Understanding Coherence in UN Peacekeeping: A Conceptual Framework

Sebastiaan Rietjens\textsuperscript{a} and Chiara Ruffa\textsuperscript{b,c}

\textsuperscript{a}Netherlands Defence Academy, Breda, Netherlands; \textsuperscript{b}Department of Peace and Conflict Research, Uppsala University, Uppsala, Sweden; \textsuperscript{c}Swedish Defence University, Stockholm, Sweden

\textbf{ABSTRACT}

Coherence is a core objective in most multinational interventions and seems of particular relevance to UN peacekeeping missions with their increasing complexity and multidimensionality. Yet, coherence has rarely been studied empirically. We borrow the concept of ‘fit’ from organizational theory and use it to develop a conceptual framework to study coherence in peacekeeping operations. Fit is the degree of match between what is required by the mandate, on the one hand, and an institutional set-up and the implemented practices, on the other. We identify three relevant dimensions of fit to study coherence: strategic and organizational, cultural and human, and operational fit. Our empirical material focuses on the UN mission in Mali (MINUSMA) and in particular on the interplay between the intelligence components and the rest of the mission. We draw upon a large empirical dataset containing over 120 semi-structured interviews, field observations and participation in pre-deployment exercises and evaluation sessions. Our empirical analysis suggests that low level of fit across several dimensions leads to inertial and widespread frictions in the practice of peacekeeping and could potentially undermine peacekeeping effectiveness. Building on existing scholarship on micro-level approaches to peacekeeping, we hope to further the debate on organizational dynamics within peace operations.

\textbf{KEYWORDS} Coherence; UN peacekeeping; peacekeeping intelligence; MINUSMA

\textbf{Introduction}

UN peacekeeping, and multinational interventions more generally, are currently struggling to meet two intertwined yet distinct aspirations. The first is to continue working with troop contributors from a wealth of different countries. In 2017 alone, almost 90,000 blue helmets originating from over 100 different countries deployed in 15 missions.\textsuperscript{1} Multinationalism comes...
with undeniable advantages in terms of legitimacy and representation of the widest possible spectrum of UN member states. At the same time, however, it also comes with coordination costs and difficulties relating to interoperability, language and cultural barriers.²

Partly as a way to address this issue, in recent years, the UN has developed a second aspiration: to increase effectiveness, it has introduced functions, structures and institutions in its missions that assign very specific roles to highly specialized task forces. For instance, several European countries such as the Netherlands, Sweden and Germany have recently committed specialized capacities to UN peacekeeping missions in Africa.³ Multinationalism and specialization create new challenges, however, partly through the implied increase in the complexity of missions. One such challenge is to maintain coherence within a mission between its mandate and how it is implemented by a multitude of actors from more diverse backgrounds.

In fact, both policy and academic debates on peace and stability operations have at length advocated the importance of coherence in peacekeeping operations, as situations in which all actors involved would work functionally and logically to achieve a common goal.⁴ In UN circles these tools are embedded within the concept of ‘coordinated effort’ or the ‘integrated approach’, whilst similarly the notion of the ‘comprehensive approach’ was developed to address the decade-long multinational NATO efforts in Afghanistan. Most of the literature on coherence in peacekeeping operations has studied the structural and organizational barriers that prevent a mission from being successful, but has neglected to capture the de facto practices of mandate implementation.

Notwithstanding notable exceptions,⁵ typically the toolboxes and frameworks developed in this context, however, mainly concern coherence between different missions and projects deployed, notably military components, on the one hand, and the NGOs on the other in the same area.⁶ Yet, we still lack a conceptual framework that could help us capture within-mission mismatch between the peacekeeping mandate and the practice of peacekeeping, which could then undermine peacekeeping effectiveness.

In order to fill this gap, we draw on the literature on strategic alliances within the field of organizational theory, which has studied coherence extensively. We borrow in particular the concept of ‘fit’ and adapt it for studying peacekeeping missions. We define fit as a constitutive part of coherence

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²See e.g. Elron, Shamir, and Ben-Ari, “Why Don’t They Fight Each Other?”; Rubinstein, Keller, and Scherger, “Culture and Interoperability in Integrated Missions”.
³See Karlsrud and Osland, “Between Self-interest and Solidarity”; Nilsson and Zetterlund, “Sweden and the UN”; van Willigen, “A Dutch Return to UN Peacekeeping?”
⁴Campbell, “Disintegration, Incoherence and Complexity”; de Coning and Friis, “Coherence and Coordination”; Metcalfe, Haysom, and Gordon, Trends and Challenges in Humanitarian Civil–Military Coordination.
⁵de Coning and Friis, “Coherence and Coordination”.
⁶Friis, “Which Afghanistan?”; Ruffa and Vennesson, “Fighting and Helping?”
and define it as the degree of match between what is required by the mandate and institutional set-up and practices. In particular, we argue that coherence has three components, namely (1) strategic and organizational fit, (2) cultural and human fit and (3) operational fit. Focusing on these three dimensions of coherence allows us to empirically detect and conceptually categorize not only the structural and organizational constraints to higher levels of fit and hence coherence but also the ways in which different components of the mission understand those constraints and react to them.

We conducted an exploratory empirical study to document the three dimensions of fit at different levels of the peacekeeping mission. Due to the site-intensive nature of such approach, we selected one single case, the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission (MINUSMA) deployed to Mali from 2013. MINUSMA is at the same time widely multinational, with troop contributors coming from 52 different countries as of 2017, and one of the most unique missions, with its ambition of expanding the role of intelligence in UN peacekeeping. MINUSMA deploys both highly specialized intelligence components, constituted by the Swedish and Dutch ISR units (Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance) as well as traditional UN information-gathering units. Within MINUSMA, we focused specifically on the relation between the intelligence components and the broader MINUSMA mission they belong to. Our data relies on more than 120 semi-structured interviews, a three-week field trip to Mali and participation in pre-deployment exercises as well as evaluation sessions, conducted between 2014 and 2016. Our main results suggest that low levels of fit within each of our proposed dimensions has negative consequences for coordination and more in general the effectiveness of the day-to-day implementation of the mandate. Ultimately, we suspect that coherence across different levels matters for peacekeeping success. It seems crucial to open up the ‘black box’ of the peacekeeping mission to explore dimensions of coherence at different levels of the organization. This particular black box is of particular relevance because peacekeeping missions are still too often treated as unitary actors, while in fact several components within the mission matter. By opening up this particular black box we may understand, empirically observe and analytically categorize different dimensions of coherence and how they may ultimately affect peacekeeping effectiveness. Persistent and systematic lack of coherence could for instance undermine some important conflict resolution dynamics at play and we hope to start to be able to shed light on those mechanisms. While the case under study might be too exceptional to generalize, it also sheds on broader dynamics of within-mission diversity that recent scholarship has also engaged in.

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7 Douma, Strategic Alliances.
8 Bove and Ruggeri. “Kinds of Blue”.
We contribute to existing scholarship in two ways. First, building on the literature on coherence in international organizations and third-party intervention, we lay the foundation for further theorizing by focusing on within-mission dynamics. With our framework, we are able to capture micro-level dynamics that reflect the stakes, interests and cultures of those that implement peacekeeping mandates as well as detect potential misfit.9 Second, we indirectly contribute to the ongoing debate on the effectiveness of peacekeeping operations. On the one hand, several quantitative studies have analyzed conditions for peacekeeping effectiveness at the aggregate level.10 Even though the literature has started to look quantitatively at the micro-level dimensions of peacekeeping, due to data limitations it cannot study micro-level dynamics that are qualitative and not quantifiable.11 As a complement to those quantitative approaches, we follow Autesserre’s call for an empirical shift and adopt a micro-level focus.12

Our paper proceeds in four steps. First, we review relevant literature and discuss the conceptual framework we use to study coherence. Second, we present the case of MINUSMA. Third, we delve into the empirics and discuss the findings. Fourth, we draw some conclusions and provide recommendations for future research.

Literature Review

Within the coherence literature, a wealth of studies focused on coherence and tensions ‘between humanitarian and political actors, which has been referred to as the humanitarian dilemma’.13 Yet, very little attention has been paid to coherence within the peacekeeping mission itself. An exception is De Coning and Friis’ framework, which have developed a broader framework and also included an intra-agency focus, hence within mission, in our case. We take a step further and zoom in on what ‘within mission’ might include. Little empirical research has been devoted to disentangle how we can study coherence empirically at the micro-level and within mission, particularly in terms of how it can be empirically documented and systematically categorized in the practice of UN peacekeeping operations.14

9Campbell, “(Dis)integration, Incoherence and Complexity”; Campbell and Kaspersen, “The UN’s Reforms”; Ruffa, “Military Cultures and Force Employment in Peace Operations”.
10Bove and Ruggeri, Why and How Peacekeeping Composition Matters; Fortna, Does Peacekeeping Work?; Hultman, Kathman, and Shannon, “United Nations Peacekeeping and Civilian Protection in Civil War”; Hultman, Kathman, and Shannon, “Beyond Keeping Peace”.
11Fjelde, Hultman, and Nilsson, “Protection Through Presence”.
12Autesserre, “Going Micro”; Autesserre, “Peaceland”.
13Campbell, “(Dis)integration, Incoherence and Complexity”; Donini, “Between a Rock and a Hard Place”; Metcalfe et al., Trends and Challenges in Humanitarian Civil–military Coordination; Ruffa and Vennesson, “Fighting and Helping?”
14Campbell, “(Dis)integration, Incoherence and Complexity”; Campbell and Kaspersen, “The UN’s Reforms”.

An exception is Campbell’s call for bottom up coherence. Campbell points at ‘the complexity and unpredictability of war-to-peace transitions’ and discusses the need for selective ‘bottom-up’ coherence.\textsuperscript{15} In particular, she reflects on how the UN difficulty at achieving coherence is connected to its ‘two conceptually separate, but operationally interdependent, components’,\textsuperscript{16} namely its very character as an international organization tasked with the protection of individual and collective interests and its bureaucratic nature. As an international organization, the UN pursues ‘socially valued goals such as protecting human rights, providing development assistance, and brokering peace agreements’, which member states may not be able to pursue alone.\textsuperscript{17} Building on Halperin, Campbell reminds us that bureaucracies have their own incentives to maintain their respective autonomy, organizational morale, organizational essence, roles and missions, and budgets. As a result, ‘options which involve cooperation between organizations and which would require an organization to alter its structure or perform extraneous missions are unlikely to be advanced’.\textsuperscript{18} Instead, ‘decisions are not made after a rational decision process but rather through a competitive bargaining process over turf, budgets, and staff that may benefit parts of the organization at the expense of overall goals’.\textsuperscript{19} While Campbell’s bottom up approach helps us explain lack of coherence, it still does not allow us to capture the potential disconnect between the mandate and the ways in which the mandate is interpreted and hence what peacekeepers ultimately do.

Yet, recent scholarship within the field of security and military studies suggests that soldiers interpret their mandate in particular ways when deployed in multinational missions.\textsuperscript{20} Some studies suggest that soldiers have margins of maneuver for how they interpret their mandate and how they behave more specifically in peacekeeping missions. This is in stark contrast with an implicit, yet widely-held, assumption within the literature on UN peacekeeping according to which soldiers deployed as peacekeepers are mere executors of missions’ mandates. Notwithstanding the lively debate on how to improve a peacekeeping mission and the policy urgency on how to make it better, we still know very little about what peacekeepers do and why. Indirectly, understanding sociological practices, operational experiences and mandate interpretation is crucial for peacekeeping success.\textsuperscript{21}

\textsuperscript{15}Campbell, “Dis)integration, Incoherence and Complexity,” 562.
\textsuperscript{16}Ibid., 559.
\textsuperscript{17}Barnett and Finnemore, Rules for the World International Organizations in Global Politics, 5.
\textsuperscript{18}Halperin, “Why Bureaucrats Play Games” cited in Campbell, “Dis)integration, Incoherence and Complexity,” 560.
\textsuperscript{19}Barnett and Finnemore, Rules for the World International Organizations in Global Politics, 37.
\textsuperscript{20}Friesendorf, How Western Soldiers Fight; Ruffa, “Military Cultures and Force Employment in Peace Operations”; Ruffa and Sundberg, “Breaking the Frame”; Saideman and Auerswald, NATO in Afghanistan.
\textsuperscript{21}Ruffa, “Military Cultures and Force Employment in Peace Operations”.
Conceptual Framework

As a starting point, following recent work in the coherence literature, we understand coherence as an empirical category. Hence, coherence should not be understood as an effort aimed equally at all partners towards unity of purpose, nor should all partners be expected to achieve the same level of unity of effort. Instead, coherence should be seen as a scale of relationships where the most appropriate and realistic level of coherence that can be achieved will depend on the exact constellation of organizations involved in an interdependent relationship in that specific context.

Trying to move beyond ‘politically correct calls for ever more coherence’, we rely on a rather narrow definition of coherence, going back to the etymology of the term, which comes from the Latin word *cohaerentia* and refers to a ‘logical arrangement of parts’. With organizational studies, such logical arrangement of parts refers back to the concept of symbiosis or fit which refers to ‘whether successful cooperation is possible, given the strategic background, objectives and organizational characteristics’ of the partners involved (Douma, 1997: 39). To address this variety of relations, de Coning and Friis developed a coherence matrix. This matrix identifies four main types of relationships on the horizontal axis (whole of government, intra-agency, inter-agency and international-local). On the vertical axis of the coherence matrix, De Coning and Friis defined six levels of coherence that apply to each of the four types of relationships. These levels vary from actors are united at one end of the spectrum to actors compete at the other end. In between these extremes, De Coning and Friis identified integration, cooperation, coordination and co-existence. Implicitly, we zoom in within the mission and develop a conceptual framework that could enable researchers as well as practitioners to further unravel the dynamics of coherence. The added value of our approach is that it allows to capture the micro-level dynamics of incoherence. In order to do that, we need analytical tools that allow us to study both the deliberate (such as structures and procedures) and the unwitting parts of the functioning of an organization (such as the interpretation of those). As a first test, we focus in particular on how the intelligence components of the UN mission, related to the rest of the mission, in both its military and civilian components. To gain more analytical rigor we

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22 de Coning and Friis, “Coherence and Coordination,” 272.
23 de Coning and Friis, “Coherence and Coordination,” 245.
24 Coning and Friis, “Coherence and Coordination”.
25 Coherence among the policies and actions of the different government agencies of a country.
26 Coherence among the policies and actions of an individual agency.
27 Coherence among the policies pursued by the various international actors in a given country context.
28 Coherence between and among the policies of the internal and external actors, in other words the host nation and international actors, in a given country context.
29 Coning and Friis, “Coherence and Coordination”.

borrow key concepts from the literature on strategic alliances within organizational studies. These alliances share many similarities with multinational peacekeeping operations: they both imply a contractual, temporary relationship between a limited number of actors that remain independent and aim at reducing the uncertainty around the realization of the partners’ strategic objectives by means of coordinating or jointly executing one or several activities.

Within the strategic alliance literature, it is well-established that a successful alliance requires a sufficient degree of fit on several inter-related domains. Importantly, Douma underlines how fit does not by definition mean equality. It is quite possible that two comparable cultures will still clash in an alliance. Fit is primarily about the question whether successful co-operation is possible, given the strategic background, objectives and organizational characteristics of the potential partners. To a certain extent, fit may also be described as symbiosis.

As opposed to two or more organizations that fully merge, the partners in an alliance remain independent which requires a different approach to alignment. In this respect Douma et al. stress that ‘it is crucial to balance the interests and backgrounds of the partners involved, so that a win–win situation is created’. As such, within the context of alliances, the concept of fit emphasizes that partners find a complementary and harmonious balance in which they gain mutual benefits while depending on each other.

Since the concept of fit in organizational studies literature and the concept of coherence in the security studies literature both refer to the logical arrangements between two or more organizations that remain independent, we adapted Douma’s fit-model to further study coherence within the MINUSMA case. The model consists of several key areas that require a sufficient degree of fit in order to expect coherence. These key areas are:

1. Strategic and organizational fit. This area addresses the extent to which strategies and organizational characteristics of partners are mutually dependent and compatible. Important questions to consider while determining fit in this area include: do joint activities have added value for the partners? Will the alliance be accepted by the environment? And who has ultimate control of the strategy implementation.

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30See e.g. Das, *Researching Strategic Alliances*; Russo and Cesarani, "Strategic Alliance Success Factors".
31Ostroff, Judge, and & Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology, *Perspectives on Organizational Fit*.
32Douma, *Strategic Alliances*, 39.
33Douma et al., “Strategic Alliances,” 581.
34Douma, *Strategic Alliances*; Douma et al., “Strategic Alliances”.
35Strategic fit relates to the strategy and objectives of the partnering organizations and should not be confused with the strategic level of peacekeeping missions (i.e. UN headquarter level).
Cultural and human fit. This second key area refers to the extent to which the individuals concerned and the organizational cultures of the partners align. Within this area trust is an important component as well as the cultural backgrounds and the language of the people involved.

Operational fit. The third and final key area deals with the extent to which the resources and modus operandi of the partners align. This includes working procedures, operational systems as well as operational standards.

Douma et al. stress that it is essential for alliance managers to address all these aspects of fit in their mutual relationship as an insufficient fit in one area can lead to the failure of an alliance. Our focus on the interplay between the intelligence components and the rest of MINUSMA requires a micro-level qualitative approach. We aim to disentangle the different components of coherence at the broader mission level has potentially important drivers that originates from the micro-level in the daily functioning of the mission and the conduct of daily peacekeeping activities and their effectiveness. The next section first introduces MINUSMA and the intelligence components of the mission.

The United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA)

The establishment of MINUSMA by the UN Security Council in Resolution 2100 on 25 April 2013 was the result of a number of intertwined events. The northern regions of Mali had long lamented a lack of democratic power-sharing, leading to resentment and a loss of state control. The region became increasingly unstable due to illicit trafficking of arms, drugs and people, with heavily armed Tuareg fighters returning from Libya after the fall of the Gaddafi government in 2011. This explosive cocktail led to mutinies in the country and a military coup in March 2012 before some democratic order was restored and a marginalization of the Armed Forces of Mali (FAMA), which constantly lacked ammunition and reinforcements to fight in the North. At the invitation of the government, France deployed forces to push back the rebels, who were based in the North, and by some other groups widely labelled as ‘terrorists.’ A peace process was fostered with the rebels. An African Union mission was temporarily deployed in early 2013 before the United Nations took over the peacekeeping duties. In broad

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36Douma et al., “Strategic Alliances”.
37The section is partly based on Rietjens and Dorn, “The Evolution of Peacekeeping Intelligence”.
38The African-led International Support Mission to Mali (AFISMA) was authorized by the UN Security Council in resolution 2085 of 20 December 2012. It was a military mission of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), led by Nigeria. The first forces arrived on the ground in January 2013.
terms, it is MINUSMA’s task to promote a stabilization of key population centres and guide the political/peace process. It also carries the mandate for ‘protection of civilians,’ which has become more common for peace operations launched in recent years.

By 2015, MINUSMA consisted of close to 9000 military personnel, 1000 police, 500 international civilians, and 120 UN volunteers, along with many local hires. The military troops originated from 52 different countries including European countries (e.g. Denmark, Germany, Sweden, and the Netherlands), African countries (e.g. Egypt, Gambia, and Niger) and others, notably China. In addition to the Force Headquarters (FHQ) in the capital Bamako, MINUSMA had three Sector Headquarters (SHQs) that commanded approximately 4,000 military personnel each, mostly from the developing world. SHQ-West was headquartered in Timbuktu, whereas SHQ-East operated from Gao. A SHQ-North was created in 2014, based in Kidal and covering a smaller but very turbulent region. African forces contributed the majority of troops on the ground, conducting patrols and seeking to maintain security. By contrast, European countries contributed key enabling forces such as a Special Forces unit labelled the Special Operations Land Task Group (SOLTG), a helicopter detachment consisting of Apache and Chinook helicopters and a set of Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) units deployed in Regional Command East and West.

To add up to the complexity, on the civilian side of MINUSMA, many different agencies were active at the country as well as the regional levels. These included the United Nations Department for Safety and Security (UNDSS), Protection of Civilians, Political Affairs, Civil Affairs, the Human Rights Division and the Stabilization & Recovery section. In the information realm, a Joint Mission Analysis Centre (JMAC) was established to produce mission-wide and longer-term analysis for the senior management. Also a Joint Operations Centre (JOC) kept track of the situation on the ground, focusing on unfolding events and the immediate future.

The next section focuses on the coherence between the organizations that were involved in MINUSMA’s information and intelligence gathering, with an emphasis on the peacekeeping force. In doing so, we try to open the black box of coherence and understand in which ways coherence or the lack thereof manifests itself and what underlying causes can be identified that influence coherence.

39. MINUSMA Facts and Figures,” United Nations. See: https://minusma.unmissions.org/en/fact-sheets (accessed April 15, 2015).
40. For an overview of the functioning of a JMAC in integrated UN missions, see Shetler-Jones, “Intelligence in Integrated UN Peacekeeping Missions”.
Coherence in Minusma

We present our empirical material following the fit-model that we introduced in Section 2. The next subsections therefore disentangle three key dimensions of coherence (1) strategic and organizational fit, (2) cultural and human fit, and (3) operational fit. For each dimension, we first present key actors and activities relevant for the fit dimension and then analyze the consequences it had.

Strategic and Organizational Fit

From the start the UN had formulated an integrated strategy for MINUSMA as part of its mandate. This strategy entailed security and stabilization, the re-establishment of state authority, cultural preservation as well as humanitarian assistance. To implement it, MINUSMA had a general formal hierarchical structure that was headed by a Special Representatives of the Secretary General (SRSG). In this structure the civilian and military components operated in different stovepipes as usually seen in other UN integrated missions. On the one hand, UN civilian officials were directed by two deputy Special Representatives of the Secretary General (SRSGs), the chief of staff (in the case of JMAC, JOC and UNDSS) or the police commissioner (in the case of UNPOL) and emphasized the political and reconstruction processes. On the other hand, the UN military component was tasked with the security aspects of the mission and its force commander directed all the military assets. Within the civilian as well as the military components, timely, relevant and actionable intelligence was required to guide the decision-making process of the leadership.

In terms of organizational structure, MINUSMA’s military force opted for functional differentiation of its different intelligence components. Several units were in charge of collecting different kinds of intelligence and with different functions and positioning within the command structure. As graphically shown in Figure 1, one discerns several units that were closely involved in obtaining intelligence. First, MINUSMA deployed typical military intelligence units, demarked by the number 2 military branch, according to standard military staff convention within each of its battalions (S2), Sector headquarters cells (G2) and Force Headquarters cell (U2).41 Second, MINUSMA also deployed special forces (SOLTG) and a helicopter detachment which was under the direct command of the Force Commander. All these units were tasked to provide MINUSMA’s commanders with current intelligence, especially relating to security.

41In a military unit the staff branches are indicated by numbers (1–9). Each branch focuses on a different functional area such as personnel issues (i.e. branch no. 1), planning (branch no. 5) or operations (branch no. 3). Branch number 2 is responsible for the intelligence issues.
In response to the many intelligence deficiencies that confronted the UN in earlier missions (see e.g. Dorn, 2010), Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Hervé Ladsous requested MINUSMA to be enhanced by an additional military intelligence unit widely used in NATO context, the All Sources Information Fusion Unit (ASIFU). To carry out its tasks ASIFU consisted of headquarters in Bamako as well as two subunits: (1) a multinational Intelligence Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) company of approximately 65 people under Dutch command in sector East (Gao) and (2) a Swedish ISR Taskforce of approximately 200 people in sector West (Timbuctu).

Notwithstanding its clear military function, ASIFU was supposed to cover a broader range of tasks, of relevance to the military as well as the civilian component of MINUSMA. ASIFU’s task was to ‘contribute especially to traditionally non-military intelligence analysis, such as illegal trafficking and narcotics-trade; ethnic dynamics and tribal tensions; corruption and bad governance within Mali and MINUSMA area of interest’.42 This wide range of topics was often referred to as X-PMESII following NATO conventions, which indicates that information was to be gathered and analyzed on Political, Military, Economic, Social, Infrastructure and Information domains. The X (cross) referred to the fact that these domains were interconnected and could not be seen separately. Relatedly, ASIFU’s products could be of use to both civilian and military actors within MINUSMA as spelled out by the first ASIFU commander:

- to improve the processing and production of MINUSMA broad information and intelligence in order to have accessible and useable information on time. This will support the decision-making processes on the operational (force

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42PowerPoint presentation by representative of UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations, Carlisle Barracks, United States, 28 January 2015.
headquarters) and tactical (sector headquarters) level. But ASIFU should also be able to support the strategic level: the special representative of the secretary-general through the JMAC and UNDSS.43

Because of its broader scope, during the build-up of the mission it was decided to position ASIFU as a separate organizational unit under direct hierarchical control of the Force Commander, rather than integrating ASIFU within the main force’s intelligence structure until late 2017. In our empirical work, we find that ASIFU peculiar placement in the command structure was to strictly separate western intelligence capabilities from the other UN contributors’ capabilities. The reason for such separation was to strengthen (information) security and counterintelligence since ‘intelligence is a trust sport, which you only play with those you trust’.44 For the Netherlands, one of the main suppliers of ASIFU capabilities, separating ASIFU from the main intelligence structure was also deemed to facilitate a smooth transfer to other nations once the Netherlands would withdraw from the mission. So in sum, the intelligence components were functionally differentiated and serving different parts of the mission, which remained, however, strongly separated (stove-piped) at the strategic level.

This strategic and organizational misfit led to frictions between different military intelligence components, which could potentially undermine the effectiveness of the mission. For a start, during long periods of time, MINUSMA’s Force Commander and his sector chiefs lacked adequate current intelligence on crucial safety and security issues such as the threat along MINUSMA’s main supply routes and the whereabouts of armed groups. Regular intelligence branches (i.e. the S2, G2 and U2 branches) were unable to collect this kind of information because they argued the quality of their personnel fell short, they were understaffed and the internal command and control structure was too rigid.45 To illustrate, in mid-2015 the G2 section of Sector HQ East did not even know who the S2 officers of its own battalions were.46 The widespread information asymmetry led to large pressure on ASIFU to fill this gap and focus on current and security-related intelligence. However, ASIFU refused to do this and largely maintained its original focus on comprehensive intelligence on the mid- and long-term. As a result, ASIFU’s intelligence products became rather detached from the Force Commander’s main interest and were therefore only used to a limited extent in the decision-making process of the military component of MINUSMA.47

43First Commander ASIFU, Col. Keijsers, cited in Karlsrud & Smith, “Europe’s Return to UN Peacekeeping in Africa?” 11.
44Interview with ISR officer by one of the authors.
45For further elaboration on this issue see Rietjens and Dorn, “The Evolution of Peacekeeping Intelligence”.
46Interview with a captain of the ISR Company by one of the authors.
47ASIFU was incorporated within U2 in late 2017.
Apart from ASIFU and the regular intelligence branches, two other military units were tasked with intelligence-gathering. These were the special forces (SOLTG) and the helicopter detachment and both units were Dutch. Although the special forces did not have a counter terrorism mandate, during some rotations they acted like they did have one and often deviated from their objective to gather intelligence. The commander of the first rotation of the Dutch ISR company summarized it as follows: ‘The special forces went to Mali to kill people. Hunt people and arrest them…. This was the case even though we upfront agreed that the mission would be calm, shooting kept to a minimum and wear the blue beret’.\textsuperscript{48} Such an extreme interpretation of the mandate led to many struggles between the special forces and the Dutch ISR company and greatly hampered their interaction.

Moreover, since both the special forces and the helicopter detachment were under direct command of MINUSMA’s Force Commander, ASIFU and therefore also the Dutch and Swedish ISR companies under its command did not have the authority to send out data collection tasks to these units. The information flow from the special forces and the helicopter detachment to ASIFU was thus not self-evident and heavily relied on informal agreements and relationships. With the Force Commander’s increasing focus on current intelligence this situation proved to be detrimental to the effectiveness of the intelligence structure as decisions on whether and when to share information with ASIFU were made on a case-to-case basis.

Within the intelligence realm but at the level of the overall MINUSMA organization, there were overlapping but not coordinated strategies between ASIFU and JMAC and to a lesser extent also between ASIFU and both UNDSS and UNPOL. Since 2005, the UN had included JMACs in several missions to inform UN leadership about the situation and the progress that was being made.\textsuperscript{49} Until ASIFU was attached to the mission in 2014, JMAC was the primary actor with such responsibilities. From then on, both organizations competed for the favours of MINUSMA’s force commander and SRSG. The close ties between the first Dutch ASIFU commander and the then Dutch Special Representative of the Secretary General (SRSG) Bert Koenders further fuelled JMAC’s wariness of ASIFU. As a result of this rivalry, much stöviping remained, undermining the relationship between JMAC and ASIFU. JMAC representatives at the UN headquarters illustrated this as follows:

Instead of sharing intelligence, most people keep information to themselves, due to the competition to bring the most accurate information to the senior management of the mission.\textsuperscript{50}

\textsuperscript{48}Interview with the commander of the first rotation of the ISR Company by one of the authors.
\textsuperscript{49}Shetler-Jones, “Intelligence in Integrated UN Peacekeeping Missions”.
\textsuperscript{50}Interview with JMAC representative by one of the authors.
And

Influential people or key leaders use the different UN intelligence organizations, sometimes ASIFU, then JMAC, then U2, pitting them against each other.\(^{51}\)

As a result of this rivalry, the actors involved emphasized the intelligence that their own leadership favoured. Initially, the intelligence efforts were hardly coordinated, which led to great duplication of effort as well as irritation. As one of the JMAC officers remarked:

Little information came from the Special Forces and the ISR Company. Their reports went to the U2 [intelligence staff of the force commander] and ASIFU, but not to the wider mission. If we asked for it, we would be helped, but then you would have to know about it.\(^{52}\)

To improve the situation and better coordinate all intelligence related activities MINUSMA installed a Joint Coordination Board in 2015. The chief of JMAC chaired this board, which included representatives of JMAC, ASIFU, U2, UNDSS, U3, UNPOL, JOC and the office of the SRSG. The weekly meetings of the JCB facilitated communication, increased information sharing between the actors involved and overall ‘streamlined the intelligence gathering process in Mali’.\(^{53}\) However, as the JCB was a coordinating body only, it had no directive powers, which clearly limited its effectiveness.

Adding up to the misfit, the civilian and military components had profoundly different and incompatible understandings of the humanitarian principle as seen in many other complex humanitarian emergencies, like Afghanistan and Somalia. Many of the civilian organizations emphasized their neutral and impartial stance, and saw the military peacekeepers as a threat to their perceived impartiality and therefore their own security.\(^{54}\) This issue was most prevalent within the humanitarian actors outside MINUSMA such as the non-governmental organizations (NGOs), but also many UN organizations stressed this issue. Since the intelligence component was a military activity and widely perceived as such, this worsened even further the fit between the intelligence components and the broader functioning of MINUSMA. In his research on civil–military communication in Gao, Van der West\(^{55}\) noted that:

One respondent of the ISR Company went to visit the UNOCHA office the day after a demonstration against MINUSMA took place in Gao and said the following: “And I arrived at UNOCHA, and they directly told us that they were not very keen on us visiting them, out of their own interest. In order to not be identified with the military part of the UN”.

\(^{51}\)Interview with JMAC representative by one of the authors.

\(^{52}\)Interview with JMAC representative by one of the authors.

\(^{53}\)Duursma, “Information Processing Challenges in Peacekeeping Operations”.

\(^{54}\)Tesfaghiorghis, (In)securing Humanitarian Space?

\(^{55}\)Van der West, Civil-military Communications within Integrated United Nations Peacekeeping, 33.
In other words, also the intelligence components were met with suspicion because of the notion of humanitarian principle and also because intelligence gathering activities could be seen as dangerously close to humanitarian aid. In sum, the profound strategic and organization misfit between the intelligence components and MINUSMA at large triggered widespread frictions at all levels and could potentially undermine peacekeeping effectiveness.

**Cultural and Human Fit**

The cultural and human fit is of particular relevance in the case under study. Since 52 countries participated in MINUSMA’s peacekeeping force, it comes as no surprise that personal and cultural differences greatly affected the level of coherence. These differences were rooted in the languages, personalities, military cultures, levels of training and education as well as in the frames of reference among of the people involved. And they became particularly relevant in the interaction between different intelligent components and between intelligent components and other parts of MINUSMA.

The most prominent issue that emerged in this regard was the frustration that many European military respondents expressed towards the African troops, which triggered several tensions and exclusion mechanisms. They indicated that most soldiers in African units were illiterate and not used to writing reports (e.g. after a patrol). Also, their view on intelligence turned out to be different as one of the European respondents argued and partly related to the specific military command culture of their country of origins.

It seems that in the West African military culture the role of intelligence is very different from ours. The role of intelligence is to find out little things for the commander when asked, often focusing on events that have already occurred, but not to present information proactively because that would imply that the commander did not have the right information or that he should act, both of which are not desirable for these commanders.

Similarly, an officer told us ‘the skiing nations was the only personnel that was allowed to access that information. The rest of these guys were Africans and it was like divided information and divided race, that is how we managed it.’ The critique of the European soldiers on their African counterparts seemed however a luxury they could not afford. First, while European forces mostly deployed in strategic and supportive roles, African soldiers were permanently based in the dangerous areas of the mission such as Kidal. Here they were exposed to much greater risks. Secondly, most European military

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56Interviews with military representatives of the intelligence staff at the UN headquarters (U2) and ASIFU headquarters by one of the authors.
57Interview with the chief of the all source intelligence cell of the ISR Company by one of the authors.
58Interview with ISR officer by one of the authors.
59DIIS, African Peacekeepers in Mali.
peacekeepers deployed lacked strong connections to the local culture. Although a few European military representatives spoke fluent French or Arabic and had extensive cultural knowledge through for instance working experience in African countries, in many cases, European soldiers lacked awareness of the complexity of the conflict, the history of Mali and the ethnic sensitivities. This negatively influenced their effectiveness, as they were not fully able to unravel the dynamics of the environment and address the information requirements they were tasked with. Improved fit with the African troops was therefore deemed necessary since they mastered many of the local languages and had in-depth socio-cultural intelligence.

One of the initiatives to address this issue was to attach liaison officers to the African battalions and the sector headquarters. The information that these officers brought back was, however, received with mixed feelings. One of the officers reflected on this as follows:

I think we judged very quickly NIGERBAT (i.e. the battalion from Niger). There is an enormous cultural difference in the way they practice intelligence, and it is not possible to say if our way is better than theirs. […] I have never witnessed a planning process, the commander just decided, this could take as little as fifteen minutes. We gave them village assessment formats, and the assessments they brought back weren’t bad at all. […] The difference with these African battalions is that they really have to be tasked, if you do not specifically ask them to produce a village assessment they will simply go there, drive around a bit and come back.60

Cultural differences did not only affect the interactions between units of different nations, but also the interaction between units of a single troop contributing nation. Fit between the Dutch special forces and the Dutch ISR company was a case in point. Several respondents of the ISR company accused the special forces of feeling superior to them and having the wrong mindset, one focused on chasing terrorists instead of collecting intelligence. According to several respondents the special forces unit had a specific ‘macho’ culture and one of them remarked:

The special forces unit had people walking around with the mentality of ‘if you are not a commando I do not talk to you’61

To address part of these challenges and to improve fit between the military units, the Netherlands Armed Forces organized an international intelligence preparation before deployment. Participants from several different European nationalities gathered in the Netherlands and during one week received briefings on Mali and carried out several joint exercises. Many respondents felt that this improved their mutual understanding and respect when they were

60Interview with a civil-military cooperation officer from the ISR company by one of the authors.
61Interview with an officer from the ISR company by one of the authors.
in Mali. However, this exercise remained limited to European peacekeepers. Overall, the cultural and human misfit triggered dynamics of mistrust and patterns of exclusion, which could potentially have undermined the effectiveness of the mission.

**Operational Fit**

Within MINUSMA’s intelligence realm many different organizations brought relevant resources to the table. However, many of these resources were incompatible mainly due to a misfit in operational procedures. Most western European countries contributed high-tech and innovative resources to MINUSMA’s peacekeeping force. These resources were mostly embedded within the ASIFU units, the special forces and the helicopter detachment and included advanced information systems, unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) and apache helicopters. Instead, contrary to many of the western countries, the African and Asian troop contributing countries mainly deployed low-tech capabilities. Most of these units did not use advanced information systems and lacked sophisticated technological systems to support their operations. As one of the respondents remarked:

I don’t think any officer in Nigerbat [the battalion peacekeepers from Niger] in Ménaka has a UN account. And even the internet there … It’s probably a lot better now, but it’s not conducive to wanting to write a lot.62

Most respondents believed that the integration of both types of resources (i.e. high-tech and low-tech) was essential for effective command and control and sharing of information between the organizations involved. Such integration however turned out to be very challenging due to profoundly different operational procedures. Many of the European countries used procedures that were largely based on the NATO operations in Afghanistan. Their intelligence procedures were often strict and prescribed in handbooks and doctrines. African units to the contrary were largely unfamiliar with western-style intelligence gathering. Rather than processing the incoming information within intelligence branches, many African troop contributing countries considered intelligence to be a matter for commanding officers only. A western respondent of the force commander’s intelligence staff formulated this as follows:

As soon as a patrol discovers something, they immediately tell their chief. This chief reports it to his commander – even if he is the battalion commander. This commander immediately calls the commander of the sector headquarters. And if you are unlucky the Sector commander reports it to the Force Commander. And when the Force Commander sits in the daily morning briefing and listens to the U2 he might say: “no way, because I heard this and that.” 63

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62 Interview with representative of ASIFU headquarters by one of the authors.
63 Interview with representative of the force commander’s intelligence staff by one of the authors.
ASIFU expended considerable effort into training the UN battalions. These initiatives had mixed results as one of the ASIFU members recalls:

We have provided many units with [intelligence] training. Together with the French G2 of sector headquarters East in Gao we went to Nigerbat [the battalion from Niger], and provided the entire intelligence section as well as the platoon commanders with basic intelligence training. Doing this we hoped that Nigerbat started to report since they didn’t do that at all. Unfortunately, this training did not help either. We also provided training to the Bangladesh Riverine Unit. They do report and asked us for [intelligence] formats when they navigate the rivers. We gave these to them and this improved the quality of the incoming information.64

With regard to the information systems in place, most respondents considered MINUSMA’s general information system to be ‘UN-classified,’ meaning that the system was unsafe and had no classification at all. This situation directly impacted the helicopter detachment as well as ASIFU’s unmanned aerial vehicles. Both units were not allowed to share the metadata (e.g. time, location) of their images because this could reveal operational details. As long as the images were internally shared with other Dutch units, this was not considered to be a problem. However, as some of the information was directly sent to other MINUSMA military units, there was a risk that the information became public due to the low security standards of these other units. In response, the information of the UAVs and the helicopters was first analyzed, and the intelligence reports (INTREPs) that came out of these analyses were then shared with external units.

Although the lack of interoperability between the organizations’ resources was most prominent between European and African countries, also European countries faced mutual challenges integrating their own resources. From 2015 an Estonian human intelligence team got embedded within the Dutch ISR company in Gao. According to regulations, the Estonians were not allowed to operate the FM9000 radios that the Dutch used in their vehicles. However, since the Estonians did not bring their own vehicles, they depended on Dutch transport and as a result at least one Dutch soldier was required to join the Estonian patrols. In terms of manpower it had a marginal impact, but the Dutch respondents considered it as extremely distrustful towards their Estonian colleagues and felt it undermined the cohesion within the mission and, indirectly, undermined the fulfilment of the mandate.65

Turning to the operational fit between units of one single country, one observes many challenges as well. The Dutch ISR company and the Dutch SOLTG are a good case in point. The Dutch ISR company often depended on force protection by the SOLTG when they left the compound to gather

64Interview with the chief of the all source intelligence cell of the ISR company by one of the authors.
65Interview with officers of the second ISR rotation by one of the authors.
intelligence. However, there were many incidents in which ISR personnel did not follow safety orders that the SOLTG had provided. An SOLTG commander formulated this as:

We would take them [ISR company] to a city for them to be able to collect intelligence, but we had given them orders to stay in the same place. All of a sudden, we see them in a completely different part of the city.

These incidents led to great frustrations and SOLTG personnel not wanting to work with their counterparts of the ISR company, which suggests that procedures were too ambiguous to work with.

Also, at the broader mission-level, MINUSMA did not display a high level of operational fit. A clear example in this respect were the Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) that both the Swedish and Dutch-led ISR units had at their disposal. As the UN had very limited experience deploying UAVs within peacekeeping operations, the incorporation of UAVs in the MINUSMA mission suffered from the bureaucratic regulations that the UN enforced. According to these regulations the UAVs could only be operated after they had been thoroughly checked and approved by the UN. However, in the course of 2014 when the Dutch had just deployed their ScanEagle UAVs, the UN checked them as if they were standard flying platforms. Questions that UN civilian aviation staff asked included:

- does the pilot of the UAV fulfill his training requirements? Or, does the rear wheel of the UAV function properly? Although the ScanEagle UAVs did not have a pilot or a rear wheel, it took the Dutch contingent almost half a year to get the UAVs accredited.

When the ScanEagle eventually became operational the system was able to collect many hours of imagery information that supported many of the units and turned out to be crucial for fulfilling missions’ objectives. In sum, operational misfit led a number of frictions that could have potentially undermined effectiveness.

**Discussion and Conclusions**

Reflecting on the concept of coherence in international interventions, Paris argued that prescribing improved coherence as a remedy for the contradictions and dilemmas that come with this type of operation is too simple a solution. It shies away from the possibility that there may be institutional inconsistencies in peace operations or that we still know too little about how to turn countries wrecked by conflict into secure and stable societies.

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66 Interview with the commander of the first rotation of the SOLTG by one of the authors.
67 Dorn, *Smart Peacekeeping*.
68 Interview with the commander of the Unmanned Aerial Systems section of the ISR company.
69 Paris, "Understanding the 'Coordination Problem' in Postwar Statebuilding," 58.
The call for improving coherence runs the risk of reiterating a substantive disagreement in procedural-technocratic terms. Failure in UN peacekeeping operations has been often ascribed to a lack of coherence among the agencies and different components involved. This is likely to become ever more relevant with the UN embarking on more diverse missions, including intelligence components, with more ambitious objectives, such as protecting civilians. Our starting point is that before calling for more coherence, we should focus on what coherence is, what it is made of and how it looks like in practice.

In our paper, we adopted an evidence-based micro-level focus and explored the ways in which coherence manifested itself. To gain more analytical rigor we turned to the literature on organizational theories and building on the literature on strategic alliances adapted Douma’s fit-model to further operationalize the concept of coherence. We identified three different key areas in which coherence is deemed crucial for the effectiveness of an alliance, namely: strategic and organizational fit, cultural and human fit, and operational fit. Adapting this model to the practice of peacekeeping within MINUSMA and more specifically to MINUSMA’s intelligence organization enabled us to gain insight in the ways in which coherence plays out in practice. However, the case under study is unique of the case and the implementation of intelligence within a UN mission has been widely criticized and also considered an experiment. Therefore, we should be cautious at generalizing the results of this study.

The analysis revealed many manifestations of misfit on each of the three key areas. If we consider the effectiveness of peacekeeping operations as the level of goal realization (i.e. fulfilling the UN mandate) our analysis suggests a positive and rather strong relation between the coherence and effectiveness. When coherence or a lack thereof was observed in each of the three key areas, this directly seemed to impact the level of goal realization. Increasing coherence between the actors that are involved in peacekeeping operations however does not require having all actors to interact in a unified way. There are just too many different interests, mandates and modi operandi to make full integration possible or even desirable. But we find that unpacking coherence is a first step in shedding light to further theorizing on this issue. Further research could explore the relation between different key areas of fit and also on how they influence each other, i.e. a lack of organizational fit is one of the reasons for a lack of operational fit. And the fit-model should be tested to additional cases to see if it holds. Further research should also explore more systematically how organizational variables may hinder peacekeeping success.

70See e.g. Rousseau, “Is There Such a Thing as Evidence-Based Management?”; Soeters and Heeren-Bogers, “The Quest for ‘Evidence-Based Soldiering’.”
When we turn to MINUSMA in particular, it becomes clear that the mission would benefit from higher levels of coherence than is presently the case. Our fit model is a useful tool for identifying key areas in which further work is needed. This implies that actors should try to better integrate their approaches and activities while maintaining their individual identities as well as their right to take independent decisions.71 Looking at the three different key areas (strategic and organizational fit, cultural and human fit and operational fit) there are several recommendations that deserve immediate follow-up. First, with respect to the area of strategic and organizational fit it is important to increase role clarity between ASIFU and JMAC and to further integrate or at least more clearly define command and control relationships of U2 and ASIFU.72 In addition, it would be important to improve linkages (e.g. liaison officers) between military intelligence capacities and the main force. Relatedly it would be key to give existing coordination platforms decision powers and inserting them in the chain of command and control. The lack thereof could explain the failures of the Joint Coordination Board.

In relation to the cultural and human fit, more emphasis on the development of cross-cultural competences seems essential to operate more effectively.73 Abbe & Halpin74 and Abbe et al.75 identified three main components that are necessary to acquire cross-cultural competence and therefore to effectively work in a foreign culture.76 These are cultural knowledge (i.e. an awareness of one’s own culture and an understanding of culture and cultural differences through schemata or frameworks), affect (i.e. attitudes toward other cultures such as openness and empathy and the motivation to learn about and engage with them) and skills ‘to regulate one’s own reactions in a cross-cultural setting, interpersonal skills, and the flexibility to assume the perspective of someone from a different culture’.77 Emphasizing these competencies e.g. during pre-deployment training and exercises seems very beneficial.

Finally, within the area of operational fit, it seems crucial to better marry the Western and African capabilities. This includes aligning procedures and standards, and requiring systems to uphold information security. In this respect, establishing a joint database, including underlying technical and

71De Coning and Friis, “Coherence and Coordination”.
72Initiatives to address this issue have already been taken by integrating the U2 and ASIFU.
73See e.g. Selmeski, *Military Cross-Cultural Competence*.
74Abbe and Halpin, “The Cultural Imperative for Professional Military Education and Leader Development”.
75Abbe and Halpin, “The Cultural Imperative for Professional Military Education and Leader Development”; Abbe et al., *Cross-Cultural Competence in Army Leaders*.
76Abbe and Halpin, “The Cultural Imperative for Professional Military Education and Leader Development”; Abbe et al., *Cross-Cultural Competence in Army Leaders*.
77Abbe and Halpin, “The Cultural Imperative for Professional Military Education and Leader Development”, 24.
security infrastructure is crucial. More in general, the UN and the International Community at large should think at how to better integrate of high-tech capabilities within a generally low-tech environment, without recreating divisive practices of exclusions based on technological divides. One of the core issues here seems the conflation of capabilities with trust: in MINUSMA when capabilities were absent trust was lost. One way to address this issue is to acknowledge the complementarity of skills and context awareness but also systematically engage in joint training to bridge the Western-African divide. Overall, the main take away of this paper is that functional differentiation has important implications for misfit across all levels of the organizations. While greater diversity in UN peacekeeping has undeniable advantages in terms of legitimacy and representativeness, the recent return of European troops to UN peacekeeping in Africa begs the question of how to strike the balance. We find that addressing misfit more openly could be useful to make peacekeeping more effective.

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Notes on Contributors

Sebastiaan Rietjens is professor of Intelligence & Security at the Netherlands Defense Academy. He has published in international books and journals including Disasters, Armed Forces & Society, International Journal of Public Administration and Journal of Intelligence and Counter Intelligence and edited volumes on on civil–military interaction (Ashgate, 2008; Springer, 2016), research methods in the military domain (Routledge, 2014) and organising in the military (2016).

Chiara Ruffa is Academy Fellow at the Department of Peace and Conflict Research at Uppsala University and associate professor in War Studies at the Swedish Defense

\[78\text{See e.g. Dorn, Smart Peacekeeping.}\]
University. She is the author of Military Cultures in Peace and Stability Operations (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018) and her work has appeared in Security Studies, Acta Sociologica, Armed Forces and Society, Security and Defence Analysis, Small Wars and Insurgencies, among others.

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