



## Chinese Military Participation in Mali

**OE Watch Commentary:** Recently Malian news ran a story about Chinese troops being honored for their role in the United Nations peacekeeping mission in Mali, officially known as United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission (MINUSMA). Chinese participation in the peacekeeping mission has been fairly limited in number and scope. According to the accompanying excerpted article from *bamada.net*, the six Chinese soldiers being honored were members of a communications unit, which arrived in Mali in September 2017. Among their jobs while serving in MINUSMA was the installation “new digital last generation radio equipment ‘YYTERA’ provided by the People’s Republic of China.” In addition to providing “highly secure GSM communication coverage of Bamako, Sénou, Kati and their surroundings,” the unit trained Malian soldiers in the basics of military communications. The composition of the unit has been fairly typical of previous Chinese military units participating in UN peacekeeping missions—no combat troops—support and logistics only.

However, the Chinese broke their own norm when in 2013, China announced that it would send a combat unit of 500 troops to Mali. That deployment marked the first time that Chinese combat troops have participated in a UN Mission abroad. Since then, both Chinese infantry and special forces soldiers have served in Mali. The Chinese have also suffered casualties. In 2016 an IED killed one Chinese soldier and wounded four others from the 4th contingent of Chinese peacekeeping troops. Three Chinese civilians were also killed a year earlier, in November 2015, when the Radisson Blu Hotel in Bamako was attacked.

Chinese casualties at the Radisson Blu may support the notion that the Chinese military has traditionally followed its economic interests. To be sure, China is a significant player in Africa, both in terms of its UN peacekeeping contribution and its many diverse economic endeavors on the continent. However, Mali pales in comparison to other African countries for return on investment. Mali ranks near the bottom in ease of doing business and it is not an oil producing country. Rather than economic, some consider that the Chinese military presence in Mali may be a lever to pull, part of Chinese President Xi Jinping’s concept of “great power diplomacy.”

It can also be argued that the Chinese military in Africa has been historically risk-averse. It is a far cry from a slew of recent Chinese box office sensations like *Wolf Warrior 2*, this one set somewhere on the African continent depicting heroic Chinese special operations soldiers, a willingness to fight any and all bad guys, and a large body count. While the Chinese public has fully embraced the larger than life theatrical depiction of its men and women in uniform, the fact remains that Chinese military participation in Mali and elsewhere in Africa under a UN mandate remains purposefully designated to a supporting and presence role.

This 2018 news piece, and the accompanying similar one from *Africanews* in 2017 (different unit—same ceremony), seem to have been written to highlight the close relationship between the two countries. To be sure, China, in Mali since the 1960s, seems intent to continue its partnership. As China expands its international presence and continues to provide military assistance to protect its growing list of global assets in countries like Mali, teetering on the brink of protracted war, it may find itself in situations where its military will be forced to act. **End OE Watch Commentary (Billingsley)**



Cérémonie de remise de médaille du 4ème contingent Chinois de la MINUSMA à Gao en présence du Représentant Spécial du Secrétaire Général des Nations Unies, Chef de la MINUSMA, M. Mahamat Saleh Annadif et de l'Ambassadrice de la Chine S.E.Mme LU Huiying.

Source: MINUSMA/Harandane Dicko...MINUSMA 1...17-02-07-SRSG-Chine medal parade Gao\_30; MINUSMA/Harandane Dicko, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/minusma/albums/72157678513543170>, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0





## Continued: Chinese Military Participation in Mali

**Source:** “Coopération Mali-Chine: Six Coopérants Chinois Distingués (Mali-China Cooperation: Six Chinese Cooperants Distinguished),” *Bamada.net*, 10 December 2018. <http://bamada.net/cooperation-mali-chine-six-cooperants-chinois-distingues>

...the Chinese team also trained its service technicians on the installation of the new digital radio equipment “YYTERA” of the last generation, provided by the People’s Republic of China. This equipment, he says, will provide highly secure GSM communication coverage of Bamako, Sénou, Kati and their surroundings.

...As for the Chief of the [Malian] General Staff of the Armed Forces, he praised, on behalf of the Supreme Chief of the Armed Forces, the “very strategic” partnership that has existed since the first hours of independence between Mali and China. “Today, China has remained a constant partner, never wavering in its deep relations with Mali...,” said General M’Bemba Moussa Keïta...

**Source:** “Mali: le 4ème contingent chinois honoré pour sa lutte contre les groupes terroristes (UN Honors Chinese Peacekeepers in Mali),” *Africanews*, 9 February 2017. <http://fr.africanews.com/2017/02/09/mali-le-4eme-contingent-chinois-honore-pour-sa-lutte-contre-les-groupes/>

...The mission in Mali, compared to the mission of fighting Ebola in Liberia is more bloody and closer to the battlefield, especially when we deal with people who suffer penetrating or blast wounds, the injuries are complex, but I have accumulated more experience of rescuing and treating the injured on the battlefield.’ Yang Limin, nurse, medical detachment, 4th contingent of Chinese peacekeeping force in Mali.

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Review of the troops of the Major General and Commander of the MINUSMA Force, Jean-Paul Deconinck during the ceremony of decoration and presentation of the United Nations medal to the 395 peacekeepers of the 5th Chinese contingent, including fourteen women who arrived at the Mali in May 2017.

Source: MINUSMA/Harandane Dicko... MINUSMA 1... 17-02-07-SRSG-Chine medal parade Gao\_30, MINUSMA/Harandane Dicko  
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