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THE INVOLVEMENT OF THE PORTUGUESE ARMED FORCES IN EUTM MALI: IMPROVING PORTUGAL'S RECOGNITION IN THE SAHEL[1]

A PARTICIPAÇÃO DAS FORÇAS ARMADAS PORTUGUESAS NA EUTM MALI. CONTRIBUTOS PARA A AFIRMAÇÃO DE PORTUGAL NO SAHEL

Luís Miguel Rodrigues Gomes
Lieutenant Colonel, Comando, Infantry
Master's Degree in Military Sciences – Security and Defence from the IUM
Commander of the Commando Battalion and the 16QRF/MINUSCA/RCA
gomes.lmr@exercito.pt

Luís Manuel Brás Bernardino
Infantry Colonel (Reserve)
Master's Degree in Strategy and PhD in International Relations from the Institute of Social and Political Sciences of the University of Lisbon (ISCSP-UL)
Assistant Professor at the Autonomous University of Lisbon
Integrated Researcher at the Centre for International Studies of the University Institute of Lisbon (CEI-IUL)
lbernardino@autonoma.pt

Abstract

This study analysed the involvement of the Portuguese Armed Forces in the European Union Training Mission in Mali (EUTM Mali) to identify proposals for a national strategy for the Sahel. The study used a deductive reasoning methodology, a qualitative strategy and a case study research design based on a literature review and semi-structured interviews. The findings showed that the European Union has an interest in the security of the Sahel region because some of the threats that come from this region pose a risk to the EU Member States. Due to the situation in northern Mali having escalated, Europe has decided to become more active in the country by conducting missions within the framework of the Common Security and Defence Policy. The study revealed that the involvement of the Portuguese military in EUTM Mali has helped the European Union meet its international commitments in the region, showing that Portugal is committed multilaterally, that it is a producer of regional security and that it has the credibility to influence the European Union's decisions regarding Africa, and specifically the Sahel.

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Keywords: Portuguese Armed Forces, European Union Training Mission in Mali, Mali, Portugal, Sahel, European Union

Resumo

Neste estudo foi analisada a participação das Forças Armadas Portuguesas na Missão de Treino da União Europeia no Mali (EUTM Mali), tendo em vista identificar possíveis contributos para desenhar uma estratégia nacional para o Sahel. A investigação seguiu um método de raciocínio dedutivo, consubstanciado numa estratégia qualitativa e utilizou-se o estudo de caso como desenho de pesquisa, sustentado na pesquisa bibliográfica e documental, bem como em entrevistas semiestruturadas. Desta investigação constatou-se que a União Europeia está interessada em garantir a segurança na região do Sahel porque algumas das ameaças originárias desta região podem potencialmente colocar em perigo os seus Estados-membros. Com a deterioração da situação no norte do Mali, a Europa decidiu tornar-se mais ativa neste país através de missões no quadro da Política Comum de Segurança e Defesa. Concluiu-se que a participação militar nacional na EUTM Mali, tem procurado contribuir para a satisfação dos compromissos internacionais assumidos pela União Europeia na região, mostrando que Portugal se empenha multilateralmente, demonstra ser um produtor de segurança regional e possuindo a credibilidade necessária para influenciar decisões na União Europeia relativamente a África, e mais concretamente ao Sahel.

Palavras-chave: *Forças Armadas Portuguesas, Mali, Missão de Treino da União Europeia no Mali, Portugal, Sahel, União Europeia*

"… The EU is facing growing calls to rethink its approach to the Sahel region. In her 2023 State of the Union address, European Commission President von der Leyen announced a revision of the EU's strategic presence in the region. However, there is no consensus among EU Member States on the future of the EU missions and partnerships in the Sahel. Foreign Affairs ministers discussed the topic during their meeting on 11 December 2023 but did not formally decide on a new strategy. The European External Action Service is tasked with preparing a paper outlining potential options for revising the Sahel strategy…"

The European Union's Integrated Strategy in the Sahel in "A Stronger Europe in the World", 20/01/2024 [2]

1. Introduction

The Sahel countries (Mauritania, Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso and Chad) are currently facing several challenges that are weakening the region, including chronic insecurity, a surge in extremism, lack of economic prospects and access to education, employment and basic services such as water and electricity, as well as climate change. Addressing the situation will require an approach that accounts for the region's security challenges while ensuring lasting sustainable development (Alliance Sahel, 2023).

The stability of Sahel countries and their governments' ability to provide security and manage social change have an impact on migration flows, economic development and health

[2] https://www.europarl.europa.eu/legislative-train/theme-a-stronger-europe-in-the-world/file-eu-strategy-in-the-sahel

concerns (Eizenga, 2019, p. 6). In 2023, the European Union (EU) spent 181.5 million euros on emergency humanitarian aid to the region (this includes healthcare, vaccines, food, hygiene and security). Since instability in the Sahel puts EU Member States at risk, there has been a significant investment on improving security conditions in the region (European Commission, 2023).

The EU Council has issued its conclusions about the Integrated Strategy for the Sahel and realigned its strategic priorities. The EU Member States expressed their desire for stronger partnerships with the G5 Sahel (G5S)[3] and its Member States, institutions and citizens, as this will help guarantee peace, stability, democracy and sustainable development in the region (Council of the European Union, 2021). All Sahel countries are plagued by political instability, and there have been latent conflicts in Mali practically since it became an independent State in 1960. The crisis in Mali worsened in the wake of the Libyan crisis of 2011, leading the EU to become a security actor in the region to combat the new threats to global security, particularly those with an impact on European security (Ibrahim, 2019).

As violence continues to escalate in the Sahel region (marked by the events that took place in Mali in May 2021), partnerships that were fragile to begin with are being weakened and the EU (and France in particular) must work closely with the unpredictable Malian government and the Sahel's military authorities. The new European strategy for the Sahel focuses on civil society, acknowledges the limitations inherent to exclusively securitising approaches, and attempts to partially reintroduce a long-term, values-centred approach based on governance reforms and accountability (Freitag, 2021, pp. 5-6).

EUTM Mali, one of the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) missions in Africa, was launched in February 2013 and its mandate has been renewed five times since 2020. The mission aims to train and advise the Malian Armed Forces (MaAAFF), aiming to strengthen their defence capabilities and their ability to protect the Malian citizens (MDN, 2022). The mission objective is to help the MaAAFF and the G5S Joint Force[4] (G5S JF) meet their operational needs, while laying the groundwork for the MaAAFF to hand over power to the legitimate (civilian) political government (Ordinance No. 301/2019, 2019).

Portugal has contributed to EUTM Mali through its AAFF since the mission was launched. Seven soldiers were deployed at the outset of the mission, and by the end of 2022 the Portuguese contingent had reached 132 military personnel. In 2023 and 2024, Portugal's is expected to have five soldiers in the mission's General Staff. Exploring this topic will allow us to reflect on the security risks that the Sahel poses to the European space, the strategies to mitigate and contain those threats and bring stability to the region, and the involvement of the Portuguese AAFF in the mission.

This study will analyse EUTM Mali and the Portuguese AAFF's contributions to the mission, in order to identify practical proposals to improve Portugal's recognition as a producer of security in the Sahel. This will be done by answering the following research question: How

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[3] Group of Five for the Sahel.

[4] The G5S JF consists of the five Sahel countries (Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger e Chad). It was established in 2017 to address the surge in armed groups and the worsening of the security situation in the region - https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=EPRS_BRI(2020)652074

does the involvement of the Portuguese AAFF in EUTM Mali contribute to the development of a national strategy for the Sahel?"

2. Literature Review and Key Concepts

2.1. Security

The concept of "security" is constantly evolving. To analyse it from the perspective of International Relations, we must understand these changes through the lens of the Copenhagen School's constructivist approach to Security Studies.

Founded in 1985, the Copenhagen School proposes a constructivist approach to security that broadens its scope beyond its traditional focus on the State and military conflict (Walt, 1991; Santos, 2019). After the Cold War, security began to include non-military threats, including environmental, energy and cyber threats (Vieira, 2014). The securitisation theory proposed by the Copenhagen School has important elements that can help to explain the security situation in the Sahel region. Barry Buzan, Ole Waever and Jaap de Wilde emphasise the importance of discourse in understanding threats (Oliveira, 2019). For example, cooperative, collective and human security are the elements that compel Portugal to participate in international missions (Dias & Freire, 2021; Independent Strategic Reflection Group, 2019, p. 86; Tomé, 2010). Humanitarian security refers to the ability to solve problems related to peace, human security, human rights and dignity. The concepts of security, defence and development are interconnected through this broader concept (Independent Strategic Reflection Group, 2019, p. 86).

2.2. Defense

The concept of defence refers to actions taken to protect against aggression and guarantee security (Saint-Pierre, 2011, p. 412). In addition to military defence, Portugal's 2013 National Defence Strategic Concept (CEDN) mentions the need to mobilise economic, political, technological and psychological resources, among others (Barroso, 2008; National Defence Institute, 2023). Security and defence issues play a crucial role in international relations, underlying military alliances and military-technical cooperation (Bernardino, 2019; Held et al., 1999).

2.3. Development

The concept of development is a priority in global agendas, especially when it involves security and defence (Amaro, 2003, p. 36). For the United Nations Organisation (UNO) (2004), linking security to development is crucial because developing underdeveloped countries contributes to a more secure world. The EU plays a vital role in these efforts by helping partner countries build stable societies (Ferreira, 2018, p. 7; Saraiva, 2019, p. 166). The security-development axis influences global agendas, compelling States and their AAFF to commit to military cooperation programmes, which the Portuguese presence in Africa has proved are an essential tool (Bernardino, 2019, p. 104).

2.4. Cooperation

In international relations, "Cooperation", a concept that has been defined as joint action to achieve common goals, has evolved from realism and idealism to constructivism (Bernardino, 2012, p. 1; Sousa, 2005, p. 53). International security cooperation initiatives such as the EU programmes in Africa are crucial for security, defence and development. Given Portugal's historical and cultural links to the African continent, the country's focus is on multilateralism in the EU and bilateral cooperation, especially with the PALOP[5] and East Timor (Presidency of the Council of Ministers, 2014). Portugal has bilateral relations with two Sahel countries, Mauritania, a member of the G5S (through a bilateral agreement signed in 2010), and Algeria (the most recent agreement was signed in 2016). Multilateralism and bilateral cooperation are essential to Portugal's efforts to improve its international recognition, especially through "bi-multilateral"[6] cooperation in programmes to increase security and development in Africa (Bernardino, 2019, p. 8; Ferreira et al., 2015, p. 67).

The nature of the current security challenges facing Europe requires an integrated approach by all Member States. Therefore, the EU must develop strategies to address these threats.

In its broadest sense, the concept of "strategy" refers to a plan or guideline to deal with a situation (Mintzberg, 1987), using political, economic and military power to achieve national objectives (Couto, 2020, p. 216; Yarger, 2006, p.1). In the Sahel, the EU has adopted a comprehensive approach to security and development, and the region is serving as a test case for its new strategy in Africa (Venturi, 2017, pp. 2-3). At the 6th EU-African Union (AU) Summit, the EU committed to an investment of 150 billion euros to support sustainable and resilient economies in Africa and promote solidarity, security and development (European Council, 2022a). The EU strategy for the Sahel is viewed as a laboratory for experimentation in the implementation of a "comprehensive approach" to address complex challenges in the region (Lucia, 2017).

Portugal should include peace and sustainable development in the CEDN and the national Foreign Policy (FP) for Africa, emphasising the vital role of the AAFF in the country's relations with the PALOP and in the multilateral aspects of the Community of Portuguese Language Countries (CPLP) (Bernardino, 2019, p. 119).

2.5. Military instrument

The military instrument (represented by the AAFF) is a tangible and measurable resource that plays a crucial role in international relations and in pursuing the national objectives (Cortinhas, 2021; Gonçalves, 2016). Over the last decades, the Portuguese AAFF have been used as a FP tool in several contexts in Asia, Africa and Europe (Bernardino, 2019, p. 112), contributing to Portugal's national defence, the protection of national interests and the country's participation in the UN, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and the

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[5] Portuguese-speaking African countries.

[6] A concept defined in 2005 to "promote bilateral cooperation by combining it with multilateral efforts while ensuring that bilateral efforts are coordinated to align with the interventions of third partners." (Presidency of the Council of Ministers, 2005).

international missions of the EU. In 2022, 27.250 soldiers (International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2022) were engaged in international missions that aim to consolidate strategic partnerships and strengthen security architectures in several regions, and especially in Africa (Bernardino, 2019, p. 112; National Defence Institute, 2023, p. 7). The Portuguese AAFF have been engaged in a mission in Mali since 2013, under the framework of the EU and the UN. The crisis is considered a threat to European security, highlighting the need to identify the security challenges and stakeholders in Mali and the Sahel in general.

3. Methodology e Method

This case study addresses the period between 2013, the year in which the Portuguese AAFF were first deployed in the mission, and the end of 2022. The geographical space analysed in the study is the territory of Mali. In terms of content, the study addresses the Portuguese involvement in EUTM Mali from a military (operational) perspective.

Three compatible and distinct specific objectives (SO) were defined to help achieve the GO, and subsidiary questions (SQ) were derived from each. They are outlined in the table below:

Table 1 – Analytical framework

<table>
<tr><td>General Objective</td><td colspan="5">To analyse the involvement of the Portuguese AAFF in EUTM-Mali and identify proposals for a national strategy for the Sahel.</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">Specific Objectives</td><td>Research Question</td><td colspan="4">How does the involvement of the Portuguese AAFF in EUTM Mali contribute to the development of a national strategy for the Sahel?</td></tr>
<tr><td>Subsidiary Questions</td><td>Concepts</td><td>Dimensions</td><td>Indicators</td><td>Data collection technique</td></tr>
<tr><td>SO1 To identify the security challenges for Europe in the Sahel (Mali) and the main stakeholders in the region</td><td>SQ1 What are the security challenges for Europe in the Sahel (Mali) and the main stakeholders in the region?</td><td rowspan="3">Security

Defence
Development

Cooperation

Strategy

Military Instrument</td><td rowspan="3">Security and Development

Military</td><td>Terrorism
Drug Trafficking
Clandestine migrations and human trafficking
Involvement of private military forces
Stakeholders</td><td rowspan="3">Literature review

Interviews</td></tr>
<tr><td>SO2 To analyse the European strategy and Portuguese strategy for the Sahel</td><td>SQ2 What characterises the European strategy and Portuguese strategy for the Sahel?</td><td>Strategies
Bilateral agreements
Multilateral agreements
Participation in missions and military operations</td></tr>
<tr><td>SO3 To interpret the participation of the Portuguese Armed Forces in EUTM Mali</td><td>SQ3 How can we interpret the participation of the Portuguese Armed Forces in EUTM Mali?</td><td>Structure and organization
Portuguese contingents
Posts filled</td></tr>
</table>

Seven officers from the Portuguese AAFF agreed to participate in the study. Their names are listed in Table 2 (interviews).

Table 2 – Interviewees data

Post	Name
Land Forces Commander	Lieutenant General António Martins Pereira
Deputy Director / Chief of Staff of the Military Planning and Conduct Capability at the European Union Military Staff (EUMS)	Lieutenant General Hermínio Teodoro Maio
EUTM Mali Mission Force Commander and Senior National Representative at the TO (December 2019 to June 2020)	Major General João Pedro Rato Boga de Oliveira Ribeiro
EUTM Mali Deputy Mission Force Commander and Senior National Representative at the TO (April 2018 to October 2018)	Brigadier General João António Manuel de Almeida Domingues Varregoso
ATF J3 Staff Officer and Senior National Representative at the TO (April 2014 to October 2014)	Commander FZ José Eduardo Pinto Conde
MFHQ Information Operations (InfoOps) Staff Officer and Senior National Representative at the TO (June 2015 to December 2015)	Lieutenant Colonel (Cavalry) Fernando Luís Ferreira da Silva
MFHQ J6 Chief and Senior National Representative at the TO (August 2021 to February 2022)	Lieutenant Colonel (Signals Intelligence) Gustavo Ferreira Gapo

A review of relevant literature and documents, national and international legislation, and various strategic concepts was conducted to collect data. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with experts with experience in the command of the Land Forces, in the EU's Military Planning and Conduct Capability, in the command of EUTM Mali or as Senior National Representative (SNR) in the Theatre of Operations (TO) in Mali.

A content analysis was performed to process the data, using a methodology for analysing, transcribing, reading, summarising and performing descriptive and interpretative analyses on interviews (Guerra, 2014, pp. 68-86) to confirm the indicators derived from the SQ (Table 1).

4. Analysis and Discussion of Findings

This chapter describes the main security challenges for the EU in the Sahel, and specifically in Mali, as well as the main stakeholders operating in the country.

4.1. The security challenges that Mali poses for Europe

"Europe is in danger, as I have said this many times.
We live in an era of strategic competition and complex security threats."

Josep Borrell, (European Union Military Committee [EUMC], 2023)

In recent years, Europe has faced several security challenges stemming from crises in the African continent. The Sahel region covers a large area in constant change, having recently attracted global attention due to terrorism, human trafficking, drug trafficking and

the presence of armed groups, which could have serious consequences for European security (Dewal, 2021; Helly & Galeazzi, 2015; Rouppert, 2011).

According to the constructivist strand of the Copenhagen School, the threats in the Sahel region are linked to local social, economic and political dynamics, especially in fragile states. Securitising the region has failed to contain these threats because the security discourse of political leaders is not legitimised by their citizens, nor by the insurgent groups that operate there (Cardoso, 2020).

To address the security situation in the Sahel, the EU has focused on improving coordination with political decision makers and on stepping up cooperation with all stakeholder organisations to bring security to the region and normalise peace, as this will help contain the risks and threats before they spread to the European space.

According to some interviewees, the most important security challenges that the situation in the Sahel poses for Europe include terrorism, drug trafficking, human trafficking and migration (H. Maio, Zoom interview, 11 March 2022). Criminal organisations in the region are able to hijack migratory movements to transport drugs across Europe's southern borders (J. Varregoso, email interview, 12 March 2022). Other causes for concern include waves of refugees and migrants in the Mediterranean and Europe, as well as risks for European migrant communities in the Sahel countries (A. Pereira, email interview, 03 April 2022). Vulnerability and instability in the region create ideal conditions for terrorist organisations to emerge and spread, both local and affiliated with global groups such as the Islamic State and Al-Qaeda (J. Ribeiro, email interview, 20 March 2022).

A coalition of major terrorist organisations operating in Mali called Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslim (JNIM)[7] was established in March 2017[8]. It brought together terrorist groups Ansar Dine, AQIM, Katibat Macina, and Al-Mourabitoun, which operate practically in areas of Mali, making it the largest jihadist force in the Central Sahel (International Crisis Group, 2021).

Mali and other Sahel countries face risks such as illicit trafficking, instability caused by Tuareg uprisings, jihadist terrorism and humanitarian crises. This instability can lead to forced migration, human trafficking, terrorism and a surge in drug and arms trafficking, posing challenges to the EU, and experts have recommended that the EU adopt an integrated approach to align its political, security and development strategies in Mali.

4.2. Main stakeholders in Mali

UN's MINUSMA[9] was mentioned by all interviewees as a major stakeholder in the region, and as the largest active multidimensional mission (A. Pereira, op. cit.) working to bring

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[7] The JNIM carried out its first attack on 5 March 2017. The group attacked a military base in central Mali, killing 11 Malian soldiers -https://cisac.fsi.stanford.edu/mappingmilitants/profiles/jamaat-nusrat-al-islam-wal-muslimeen#highlight_text_8222

[8] United by fealty to the Al-Qaeda network, these terrorist groups distinguish themselves other militants who have pledged allegiance to the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria -https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/sahel/mali/306-mali-enabling-dialogue-jihadist-coalition-jnim

[9] United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali [MINUSMA].

stability in Mali (H. Maio, op. cit.). It has a significant contingent and its operations in the territory aim to neutralise attacks by armed groups and provide assistance to the Malian population and government (J. Conde, email interview, 21 March 2022).

The UN mission in Mali was established by resolution 2100 of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) in April 2013. Its mandate is to support the political process and maintain security in the country. When the operation deployed in July 2013, it had a contingent of 6,000 blue helmets. After the transfer of the International Support Mission for Mali (AFISMA[10]), that number increased to 12,600. In 2014, Portugal contributed two AAFF personnel to the mission. Between 2014 and 2020, it deployed an additional 63 soldiers[11] and a C-130 aircraft (Ministerial Order no. 679/2014, 2014b). In 2022, the mission contingent comprised 12,261 soldiers (including two Portuguese AAFF personnel[12]), 1,718 police officers and 1,180 civilians (MINUSMA, 2022). Its main objective was to support the implementation of the 2015 "Algiers Accords" and protect the Malian people (J. Ribeiro, op.cit.).

The EU launched the Sahel Security and Development Strategy (SSDS) in 2011, which initially focused on the development-security dynamic. The strategy set the foundations for the Regional Action Plan 2015-2020, which is still in force today, confirming the EU's continued engagement in the Sahel. The CSDP provides the EU with the operational capacity it requires to conduct military and civilian missions outside Europe's borders (European External Action Service [EEAS], 2022a), contributing to global security, conflict prevention and the protection of European citizens (EEAS, 2022a).

The EU plays a key role in regional security in the Sahel through three CSDP missions[13]: the European Union Capacity Building Mission (EUCAP) Sahel Niger (since 2012), the EUTM Mali (since 2013) and the EUCAP Sahel Mali (since 2014). The EU has made a substantial investment to support the Malian authorities in their mission to protect peace and stability, governance and sustainable development in the country.

EUTM Mali was established in 2013, following the jihadist offensive and French military operation "Serval"[14]. It is a non-executive training and mentoring mission tasked with helping to rebuild the Malian Army. The mission objetive is to train the Malian Armed Forces (MaAAFF) to promote stability and restore power to the government (Tull, 2020, p. 4). The mission has four areas of focus: training, education / mentoring, strategic advice and support to the G5S JF. In 2022, it had a contingent of about 700 troops from 25 countries (22 EU

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[10] AFISMA (African-led International Support Mission in Mali) was a military mission organised by ECOWAS to support the Malian government - https://www.peaceau.org/en/article/afisma-transfers-its-authority-to-minusma

[11] The Portuguese contingent (63 soldiers) participated in the mission between 1 July and 31 December - https://www.emfa.pt/noticia-3017-forca-aerea-integra-minusma

[12] https://www.emgfa.pt/

[13] In addition to the missions in the Sahel, the EU participates in missions and operations in four African countries: the Central African Republic (CAR), Libya, Somalia and, more recently, Mozambique - https://eeas.europa.eu/topics/military-and-civilian-missions-and-operations/430/military-and-civilian-missions-and-operations_en

[14] Operation Serval was launched at the request of the Malian government, with the backing of the UNSC, to halt the advance of Islamic radicals towards Bamako, supported by the MaAAFF and AFISMA troops from Chad and Nigeria - https://www.arquus-defense.com/start-operation-serval

Member States and three non-member States[15]) (EUTM Mali, 2022) working in coordination with the UN and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

Despite the fact that less than half of interviewees mentioned the AU as one of the main stakeholders in Mali, this organisation has played an important role in protecting peace and stability in the Sahel. However, as some interviewees noted, the organisation may face resource constraints and reduce its activity due to a variety of problems (H. Maio, op. cit.). For example, the AU seeks to improve regional security and stability by combining local resources with international support (J. Ribeiro, op. cit.).

The AU[16] is an international organisation with 55 African countries as member states, headquartered in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. It was established formally in 2002 in South Africa (Vela, 2019). In 2014, the AU lauched a strategy for the Sahel. The strategy would be implemented by MISAHEL[17] and its goal was to achieve peace and stability in the region in cooperation with other AU organisations (African Union, 2014; Strydom, 2019; Union Africaine, 2018).

ECOWAS[18], an organisation comprising 15 West African countries, was created in 1975 by the Treaty of Lagos (Economic Community of West African States [ECOWAS], 2022). In 2012, ECOWAS helped the Malian government fight the jihadists operating in the north of the country by enlisting international support and by authorising the deployment of AFISMA through UNSC Resolution 2085 (Alcalde, 2013, p. 2).

There were three coups d'état in West Africa between 2020 and 2022, in Mali, Guinea and Burkina Faso. In Mali, legislative elections triggered a wave of popular demonstrations, leading to the coup of 20 August 2020, which ousted President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita and put a military junta in power (Komenan, 2022, p. 74). In 2022, ECOWAS imposed sanctions on Mali after the junta refused to hold elections and return power to civilians. The sanctions were lifted in July 2022 after the military junta proposed a transition period until it would hand over power in March 2024.

ECOWAS has played a crucial role in the transition process in Mali, which has been supported by the EU when both organisations' interests aligned (H. Maio, op. cit.). ECOWAS is as a regional organisation which, like the AU, wishes to create conditions for regional security and stability by combining local resources with international support (J. Ribeiro, op. cit.).

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[15] The EU Member States involved in EUTM Mali are: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden. The non-member States in the mission are Georgia, Moldova and Montenegro - https://eutmmali.eu/organization/

[16] The AU has a combined territory of 30.3 million km2, spanning the entire African continent, and its goals are African unity and solidarity - https://www.infoescola.com/geografia/uniao-africana/

[17] Mission de l'Union africaine pour le Mali et le Sahel.

[18] The ECOWAS territory covers an area of 5.2 million km2. Its Member States are Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Senegal and Togo. The organisation aims to promote cooperation and integration and set the stage for a future economic union in West Africa that can help raise the living standards of its citizens, maintain and strengthen economic stability, foster relations between member states and contribute to progress and development in the African continent - https://ecowas.int/?lang=pt-pt

The G5S seeks to solve security problems through regional cooperation; currently, its focus is on fighting armed groups and jihadist groups that bring security problems to the region (Sandnes, 2021; Santos et al., 2018, p. 6; Tebas, 2017, p. 4). In 2017, it established a joint military force dubbed "G5S JF" to combat these threats, through which countries share intelligence and cooperate with other actors in the region, such as the UN, the EU or France.

The G5S and its joint force were created to address local challenges in the Sahel. However, it faces considerable challenges because its effectiveness largely depends on local military contributions and international logistical support. The situation could be further complicated by the current state of the relations between Mali and France (J. Ribeiro, op. cit.).

Mali announced its decision to leave the G5S and the Joint Military Force on 15 May 2022 (and did so in 2023), citing as a reason the opposition to a Bamako chairmanship by a member state of the organisation due to Mali's fragile internal political situation. However, the decision was also influenced by France, as the country wishes to isolate Mali; the UN condemned the decision, warning that the country's withdrawal from the organisation would have an impact on stability and security in the Sahel (Deutsche Welle, 2022; Reuters, 2022; Strategic Survey, 2022, p. 328). After Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso also declared that they would withdraw from the G5S and the G5S JF in 2023, and the future security outlook for the region is uncertain.

Most interviewees mentioned France as one of the main stakeholders in Mali. A combination of cultural differences, government mismanagement, terrorism and corruption destabilised the Malian territory, leading France to plan and execute a major operation in the country, "Operation Serval" (Machado, 2017, p. 95).

France's justification for launching Operation Serval to combat criminal activity in West Africa was based on the risks that such activities posed for European security (Almeida, Costa, & Fernandes, 2014, p. 7). Other authors suggest that the operation reflects France's FP, which aims to increase the country's influence in Europe and grant it access to resources (Baig, 2013; Machado, 2017). As a response to a spike in attacks spiked in 2014, France replaced Operation Serval with Operation Barkhane and adapted the strategy to strengthen security in Mali and the Sahel (Charbonneau, 2017). Through Operation Barkhane, France focused its efforts on containing and curtailing the terrorist threat, as well as on helping the Malian governments stabilise and organise the country's governance (A. Pereira, op. cit.).

On 10 June 2021, French President Emmanuel Macron announced the end of military Operation Barkhane. The operation was replaced by a French-led coalition of G5S countries approved at the Pau Summit on 13 January 2020[19], dubbed the Sahel Task Force[20] (Ordinance no. 182/2021, 2021), and its mission is to advise the MaAAFF in the fight against terrorism (North Atlantic Treaty Organisation [NATO], 2021). During the 6th EU-AU Summit, the president of France announced the withdrawal of the French troops from Mali, triggering

[19] At France's request, the NATO Support and Procurement Agency (NSPA) will provide logistical support for Task Force Takuba's operations. This was the first time the agency provided assistance to a coalition that was not part of the Alliance - https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_185374.htm?selectedLocale=en

[20] Task Force Takuba.

a wave of protests in support of the military junta. The military government's plans are to replace the French troops with Russian Private Military Companies (PMC) such as the Wagner Group (WG) (Silva & Vieira, 2022).

In the last 20 years, Russia has adopted an expansionist policy which aims to restore the influence of the former Soviet Union (Benaso, 2021, p. 5). The Sahel countries see Russia as an alternative to accepting the conditions China imposes in exchange for assistance and its difficulty in maintaining order (Herráez, 2019, p. 218). Russia aims to gain political and economic support by selling arms and resources, as the country has a military interest in the "global power competition" (J. Ribeiro, op. cit.). It also aims to influence the Sahel through its political, economic and military interests, using the WG to provide security in exchange for concessions (Arnold, 2019, p. 53). Despite the war in Ukraine, African countries are reluctant to support the West because they depend on autocratic regimes for equipment (Kohnert, 2022, p. 15). The Russian forces in Mali have been criticised for human rights violations (Thompson et al., 2022), which should serve as a warning to the West regarding the risks and the need to strengthen diplomatic partnerships and support local civil society (Latorre, 2022).

Germany has been involved in the efforts to resolve the conflict in Mali since 2013 through its participation in EUTM Mali and MINUSMA. It contributed 494 million euros and 1,100 troops until 2021, after joining the Sahel Alliance[21] in 2017 (Federal Foreign Office, 2021; Federal Foreign Office, 2022; Mirzekhanov & Trunov, 2021, p. 225). When the WG began its operations in Mali, Germany suspended its participation in the EUTM and withdrew from the country (Gridneff, 2022). After France withdrew from Operation Barkhane, Germany extended its participation in MINUSMA until May 2024 and proposed another extension to the Bundestag[22], in order to continue to combat violence in the Sahel and mitigate humanitarian and security impacts (Krippahl, 2022). Germany has pledged to increasing and redefining its development aid and to engage in more systematic and coordinated cooperation with France. This is now more essential than ever given the troubled international climate (Antil & Maurice, 2022; Federal Foreign Office, 2021).

Since 1976, China's efforts have been focused on modernisation and on becoming a global economic power. It has become a major stakeholder in Africa: in 2010, its exports to the continent surpassed Germany's. To acquire the resources it requires, it has built a fishing fleet that operates globally, including off African countries' coastlines (Herráez, 2019, p. 195). China has emerged as an economic, political and security actor in the continent, having implemented its "Going Out" policy since 2001 and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) since 2013 (European Parliament, 2019; Herráez, 2019; Nantulya, 2019). Beijing's interests in Mali reflect the same objectives that China seeks to achieve in the African continent by implementing the BRI (J. Ribeiro, op.cit.).

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[21] The Alliance aims to help the countries of the Sahel restore the foundations of stable societies, in order to promote sustainable development in the region. It has supported and funded more than a thousand projects to date - https://www.alliance-sahel.org/en/

[22] Parliament of the Federal Republic of Germany.

Its relations with Mali address several areas, including the political, sociocultural, economic (it is Mali's fourth largest importer) and security sectors. China's presence in Mali is motivated by its role in MINUSMA, the complexity of the conflict in the Sahel and its interest in securing Chinese state-owned enterprises a role in post-conflict reconstruction in the country (Benabdallah & Large, 2020; Devermount, 2020; Lanteigne, 2019).

4.3. The European Union's strategy for the Sahel

The European Union Global Strategy (EUGS)[23], which replaced the European Security Strategy (ESS), addresses challenges such as instability, terrorism, climate change, illegal migration and cybercrime (Jain & Pandey, 2019; Marcinkowska, 2020; Nunes, 2021). Its goal is to improve the EU's ability to deal with crises, emphasising the role of the European space and multilateralism (Mogherini, 2019; Reis, 2018; Tocci, 2017).

The EUGS complements the CSDP, another essential crisis management instrument (Silva, 2021) that includes civilian and military missions. It has five priorities, including conflict response and the protection of the EU and its citizens (Baltazar, 2021, p. 86; Vieira et al., 2021, p. 119). These missions span three continents and currently engage approximately 4,000 military and civilian personnel from EU countries (EEAS, 2023). Josep Borrell[24], the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the European Commission, has stated that these missions are vital for European and global security because they show that the EU is capable of effective action.

4.3.1. The Strategic Compass

The SC was the culmination of a project that was developed over four European Council Presidencies[25]. Created in June 2020 as an initiative of the Member States, it was approved by the European Council in March 2022.

The SC outlines the main threats and challenges for Europe in the short and medium term, providing a roadmap for the EU's CSDP and setting clear guidelines for EU security and defence for the next five to ten years. The threat assessment process[26] was conducted in November 2020 by the intelligence services of the EU Member States and the European External Action Service (EEAS), and it likely involved the identification of threats, contingencies and possible scenarios (Baltazar, 2021, p. 69).

This initiative rests on four pillars: establishing partnerships to face common threats, responding quickly to crises, investing in capabilities and technologies, and protecting EU citizens. The strategy addresses economic rivalries, geopolitical competition, technological development, disinformation, the climate crisis and regional and global instability (European

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[23] The EUGS aims to respond to external conflicts and crises, develop partner countries' capabilities and protect the EU and its citizens -https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/eu_global_strategy_2019.pdf

[24] In early 2023, the CSDP comprised nine military missions / operations and 12 civilian missions - https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/EU-mission-and-operation_2022.pdf

[25] Germany, Portugal, Slovenia and France.

[26] Classified document.

Council, 2022b). The EU also follows these guidelines in the Sahel, in addition to other strategies for Africa such as the Cotonou Agreement[27] and the Joint Africa-EU Strategy.

4.3.2. The European Union's strategy for the Sahel

Setting up partnerships to address common threats is one of the pillars of the EU SC. This approach has been employed in EU-Africa relations since 1957, the most notable example being the First EU-Africa Summit in 2000 (Ferreira & Oliveira, 2021, p. 1). European and African leaders reaffirmed this partnership at the 6th EU-Africa Summit in 2022, citing a set of common goals: solidarity, security, peace, development and sustainable economic prosperity (European Council, 2022a).

In addition to participating in these summits, the EU has adopted three regional strategies for Africa, including the Sahel Strategy. The strategy, which was originally presented in 2011 and reviewed in 2014, was followed by the Regional Action Plan for the Sahel (2015-2020), which includes civilian and military missions such as EUTM Mali (Cruz, 2021; Pichon, 2020). In 2021, the EU launched a new Integrated Strategy for the Sahel[28] to address the political instability in the region. The strategy focuses on governance, human rights, security, economic and social development, combatting corruption and climate change, and its stated goal is to promote democracy, peace and sustainable development (Alcojor, 2022; Council of the European Union, 2021; European Parliament, 2021a; Freitag, 2021).

Most interviewees agree that the EU's strategy for the Sahel aims to contribute to development and security in the region. The current strategy is theoretically sound and comprehensive, combining different vectors to identify linkages between security and development (J. Ribeiro, op. cit.). On the other hand, Europe's strategy for Mali and the Sahel region aims to support the country develop the government and its institutions, including law enforcement and the AAFF, in order to create the conditions to enforce the state's authority and protect the country's citizens (J. Varregoso, op. cit.).

With regard to the strategy's shortcomings, half of the interviewees mention that it is difficult to understand and that it will not be easily accepted by local stakeholders. The strategy is described as complex, containing a variety of instruments and initiatives that make sense from a European perspective. It was also mentioned that the strategy will only be successful if the Sahel countries (and the region itself) understand it and are involved in its implementation. The strategy has not yielded the desired results, perhaps due to the influence of some States in the design of EU strategies (such as France, whose decision to withdraw the Takuba and Barkhane missions has created a critical gap) (H. Maio, op. cit.). The main issue

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[27] The Cotonou agreement was adopted in 2000, establishing the general framework for the EU's relations with the countries of Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific. The new post-Cotonou agreement will provide a new legal framework that will guide political, economic and cooperation relations between the EU and the 79 members of the Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific States (OACP) over the next twenty years - https://www.consilium.europa.eu/pt/policies/cotonou-agreement/

[27] The EU Council conclusions on this new strategy were adopted by written procedure on 16 April 2021 -https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-7723-2021-INIT/pt/pdf

with the strategy is that it follows a model that is more European than African, which will make it difficult to implement and less likely to be accepted at local level in the medium and long term (J. Ribeiro, op. cit.).

4.4. Portugal's Strategy for the Sahel

4.4.1. Portugal's geopolitical and geostrategic stance

Augusto Santos Silva, the former Portuguese Minister of Foreign Affairs, conceptualises Portugal's FP as a hexagon, rather than a square, as in traditional theories. The policy has two main orientations: internationalisation (economy, language, culture and technology) and multilateralism (adherence to the UN Charter and participation in multilateral organisations). The Portuguese FP is stable, meticulous and complex. While it is aligned with EU and NATO policies, it is also autonomous. The same author illustrates Portugal's geopolitical stance using four concentric circles, which include the EU, NATO, the CPLP, and other regions in Africa, Latin America, Asia and the Arab world. For Portugal, the arc that runs from the Maghreb to Central Asia is strategic to ensure the security of the EU's southern flank and promote stability and coordination in Europe's neighbourhood (Pereira, 2018, p. 276).

Almost all of interviewees agree that Portugal's interests in the Sahel are aligned with Europe's. Portugal's stance is what is expected from a Member State of the EU: its interests largely coincide with Europe's and it is especially alert to the terrorist threat in the Gulf of Guinea and the possibility that it could spread southwards (A. Pereira, op. cit). Portugal's interests are aligned with Europe's, especially regarding the need to stabilise the Sahel to prevent the instability from spreading to neighbouring nations (H. Maio, op. cit; L. Silva, email interview, 28 March 2022; G. Gapo, email interview, 04 May 2022).

Several European States, including Portugal, have interests that align with the EU's, especially regarding the African parts of the Sahel, which are rather different from the Portuguese-speaking African countries, Portugal's more obvious historical and cultural ties (J. Ribeiro, op.cit).

4.4.2. Bilateralism, Multilateralism and Bi-multilateralism

Portugal wishes to strengthen its bilateral relations both politically and economically, especially with Portuguese-speaking countries. Its cooperation agreements are mainly with the PALOP, East Timor and with a member of the G5S, Mauritania (a bilateral agreement was signed in 2010). Non-resident ambassadors in Dakar (Senegal) and Abuja (Nigeria) represent Portugal in other countries in the region (Calmeiro, 2021, p. 29; Moita et al., 2019, p. 198; Presidency of the Council of Ministers, 2014; Teixeira, 2010, p. 59).

Portugal has bilateral relations with Mali as a European State participating in a non-executive EU mission. At this time, there are no other bilateral defence relations between the countries. The Portuguese personnel deployed to the mission have the status set out in the agreement between the EU and Mali, while relations outside that framework follow the same lines as those with countries not bound by common treaties other than the UN Charter (A.

Pereira, op.cit.). The instability in Mali makes it challenging to maintain consistent bilateral relations, not only in defence, but also in the political, diplomatic and economic sectors, which are at the core of relations between States (H. Maio, op.cit.).

Portugal recognises the importance of multilateralism in its foreign policy and is active in international organisations, especially the EU and the UN. Portugal's cooperation strategy has consistently emphasised multilateral cooperation, especially with African nations and less developed countries. It has made efforts to bring Africa to the forefront of the international agenda, and it sees the Sahel as a strategic region due to the security challenges it poses and its role in the region (Ferreira et al., 2015, p. 42; Pereira, 2018).

Most interviewees agree that Portugal's foreign relations are mainly multilateral, and that regarding the Sahel, and Mali in particular, Portugal's relations and interests are not significantly different from the EU's. Even though Portugal does not have a direct diplomatic representative in Mali, it has a diplomatic representative for the Sahel[29] who resides in Portugal and frequently travels to the region. Portugal is also an active participant in the EU's diplomatic representation in Mali, having been involved in all European missions, not only those that operate in the country (J.Ribeiro, op. cit.). The study will focus on these military missions, which use the military instrument as the lynchpin of multilateral cooperation, and on Portugal's involvement, through its Armed Forces, in missions for International Organisations (the UN and the EU), as well as in bilateral cooperation projects in the field of Defence Cooperation (DC) with all the PALOP countries.

The complex crisis facing the Sahel involves various regional and international stakeholders, requiring a dynamic approach that combines bilateral and multilateral relations, that is, bi-multilateral cooperation. The strategy, defined in the "Strategic Vision for Portuguese Cooperation"[30], emphasises the need to boost bilateral cooperation, combined with multilateral efforts, to complement interventions by third partners.

This innovative approach (especially in terms of security and defence) proposes complementarity and sharing of responsibilities among States and regional organisations, "[...] representing a paradigm shift for military cooperation in Africa, which Portugal must know how to capitalise on within the framework of its foreign policy" (Bernardino, 2019, p. 644).

4.4.3. The use of the Military Instrument

The military instrument has been a relevant part of Portuguese PF since the 1990s, with the engagement of the AAFF in NATO, UN, EU and CPLP missions (Presidency of the Council of Ministers, 2013, p. 8). The current Military Strategic Concept states that the country's

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[29] Ambassador José Moreira da Cunha is currently (2024) Portugal's special envoy to the Sahel. He is responsible for monitoring the political and military situation in the region -https://observatoriodomundoislamico.pt/embaixador-jose-moreira-da-cunha-e-do-interesse-de-todos-que-se-verifique-quanto-antes-uma-aproximacao-entre-washington-e-teerao/

[30] The document, which outlines the government's vision of cooperation policy, is a credible mechanism for dialogue with national and international stakeholders - https://www.instituto-camoes.pt/images/cooperacao/visao_estrategica_para_cp.pdf

involvement in EU operations has allowed it to contribute to international peace and security through military cooperation and assistance programmes, which include support to security sector reforms in third countries (Ministry of National Defence [MDN], 2014, pp. 5-7).

In 2022, 20% of Portugal's deployed forces are engaged in EU missions (General Staff of the Armed Forces [EMGFA], 2020, pp. 1-3) such as EUTM Mali, through which they train and advise the MaAAFF (MDN, 2022). The Portuguese AAFF have been involved in EUTM Mali since 2013, having taken command the mission from late 2019 to the first half of 2020. The mission mandate has been renewed five times since its inception[31]. At this time, 15 Portuguese AAFF personnel are deployed in the mission (this number may be increased to a maximum of 17) (MDN, 2022).

After the second half of 2022, 12 AAFF personnel returned to Portuguese territory, only three remaining on the mission. Two more will join the mission in January 2023, after which Portugal will have a total of five AAFF personnel engaged in EUTM Mali (Office of the Minister of National Defence, 2022).

Most interviewees agree that AAFF personnel and capabilities which Portugal has contributed to the mission are proportional to the national interests and resources, and about half of interviewees stated that the contingent is appropriate to Portugal's size. Portugal's contribution is in line with its interests and capabilities (A. Pereira, op. cit.). Portugal has been extremely committed to these missions, beyond what would be expected from a country of its size (H. Maio, op. cit.). Portugal's strategy aims to defend Europe's interests in Mali and the presence of a Portuguese contingent is suited to the national reality (L. Silva, op. cit.).

4.5. EUTM Mali

This chapter begins by describing the historical background and evolution of the mission. Next, it will outline the mission's structure and organisation, as well as the participation of the Portuguese AAFF since the mission was launched.

4.5.1. Background

The conflict in Mali, which began in January 2012, involves insurgent groups such as the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA)[32], which aims to gain independence for the Azawad region, or at least increase its autonomy (Dicke, 2014; EUTM Mali, 2018; Thurston, 2013). The situation of instability was worsened by political and military factors, leading to international intervention (Baudais & Maïga, 2022; Djiré et al., 2017; Francis, 2013; Thurston, 2013).

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[31] On 23 March 2020, after the mission's strategic review, the Political and Security Committee recommended that the mandate of EUTM Mali be amended and extended until 18 May 2024 - https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/PT/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32020D0434&from=EN

[32] The MNLA was founded in October 2011 after meetings in northern Mali, which mainly involved Tuareg communities. Originally, it was formed by various Tuareg groups that had returned from the 2011 rebellion against Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi and deserters from the Malian Defence and Security Forces -https://ecfr.eu/special/sahel_mapping/mnla

The launch of EUTM Mali was authorised on 18 February 2013 by Decision 2013/87/CFSP of the Council of the European Union, with a mandate of 15 months. On 15 April 2014, Decision 2014/220/CFSP of the Council approved an extension of the mission mandate until 18 May 2016 (Ordinance No. 118/2017, 2017, p. 9445). Until that date, EUTM Mali is tasked with training and advising the MaAAFF. EUTM Mali aims to improve the capabilities of the MaAAFF, empowering them to stabilise and restore authority to the Malian government in all areas of the Malian territory (Tull, 2020, p. 4). Two recent military coups, on August 2020 and May 2021, have led to uncertainties regarding international support. In the wake of the 2020 coup, the EU temporarily suspended EUTM and Estonia, France and the US also withdrew their support (The International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2022).

As we mentioned in chapter four, during the Sixth EU-AU Summit, the French president announced the withdrawal of the country's armed forces from Mali, more specifically the forces that were engaged in operations Barkhane and Takuba, after the Malian authorities announced their intention to ousource some services to the WG. This triggered protests in support of the military junta that currently rules the country. Germany also announced its withdrawal for the same reason. EUTM Mali is undergoing a major restructuring and several questions remain open regarding its future. After January 2023, five Portuguese AAFF personnel are expected to join the mission (out of a total of 298 posts), but the current restructuring means that the future of EUTM Mali is uncertain.

4.5.2. Structure and organisation

EUTM Mali, currently commanded by Brigadier General Santiago Juan Fernández Ortiz-Repiso, is on its fifth mandate since 2020. The mission is staffed by about 700 troops from 25 countries (22 EU Member States and three non-member States[33]), who provide training, education and advice to the MaAAFF, based on three pillars: training, education / mentoring and strategic advice (EUTM Mali, 2022). These activities are carried out by the Educational and Training Task Force (ETTF) and the Advisory Task Force (ATF), both of which will be integrated into the new Education & Advisory Task Force (EATF) in January 2023. Spain currently fills 70-75% of the posts in the mission, which reflects its strategic interest in a stable Sahel.

4.5.3. Mandates

EUTM Mali has had several mandates since it was launched in 2013. The first ran from 2013 to 2014. During that period, the mission was tasked with meeting the operational needs of the MaAAFF by providing training and mentoring in coordination with the UN and ECOWAS (Baudais & Maiga, 2022, p. 1; Council of the European Union, 2013; EUTM Mali,

[33] The Member States that contribute to EUTM Mali are: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden. Georgia, Moldova and Montenegro participate as non-member States (EUTM Mali, 2022).

2022; Ordinance No. 116/2013, 2013). The second mandate ran from 2014 to 2016 and had the same mission objective (Baudais & Maiga, 2022, p. 1; Council of the European Union, 2014; EUTM Mali, 2022; Ordinance No. 596/2014, 2013).

During the third mandate (2016 to 2018), the mission's tasks were expanded to include the south bank of the River Niger and providing decentralised support to militarised regions (Baudais & Maïga, 2022, p. 2; Council of the European Union, 2016; Ordinance No. 225/2016, 2016; Ordinance No. 118/2017, 2017; EUTM Mali 2022;). The fourth (2018 to 2020) increased the support provided to the G5S (Baudais & Maiga, 2022, p. 2; Council of the European Union, 2016; EUTM Mali, 2022; Ordinance No. 225/2016, 2016; Ordinance No. 118/2017, 2017). After a strategic review, the mission was extended until May 2024, its area of operations was expanded to the entire Malian territory. It was also authorised to provide military assistance to the G5S countries and its budget was significantly increased (Council of the European Union, 2020; EUTM Mali 2022).

4.6. The contribution of the Portuguese Armed Forces

4.6.1. Contingent

The Portuguese AAFF have been involved in EUTM Mali from 2013 (the year the mission was launched) to 2022, having engaged a total of 132 soldiers from the three branches of the AAFF (Figure 1). The largest contributor has been the Portuguese Army, with Army personnel accounting for 59.1% of the force. The mission faced challenges due to the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), which it addressed by preparing response plans and planning temporary reductions in personnel.

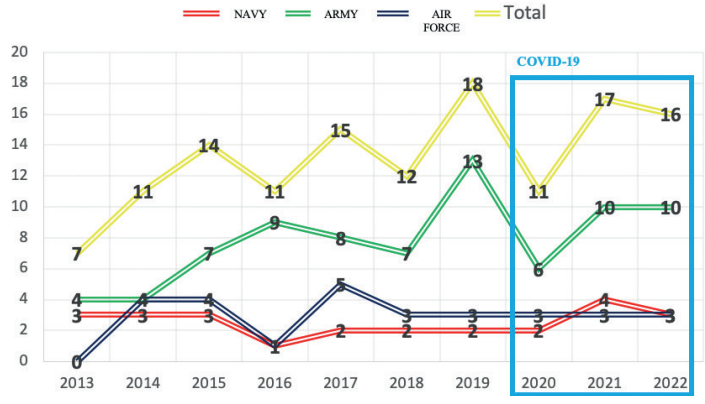

Figure 1 – Portuguese contingent in EUTM Mali

Most interviewees believe that the contribution of the Portuguese AAFF to EUTM Mali is proportional to the country's interests and resources. About half state that the contingent is appropriate and proportional to Portugal's size. Portugal's commitment to the missions is noteworthy, going beyond what would be expected but remaining proportional to its size

(H. Maio, op. cit.). The national contingent is appropriate both in quantitative and qualitative terms, contributing to Portugal's recognition (J. Ribeiro, op. cit.), serving its interests and matching its resources (A. Pereira, op. cit.).

4.6.2. Mandates and posts

The Portuguese AAFF joined EUTM Mali in 2013, when the National Security Council (CSDN) approved their involvement in the mission (Ordinance No. 116/2013, 2013). The Portuguese contingent was deployed for a period of 15 months, which could be extended for the same period of time until the end of the mission. It consisted of seven AAFF personnel (one GS Officer stationed at Mission Force Headquarters (MFHQ); one Long Range Firing Instruction Team with six soldiers, which alternates with a Hungarian team stationed in Segou-Markala). In 2014, during the second mandate, the Portuguese contingent was increased to 12 AAFF personnel (Ordinance No. 596/2014, 2014a). A total of 11 soldiers from the three branches were engaged in the mission in 2014, which increased to 14[34] in 2015.

For the third mandate (Ordinance No. 225/2016, 2016; Ordinance No. 118/2017, 2017), Portugal maintained the same force numbers, with 11 soldiers in 2016 and 15 in 2017. During the mandate, on 18 June 2017, Staff Sergeant Gil Fernando Paiva Benido (who was appointed "MFHQ - J6 IT Supervisor") died following the tragic events at "Le Campement Kangaba"[35], becoming the first Portuguese casualty in EU operations and missions.

The fourth mandate (Ordinance No. 301/2019, 2019) began on 18 May 2018. Portugal remained committed to the EU's efforts with regard to the objectives set for EUTM Mali, filling 12 posts in the mission's staff during 2018. However, Portugal's participation was slightly reformulated when it was offered the "Deputy Mission Force Commander" post as part of the Portugal-Spain bilateral support agreement, and when the Tactical Air Control Party Training Team (TACPTT) was replaced by another PoAF team comprising two soldiers ("SME Air FusCo") who were tasked with training military personnel to defend the MaAAFF air bases.

As we can see in Figure 1, Portugal contributed the most troops to the mission in late 2019, during the fourth and fifth mandates, when it took command of the mission at Spain's request, engaging 18 AAFF personnel. The EUTM Mali is generally headed by the countries that contribute the most troops, which makes it difficult for Portugal to take on leadership roles due to the size of its contingent. A larger contribution could be more in line with national interests in security and stability, especially when it serves as mission leader (J. Ribeiro, op. cit.).

Still during the fifth mandate, Portugal contributed 11 AAFF personnel in the 2nd semester of 2020 and 17 in 2021-2022. As mentioned above, as of January 2023, Portugal is expected to contribute to five soldiers to EUTM Mali, who will be stationed at the MFHQ.

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[34] This number is justified by the rotation of military personnel during the same calendar year.

[35] The Le Campement Kangaba Hotel was recognised and authorised by EUTM Mali as a place where military personnel on mission in the TO could rest and recover between periods of operational activity -https://expresso.pt/politica/2017-06-19-Militar-portugues-morre-no-Mali

The revised mission plan (EEAS, 2022b) set out the new terms of the mission, reducing its staff to a total of 298 troops on the Crisis Establishment List (CEL[36]).

From 2013-2022 (Figure 2), the majority of filled posts were in the ETTF located in the KTC (a total of 79, or 59.8%). The maximum number of filled posts was in 2021 (11, or 13.9% of the total number of posts in the ETTF). Portugal's total contribution to the MFHQ was 27.3%. From 2019-2020, during its command of the mission, Portugal held 10 posts in the MFHQ (27.7% of the total number of posts in the MFHQ), while its contribution to the ATF was lower (a total of 12.9% of available posts).

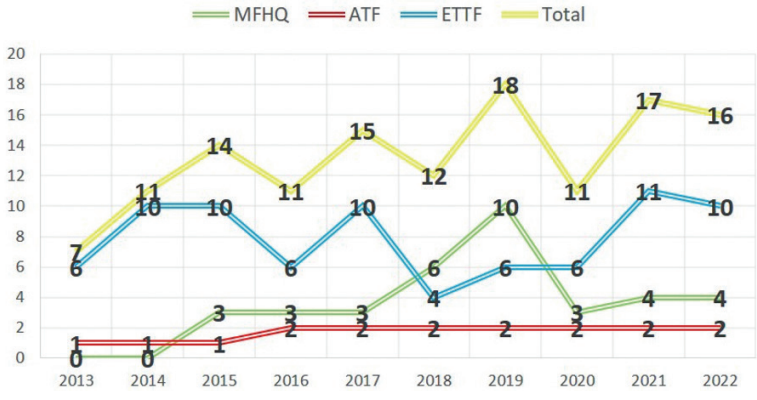


Figure 2 – Posts held by Portuguese AAFF personnel in EUTM Mali

4.6.3. AAFF officers deployed to the mission

As Figure 3 shows, Portugal has contributed 69 officers from the three branches of the AAFF (52.3% of its total personnel). Most (43) are from the Portuguese Army (PoAr) (62.3% of deployed personnel).

In November 2019, by Decree of the President of the Republic no.83/2019 (2019, p. 3) "Infantry Colonel João Pedro Rato Boga de Oliveira Ribeiro was appointed Commander of the European Union Training Mission in Mali for a period of six months, [...]", with the respective GS (having already held the position as Brigadier General). Portugal's term at the helm of the mission started on 12 December 2019 and ended on 12 June 2020.

Commanding the EUTM Mali force was of great significance for Portugal's recognition and relevance. Even with a small contingent, the opportunity to lead the mission allowed Portugal to "punch above its modest size" (H. Maio, op. cit).

As Figure 4 shows, of the officers who participated in the mission, 29 (67.4%) were Senior Officers from the PoAr, which means that most posts were in the MFHQ. The Portuguese

[36] The EUTM-Mali session of the EU Force Generation conference on 8 November 2022 was considered a failure because only 213 posts were filled (71%).

Navy (PoNa) and PoAF officers were First Lieutenants / Captains (72.7% in the PoNa and 53.3% in PoAF), and the PoAF also contributed junior officers (40%).

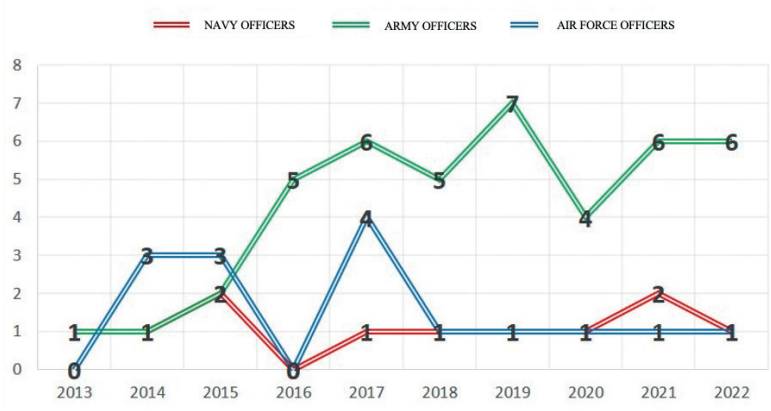
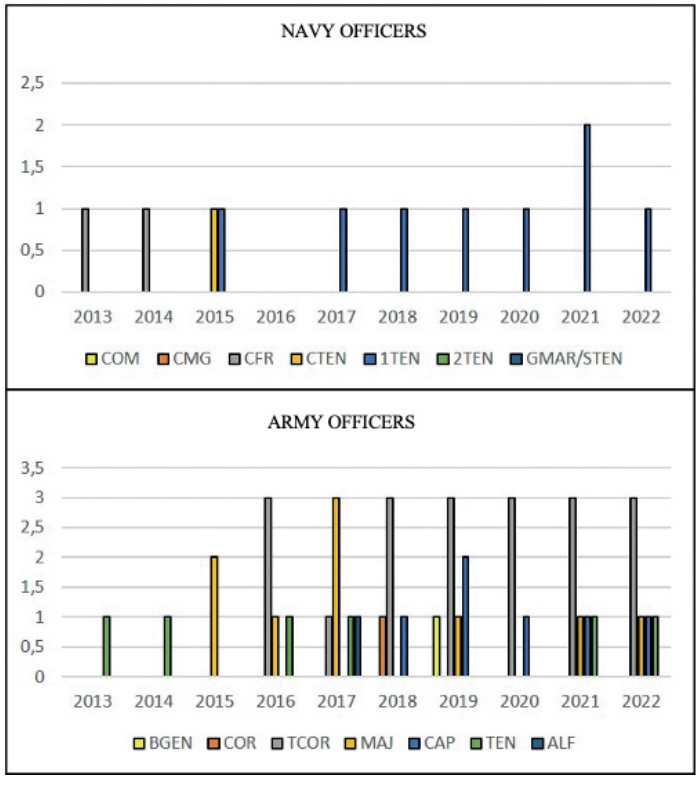


Figure 3 – Portuguese AAFF Officers deployed to EUTM Mali



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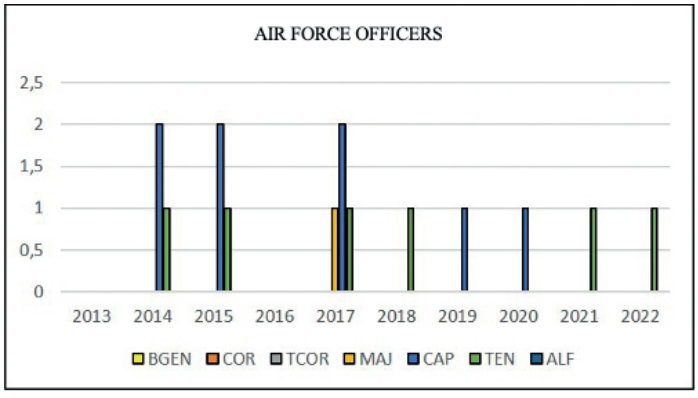

Figure 4 – PoNa, PoAr and PoAF officers deployed to EUTM Mali

4.6.4. AAFF Sergeants assigned to the mission

The Sergeants category (Figure 5) of the Portuguese AAFF contributed 58 personnel (43.9%), almost as many as the Officers category. Again, the PoAr contributed the most personnel (31 personnel, or 58.4%). The other branches' contribution was more modest, about 23% in both cases (Figure 6). All military personnel in the Sergeants category occupied posts in the ETTF, with the exception of the "MFHQ - J6 IT Supervisor" position, which was held by a PoAr SCH /SAJ stationed at the MFHQ since 2015, as well as the "MFCdr Protection Detachment" post, which was filled by 1 Army seargeant in the MFHQ during Portugal's

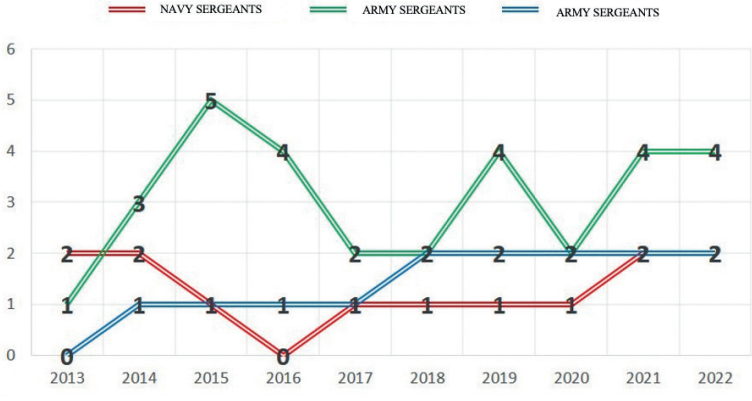

Figure 5 – Portuguese Sergeants deployed to EUTM Mali

Figure 6 – PoNa, PoAR and PoAF Sergeants deployed to EUTM Mali

period as mission commander in 2019-2020.

4.6.5. AAFF privates deployed in the mission

The privates category is the least represented, with only five soldiers (3.8%) deployed since the mission was launched, four from the PoAr (2 in 2013 and 2019) and 1 from the PoNa (2016) (Figure 7). With regard to their roles, since the AAFF were first involved in the mission, in 2013, the PoAr privates have helped train the "Sharpshooter Training Team" at

the ETTF. In 2016, the only private from the PoNa held the post of "501 - Mobile Training Task Force / Sharpshooter Sniper", also at the ETTF. In 2019, during the Portuguese command of the mission, the two PoAr privates were assigned to the Force Protection detachment of the

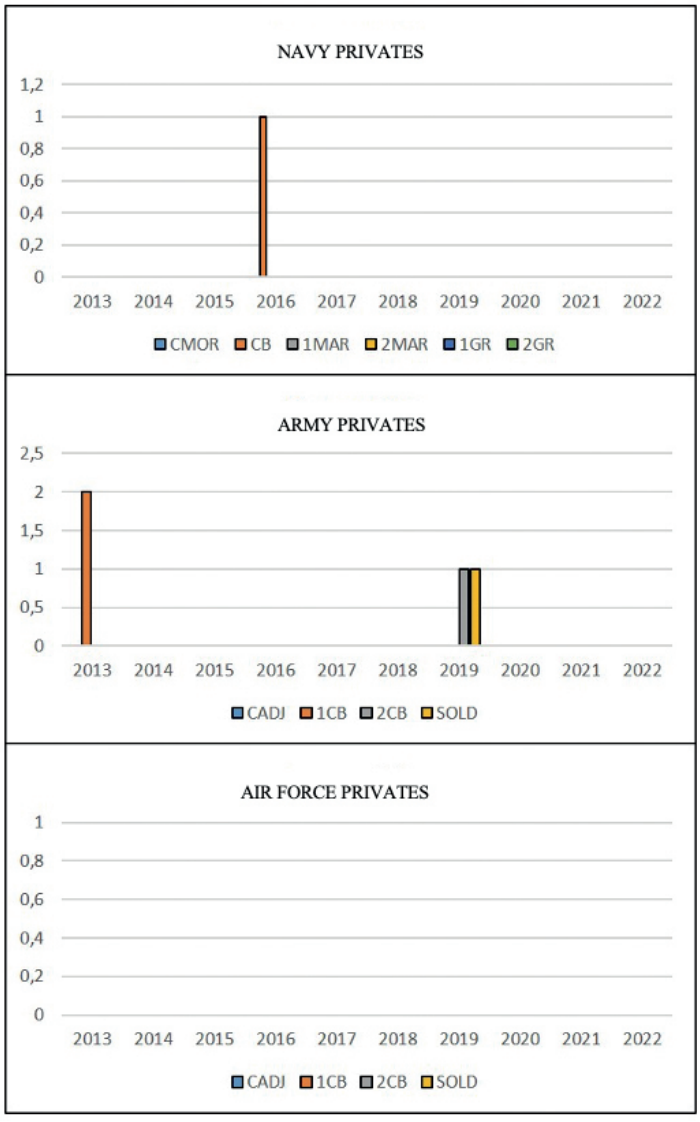

Figure 7 – PoNa, PoAr and PoAF privates deployed to EUTM Mali

Mission Force Commander at MFHQ.

5. Conclusions

The EU considers the Sahel strategic because the security challenges facing the region can pose a risk to the EU Member States. The EUTM-Mali is part of the EU's approach to

stabilising Mali by providing training, education, strategic advice and support to the G5S JF. The involvement of the Portuguese AAFF in this non-executive EU mission began in 2013, the same year the EUTM-Mali was launched. In late 2019, Portugal took command of the mission for one semester. It was during this period that Portugal's contribution through the military instrument was most significant.

This study used a deductive reasoning methodology, a case study research design and a qualitative strategy. The data collection instruments were a literature review which mainly included primary sources, national and international legislation and strategic concepts, complemented by semi-structured interviews with seven military experts with experience in the command of Land Forces, in the EU's Military Planning and Conduct Capability, in the command of EUTM-Mali or as SNR in the Mali TO.

Three SOs, each with a corresponding SQ, were derived from the main research objective – "To analyse the involvement of the Portuguese AAFF in EUTM-Mali and identify proposals for a national strategy for the Sahel".

With regard to SO1 – to identify the security challenges for Europe in the Sahel (Mali) and the main stakeholders in the region – the answer to SQ1 is that the main security challenges that Europe faces due to the situation in the Sahel, and especially in Mali, are drug trafficking, illegal migration, human trafficking and terrorism. This highlights the need for a comprehensive integrated EU approach to align common political, security and development goals. The UN, EU, AU, ECOWAS and G5S are major stakeholders in the region. France, a country that has long been committed to combatting the terrorist threat, announced the withdrawal of its forces, while Russia and China are emerging as strategic competitors in the region. To protect its interests, the EU must mount a coordinated response.

With regard to SO2 – to analyse the European strategy and Portuguese strategy for the Sahel –, the answer to SQ2 is that Europe's strategy for the Sahel (under the framework of the CSDP) is implemented through the EUGS, which shows that the EU is taking a comprehensive approach to combating global threats. The SSDS, one of three regional strategies for the Sahel, was reviewed in 2014. The document states that military and civilian cooperation is essential to support security sector reforms. In light of recent incidents, the EU has developed a new integrated strategy for the Sahel, which includes stepping up coordination with political decision makers and regional security cooperation.

Regarding the national strategy for the Sahel, Portugal has had a consistent approach aligned with the EU, NATO and the CPLP, prioritising peace, security and institutional capability building in Africa. Portugal's main bilateral cooperation agreements are with the PALOP countries (the country does not have a resident representative in the Sahel). It actively participates in EU missions such as EUTM Mali, with a contingent that is both significant and proportional to the national reality, and it has committed to a multilateral approach to deal with the region's security challenges. Bi-multilateral cooperation with G5S countries and various stakeholders is one possible way to address the complex crisis facing the Sahel. Portugal is a relevant actor, with 20% of its AAFF engaged in EU missions, and a significant

involvement in a strategic area of the world, the Sahel.

With regard to SO3 – to interpret the participation of the Portuguese Armed Forces in EUTM Mali –, the answer to SQ3 is that Mali has been plagued by constant conflict with political origins since 2012, leading to a series of uprisings that plunged the country in political chaos and allowed rebel groups to consolidate their presence in the north of the territory and expand southwards towards Bamako. In late 2022, EUTM Mali began its fifth mandate and underwent a major restructuring after France announced that the withdrawal of its AAFF, with Germany following suit. The restructuring involved personnel cuts for 2023 and raised several questions about the mission's future.

Portugal contributed a total of 132 troops from 2013-2022. This contribution is deemed appropriate and proportional to the size of the country and its AAFF, whose members held important posts in the EUTM Mali staff during its five mandates, including in the MFHQ. This representation is in line with the national interests and resources. Portugal's involvement in the mission should be interpreted in the wider context of the country's commitment to the EU's CSDP missions. The country is clearly a relevant, visible contributor to this type of mission, since it has been at the helm (and still is in some cases) of all other EU missions with the exception of EUTM Somalia.

The above analysis accomplishes the GO and provides an answer to the RQ: Portugal's military involvement in EUTM Mali has served to support the State's FP and to help the country meet the international commitments undertaken by the EU, especially through humanitarian and peacekeeping missions such as the one addressed here. By being involved in this mission, Portugal participates in multilateral cooperation. Given the country's size, its contributions show that it is a committed partner, a producer of regional and international security, with the credibility to influence decisions on Africa within the organisations to which it belongs. This study's main contribution to knowledge is that it provides a detailed (and previously non-existent) interpretation of the involvement of the Portuguese AAFF in EUTM Mali, the relevance of the national role within the Mission, and, consequently, within the EU. The number of personnel deployed to the mission during the time frame under study is considered appropriate to the size of the country, showing its commitment and dedication and increasing its credibility and recognition on the international stage.

In her 2023 State of the Union speech, Ursula von der Leyen stated that the EU is currently under pressure to reassess its approach to security in the Sahel, both from within and from the region's nations. However, the EU Member States have not reached a consensus regarding the future of the missions and partnerships in the region, and a formal decision on a new strategy has not yet been made, despite the meetings of foreign ministers that took place in December 2023. In spite of the uncertainty that a strategic review at European level represents for the Sahel, Portugal has kept a contingent in Mali and the Sahel region, proportional to its size and resources. It is recommended that it continues to take this strategic stance in order to help citizens in need and to assert itself as a credible, present actor who is recognised at international level, contributing to security and development in the region and, indirectly, to a more secure Europe.

The main limitation of this research was that the data on the Portuguese AAFF contribution to EUTM Mali is scattered in different documents, making it difficult to organise and collect information for statistical analysis.

Future studies may examine the involvement of the Portuguese AAFF in the other EU CSDP missions on the African continent, correlating them with the national strategies for those regions, based on an innovative bi-multilateral vision to provide a holistic, informed and organised overview of the topic.

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