic Culture, Mali, Peace Operations, Military and Civilian Approaches and Interactions, Whole of Nation Approach, Crisis Management, Social Coherence, Coordination

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Short CV Markus Gauster

Dr. Markus Gauster is a senior researcher with the Institute for Peace Support and Conflict Management (IFK) of the Austrian National Defence Academy since 2004. His research areas include conflict transformation in Afghanistan, civil-military interaction, Comprehensive Approach as well as innovative concepts for International Crisis Management from the European perspective. Markus Gauster undertook fact finding missions in Afghanistan between 2004 and 2016, e. g. as a long-term election observer for the European Union. He authored various articles and publications and is a member of the International Society of Military Sciences (www.isofms.org) and executive board member of the Austria-Afghanistan Society (www.oefg.at) in Vienna.

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