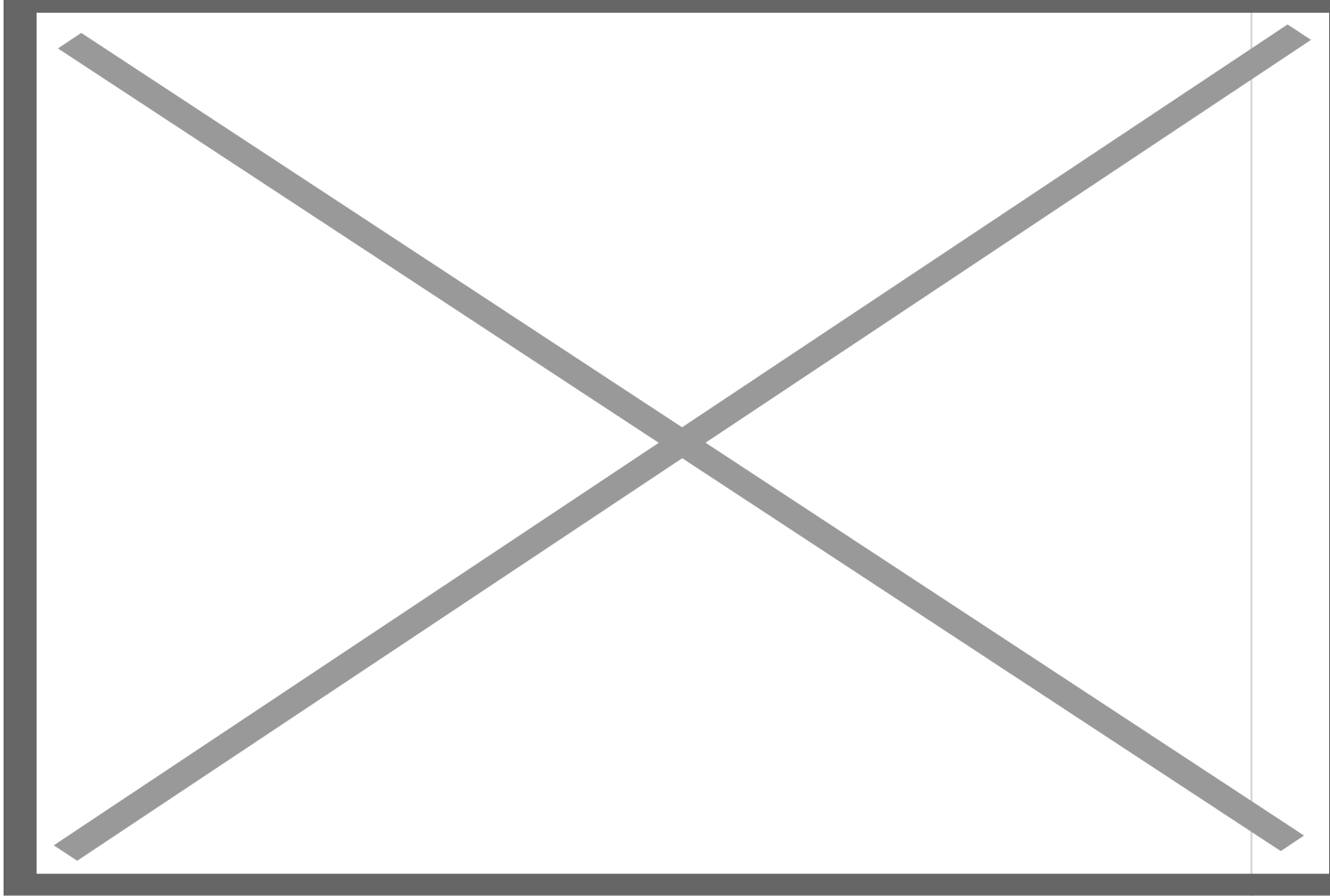


UN forces in Mali speed up withdrawal as security deteriorates

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Forces from the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) patrol in front of the Great Mosque in Timbuktu [File: Florent Vergnes/AFP]

United Nations, August 14 (RHC)-- The United Nations' peacekeeping mission in Mali has sped up its withdrawal from the city of Ber in the north after a surge in fighting. The UN mission, known as MINUSMA, said in a statement on Sunday that "deteriorating security" had made its departure urgent.

"MINUSMA has brought forward its withdrawal from Ber due to the degradation of security in the area and the high risks that brings for our Blue Helmets," the force said on X, formerly known as Twitter. "It urges all concerned parties to refrain from any actions that could further complicate the operation."

A senior local security official said the UN mission left "without incident."

In recent days, the Tuareg-led northern rebel alliance, called the Coordination of Azawad Movements (CMA), accused Malian forces and Russian Wagner Group troops of violating a ceasefire by attacking its forces near Ber.

Mali's army has not addressed the CMA's accusations, but said six of its soldiers stationed in the town were killed by "armed terrorist groups". Fighting continued on Sunday between the rebels and Mali's troops, according to CMA spokesperson Mohamed Elmaouloud Ramadane.

The departure of MINUSMA, therefore, came as an unexpected demand by Mali back in June, as the force had been there for the last decade. Their presence helped thwart a Tuareg-led rebel separatist uprising through the signing of the 2015 Algiers Accord. MINUSMA had about 11,600 troops and 1,500 police officers in the country.

In 2012, armed groups hijacked the Tuareg's uprising, their insurgency eventually spreading to neighbouring Burkina Faso and Niger, killing thousands and evolving into one of the world's worst humanitarian crises.

The country's instability as a result helped Mali's military government seize power in coups in 2020 and 2021. The military rulers are also accused of "grave human rights abuses", according to the United Nations.

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