Applying the HIPPO Recommendations to the Central African Republic: Toward Strategic, Prioritized, and Sequenced Mandates

OCTOBER 2017

Introduction

In anticipation of the expected renewal of the mandate of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) in November 2017, the International Peace Institute (IPI), the Stimson Center, and Security Council Report co-organized a workshop on October 3, 2017, to discuss MINUSCA’s mandate and political strategy. This workshop aimed to help member states and UN actors develop a shared understanding and common strategic assessment of the situation on the ground in the Central African Republic (CAR) and to use that common assessment to inform the political strategy and design of MINUSCA. The discussion was intended to help the Security Council make informed decisions with respect to the strategic orientation, prioritization, and sequencing of the mission’s mandate.

The first session of the workshop began with a discussion of the situation on the ground in CAR. Experts presented a brief analysis of the security and political dynamics in the country, and participants then discussed how MINUSCA’s current political strategy could be adapted to respond to the evolving context. In the second session, participants discussed the highest-priority objectives for the mission and how to sequence them in order to advance the political strategy discussed in the previous session.

Conflict Analysis

CAR is currently experiencing an increase in violence against civilians and a slide toward instability. Armed groups and conflict entrepreneurs are pursuing a range of political and economic objectives through violence. Attempts to find a solution through a political process have stalled. Despite efforts to strengthen state authority outside Bangui, the state is not present in most of the country. And Central Africans do not trust their government to represent them or the mission to protect them.

SLIDE INTO INSTABILITY

In the first half of 2016, in the wake of presidential elections, violence in CAR significantly decreased. This decrease was largely due to armed groups and communities hoping that the new government would address their grievances. However, the initial refusal of President Faustin-Archange Touadéra to negotiate with armed groups until they disarmed undermined these hopes. Since then, violent activity by both ex-Séléka and anti-balaka armed groups has increased, and the security situation in CAR has deteriorated, with many civilians targeted on the basis of religion or ethnicity.
Civilians face threats from armed groups, intercommunal violence, cattle raiding and other resource-related conflict, and criminality and extortion. This rising violence has led to large-scale civilian casualties and displaced approximately 600,000 people. In August, the UN’s emergency relief chief announced that early warning signs of genocide were present in the country.1

Many of these conflicts manifest themselves in retaliatory cycles of violence by increasingly fractured armed groups and self-defense groups. According to one expert, having been prevented militarily from seizing political control, the leaders of armed groups are using violence to pursue a diverse array of alternative objectives. These include exerting control over resource-rich areas and key markets for self-enrichment, gaining positions in the government, and securing amnesty from criminal charges and international investigations. Opportunistic violence and criminality occur in the absence of adequate law enforcement and judicial mechanisms to hold offenders accountable. Participants also noted that violence rose in the southeast part of the country due to the security vacuum left by the withdrawal of the United States and Ugandan operation to counter the Lord’s Resistance Army.

STALLED POLITICAL PROCESS

Attempts to find a political solution to the conflict have stalled. Participants highlighted that, although all parties remain committed to the principles and recommendations that came out of the Bangui Forum for National Reconciliation in 2015, the government has failed to build on this initial success. This is due, in part, to a failure by the conflict parties to live up to their commitments. While President Touadéra insisted that all armed groups lay down their weapons prior to engaging in dialogue, four of the largest armed groups have yet to contribute the soldiers they promised to participate in the “mixed disarmament, demobilization, reinsertion and repatriation” (DDRR) pilot project established by the Consultative Follow-Up Committee.

A second challenge to the political process has been the multiplicity of mediation efforts, mainly led by regional or external actors. These include mediation by the Economic Community of Central African States, the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, the African Union (AU), and Angola. Nongovernmental organizations such as Sant’Egidio have also attempted to mediate an end to the armed violence, with little success. The most recent initiative, which has the backing of the UN, is the AU Roadmap for Peace and Reconciliation (the second of its kind). Although the UN has been involved in these processes, it does not play a prominent political role.

None of these initiatives has so far yielded adequate incentives for the leaders of armed groups to lay down their weapons, and some have been criticized for their tolerance of amnesty for these leaders. Some mediation efforts, like that led by Sant’Egidio, were weakened by unrepresentative participation and insufficient buy-in by stakeholders on the ground. Armed groups in CAR have exploited these weaknesses and the multiple mediation efforts by engaging in a form of “forum shopping.”

Moreover, with political efforts focused at the national level, there has been a gap in political engagement at the local level. Communities on the ground are not seeing immediate peace dividends from the national process, and many grievances remain. Many local communities may not trust the national process to address their particular needs and concerns because of the localized nature of many conflict drivers and their own lack of representation in discussions at the national level.

GOVERNANCE AND CITIZENSHIP

Despite significant efforts by MINUSCA to support the extension of state authority, the government of CAR has struggled to establish its influence throughout the country. In addition to the physical absence of the state in many regions, the government has failed to communicate an inclusive narrative that embraces all religious and ethnic groups as Central Africans. Fundamental questions about who qualifies as a citizen of CAR and whose interests are represented by its government were primary drivers of the 2012–2014 violence, and the government continues to leave them unaddressed.

Although violence has been perpetrated along religious lines, it appears less driven by ideology than by feelings of marginalization and exclusion. Many Central Africans do not feel represented by state institutions, and the Bangui Forum and the national elections failed to address the concerns of disenfranchised parts of the population. This feeling of marginalization persists as state security forces are overwhelmingly Christian and local administrative authorities are often passive—and at times complicit—in the face of ethno-religious conflict.

MISTRUST AND SUSPICION

The growing social fractures and violence perpetrated along ethnic and religious lines have amplified mistrust and suspicion throughout the population of CAR. This includes mistrust between different religious and ethnic groups, which has contributed to rising violence, as well as mistrust of the government by marginalized populations and mistrust of MINUSCA.

A lack of trust in MINUSCA undermines the mission’s ability to achieve its mandated objectives. False perceptions that the mission is actively assisting armed groups, or politically favoring either Muslims or Christians, have contributed to deadly attacks against MINUSCA peacekeepers. The mission’s lack of capacity to monitor media in Sango and other local languages reduces its ability to counter the rhetoric of local media outlets, which is often more critical and suspicious of the mission than that of francophone outlets.

Political Strategy

Considering these factors driving conflict in CAR, MINUSCA’s political strategy should focus on halting and reversing the country’s slide into instability and insecurity while rallying the people around an inclusive and locally driven political vision. Workshop participants identified the following key elements for MINUSCA’s political strategy:

UNITING BEHIND AN INCLUSIVE VISION

CAR must unite behind a vision of inclusive peace. This vision must come from CAR itself and cannot be forced by outside actors. However, the government of CAR—whose makeup is unrepresentative of the population as a whole—may continue to be unable or unwilling to articulate a narrative of inclusiveness. In that case, MINUSCA should work at the local level to amplify the voices of communities that seek an inclusive future for CAR. While Central Africans should lead the process of defining a vision for their country, MINUSCA could more vocally advocate for an inclusive approach and stand against stakeholders who undermine efforts to build sustainable peace.

LINKING POLITICAL SOLUTIONS TO PROTECTION

Participants debated the relative prioritization of support for the political process and the protection of civilians. Some participants expressed concern that the protection of civilians agenda was drawing the mission’s efforts and resources away from support for a political solution to the conflict. However, other participants argued that protection of civilians should not be seen as a standalone mission activity, but rather as a necessary ingredient for the success of the political process in CAR. Communities cannot invest in reconciliation processes while they continue to be attacked on the basis of identity. In addition, communities will continue to support armed groups, which sometimes offer them protection, if they do not think the government and MINUSCA can ensure their security.

Moreover, MINUSCA’s activities can simultaneously serve to protect civilians and advance the political process. For example, MINUSCA’s efforts to prevent an armed group from taking control of a population center could both protect civilians from violence and incentivize that group to participate in DDRR or other political processes. The mission should therefore understand the protection of civilians not only as a moral obligation to the population of CAR but also as a vital component of the political process. Protection and political activities can therefore be seen as complementing and strengthening each other.

EMPHASIZING LOCAL ACTION

Even if the currently stalled political process at the national level yields results in Bangui, local-level concerns risk being forgotten. This is a problem because much of the current violence in CAR is driven by local disputes and grievances. If the mission focuses its political engagement disproportionately on Bangui, it risks reinforcing the same
dynamics that created the crisis of 2012–2014.

MINUSCA should place greater emphasis on local-level actions (by its civilian, police, and military components) to protect civilians and on political solutions at the community level. For example, instead of supporting the extension of state authority via the deployment of government figures from Bangui to the rest of the country, the mission could focus on building and supporting local governance capacities. The mission should look for opportunities to link these bottom-up and top-down initiatives in a coherent way.

**STRATEGICALLY COORDINATING CIVILIAN, POLICE, AND MILITARY CAPACITIES**

The mission should strategically coordinate its military, police, and civilian capacities to influence armed groups, the government of CAR, and the population to commit to the political process and invest in a peaceful future for their country. This means viewing not only the protection of civilians but also DDRR, security sector reform, local conflict management, and the mandate to conduct arrests as ways to enable the political process.

**UNDERSTANDING THE POLITICAL ECONOMY**

Economic factors are driving the strategies, tactical advancements, and partnerships among armed groups. MINUSCA should identify whether and how it can use its capacities to prevent armed groups from seizing control of assets they can exploit for economic and political gain. This would require a thorough understanding of the political economy of the conflict, including armed groups’ access to key cattle markets and mining sites.

**BUILDING TRUST THROUGH COMMUNICATION**

There is an urgent need for the mission to communicate its mandate and build trust with the population of CAR. The mission can further improve its strategic communications, including through a more locally focused (not Bangui-centric) approach and through greater communication in local languages.

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**Prioritization and Sequencing**

MINUSCA’s upcoming mandate should continue to prioritize the protection of civilians, clarify and strengthen the mission’s role in the political process (including mediation efforts), focus on fostering local peace capacities, encourage the effective use of urgent temporary measures to advance DDRR and the political process, place renewed emphasis on security sector reform, and reconsider support to the extension of state authority.

**PRIORITIZATION OF THE PROTECTION OF CIVILIANS**

Growing violence against civilians represents a critical threat to peace and to the political process in CAR, and MINUSCA will be judged on its ability to prevent or stop atrocities. The Security Council should authorize more troops to enable the mission to halt and reverse this trend. With these troop reinforcements, MINUSCA should be in a better position to reduce the security vacuum in the southeast and respond in a more dynamic and mobile manner to outbreaks of violence throughout the country. However, MINUSCA’s forces will still be stretched thin; the mission should apply a preventive approach to protection, relying on forecasting analysis and, when possible, responding with the appropriate civilian, police, and military capacities before violence has manifested itself.

The dynamics driving violence against civilians are centered at the local, not the national, level. Consequently, many participants agreed that MINUSCA should adopt a more decentralized approach to the protection of civilians, including by ensuring that field offices have the situational awareness and decision-making capacities needed to respond to threats against civilians in a timely and effective manner.

**STRONGER ROLE IN THE POLITICAL PROCESS**

CAR’s political process has stalled in part due to the proliferation of mediation processes and
uncertainty over who should lead them. MINUSCA has a key role to play in the cultivation of a common political vision for the future of CAR, particularly given its presence on the ground around the country and its ability to connect local voices to the national political process. Some participants also mentioned the possibility that MINUSCA “lead from behind” on mediation efforts, though it remains to be defined what this would look like in practice. MINUSCA’s exit strategy must be founded on a credible and multidimensional political solution. It is therefore crucial that MINUSCA clarify and strengthen its role in the mediation efforts aimed at finding a political solution to the conflict.

**FOSTERING LOCAL PEACE CAPACITIES**

While the political process progresses at the national level, MINUSCA should increase its efforts to stop the country’s slide into instability by fostering local peace capacities. CAR boasts strong and resilient capacities for peace at the local level, including many local peace committees operating throughout the country.

MINUSCA should prioritize support to these local peace capacities and explore opportunities to work with governance actors at the local level to help stem violence in the short term as the national government works to build its capacity, reform its institutions, and extend its presence in the long term. MINUSCA should also use its good offices to amplify the voices of the local peace committees and connect local governance actors to the national process.

**URGENT TEMPORARY MEASURES**

The mission must make better use of its “carrots and sticks” to persuade the leaders of armed group to remain committed to the peace process. The prospect of arrest and conviction is a powerful stick. Thus far, MINUSCA’s use of its authority to arrest has been limited. Some criticized the mission for declining to arrest the leaders of armed groups congregating in Bria in October of last year and for allowing Ali Darassa, leader of the armed group Union for Peace in CAR (UPC), to depart Bambari in February without detaining him. These decisions also contribute to the popular mistrust of MINUSCA, as many perceive them as evidence of MINUSCA’s support for the ex-Séléka rebels.

The Security Council should reinforce MINUSCA’s mandate to adopt urgent temporary measures and urge the mission to use these effectively to protect civilians and as leverage to get the leaders of armed group to genuinely participate in the political process. Arresting key leaders would undermine the war economy fueling the violence, pressure other leaders to engage honestly in the political process, and demonstrate to the population of CAR that the mission is impartial and trustworthy.

**GREATER FOCUS ON SECURITY SECTOR REFORM**

Even with troop reinforcements, MINUSCA will be hard-pressed to respond to CAR’s security needs. MINUSCA should increase its focus on security sector reform to promote stability in the country. The mission should explore opportunities to collaborate with units of the Central African Armed Forces that were trained by the European Union Training Mission while carefully applying an assessment of risks and mitigation strategies in accordance with the UN Human Rights Due Diligence Policy. MINUSCA should also be careful to promote the capacity of CAR’s police and gendarmerie (not only the armed forces) and should place particular emphasis on ensuring the accountability and inclusiveness of CAR’s security forces. MINUSCA is well-placed to push for greater inclusion of Muslims and ethnic minorities in the military, police, and gendarmerie and should promote a representative security sector.

**INCLUSIVE AND REPRESENTATIVE STATE AUTHORITY**

MINUSCA’s prioritization of the restoration and extension of state authority should be reconsidered. Some workshop participants favored removing this task from the upcoming mandate to free up resources for more urgent priorities, and perhaps adding it back into the mandate after the slide toward instability has been halted. Others favored redefining it to focus on promoting inclusive and representative governance mechanisms at the local level, or narrowing the extension of state authority to a smaller number of strategically important areas.

Regardless of which approach it chooses, the Security Council should clarify what is expected of the mission with regard to this agenda, which many personnel within the mission find unclear and
confusing. The mission should consider providing more vocal support for inclusive efforts and more vocal opposition to statements from any stakeholders (including government representatives) that promote exclusion and marginalization.

**Conclusion**

National and international actors, including MINUSCA, must work urgently to halt and reverse CAR’s slide back into violence. In the face of a stalled political process, activity by armed groups and opportunistic criminality continue to put civilians at risk and destabilize the country, while exclusionary rhetoric and widespread suspicion erode trust and further fuel intercommunal violence.

When reviewing MINUSCA’s mandate next month, the Security Council should prioritize the protection of civilians and increase MINUSCA’s troop ceiling, articulate a clearer role for the mission in the political process, strengthen support to local peace capacities, encourage the mission to make more strategic use of its mandate to adopt urgent temporary measures, strengthen the mission’s efforts on security sector reform, and redefine the mission’s role in promoting inclusive and representative state institutions.
Agenda

Tuesday, October 3, 2017

9:00–9:20 Opening Remarks

9:20–11:00 Session 1: Political Strategy

In this session, experts will present a brief conflict analysis, outlining the recent developments and the major threats to peace and security in CAR. They will assess both major challenges and opportunities facing the mission and outline the progress that has been achieved. Participants will then discuss a political strategy for the mission that responds to the threats outlined in the conflict analysis.

Discussion questions: What does an analysis of the conflict in CAR tell us about the drivers of the conflict? What are the primary obstacles to successful implementation of reconciliation measures? What is the current understanding of local capacities and effective local arrangements for peace? What is the political strategy underlying MINUSCA’s current mandate? Is that political strategy still viable, or does it need to be revised? How, for example, can the mission protect civilians in this context of renewed ethnic violence? How can the UN help define and support the return of state authority in such an environment? What role should the mission play in regionally led initiatives? What are the primary obstacles to and opportunities for the successful transfer of tasks to the government and the country team? How can the Security Council remain engaged in support of MINUSCA’s political strategy and of long-term solutions building on capacities for peace with the support of the UN on the ground?

Chair
Youssef Mahmoud, International Peace Institute

Speakers
Igor Acko, United States Institute of Peace
Nanette Ahmed, United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations
Louisa Lombard, Yale University
Enrica Picco, Independent Consultant

11:00–11:15 Coffee Break

11:15–1:00 Session 2: Prioritization and Sequencing

In this session, participants will identify the mission’s highest priority objectives in order to advance the political strategy defined in the previous session. Participants will also discuss the sequence in which priority objectives should be undertaken. By sequencing the objectives, participants will aim to ensure that the mission is not burdened by too many tasks at the same time. Participants will also aim to sequence objectives so that the mission is not asked to carry out certain tasks prematurely, before the conditions for their success are in place.

Discussion questions: On the basis of the secretary-general’s latest report and subsequent developments, which objectives in the current mandate should be prioritized? What aspects of the currently prioritized and sequenced mandate have the mission implemented successfully? What obstacles have prevented the mission from translating mandated tasks into action, and
what conditions need to be in place for those tasks to be carried out? How can MINUSCA’s mandate better allow the mission to adapt to changing conditions on the ground?

Chair
Ian Martin, Security Council Report

Speakers
Samuel Gourgon, Permanent Mission of France to the United Nations
Nanette Ahmed, United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations
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Mr. Michael Bonser  
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Mr. Arthur Boutellis  
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Ms. Lina Bunis  
Permanent Mission of Sweden to the United Nations

Ms. Jun Chi  
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Mr. Eric Chung-Lim  
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Ms. Christina Hackmann  
United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

Mr. John Hirsch  
International Peace Institute

Ms. Julie Jolles  
United States Mission to the United Nations

Mr. Ivan Khoroshev  
Permanent Mission of the Russian Federation to the United Nations

Ms. Grace Kpohazounde  
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