Parallel Legitimacy Dynamics
A Comparative Case Study of Serval/Barkhane and MINUSMA

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Abstract

This comparative case study examines how parallel deployments impact on UN peace operations’ legitimacy. It focuses on if and how the two French military operations, Serval and Barkhane, affected the legitimacy of MINUSMA. A theoretical framework on relational dynamics of parallel deployments and on legitimacy was established. The first step was to analyze the legitimacy of Serval/Barkhane. Thereafter, the relational dynamics between Serval/Barkhane and MINUSMA were analyzed. Last step was discussing how the legitimacy of respective military operation and the relational dynamics could explain the parallel legitimacy dynamics. Using assessment reports by different institutions, a qualitative within-case analysis was conducted to identify changes in legitimacy. The study shows that both Serval and Barkhane had a negative impact on MINUSMA’s legitimacy but in different ways. Serval affected the legitimacy negatively by creating high expectations that MINUSMA could not fulfill. Barkhane affected the legitimacy negatively by making the UN peace operation seem partial due to its association with the counterterrorist Barkhane.

Keywords: Parallel deployments, relational dynamics, parallel legitimacy dynamics, Operation Serval, Operation Barkhane, MINUSMA
# Table of Contents

1. **Introduction** ................................................................. 5  
   1.1. Research Problem ..................................................... 5  
   1.2. Aim and Research Question ........................................ 6  
   1.3. Disposition .............................................................. 7  

2. **The Conflict in Mali** .................................................... 9  
   2.1. Historical Context of the Conflict in Mali ....................... 9  
   2.2. Root Causes of the Conflict in Mali .............................. 10  

3. **Theoretical Framework** ................................................ 11  
   3.1. Relational Dynamics of Parallel Deployments ................... 11  
   3.2. Legitimacy ............................................................. 13  
   3.3. Hypothesis ............................................................ 16  

4. **Previous Research** ..................................................... 18  
   4.1. Parallel Deployments ............................................... 18  
   4.2. Peacekeeping Legitimacy ........................................... 19  

5. **Research Design** ........................................................ 21  
   5.1. Structured Focused Comparison .................................... 21  
   5.2. Comparative Case Study ............................................ 21  
   5.3. Within-Case Analysis .............................................. 22  
   5.4. Case Selection ....................................................... 22  
   5.5. Operationalization .................................................. 24  
   5.6. Selection of Empirical Data ...................................... 25  
   5.7. Reliability and Validity ............................................ 26  

6. **Empirical Analysis** .................................................... 28  
   6.1. Serval and MINUSMA ................................................. 28  
      6.1.1. Serval’s Legitimacy ............................................. 28  
      6.1.2. Relational Dynamics between Serval and MINUSMA ........ 30  
      6.1.3. Parallel Legitimacy Dynamics between Serval and MINUSMA 31  
   6.2. Barkhane and MINUSMA .............................................. 32  
      6.2.1. Barkhane’s Legitimacy ......................................... 32  
      6.2.2. Relational Dynamics between Barkhane and MINUSMA .... 34  
      6.2.3. Parallel Legitimacy Dynamics between Barkhane and MINUSMA 36  
   6.3. Discussion ............................................................. 36  

7. **Conclusions** ............................................................. 39
1. Introduction

In this chapter, the context of parallel legitimacy dynamics is introduced. The research problem as well as the aim and research question of this study is presented, followed by the disposition.

1.1. Research Problem

The initiation of United Nations peacekeeping took place in 1948 when the Security Council granted authorization for the deployment of UN military observers to the Middle East. In total, the UN has undertaken over 70 peacekeeping operations, including the participation of hundreds of thousands of military personnel, along with tens of thousands of UN police and other civilians coming from over 120 countries (UN Peacekeeping 2023a).

UN peacekeeping is based on three principles: (1) consent of the parties, (2) impartiality, and (3) non-use of force, except in self-defense and defense of the mandate (UN 2008, 31). For the past decades, the nature of UN peacekeeping has been changing and adapting in response to emerging challenges. Initially intended to assist in peace agreements and inter-state ceasefires, contemporary peace operations have undergone a transformation over time. The focus has increasingly shifted towards dealing with intra-state conflicts, fragile or failed states, and scenarios marked by the asymmetric use of force, often involving violent extremist groups. The emergence of multidimensional peace operations in the 1990s exemplified this evolution, as it brings together the military and civilians while progressively broadening its scope to encompass human-rights monitoring, institutional capacity building, protection of civilians, the robust application of force, state-building, and stabilization (Day 2023, 1; UN Peacekeeping 2023a).

Furthermore, a new notable trend within peace operations is parallel deployments. Parallel deployments refer to two or more simultaneous peace operations independently deployed in the same conflict (Balas 2011, 393-395). These include deployments by individual states, ad hoc coalitions, private military companies, and regional organizations (Bellamy and Williams 2005, 158 & 167; Dahir et al. 2020, 5). Since the end of the Cold War, the UN Security Council has authorized or acknowledged over forty parallel deployments operating alongside UN peace operations. These parallel complex relationships have become a more common feature of UN peace operations where they partner up with or seek support from national or regional non-UN forces (Labbé and Boutellis 2013, 540-541). Africa is the region with most UN peace operations as well as parallel deployments. The conflict in Mali did, for instance, attract multiple parallel deployments (Klobucista and Ferragamo 2023).

The relational dynamics between parallel deployments have been discussed in terms of competitors and partners. Future research is, however, needed to explore further the importance of these relationships.
Previous research often considers parallel deployments within the same country or conflict separately, represented as individual cases. If only one deployment is being examined at a time, the other parallel deployments are excluded from the analysis even though the relational dynamics between them influences the outcome (Diehl and Druckman 2018, 43). It is, therefore, important to study the relational dynamics between parallel deployments and how it affects the perceived success or failure. This goes hand in hand with the broader prominent question among researchers - “Does UN peacekeeping work?”.

Furthermore, legitimacy has been identified as one of the six key ‘success factors’ in the fundamental principles and guidelines for UN peacekeeping operations. It contends that for UN peace operations to be successful, they must be seen as legitimate, both in the eyes of the local population and the international community (UN 2008, 36). In the context of peacekeeping, legitimacy refers to the perceived and accepted authority, justification, and credibility of a peace operation by various actors, (Weigand 2017, 360-361). The legitimacy of peace operations depends, for instance, on the conduct of their personnel. Cases of sexual exploitation, abuse, or serious misconduct are factors that diminishes legitimacy (United Nations 2008, 36-37). A peace operation lacking legitimacy will most likely not receive any support from the host population, posing significant challenges for fulfillment of the mandate and fostering peace and security (Bellamy and Williams 2005, 173). In turn, if a parallel force's actions are viewed as illegitimate, it can impact the legitimacy of other forces negatively. This presents a particular risk for UN peace operations and their effectiveness in fulfilling their mandate, especially when deployed alongside non-UN actors with distinct agendas and approaches, such as a counterterrorist mandate. This risks UN operations to be perceived as partial (Novosseloff and Sharland 2019, 21-22; Dahir et al. 2020, 3 & 6).

In summary, while there is considerable research and literature about peacekeeping legitimacy, there remains a gap on how legitimacy is affected in more complex dynamics. Rather than investigating whether the actions of UN peace operations increase or decrease their own legitimacy in a linear manner, I will examine how a parallel deployment can affect the legitimacy of an UN peace operation.

1.2. Aim and Research Question

This thesis seeks to contribute to the research on parallel deployments and peacekeeping legitimacy by combining these two concepts. I will examine how a parallel deployment can affect the legitimacy of an UN peace operation based on their relational dynamics¹. I believe the case of the UN peace operation MINUSMA² (2013-2023) is of special interest because it has been deployed in parallel with two French

¹ Hereafter referred to as parallel legitimacy dynamics.
² Hereafter referred to as MINUSMA.
counterterrorist military operations: Operation Serval\textsuperscript{3} (2013-2014) which was considered as a success and Operation Barkhane\textsuperscript{4} (2014-2022) which was considered as a failure. The two different outcomes will hopefully contribute with nuances of the understanding of parallel legitimacy dynamics. In order to analyze this concept in the case of Serval/Barkhane and MINUSMA, I will perform a comparative case study with a within-case analysis. The first step will be to analyze the legitimacy of Serval. Thereafter, the relational dynamics between Serval and MINUSMA will be analyzed. Last step will include a discussion of how the legitimacy of the military operations and the relational dynamics between them and MINUSMA can explain the parallel legitimacy dynamics. The same steps will be repeated in the case of Barkhane. The aspiration is to provide an answer to the following research question:

- In what ways did the French military operations Serval and Barkhane affect the legitimacy of the UN peace operation MINUSMA?

Two hypotheses are formulated regarding the parallel legitimacy dynamics based on the chosen cases. The hypotheses derivate from previous research stating that 1) counterterrorist forces deployed in parallel to UN peace operations affect the latter negatively by making them perceived as partial, and 2) if a parallel force is seen as legitimate, it will most likely to impact the other parallel force positively (Novosseloff and Sharland 2019, 21-22; Dahir et al. 2020, 3 & 6; Labbé and Boutellis 2013, 552-553). Consequently, this leads to the hypotheses in the following order:

\textit{H1:} Serval impacted the legitimacy of MINUSMA positively because of its perceived legitimacy and success.

\textit{H2:} Barkhane impacted the legitimacy of MINUSMA negatively because of its perceived legitimacy and failure.

1.3. Disposition

The thesis is structured as following – the first chapter presents the research problem, aim and research question, and the disposition. The second chapter describes the background to the conflict in Mali: the historical context and the root causes behind the conflict. The third chapter explains the theoretical framework: relational dynamics of parallel deployments and legitimacy. The fourth chapter gives an overview of previous research on parallel deployments and peacekeeping legitimacy. The fifth chapter discusses research design and the methodological approach which includes a structured focused comparative case study with a within-case analysis. The process of selection of cases, operationalization,

\textsuperscript{3} Hereafter referred to as Serval.
\textsuperscript{4} Hereafter referred to as Barkhane.
and selection of empirical data are also described, including the assessment of reliability and validity as well as limitations. The sixth chapter provides the empirical analysis and discussion of the findings regarding parallel legitimacy dynamics. The seventh chapter describes the conclusions of the analysis with some suggestions for future research. Lastly, references are listed.
2. The Conflict in Mali

In this chapter, necessary background information is presented in order to answer the research question. It includes the historical context of the conflict in Mali and the root causes.

2.1. Historical Context of the Conflict in Mali

Mali stands as one of the poorest and most aid-dependent nations in the world. After being a French colony since the late 1800s, Mali gained independence in 1960. The country underwent a transformation into a socialist one-party state. However, with Dictator Moussa Traoré in power from 1968, the ensuing decades were marked by unrest and conflicts. Demands for democracy and multiparty rule emerged in the late 1980s, leading to Traoré's ousting in a military coup in 1991. In 1992, a new constitution was adopted through a referendum, and Alpha Konare was elected as the country's president. From 1992 until a military coup in 2012, the country maintained a relative stable democracy (Landguiden 2023).

Throughout the 1990s, several conflicts unfolded between the government and the nomadic Tuareg people in northern Mali. The Tuaregs claimed marginalization by the government and sought the establishment of Azawad, a region in northern Mali, as an independent state. Even if several peace agreements were negotiated during the 1990s between Mali's government and the Tuaregs, dissatisfaction grew as promised changes were not materialized. This discontent led to the formation of the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA) in 2011 by separatists, including the Tuaregs and other northern groups. The MNLA later allied with Islamist groups that also sought political changes in Mali (Globalis 2022).

After the fall of the Gaddafi regime in 2011, many Tuaregs who had been residing in Libya for several years returned to their home countries. Numerous Tuaregs who traveled to Mali had military experience, bringing weapons and vehicles from the Libyan conflict. This influx became a significant reinforcement for rebel groups in Mali, contributing to the escalation of the conflict. The alliance between the separatist group MNLA and Islamist factions triggered a rebellion against the government in January 2012. Because of the government’s inability to address the uprising, the authorities lost control which resulted in the overthrow of President Amadou Toumani Touré. MNLA declared the northern half of Mali as a new and independent state - Azawad. This rebellion was the catalyst for the ongoing conflict in Mali (ibid).

MNLA and various Islamist factions shared the view of the government as their common enemy but disagreed on the vision for the new state in the north. One prominent Islamist organization, Ansar Dine, was not necessarily advocating for an independent state but aimed to implement Sharia law across Mali.
As government forces were ousted from the north, a conflict erupted between MNLA and the Islamists, with the Islamists emerging victorious. During the summer of 2012, different Islamist groups took control of major cities in the north, such as Kidal, Gao, and Timbuktu. Subsequently, they imposed their Islamist laws in those areas. In January 2013, the Islamists attacked the capital Bamako which posed a direct threat to the Malian authorities, prompting them to seek international assistance to halt the attacks by the Islamist groups. This is when Serval was deployed, which later on was replaced by Barkhane, and MINUSMA (ibid).

2.2. Root Causes of the Conflict in Mali

The causes of the conflict in Mali are largely rooted in the weakness and lack of legitimacy of the state, particularly among the population in the northeastern parts of the country. One of the prominent accusations is corruption. Dissatisfaction and power vacuums have given rise to uprisings, creating additional complications. Much of the violence has emerged from local disputes over resource distribution, where the authorities lack strong authority. The ongoing violence has gradually spread to new areas, contributing to terrorism and the establishment of new armed groups (Globalis 2022).

Other factors driving the conflict include a significant incentive to control trade routes in the north. Large quantities of drugs smuggled to Europe from Latin America pass through these regions in Mali. Arms and human trafficking have also generated economic gains for some. Those who profit from controlling these areas have both the will and the power to oppose various peace initiatives that threaten their power and revenue sources. They support rival armed groups dependent on illegal trade. Parts of the government are also involved in the illicit trade, fostering corruption and increased distrust in society (ibid).
3. Theoretical Framework

In this chapter, the theoretical framework is presented: the theory of relational dynamics of parallel deployments and legitimacy. These theories are my lenses in order to analyze parallel legitimacy dynamics and answer my research question. In addition, my hypotheses are presented.

3.1. Relational Dynamics of Parallel Deployments

Peacekeeping literature has been focusing on regionalization which refers to the relationship between the UN and regional arrangements in relation to international peace and security. However, that does not capture a more complex phenomenon involving more and more actors, such as individual states, ad hoc coalitions, private military companies, and regional arrangements (Bellamy and Williams 2005, 158 & 167; Dahir et al. 2020, 5). A new trend can be seen in peace operations with multiple simultaneous peace operations (MSPOs). Balas (2011) introduced this concept which refers to two or more peace operations deployed in the same conflict by various actors. There are three forms of MSPOs: sequential, parallel, and hybrid deployment of troops. The most frequent MSPOs are parallel deployments which refers to two or more simultaneous peace operations independently deployed in the same conflict. These operations are distinguished by the autonomy of each organization from the other international organization. Each retains military and political control over its own resources, the utilization, the timing, and the associated costs. The two peace operations operate in parallel, either in distinct regional areas with interconnected conflicts or in different functional domains (Balas 2011, 393-395). Typically, they articulate similar stated objectives, but their command structures differ, and there are varying degrees of overlap in their activities (Hellquist and Sandman 2020, 17). The increasing prevalence of parallel and intertwined mandates is emerging as a common aspect of UN peace operations as they collaborate with non-UN forces at the national or regional level. Mali is such an example (Diehl and Druckman 2018, 28; Labbé and Boutellis 2013, 540-541; Moe 2021, 10).

Balas continues to argue that it is essential to analyze peace operations through the lenses of MSPOs. The concept is useful to understand relational dynamics in peace operations and analyze their effectiveness. He argues that this concept is more useful than peacekeeping partnerships because it does not assume that there has to be cooperation between peace operations. It rather leaves the issue for further exploration whether they are considered partners or competitors (Balas 2011, 384 & 390; Novosseloff and Sharland 2019, 26). In addition, Hellquist and Sandman (2020) go further and identify three forms of engagement within peacekeeping partnerships: coexistence, coordination, and cooperation, and discuss whether, how, and under what conditions they create any synergies between the different military actors (Hellquist and Sandman 2020, 9-10). The theoretical framework of relational dynamics between parallel deployments will, thus, be built on the combination of
Novosseloff’s and Sharland’s theory of partners and competitors as well as Hellquist’s and Sandman’s theory of the pyramid of engagements: coexistence, coordination, and cooperation. This thesis will utilize these categories when analyzing the empirical data in order to answer the thesis question.

**Competitors**
In some contexts, UN peace operations and parallel forces may not work together, rather compete toward each other. This could result from differing mandates, conflicting strategic objectives or interests, a reluctance to cooperate among mission leaders and ground commanders, inadequate coordination and consultation at the strategic level, or a preference for international and local visibility over collaboration (Novosseloff and Sharland 2019, 24).

**Partners**
Parallel forces frequently serve as valuable allies to UN peace operations. In numerous instances, the temporary deployment of parallel forces has strengthened a peace operation, enhancing its ability to fulfill its mandate more effectively. According to Hellquist and Sandman, partnership can be divided in terms of coexistence, coordination, and cooperation, to show nuances of their relational dynamics (Hellquist and Sandman 2020, 18-19).

**Coexistence**
Coexistence pertains to either passive or active acceptance of the presence of the other actor, without engaging in direct mutual interactions. This could be the case when, for instance, both peace operations have been invited to intervene in the conflict and there is a clear division of labor due to different mandates.

**Coordination**
Coordination requires missions to harmonize and adapt their activities in consideration of the presence of other actors. Coordinative efforts may involve two peace operations assisting each other with resources and in executing specific tasks, such as logistical support, medical care, and evacuation, without assuming overall responsibility or ownership. Information-sharing would also be considered a coordination between the parallel actors.

**Cooperation**
Cooperation involves a shared project in which all participants are stakeholders and collaborate towards a shared objective. This would mean sharing responsibilities, risks, and rewards, such as joint combat operations, camp protection, and mutual training.
3.2. Legitimacy

Initially, legitimacy theories have aimed to comprehend the reasons behind why the state is deemed deserving of the obedience and support of the subordinate society (Mersiades 2005, 207). The social-contract theories put forth by Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau aimed to rationalize and define political authority based on individual self-interest and rational consent. By contrasting the benefits of organized government with the presumed drawbacks of the state of nature, these theories explained why and under what circumstances government becomes advantageous and should, therefore, be willingly embraced as a voluntary obligation by all reasonable individuals. These conclusions were then condensed into the concept of a social contract, from which it was believed that all fundamental rights and duties of citizens could be logically inferred (Munro 2023).

Beetham (1991) asserted that the essence of legitimacy is its contribution of a moral aspect to the decision to support and obey the state, going beyond mere rational choice. This quality benefits the state by fostering a more cooperative and productive population, reducing the resources required for maintaining order, and enhancing resilience. In the case of foreign military interventions, legitimacy elucidates why a society might endorse and comply with a foreign armed force intervening in its affairs (Beetham 1991, 16 & 28). Weigand (2017) argues that legitimacy can also be applicable in a conflict-torn space, beyond the context of state-citizen relationships. Armed conflicts do not occur within the institutionalized structures, rather outside of them. The state is often engaged in the conflict with armed opposition groups, whether referred to as insurgents, militias, rebels, or terrorists. In this dynamic context, the assessment of legitimacy becomes more complex because of the presence of multiple points of reference, diverse audiences, and various potential sources of legitimacy. Legitimacy, thus, refers to the perceived and accepted authority, justification, and credibility of a peace operation by the various actors (Weigand 2017, 360-361).

*International legitimacy*

Peacekeeping extends beyond international boundaries; it operates at the intersection of global and local political spheres, addressing diverse actors from the global to the local levels with all their own perception of what legitimate peacekeeping is. Acknowledging their dual role as agents of both international and local governance, peace operations require legitimacy on both these fronts and need to balance them. International legitimacy is crucial for authorizing, staffing, and funding peace operations. Therefore, peace operations must be perceived as a legitimized tool for international security, otherwise, their necessity would be undermined (Whalan 2017, 308 & 314; Mersiades 2005, 207-208).

International legitimacy of a peace operation can be defined by two connected and mutually supporting factors: political consensus and legality. Political consensus involves the agreement or acceptance of the international community and the host government on the need for a peace operation. Together with
legality, political consensus significantly shapes the legitimacy of the operation's mandate. Typically, a peace operation is established after the conclusion of a legal peace agreement among conflicting parties. The mandate of the operation represents the authority granted to engage in activities that aid the post-conflict state in transitioning to sustainable peace, outlining its broad objectives. Debates on the legitimacy of the mandate primarily center on questions of the right to intervene, the appropriate actor for the task, and the timing and methodology of the operation. Consequently, factors tied to the mandate, including its legal basis, included functions, alignment with the host country's needs, the entity granted the mandate, and its execution, can influence the legitimacy of a peace operation (Wiharta 2009, 96-97; Bellamy and Williams 2005, 173-174). According to the UN, the international legitimacy of peacekeeping operations stems from its establishment through a mandate granted by the UNSC, the primary authority for maintaining international peace and security. The extensive representation of Member States contributing personnel and funding to UN peace operations enhances this international legitimacy. Additionally, the impartial and esteemed international figure of the UN Secretary-General, who oversees UN peace operations, further reinforces the commitment to upholding the principles and purposes of the Charter (United Nations 2008, 36).

Consequently, compromising the legitimacy can directly endanger the whole peace operation. An operation considered illegitimate by the international community is less likely to contribute to international peace and security. This is due to the lack of international validation for the outcomes of the operation (Bellamy and Williams 2005, 171). However, what confers legitimacy on peace operations at the international level may not necessarily grant legitimacy at the local level. In fact, it might have the contrary effect and delegitimize the operations (Whalan 2017, 314).

**Local Legitimacy**

Local legitimacy is a subjective perception or attitude that varies among different groups of actors (Sabrow 2017, 162). The local legitimacy of peace operations pertains to the degree to which the presence, actions, and objectives of the peacekeepers are acknowledged as suitable and essential by the local actors within the deployment area. Peacekeepers achieve legitimacy when they are perceived as such by the local actors. In addition, demonstrating that peacekeeping policies learn from past errors and adapt to new contexts is also an important factor (Wiharta 2009, 96-97; Whalan 2017, 308-309 & 316).

The legitimacy of peace operations hinges on the conduct of its military, police, and civilian personnel. There should be zero tolerance for sexual exploitation, abuse, or serious misconduct. Historical evidence suggests that the perceived legitimacy may wane if the peacekeepers’ presence becomes a source of local resentment or if the operation is unresponsive during stabilization. Peace operations must respect national sovereignty, promote local ownership, acknowledge emerging capacities, and be mindful of
their impact on the local population. (United Nations 2008, 36-37). A peace operation lacking legitimacy is unlikely to gain support from the host population, posing significant challenges for its personnel to fulfill their mandate and foster enduring peace and security (Bellamy and Williams 2005, 173).

According to Sabrow (2017), legitimacy can be categorized into two types: ideological and pragmatic legitimacy. Ideological legitimacy pertains to identification of the entity conducting an operation and its underlying motivations, while pragmatic legitimacy relates to the perceived results of the operation (Sabrow 2017, 162-163). In other words, local legitimacy depends on whether the peacekeepers align with local beliefs, values, and norms, along with the objectives and accomplishments of the mandate, especially in terms of security (Karlborg 2014, 429).

Nevertheless, local legitimacy should be viewed as an evolving process in which peacekeepers undergo continual cycles of legitimation and delegitimation by local actors. The perspectives and perceptions of peace operations by local actors are likely to change over time (Whalan 2017, 313). In addition, peacekeepers function within fractured societies characterized by diverse groups each harboring their own objectives and beliefs. Consequently, the absence of a local consensus on peacebuilding strategies within such divided contexts may diminish local legitimacy (Mersiades 2005, 207-208).

In practical terms, attaining local legitimacy often involves peacekeepers aligning with the local perspective and acquiring knowledge about the specific languages, cultures, politics, and histories of the host society. Their intentions should prioritize the local actors, emphasizing accountability to them. As a result, local legitimacy increases the likelihood of local actors endorsing and assisting the peace operations. While coercion and inducement are alternative reasons for local actors to cooperate and comply, legitimacy is perceived to generate higher-quality cooperation as it is based on the belief in the necessity of a specific peace operation (Whalan 2017, 312-315).

The proximity between peacekeepers and local actors, thus, plays a significant role in shaping their perceptions of each other and the level of trust established. Meaningful interaction between the two parties is crucial for acquiring mandate-relevant information, both in terms of quantity and reliability. A small distance implies a greater understanding of each other's perspectives, fostering empathy, and cultural awareness through shared languages, practices, and norms. This, in turn, builds trust and facilitates effective communication. The reduced information asymmetry enhances cooperation and the protection of civilians, contributing to more successful peacekeeping endeavors. However, it's important to note that if there is a lack of trust between local actors and peacekeepers, the flow of information may be restricted, adversely affecting the peace operation's outcomes. Simultaneously, a small distance may also give rise to perceptions of partiality and bias towards the peace operation, potentially impeding peacebuilding efforts and delegitimizing the peace operation. Consequently, local actors may be more
inclined to undermine and resist the peacekeepers in such circumstances (Bove et al. 2020, 148-149 & 184-185; Whalan 2017, 312-316; Sabrow 2017, 165). Hence, certain scholars posit that the foreign nature of peacekeeping might enhance local legitimacy. This suggests that local actors may be more receptive to the presence of international troops, particularly those from geopolitically neutral countries. There is a perception that troops from neutral nations are seen as more impartial, solely dedicated to accomplishing their mandate, thereby augmenting local legitimacy (Whalan 2017, 315-316).

However, it is common for former colonial powers to engage in an intervention that places it in a complex position. On the one hand, it is a nation with geographical, economic, political, and social differences from the host country. Former colonial powers are, thus, likely to establish pragmatic legitimacy due to its robust capacities and operational efficiency. Being first-world nations, they generally have the financial means to deploy well-trained troops and ample equipment. Additionally, they are not constrained by the need to coordinate extensively with other states, leading to improved operational efficiency. On the other hand, historical ties exist between the two nations due to their colonial past, such as a shared official language and cultural elements. An intervention by a former colonial power gives rise to dual narratives — one portraying it as an "old friend" extending assistance and another depicting it as an external intruder. However, the narrative of a neo-colonial intruder with strategic interests is likely to prevail due to the traumatic colonial experience, thus diminishing the ideological legitimacy (Sabrow 2017, 167-169).

3.3. Hypothesis

Previous research states that parallel deployments with counterterrorist mandates affect the UN peace operations’ legitimacy negatively by being perceived as partial (Novosseloff and Sharland 2019, 21-22; Dahir et al. 2020, 3 & 6). Based on this theory, the logic conclusion would be that MINUSMA was perceived as biased during both French counterterrorist military operations. However, Serval was considered a success while Barkhane was considered a failure. The success and failure can be translated into the terms of legitimacy. Previous research also states that if a parallel force is seen as legitimate, it is most likely to impact the other parallel force positively (Labbé and Boutellis 2013, 552-553). This leads to the following two hypotheses:

H1: Serval impacted the legitimacy of MINUSMA positively because of its perceived legitimacy and success.

H2: Barkhane impacted the legitimacy of MINUSMA negatively because of its perceived legitimacy and failure.
In conclusion, this would mean that MINUSMA started its mandate with high legitimacy during Serval while ending with weak legitimacy during Barkhane, resulting in being asked to leave the country by the Malian interim government (Nichols 2023).
4. Previous Research

In this chapter, the previous research is presented: parallel deployments and peacekeeping legitimacy.

4.1. Parallel Deployments

Moe (2021) discusses the negative consequences of collaboration and convergence among international organizations and intervention frameworks in Mali, specifically in relation to the protection of civilians (PoC). She highlights that such collaboration can weaken PoC, contrary to common assumptions that it enhances peace and security. The study argues that the convergence between peacekeeping and counterterrorism efforts in Mali has led to a prioritization of counterterrorism objectives over PoC. This prioritization has resulted in a decrease in the effectiveness of peace operations in safeguarding civilian lives (Moe 2021, 21-24).

Brosig (2010) explores the conditions that trigger the choice of inter-organizational cooperation in peace operations in Africa, specifically between the African Union (AU), the European Union (EU), and the UN. The case study based on the parallel deployment of EU and UN personnel in Chad and the Central African Republic (CAR) shows that the choice of cooperation was primarily influenced by international political circumstances, limited military capabilities of the EU, and dominant national preferences of France. The issue of legitimacy did not play an essential role in the parallel deployment, given that both operations were established by the UN simultaneously in response to the worsening humanitarian conditions in Chad and the CAR (Brosig 2010, 337-340).

Dahir et. al (2020) argue that in the best case scenario, parallel deployments thrive on comparative advantages and complementarity, encompassing legitimacy, rapid deployment, and regional political influence. Conversely, at the worst case scenario, they may lead to competition, partiality, operational confusion, and conflicting strategic objectives (Dahir et al. 2020, 1). UN peace operations tend to work best alongside parallel forces when they are delivering on different mandates, complement one another, and have limited overlap in their areas of operation (Novosseloff and Sharland 2019, 26). Zimmerman (2022) agrees that when the UN and parallel forces operate with separate mandates, they often generate military synergies but encounter political tensions. Specifically, when peacekeepers depend on parallel forces for military assistance, the UN may face challenges in accomplishing its long-term political objectives. On the other hand, when parallel forces are explicitly tasked with supporting UN initiatives, the UN can more effectively utilize its relationship with parallel forces to attain both political and military goals (Zimmerman 2022, 58). UN peace operations and parallel forces tend to face the most challenges when deployed alongside counterterrorism forces. Actions taken by a counterterrorist parallel force may impose political limitations on the UN, such as its capacity to interact with specific armed
groups targeted by the parallel forces, potentially compromising political negotiations that contradict the UN principles (Novosseloff and Sharland 2019, 26; Dahir et al. 2020, 6).

4.2. Peacekeeping Legitimacy

Research on legitimacy has generally avoided more complex dynamics. Schoon (2017) argues that linear models are commonly employed in the analysis of legitimacy, such as when examining how specific insurgent behaviors (X) impact the assumptions and perceptions of the civilian population (Y). Although there is abundant evidence indicating that X can lead to variations in Y, there is also evidence suggesting that Y can influence X, especially when considering the evolution of insurgencies over time. Instead of insurgents implementing strategies independently of their broader environment, their behaviors are often shaped and constrained by the responses of their audiences. Therefore, Schoon investigates the impact of legitimacy dynamics by analyzing the conflict between the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) and the Turkish Government. Concentrating specifically on the period from 1975 to 1993, during which the PKK sought to establish legitimacy within Turkey’s Kurdish population, the analysis illustrates the interplay among the PKK’s strategies for legitimacy-building, Turkey’s counterinsurgency approaches, and civilian perceptions of the PKK. The reciprocal influence of each actor’s response led to a dynamic process, reshaping expectations and conditions for legitimacy over time. As the conflict progressed, the mechanisms shaping perceptions of legitimacy and illegitimacy also evolved (Schoon 2017, 735 & 738).

In a context with parallel deployments, some researchers raise the topic of impartiality. As previously mentioned, one of the principles of UN peacekeeping is impartiality (UN Peacekeeping 2023b). However, if a parallel force’s actions are viewed as illegitimate, it can impact the legitimacy of other parallel forces negatively. If an UN peace operation is deployed in parallel to a counterterrorist military operation, it can affect the way they are perceived by local actors, often as partial (Novosseloff and Sharland 2019, 26; Dahir et al. 2020, 6).

Labbé and Boutellis (2013) examined how the perception of UN humanitarian actors is shaped by the way the UN political or peacekeeping component is viewed. In the present UN-led humanitarian coordination system, this assertion could potentially extend beyond UN humanitarian actors to encompass all humanitarian aid agencies operating under the overall guidance of a UN Humanitarian Coordinator. The perception of humanitarian agencies by local communities, local and national authorities, and the conflicting parties plays a pivotal role in securing humanitarian access and ensuring the safety of aid personnel. Similar to the direct engagement of UN peacekeepers in combat, the UN’s collaborations with non-UN security forces involved in a conflict undoubtedly influence the perception of the UN’s political and peacekeeping component. If support is granted to security forces that are widely seen as legitimate, it is likely to impact positively on the humanitarian organization, provided it meets
at least some expectations in terms of security. However, even in this ideal situation, strictly from a humanitarian standpoint, such support inherently takes sides by favoring one party over the others in a conflict. This contradicts the imperative of impartiality and neutrality emphasized for humanitarian actors (Labbé and Boutellis 2013, 552-553).
5. Research Design

In this chapter, the methodology is presented: a structured focused comparative case study with a within-case analysis where primary and secondary sources are used. Detailed descriptions of the selection of the cases, operationalization, and the selection of empirical data are presented. A discussion regarding reliability and validity as well as limitations is provided.

5.1. Structured Focused Comparison

This thesis uses the structured focused comparison (SFC) method to explore how parallel deployments affect the legitimacy of UN peace operations depending on their relational dynamics. The reasoning behind the choice of this method derives from the two central characteristics of the method itself. First, it is structured in the sense that it requires the researcher to formulate a set of specific criteria/categories/questions directed to each of the cases to guide and standardize the data collection. It has to be the same set of criteria/categories/questions in order to enable a systematic research process that can deliver comparative results. Second, it is focused because it requires the researcher to centralize the research on particular elements of the cases or phenomenon, such as the correlation between the relational dynamics in parallel deployments and legitimacy. The structured and focused aspects of the method should be grounded in and reflect the research objective and the theoretical focus of inquiry (George and Bennett 2005, 71-73 & 86). Arguably a qualitative in-depth study allows me to explore the broader spectrum of the concepts: relational dynamics of parallel deployments and legitimacy, as they are relatively fluid and challenging to code dichotomously without diving into the nuance it holds. There is also a pragmatic aspect of justifying the qualitative in-depth approach. Even though the subject of parallel deployments and legitimacy in peacekeeping has been growing for the past decades, there is still a lack of data to perform a quantitative large-N study and it would also be very time consuming.

In relation to this research, structured focused comparison has been chosen as a tool for analyzing the cases because it contributes with a transparent methodological structure that has the potential to contribute to a focused analysis of parallel legitimacy dynamics.

5.2. Comparative Case Study

This thesis will conduct a comparative case study between the cases of Serval and MINUSMA, and Barkhane and MINUSMA. First, a case study is defined as an “intensive study for the purpose of understanding a larger class of (similar) units” (Gerring 2004, 342). An alternative definition characterizes it as a detailed examination of a distinct aspect within a historical event, aimed at either validating or formulating historical explanations that could be generalizable and applicable to other
cases. Both definitions underscore the notion that a case study typically forms a component of a broader category of units, rather than representing an isolated phenomenon (Paterson 2010, 972). Case studies are particularly effective in addressing questions related to "how" and contribute value when the research aim involves theory development (Rowley 2002, 16). The ambition is to understand and capture how parallel deployments affect the legitimacy of an UN peace operation depending on their relational dynamics.

The advantage of a case study lies in its capacity to provide a thorough examination that encompasses completeness, intricate details, richness, and a comprehensive understanding, all contributing to the explanations presented (George and Bennett 2005, 51). Following, a comparative case study will allow me to examine in rich detail the context and features of two or more instances of the chosen phenomena. Comparison is, thus, treated as a “controlled” approach which allows for the exploration of similarities, differences, and systematic patterns, based on a predetermined classification of cases. Comparability is, therefore, essential and the driving force when selecting cases (Campbell 2010, 175).

5.3. Within-Case Analysis

To be more precise, this study will conduct a within-case analysis, which involves a thorough examination of a specific case to identify how patterns and processes either substantiate, undermine, or advance (a) a chosen theory or (b) the propositions derived from a literature review of the case. Consequently, this research aims to ascertain how these patterns and processes contribute to, challenge, or enhance the theories related to parallel legitimacy dynamics (Paterson 2010, 972). As a result, this research will adopt a deductive approach, progressing from the general to the specific. This approach proves beneficial for testing and developing the mentioned theories in new contexts (Rule & John 2015, 5-6). Conducting a within-case analysis in a comparable case study is of interest as it provides an opportunity for a thorough exploration of the data within the chosen case. This, in turn, facilitates the identification of distinctive patterns and attributes specific to this case, potentially yielding new explanatory insights into the phenomenon (Paterson 2010, 972). While examining multiple cases through the framework of a theory has a drawback, as it could lead to biased conclusions aimed at theoretically validating a case, the primary objective is to identify gaps in and develop existing theoretical understanding rather than affirming the theories (Woodwell 2017, 162).

5.4. Case Selection

This thesis discusses parallel deployments which in majority have taken place in Africa. The conflict in Mali is usually brought up as an example of parallel deployments where several actors have been active during the same period (Klobucista and Ferragamo 2023). Two of the actors were France, with its
military operations Serval (2013-2014) and Barkhane (2014-2022), and the UN peace operation MINUSMA (2013-2023). Since previous research regarding parallel dynamics and legitimacy focuses on UN peacekeeping and counter terrorist military operations, MINUSMA and the French operations were elected as actors to further develop the theory.

This thesis compares how Serval affected the legitimacy of MINUSMA depending on their relational dynamics with the case of Barkhane. The two French military operations are interesting as parallel actors in relation to MINUSMA because Serval was followed up by Barkhane, however, the perceived legitimacy and outcomes of the operations were different. Serval was seen as successful while Barkhane was seen as a failure. This allows me to analyze the parallel legitimacy dynamics in different contexts.

The cases are comparable because both cases have the same actors: the UN and France. MINUSMA is constant while the sequential French operations Serval and Barkhane are similar in many aspects. Both operations took place in a highly complex context, primarily within Mali, even though Barkhane had a wider geographical focus including the whole Sahel region (Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger). Furthermore, both operations had the counterterrorist objective of addressing the threat posed by jihadist groups in the Sahel amongst others. Since both operations were led by France, both have the same colonial legitimacy that might affect the legitimacy of the operations (Assemblée Nationale 2021).

Following, the cases are different when it comes to time span. Serval only lasted one year (2013-2014) while Barkhane lasted 8 years (2014-2022). Barkhane started small but expanded and became a large operation with a larger amount of troops and included a larger area compared to Serval. However, the primary focus was still Mali where the terrorist activities were more prevalent (Assemblée Nationale 2021). In addition, AFISMA was the peace operation before MINUSMA that started in 2013, some months after Serval was deployed. This means Serval was first interacting with AFISMA before being deployed in parallel with MINUSMA (Zimmerman 2022, 64). I am, however, interested in parallel deployments’ interactions with UN peace operations and, therefore, I selected MINUSMA as a parallel force. Another key factor was the change of the French President. Francois Hollande was replaced by Emmanuel Macron in 2017 (Ray 2023). However, this means Barkhane started operating under the same President as during Serval. This proves that the French security policies initially were not too different between the French military operations.

For a comparative case study, the ideal is to use homogeneous analysis units (Esaiasson et al. 2017, 103). However, it is difficult to categorize the many types of parallel forces. No two have been the same. They have included deployments by individual states, ad hoc coalitions, private military companies, and regional organizations (Bellamy and Williams 2005, 158 & 167; Dahir et al. 2020, 5). It is, therefore, difficult to find completely matching cases to compare with. There are always other factors that
distinguish the cases (Esaiasson et al. 2017, 103). Despite this, I argue that these cases will provide a good insight of the nuances in parallel legitimacy dynamics.

5.5. Operationalization

The within-case analysis will start with the case of Serval and MINUSMA. First, the legitimacy of Serval will be described based on the formulated theoretical framework on legitimacy, see Figure 1. Legitimacy will, thus, be divided into two categories: international legitimacy and local legitimacy. International legitimacy is further divided into two sub-categories: political consensus and legality. Local legitimacy is divided into the two sub-categories: ideological legitimacy and pragmatic legitimacy.

Second, I will describe what relational dynamics Serval and MINUSMA had based on the formulated theoretical framework on relational dynamics of parallel deployments, see Figure 2. Relational dynamics will be divided into two categories: partners and competitors. Partners will further be divided into three categories: coexistence, coordination, and cooperation.
Third, I will analyze how Serval affected the legitimacy of MINUSMA based on their relational dynamics. This will be performed by examining the perceived legitimacy of Serval and the relational dynamics in relation to how MINUSMA’s legitimacy was perceived and changed.

I will repeat this process with the case of Barkhane and MINUSMA. I will, thereafter, compare the two cases in order to try and answer my thesis question on how the legitimacy of parallel deployments can affect the legitimacy of an UN peace operation depending on their relational dynamics. This will also allow me to test whether my two hypothesis $H1$ and $H2$ can be confirmed or rejected.

$H1$: Operation Serval impacted the legitimacy of MINUSMA positively because of its perceived legitimacy and success.

$H2$: Operation Barkhane impacted the legitimacy of MINUSMA negatively because of its perceived legitimacy and failure.

5.6. Selection of Empirical Data

There are numerous studies regarding peacekeeping legitimacy and less about relational dynamics in parallel deployments. However, there are even less sources regarding the combination of the concepts of relational dynamics in parallel deployments and legitimacy, such as parallel legitimacy dynamics.
Therefore, this study will be built in relation to the theories connected to the concepts, previous research, and current evaluations of Serval, Barkhane, and MINUSMA.

I will use both primary and secondary sources. The primary sources will include documents published by institutions such as the UN and the French assembly. The secondary sources will include evaluations from e.g. Swedish Defence Research Agency (FOI) and the Effectiveness of Peace Operations Network (EPON), and previously published research articles from the scientific search database Anna Lindh. I used different combinations of the keywords to distinguish between the available sources: *Legitimacy*, *Parallel Deployments*, and *Peacekeeping*. The difficulty with an electronic search database is that the keywords have to be carefully selected in order to find relevant sources (Desai & Potter 2006, 212).

I used inclusion and exclusion criteria in order to narrow down my selection of research articles. I decided that my sources for empirical findings have to be written in either English or French. Extra criteria for the research papers is that they have to be scientific and peer-reviewed which proves the reliability of the sources. In addition, I also examined the chosen research articles’ reference lists in order to trace back to original sources, find reports, and search for other relevant researchers on this topic.

5.7. Reliability and Validity

The within-case analysis will allow me to receive deep understanding of the individual cases while the method of SFC and comparative case study will help me to identify patterns, relationships, and generalizable findings. The combination allows for a thorough examination of the specific details and broader context of each case, as well as the identification of differences and commonalities across cases. The integration of these methods enhances the reliability of the research findings.

Since this is a multiple case study, more specifically two cases, the weakness is that I will not be able to generalize to a larger extent which lowers the external validity. How Serval and Barkhane respectively impacts the legitimacy of MINUSMA depending on their relations dynamics can only indicate a possible correlation between parallel deployments and legitimacy. Generalizability is not necessarily the purpose either (Gerring 2004, 348). However, most parallel deployments are located in Africa which has similar context. Thereby, external validity is not compromised to the same extent.

Moreover, analyzing legitimacy can present several challenges and difficulties in research. One difficulty is the subjective nature of legitimacy, as it is often based on perceptions and interpretations of various actors. Legitimacy can vary across different cultures and places, adding complexity to the analysis and interpretations of findings. Legitimacy also has a dynamic nature which means it can
change over time. Making an extensive study of legitimacy is not my purpose, rather find the general views of the parallel deployments to study the legitimacy dynamics between them. All views of the parallel deployments will, thus, not be included. Instead, legitimacy is discussed in broader terms as mentioned in the chosen evaluation reports.

The availability and reliability of data on legitimacy can also pose challenges as it may be difficult to access or measure certain aspects of legitimacy as well as distinguish between different dimensions of legitimacy. In order to, for instance, study the local legitimacy, it would be a better approach to be able to perform extensive interviews. However, I did not have that possibility and, therefore, have to base my analysis on empirical data that has already been collected by someone else, such as evaluation reports. This might undermine the reliability of my data, however, the authors of the reports are authorities such as the UN, FOI, and EPON which in turn increases the reliability.

Another challenge is the lack of a universally agreed-upon definition and measurement of legitimacy and relational dynamics of parallel deployments which are two concepts that can be very fluid and subjective. Therefore, I have gone through previous research regarding the concepts in order to establish a clear theoretical framework with the chosen definitions and categories that will be used in this thesis presented in the 4.5. *Operationalization* section. This will facilitate the concrete observation of chosen concepts.
6. Empirical Analysis

In this chapter, the empirical findings on parallel legitimacy dynamics in the case of Serval/MINUSMA and Barkhane/MINUSMA are presented. Thereafter, a final discussion is provided in order to answer the research question and test the hypotheses.

6.1. Serval and MINUSMA

The case of Serval and MINUSMA is divided into three sections: Serval’s legitimacy, relational dynamics between Serval and MINUSMA, and parallel legitimacy dynamics between Serval and MINUSMA.

6.1.1. Serval’s Legitimacy

The Sahel region has since long been of strategic interest for France. The 2008 French White Paper on Defense and National Security identified the Sahel region to be a critical area (Assemblée Nationale 2013). The French interests in Mali have primarily been both economic and security-related (Boeke and Schuurman 2015, 806). For instance, Niger is one of the top six countries in producing uranium (Wisevoter 2023) and has been an important exporter of uranium for France’s nuclear power plants (Paren 2023).

International Legitimacy

Political Consensus

In 2012, under President François Hollande’s leadership, France responded promptly to the escalating crisis in Mali. The President Hollande addressed the situation in Mali to the UN in September 2012 which played a crucial role in alerting the international community to the unfolding dangers in the country. Subsequently, France continued to take the lead in the adoption of vital UN Security Council resolutions, such as the UNSC Resolution 2085, with the aim to resolve the Malian crisis. This crucial resolution granted authorization for an African-led international force (AFISMA) in December 2012, tasked with assisting the Malian authorities in restoring peace and security (Assemblée Nationale 2013).

In January 2013, the Islamist extremists, such as al-Qaeda and Ansar Dine, in control of the northern Mali, launched a military offensive against the government-controlled South. This escalated the urgency of the situation even more. Mali faced an existential threat, and the potential establishment of a jihadist-controlled sanctuary in West Africa posed a direct and immediate risk to regional and international security. In response, France deemed military intervention necessary to prevent the unfolding terrorist crisis and protect the stability of the region. France's decision to initiate Operation Serval in Mali in January 2013 was, thus, driven by a confluence of pressing concerns, chiefly centered on the escalating
security crisis within Mali and the wider Sahel region (Assemblée Nationale 2013; Boeke and Schuurman 2015, 807). This was justified within the framework of the war against terrorism and, therefore, Serval was seen legitimate (Zimmerman 2022, 65).

Furthermore, the French role in the earlier adoptions of UNSC resolutions contributed to the political consensus and support for Serval (Boeke and Schuurman 2015, 809). The Secretary-General of the UN praised France's response to Mali's sovereign request. Although even if a significant majority of UN member states supported Serval, some raised questions about the potential for mission creep and long-term consequences (Assemblée Nationale 2013). Critics also condemned France, the EU, and the US for using their logistical capabilities to deploy Serval instead of employing these resources to tackle the logistical difficulties encountered by AFISMA (Van der Lijn 2019, 50). At the regional level, the intervention gained unanimous approval from the AU, emphasizing the importance of legitimacy in successful operations (Assemblée Nationale 2013). The African diplomatic community predominantly expressed positive opinions about Serval, although there was also a sense of frustration due to the ongoing reliance on external actors for such interventions (Van der Lijn 2019, 50). The accusations of France pursuing an abusive power policy or engaging in neocolonialism were, however, refuted (Assemblée Nationale 2013).

**Legality**

France's decision to intervene was reinforced the formal request and consent from the Malian interim government on January 10 in 2013 for international military assistance, addressed to both France and the UN. This is the legal basis which can also be seen as the primary source of legitimacy, even though some argue that since the Malian state is weak and lacks legitimacy itself, such invitation should not be considered legitimate. The invitation was aimed at fight against terrorist organizations in Mali. The intervention of France in Mali was also grounded in international law, specifically Article 51 of the UN Charter, which pertains to the right of collective self-defense (Assemblée Nationale 2013; Boeke and Schuurman 2015, 813; Hellquist and Sandman 2020, 22).

**Local Legitimacy**

**Ideological legitimacy**

Before Serval, France was not widely popular in Mali, primarily due to its colonial history in Africa. However, a majority of the Malian population believed Serval would liberate Mali from the jihadist groups after months of being persecuted by them. They were, thus, seen as liberators (Spet 2015, 75). The French operations was, therefore, welcomed to Mali. This initial legitimacy facilitated their work since the Malian people would share information such as the whereabouts about the opponents (Boeke and Shuurman 2015, 818).
Pragmatic legitimacy

The perceived results of Serval was, as previously mentioned, that the French troops would stop the jihadists’ advancement. In just three weeks from the deployment of Serval, both Malian and French forces successfully reclaimed the three primary cities in Northern Mali – Gao, Kidal, and Timbuktu. By March 2013, control had been restored over the majority of Northern Mali. This successful outcome contributed to the legitimacy of the operation by the Malian population and government (Van der Lijn 2019, 50).

Furthermore, when Serval ended its mandate in July 31st in 2014, it was considered a success and a clear military victory based on the fulfillment on the mandate’s objectives: halting terrorist groups’ advancement toward Bamako, prevent endangerment of Mali’s stability, protecting French and European nationals as well as restoring Mali’s territorial integrity (Assemblée Nationale 2013; French Ministry of Armed Forces 2022, 3).

However, some argue that Serval was particularly successful as a short-term intervention that efficiently countered an immediate threat to the region, diminishing the escalating influence of extremist groups in Mali. By reinstating Mali to its state before the rebellion and coup, the operation offered a provisional solution, establishing a timeframe to tackle the complex economic, ethnic, political, and social challenges confronting the country. Skepticism, on the other hand, arose at that time regarding the mission's capability to contribute to long-term stability in the region. If Serval would have been completely successful, Barkhane would not have been necessary (Boeke and Schuurman 2015, 822; Globalis 2022). Overall, Serval managed to maintain legitimacy, a factor that played a role in its overall perception as a successful operation. It served as an example, showcasing the effectiveness of a relatively small intervention (Sheehan and Siegel 2022, 303).

6.1.2. Relational Dynamics between Serval and MINUSMA

Competitors or Partners

The sub-categories of partners: coexistence, coordination, and cooperation, can be found in the case of Serval and MINUSMA. I can, therefore, conclude that they were not competitors.

Coexistence

Both Serval and MINUSMA were invited by the Malian interim government to intervene in the conflict and accepted the presence of each other which shows a clear coexistence (Hellquist and Sandman 2020, 22). The mandates between Serval and MINUSMA were of different natures – military and political - but complementary. The division of labor was clear on paper, however, Serval’s military objectives and MINUSMA’s political objectives were poorly coordinated. There was no joint internal strategy. Serval
adopted a conflict management framework in Mali, emphasizing practical military necessity, such as the use of force, and addressing the immediate violent symptoms of the conflict, with less concern for resolving Mali’s deeper issues. In contrast, MINUSMA adopted a political approach with a focus on achieving long-term conflict resolution rather than mere conflict management. The mandate involved addressing the root causes of the Malian conflict, encompassing issues like poor governance and the urgent need for reform in the security sector (Zimmerman 2022, 65; Van der Lijn 2019, 104). The French military achievements posed a challenge to MINUSMA’s overarching political mandate of supporting a national political dialogue. The success of the French military was not aligned with the broader state-building and peacebuilding strategies pursued by the UN (Zimmerman 2022, 66).

Coordination
Serval and MINUSMA were coordinating with each other by assisting with both resources and executing specific tasks. For MINUSMA, the relationship with Serval was imperative. The UN mission entered Mali fully aware that the conditions on the ground exceeded their capacity to address independently and were, thus, dependent on Serval’s capabilities and support which can be argued to have put MINUSMA at a disadvantage. For instance, Serval provided MINUSMA with aircraft resources and the necessary infrastructure, explosive device disposal, engineering services, medical evacuation for the injured, and close air support - critical capabilities that MINUSMA had struggled to deploy. The two missions also collaborated closely through exchange of information (Zimmerman 2022, 72; Lindell and Nilsson 2014, 32).

Cooperation
Serval and MINUSMA conducted joint patrols and shared protection camps. However, in UNSC/RES/2480 it is stated that France committed to intervene and assist MINUSMA in situations of imminent and serious threats, as per the request of the UN Secretary-General. Furthermore, the operations did not share common projects or responsibilities. For France, the collaboration with MINUSMA was more a matter of convenience than a sharing of mutually collective objectives. The French provided support to MINUSMA until the point where it became necessary for them to withdraw (Zimmerman 2022, 72).

6.1.3. Parallel Legitimacy Dynamics between Serval and MINUSMA
Based on the empirical data on Serval’s legitimacy and the relational dynamics between Serval and MINUSMA, parallel legitimacy dynamics will be discussed. At the outset of its engagements in Mali, MINUSMA’s international legitimacy was generally high as it was legally mandated on the resolution S/RES/2100(2013) by the UNSC, the mission was requested by the Malian interim government, and there was a political consensus that the mission was necessary (Van der Lijn 2019, 107; UN 2013).
According to the UN Charter, UN peace operations are the designated peacekeeper in international law which legitimates MINUSMA’s status (UN Peacekeeping 2023b).

France was seen as the key security player by the Malian government. Serval’s powerful military presence and high local legitimacy created equal expectations on MINUSMA from the Malian government and population. The expectations were that MINUSMA would ensure Mali’s security and combatting terrorism. These expectations led to high pragmatic and ideological legitimacy for MINUSMA which they were unable to meet due to their distinct mandate and role. MINUSMA, thus, lost the perception of being an adequate actor in order to achieve security and stability in the Mali conflict. Serval’s close cooperation with the Malian interim government undermined further the legitimacy due to expectations of the interim government for equal cooperation which also worsened MINUSMA’s position on governance changes (Zimmerman 2022, 65-67 & 72). Instead, the perception was that the UN mission was not doing enough to, for instance, prevent armed groups from targeting civilians and to aid the Malian armed forces. They were, therefore, no longer seen as relevant (Van der Lijn 2019, 57 & 77). When MINUSMA failed to support state counterterrorism efforts and restricted its work with Malian forces, sharp tensions emerged between the UN and the Malian government. MINUSMA found itself struggling to keep the peace and maintain a constructive relationship with the Malian government (Zimmerman 2022, 67).

6.2. Barkhane and MINUSMA

The case of Barkhane and MINUSMA is divided into three sections: Barkhane’s legitimacy, relational dynamics between Barkhane and MINUSMA, and parallel legitimacy dynamics between Barkhane and MINUSMA.

6.2.1. Barkhane’s Legitimacy

*International Legitimacy*

*Political Consensus*

Serval ended the 31st of July in 2014. The same year, in 1st of August, Barkhane took over. Similar to its forerunner, Barkhane had a counterterrorist mandate with the objective to provide support to the member states in the G5 Sahel group in combatting terrorism to contribute to peace and security in the region. In comparison with Serval’s clear military objectives, Barkhane was more broad and preventative with no defined achievable objectives and incorporated a larger region – the Sahel region including Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger (Assemblée Nationale 2021; Roca 2015, 5-6; Petrini 2022). Barkhane was, thus, still seen as a part of the larger war on terrorism where security issues related to terrorism and migration in North Africa had direct impact on the security of European
states. This created a political consensus that Barkhane was necessary and legitimate (Novosseloff and Sharland 2019, 14). In addition, partnership with the parallel actors, such as MINUSMA, was also an essential part of the operation which reinforced the political consensus (Assemblée Nationale 2021).

**Legality**

In comparison to Serval, France did not receive an explicit request to France from the Malian government to deploy Barkhane. There was no mandate from the UN either. The legal basis for Barkhane was rather bilateral agreements on defense cooperation between France and Sahel countries, such as the Defense Cooperation Treaty signed with Mali in 2014 (Hellquist and Sandman 2020, 23). This treaty was terminated in 2022, resulting in the Malian government asking Barkhane to leave (the French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs 2022).

**Local Legitimacy**

**Ideological Legitimacy**

While Serval had a high local legitimacy and had succeeded in its short term objectives, the French decision to stay in Mali and the larger Sahel region with the follow up Barkhane was questioned (Van der Lijn 2019, 46). Some critics called Barkhane a mission creep with its slow expansion leading to a long-term commitment with no time frame. From a colonial point of view, this can be seen as inconsistent with President Hollande’s promise to diminish the French influence over the former colonies. Others compared the French intervention to the U.S. war on terror, going as far as naming Mali as the next Afghanistan (Roca 2015, 7). In other words, the underlying motivations were questioned in terms of beneficial long-term economic interests. This shows a mistrust from the Malian population, thus, a low ideological legitimacy (Van der Lijn 2019, 46 & 110).

**Pragmatic Legitimacy**

Barkhane was perceived as a failure. One reason for this perception is the lack of clearly defined and achievable objectives beyond conducting airstrikes against jihadist leaders and providing general counter-terrorism support and capacity building for Malian forces. This ambiguity raised concerns that the mission might continue endlessly without a clear direction (Petrini 2022). Other reasons for France’s failure were misinterpretation of local conflict dynamics, political missteps, and operational blunders. A critical flaw was France's predominantly militarized approach, grounded in the inaccurate assumption that terrorist groups were the primary source of instability in the Sahel. This approach failed to effectively tackle Mali’s governance crisis, despite verbal commitments to promote democratization. France struggled to endorse a governance model that could restore legitimacy to local leaders and address the root causes of the conflict. These shortcomings contributed to the proliferation of jihadist violence from northern Mali to the central region and neighboring countries like Niger, Burkina Faso, and the northern borders of Benin and Côte d’Ivoire (Powell). The dissatisfaction of Malian junta leaders
with the French mission grew as they believed it did not offer sufficient support to the Malian armed forces, which bore the most casualties in the combat against terrorist groups, and due to the related civilian casualties. The strain between Paris and Bamako intensified after the junta came to power and decided to establish security ties with Russia. The divide became permanent when the Russian private military company Wagner Group deployed mercenary forces to the country in late 2021 (Petrini 2022).

Even if Barkhane had some operational achievements, such as the elimination of prominent jihadist figures, were overshadowed by undeniable setbacks faced by France in Mali. This resulted in diminished pragmatic legitimacy, eroding the trust of the Malian population in Barkhane's ability to achieve desired outcomes. It contributed to growing support for the August 2020 and May 2021 coups, which ousted leaders cooperating to some extent with the French. Importantly, France's credibility further suffered due to a lack of transparency regarding civilian casualties during military operations. Doussouba Konaté, a civil society activist in Bamako, highlighted a turning point in March 2021 when UN investigators disclosed that a French airstrike in January 2021, ostensibly targeting a militant position, struck a wedding in central Mali, causing the deaths of 19 civilians. This revelation contradicted the official French narrative of the events (Doxsee et al. 2022).

6.2.2. Relational Dynamics between Barkhane and MINUSMA

Competitors or Partners
The sub-categories of partners: coexistence, coordination, and cooperation, can be found in the case of Barkhane and MINUSMA. I can, therefore, conclude that they were not competitors.

Coexistence
As previously mentioned, MINUSMA was authorized by the UNSC and invited by the Malian interim government. Barkhane, on the other hand, was not explicitly invited but was still there based on the Defense Cooperation Treaty between France and Mali. Since Serval transitioned to Barkhane, there was already an endorsement of France as a parallel actor in the region vice versa. The coexistence was confirmed through the mutual endorsement of each operation where, for instance, MINUSMA was seen as a key component in the Mali conflict by France (Hellquist and Sandman 2020, 22-23).

The mandates continued to possess distinct natures and characteristics, marked by a division of labor. Notably, the missions operated in different geographic areas and exhibited varying degrees of mobility. Specifically, MINUSMA was limited to the territory of Mali, focusing its activities on thirteen locations across five sectors. In contrast, Barkhane operated across the Sahel region, utilizing primarily small and temporary bases as part of its organizational structure (Hellquist and Sandman 2020, 28). However, the division of labor was not always clear for the Malian population (Hellquist and Sandman 2020, 28). As
an example, in certain instances, Barkhane and MINUSMA have found to be active in the same area (Hellquist and Sandman 2020, 33). Following Barkhane's withdrawal, the safety of MINUSMA soldiers and its efforts to foster local trust, dialogue, and relationships became compromised. This created challenges in differentiating between the operations and identifying their distinct roles (Hellquist and Sandman 2020, 29; Lindell and Nilsson 46).

Coordination

Barkhane and MINUSMA had meetings with the aim to exchange information on eventual threats, ensure awareness of ongoing operations, share operational plans, coordinate airspace utilization, and defining clear boundaries to prevent incidents of friendly fire. This coordinated relationship was, however, mostly one sided since Barkhane did not want to share operational intelligence on their planned activities. They did not trust the UN with that kind of information due to their lack of secure IT systems and procedures to ensure confidentiality. This could potentially compromise the safety of both local collaborators and French personnel which made Barkhane hesitant to coordinate its activities. This was, in one way, beneficial for MINUSMA as to avoid the impression that they were supporting lethal actions by Barkhane. Barkhane would, thus, only share information afterwards (Van der Lijn 2019, 102; Novosseloff and Sharland 2019, 19-20; Lindell and Nilsson 2014, 20; Hellquist and Sandman 2020, 31).

Serval and MINUSMA were coordinating with each other by assisting with both resources, such as logistical support, and executing specific tasks. MINUSMA was now instead of Serval, dependent on Barkhane for medical evacuation, aircrafts, and infrastructure. However, MINUSMA also supported Barkhane with medical care (Hellquist and Sandman 2020, 35; Novosseloff and Sharland 2019, 23).

Cooperation

There were some forms of cooperation between Barkhane and MINUSMA, such as shared camp protection. Barkhane frequently clustered near or alongside the UN's camps (Hellquist and Sandman 2020, 39). This setup proved advantageous for Barkhane, as the utilization of bases protected and supported by UN peacekeepers released significant French resources, enabling Barkhane to maintain its mobile strategy in combating terrorist groups (Van der Lijn 2019, 102). Barkhane and MINUSMA occasionally conducted joint surveillance of the areas surrounding their camps to collectively anticipate potential attacks. One example of cooperation would be when both missions collaborated in the reconstruction of camp infrastructure after an attack on a shared base. Typically, interactions heightened when the groups were deployed in proximity to each other, especially when MINUSMA engaged in activities adjacent to a Barkhane camp as well (Hellquist and Sandman 2020, 38-39).
6.2.3. Parallel Legitimacy Dynamics between Barkhane and MINUSMA

Based on the empirical data on Barkhane’s legitimacy and the relational dynamics between Barkhane and MINUSMA, parallel legitimacy dynamics will be discussed. Since the deployment of Barkhane, the legitimacy of MINUSMA has remained at a low level. The perception of Barkhane have impacted MINUSMA to maintain its low legitimacy, however, for other reasons compared to Serval. This time, Barkhane had low ideological and pragmatic legitimacy.

First, Barkhane’s low ideological legitimacy, due to questioned intensions of the operation, affected MINUSMA negatively as it started to be seen as an instrument of global powers for France. This also led to the questioning of MINUSMA’s underlying motives and questioning of the mission’s ideological legitimacy (Hellquist and Sandman 2020, 22).

Second, Barkhane’s low pragmatic legitimacy, due to its counterterrorist mandate with no defined objectives and no understanding for the complex situation, also diminished MINUSMA’s both ideological and pragmatic legitimacy. Proximity with Barkhane was understood as support for counterterrorist actions which meant a risk for MINUSMA as they started to be perceived as partial in the conflict. This went against UN’s principle of impartiality which can put the whole UN’s legitimacy at risk (Hellquist and Sandman 2020, 23; Novosseloff and Sharland 2019, 19; Zimmerman 2022, 64). This was also reinforced by the fact that the Malian population had problems distinguishing between the personnel in Barkhane and MINUSMA which led to the perception as one counterterrorist operation (Hellquist and Sandman 2020, 28). MINUSMA continued to struggle to maintain the peace and stability as well as maintaining a constructive relationship with the Malian authorities through the whole mandate period. The Malian population and government as well as some African leaders, thus, perceived that MINUSMA was ineffective which undermined their pragmatic legitimacy (Zimmerman 2022, 65-67; Van der Lijn 2019, 106).

6.3. Discussion

In order to answer the thesis question “In what ways did the French military operations Serval and Barkhane affect the legitimacy of the UN peace operation MINUSMA, the hypotheses will be answered as they follow the same red thread as the question.

First of all, in both cases it can be established that the French military operations and MINUSMA had a relationship as partners, not competitors. This is a necessary pre-understanding in order to analyze parallel legitimacy dynamics since the relationship competitor would most likely impact differently.
H1: Serval impacted the legitimacy of MINUSMA positively because of its perceived legitimacy and success.

The relational dynamics between Serval and MINUSMA were primarily of coexistence because both were invited by the Malian interim government. The mandates and objectives were distinct, in contrast to cooperation where both parallel deployments would collaborate towards a shared objective. The relational dynamics were also to some degree of coordination including information-sharing and support in resources and specific tasks. This coordination can be seen from a critical point of view since MINUSMA was rather dependent on Serval’s capabilities and support than by choice. Support in cooperation was reached only in conducting joint patrols and sharing protection camps. This show that the relationship was not fully interconnected. Having this in mind, the parallel legitimacy dynamics will be analyzed regarding Serval and MINUSMA.

The hypothesis was built on the previous research stating that if a parallel force is seen as legitimate, it is most likely to impact the other parallel force positively (Labbé and Boutellis 2013, 552-553). Since Serval was considered a success and in terms of legitimacy had a quite high level of both international and local legitimacy, the hypothesis anticipated that Serval would affect MINUSMA’s legitimacy positively because of its legitimacy. However, the hypothesis was rejected. Instead of affecting positively, MINUSMA’s legitimacy was affected negatively, more specific the local legitimacy which includes both ideological and pragmatic. The legal basis and political consensus that MINUSMA was necessary remained quite positive within the international community, not affecting the international legitimacy. In relation to the theory, Serval’s legitimacy was rather understood as a disadvantage as it created expectations with high local legitimacy for MINUSMA. Instead, when MINUSMA was not able to meet these expectations, such as combatting terrorism, the local legitimacy diminished. The fact that Serval’s and MINUSMA’s relationship was mostly limited to coexistence, reinforced the perception that Serval and MINUSMA were working for distinct goals.

In addition, previous research also states that parallel deployments with counterterrorist mandates affect the UN peace operations’ legitimacy negatively by being perceived as partial (Novosseloff and Sharland 2019, 21-22; Dahir et al. 2020, 3 & 6). This theory was not applicable to the case either even if Serval had a counterterrorist mandate. The legitimacy did decrease but not because of accusations of partiality, rather the loss of its perception as an adequate actor with the capabilities of achieving security and stability in the Mali conflict. The ideological and pragmatic legitimacy were heavily diminished. The legitimacy of Serval was not enough to impact MINUSMA’s local legitimacy positively due to their unaligned mandates. This also leads to further questions whether Serval would have had a positive influence on MINUSMA if they would have been deeper in cooperation.
H2: Barkhane impacted the legitimacy of MINUSMA negatively because of its perceived legitimacy and failure.

The relational dynamics between Barkhane and MINUSMA were similar to the ones with Serval. It was primarily of coexistence even though Barkhane did no longer have a formal request from the Malian government. The mandates and objectives were still distinct. The relational dynamics were also some degree of coordination including information-sharing and support in resources and specific tasks. Compared to Serval, Barkhane’s unwillingness to share information with MINUSMA is clearly noted. This coordinated relationship can, thus, be questioned due to the French reluctance. In addition, cooperation was reached only in conducting joint patrols and sharing protection camps. This show that this relationship was also not fully interconnected. Having this in mind, the parallel legitimacy dynamics will be analyzed regarding Barkhane and MINUSMA.

The second hypothesis is confirmed based on the statement that counterterrorist forces have negative affect on the UN peace operations’ legitimacy by making them perceived as partial (Novosseloff and Sharland 2019, 21-22; Dahir et al. 2020, 3 & 6). This is what happened in the case of Barkhane and MINUSMA. In similarity to Serval, Barkhane also had a counterterrorist mandate. The difference from Serval this time is that Barkhane started from a lower level of international and local legitimacy due to the questioning of its intensions. Already from the beginning of the deployment, Barkhane affected MINUSMA’s legitimacy negatively which was reflected in the perception of MINUSMA as an instrument for global power used by France.

Furthermore, the priority of counterterrorism instead of solving the local conflict dynamics and the lack of defined objectives led to serious doubting of Barkhane’s legitimacy by both the Malian population and the government. Barkhane was eventually asked to leave Mali which MINUSMA did as well. In this context, the coexistence, coordination, and to some degree cooperation between Barkhane and MINUSMA was to a disadvantage. Their association and the confusion of which personnel belonged to which operation, led to Barkhane’s negative impact on MINUSMA’s legitimacy. MINUSMA was no longer seen as an important peace important actor in peacekeeping, rather as a biased actor in the Malian conflict together with Barkhane.

In conclusion, MINUSMA started with low legitimacy due to its inability to live up to the expectations built by Serval’s legitimacy and continued having low legitimacy due to its association to the counterterrorist Barkhane but this time accused as impartial.
7. Conclusions

In this chapter, conclusion of the empirical analysis and discussion is provided as well as some limitations of the study and suggestions for future research.

7.1. Concluding Remarks

While there is considerable research and literature about peacekeeping legitimacy, there remains a gap on how legitimacy is affected in more complex dynamics. This thesis set out to explore the topic of parallel legitimacy dynamics. It did so by examining how Serval and Barkhane respectively affected the legitimacy of MINUSMA depending on their relational dynamics. The research question was “In what ways did the French military operations Serval and Barkhane affect the legitimacy of the UN peace operation MINUSMA?” Based on previous research, two hypotheses were formulated:

*H1:* Serval impacted the legitimacy of MINUSMA positively because of its perceived legitimacy and success.

*H2:* Barkhane impacted the legitimacy of MINUSMA negatively because of its perceived legitimacy and failure.

In order to conduct the comparative case study with a within-case analysis, a theoretical framework on relational dynamics of parallel deployments was established as well as a theoretical framework on legitimacy. The first step was to analyze the legitimacy of Serval. Thereafter, the relational dynamics between Serval and MINUSMA were analyzed. Last step was discussing how the legitimacy of respective military operation and the relational dynamics could explain the parallel legitimacy dynamics. The same steps were repeated with the case of Barkhane.

The study shows that both Serval and Barkhane had a negative impact on MINUSMA’s legitimacy but in different ways. Serval affected the legitimacy negatively by creating high expectations that MINUSMA could not fulfill, thus, rejecting *H1*. Barkhane affected the legitimacy negatively by making the UN peace operation seem partial due to its association with the counterterrorist Barkhane. This confirmed *H2*. With MINUSMA as a reference point, legitimacy is seen as a dynamic process that was affected by the French military operations.

Moreover, there are might be several factors to why the French military operations’ and MINUSMA’s legitimacies were affected when analyzed individually and more extensively. The aim, however, was not to examine the reasons behind individual legitimacy, rather to understand how parallel deployments
can affect an UN peace operation’s legitimacy based on their relational dynamics. The main contribution would be to highlight that partiality is not always nor the only reason why an UN peace operation’s legitimacy is diminished when deployed in parallel with a counterterrorist military operation. Likewise, the relational dynamics between parallel actors as an important factor influencing the success of peace operations. This study, however, might not be able to generalize the findings but hopefully provide a nuance into the research on parallel legitimacy dynamics.

Furthermore, to achieve deeper insights into parallel legitimacy dynamics, it could be relevant to choose more distinct cases in forms of relational dynamics in order to see if that leads to other results. For instance, does a parallel force impact an UN peace operation differently if they were to be seen as competitors or if two non-UN parallel deployments would be analyzed? Since parallel deployments is a new trend within UN peacekeeping, more sources and statistics will be available in the future which can contribute to more discussions on parallel legitimacy dynamics. Other types of methods with primary sources could also give a broader understanding of the phenomenon than basing it on already written assessments.


References


