



Report

Public meeting: “International Security, Stakes and Perspectives: Mali”

*Organized by the Netherlands Atlantic Association
and the Royal Netherlands Society for Military Art and Science*

Monday December 10th, 2018
Dutch Ministry of Defense, The Hague

On Monday December 10th, 2018, the Netherlands Atlantic Association and the Royal Netherlands Society for Military Art and Science organized a public meeting themed “International Security, Stakes and Perspectives: Mali”. The meeting took place at the Dutch Ministry of Defense in The Hague and included Brigadier General Marc Ollier, former Force Chief of Staff of MINUSMA, as speaker. The meeting was moderated by Lieutenant General (retired) Ton van Loon of the Royal Netherlands Army and board member of the Netherlands Atlantic Association. General Ollier offered his interpretation of the MINUSMA mission in Mali to some 90 attendees.

Moderator Ton van Loon welcomed the attendees and introduced the speaker. He furthermore mentions that all that will be said during this public meeting is the opinion of the speaker only and does not necessarily represent the views of the Dutch or French Ministry of Defense.

Mali: an environment of challenges



Ollier started his account of the MINUSMA mission in Mali. Mali is a large country, that poses a challenging environment for both men and machine. These challenges are related to a myriad of aspects, including distances, terrain, and climate. The three regions in which Mali can be divided (the north, the center, and the south), also face – and provide – their own challenges.

One of the challenges facing MINUSMA is logistics. Because of the terrain and lacking

infrastructure, transportation takes a long time. Besides that, the question ‘who is our enemy?’ is also difficult to answer, according to Ollier, for various groups such as ISIS, Katibat Macina, and various tribes, are active within the country. The most challenging dimension of the MINUSMA mission, however, is the hostile environment. Improvised explosive devices (IEDs), as well as ‘complex attacks’, are serious threats and both trained soldiers and the right material are needed to counter them.

Although improvements have been made in the region, Ollier still has some concerns. Security in the region is degrading and the involvement of the Malian armed forces (FAMA) is limited. Besides that, MINUSMA has its own weaknesses and the UN-mindset is too focused on reporting and bureaucracy and not on taking action.

What’s at stake?

According to Ollier, the stakes in Mali are extremely high. Western involvement is necessary in order to protect not only Malian, but also our own interests. First and foremost, a state needs to be able to defend its own citizens. The Malian government is threatened in its capabilities by radical Islam and organized crime. We have a responsibility to do something about this. Secondly, a blunt but important reason to be active in Mali is the access to natural resources. Stability is necessary in order to extract these resources. Thirdly, the UN and EU’s credibility is on the line. We must show the world that multilateralism overcomes and that the EU has solid crisis-management capabilities.

Perspectives

Ollier proceeded by stating that more affirmative action is necessary. We must apply political pressure in order to sway local authorities. Otherwise, things will not move as it is not in their interests for things to change. The Malian Defense and Security Forces (MDSF), together with the G5 Sahel, require more support. We not only need to train and equip these local forces but also see that funding arrives at the right place. We also need to enhance MINUSMA. More and better cooperation with Operation Barkhane is necessary. This requires less bureaucracy as it slows down the progress. Ollier ended by stating: ‘‘doing nothing is not an option’’.

Q&A



During the Q&A a question was asked about the future of MINUSMA. What is the end state? Ollier answered that the end state is reached when MINUSMA’s goals are achieved: when Mali is stabilized and the government is able to defend its own territory. This will take a lot more time, but perhaps MINUSMA can develop itself into an agency which can continue to make progress in the background.

The evening ended with a closing comment from Van Loon. He stated that the operation in Mali is extremely challenging, but that continuation and expansion of MINUSMA is essential. After all, exporting stability is in our own interest.

Eline Groenewegen-Van der Weiden en Erik Korenstra