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Applying the HIPPO Recommendations to South Sudan: Toward Strategic, Prioritized, and Sequenced Mandates

NOVEMBER 2017



STIMSON

On November 9, 2017, the International Peace Institute (IPI), the Stimson Center, and Security Council Report organized a workshop to discuss the mandate and political strategy of the United Nations Mission in the Republic of South Sudan (UNMISS). This was the seventh in a series of workshops bringing together member states, UN actors, and independent experts to analyze how UN policies and the June 2015 recommendations of the High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (HIPPO) can be applied to country-specific contexts.

This meeting note was drafted collaboratively by IPI, the Stimson Center, and Security Council Report. It summarizes the main points raised in the discussion under the Chatham House rule of non-attribution and does not necessarily represent the views of all participants.

Introduction

The Security Council is expected to renew the mandate of the UN Mission in the Republic of South Sudan (UNMISS) by December 15, 2017. In addition, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) has commissioned a strategic review of UNMISS to inform Security Council action on the mission, which is scheduled to be released in early 2018. In anticipation of this review and of the mandate renewal, IPI, the Stimson Center, and Security Council Report organized a workshop on November 9, 2017, to discuss UNMISS'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 South Sudan and to use that common assessment to inform the political strategy and design of UNMISS. 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 South Sudan. Experts presented an analysis of the security, humanitarian, and political dynamics in the country, and participants discussed how UNMISS'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 mission's political strategy.

Conflict Analysis and Political Strategy

Over the past year, political and military actors and agendas in South Sudan have increasingly fragmented, and the political process led by the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) has stalled.¹ These developments have had significant implications for the security of civilians, the stability of the country, the humanitarian situation, and the viability of efforts to pursue sustainable peace. Moreover, mistrust toward international actors on the part of the South Sudanese population has further curtailed UNMISS's ability to implement its mandate.

SECURITY DEVELOPMENTS

The security situation in South Sudan has worsened significantly over the past year. The Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), the state security forces

1 IGAD's members include: Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, and Uganda.

under the control of President Salva Kiir, has continued its military dominance over opposition forces. Nearing military defeat and lacking strong supply lines, opposition forces have splintered into several smaller armed groups, causing the conflict to become increasingly fragmented—that is, dominated by local figures, removed from the chains of command of the main national groups, and driven by local agendas. These opposition groups have adopted guerilla-style tactics against the SPLA, and they rely on local populations for food, shelter, and new recruits, often coercing internally displaced and marginalized people to supply or fight for them. In response, the SPLA has adopted scorched-earth tactics, brutally attacking communities it perceives as supporting opposition groups. Areas of the country that were previously less affected by the conflict, such as Northern Bahr el Ghazal, are now beginning to experience high levels of violence.

It is anticipated that the SPLA will launch a concerted offensive during the coming dry season, expected to begin at the end of November. This offensive presents a grave and urgent risk of atrocities and other forms of violence against civilians. President Kiir appears to be aiming to win the war by annihilating opposition groups and suppressing the communities that support them, and then holding elections to cement and legitimize his place in power. This would allow him to ignore any political commitments made through the IGAD-led process and to exert his influence over the country. Participants considered, however, that such military dominance is unlikely to lead to a political victory.

FRAGMENTATION OF THE POLITICAL LANDSCAPE

The ruling coalition is struggling to maintain a cohesive structure, and significant divisions have emerged within the ruling party. In May, President Kiir fired his once-close ally Paul Malong, former military chief of staff and former governor of

Northern Bahr el Ghazal, and placed him under house arrest. Continued contraction of South Sudan's economy is affecting the ruling coalition's ability to maintain its patronage networks and exert control over the armed forces. As of November 2017, many SPLA soldiers have not been paid in five months and have been making up lost wages by exploiting local communities with impunity.

Divisions have also grown between political figures in the opposition. Although Taban Deng Gai has formally replaced Riek Machar as first vice president, Machar continues to command loyalty among some communities. Several local political and military figures have risen to prominence and mobilized armed groups around local grievances. In March, renegade general Thomas Cirillo spearheaded a new rebel movement, the National Salvation Front, to fight against the government in Juba.² In early 2017, Johnson Olony, traditional leader of the Shilluk ethnic group, led armed actors in retaking territory from government forces in the former Upper Nile state.³

HUMANITARIAN CRISIS

These security dynamics have exacerbated South Sudan's humanitarian crisis. There are 7.6 million South Sudanese in dire need of humanitarian assistance and 6 million living with food insecurity.⁴ Humanitarian access is severely obstructed, particularly by government actors wishing to prevent the international community from witnessing violence by or mobilization of its own forces. Humanitarian workers are regularly harassed or attacked, preventing them from reaching vulnerable populations. The situation looks unlikely to improve in the short term, with the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) predicting that the number of refugees will rise from the current number of 1.8 million to 3 million by the end of 2018.⁵

UNMISS's efforts to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian assistance is tied to the protection of civilians and contributes to a favorable view of

2 John Tanza, "South Sudan General Announces New Rebel Group," Voice of America, March 6, 2017, available at www.voanews.com/a/south-sudan-general-announces-new-rebelgroup/3751800.html.

3 Amnesty International, "South Sudan: Killings, Mass Displacement and Systematic Looting as Government Forces Purge Civilians from Upper Nile," 21 June, 2017, available at www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2017/06/south-sudan-government-forces-purge-civilians-from-upper-nile/.

4 UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), "Humanitarian Bulletin, South Sudan," Issue 14, September 8, 2017, available at https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/SS_170908_OCHA_SouthSudan_Humanitarian_Bulletin_14.pdf.

5 UN Multimedia, "South Sudan Refugees Will Near 3 Million in 2018 without Peace," November 10, 2017, available at <http://www.unmultimedia.org/radio/english/2017/11/south-sudan-refugees-will-near-3-million-by-end-of-2018-unless-fighting-stops/#.WhR-ybpFXTx>.

international efforts by local populations. The fragmentation of security and political actors will likely make the process of negotiating humanitarian access even more burdensome and difficult.

IGAD-LED PEACE PROCESS

The High-Level Revitalization Forum, led by IGAD, aims to rejuvenate the dysfunctional 2015 peace agreement. However, the grievances of many marginalized groups, some of which have taken up arms, remain unaddressed. Adapting the two-year-old agreement to the current context will prove challenging, especially given that the revitalization forum is perceived as favoring the ruling coalition.

Participants also debated the need to reopen or renegotiate the 2015 peace deal. The fact that President Kiir participates in the agreement as a head of state, while the participation of opposition figures has yet to be determined and they may not be given equivalent status, has raised questions over the legitimacy and viability of the process. This problem is exacerbated by the growing number of opposition figures seeking a seat at the table. Generally, the IGAD-led political process continues to be dominated by political elites and is unlikely to produce an outcome that addresses the needs of ordinary people.

In light of UNMISS's marginal role in the IGAD-led process, workshop participants highlighted the need for member states to play a strong role in supporting the process. Key IGAD member states, and some members of the Security Council, have so far been unwilling to exert pressure on President Kiir to abide by his commitments, including because of their vested financial interests in the country. Competition between Uganda and Ethiopia has impaired the prospect of a concerted regional effort to end the conflict, and President Kiir has manipulated these dynamics to his advantage. UN sanctions have been largely ineffective, in the view of some workshop participants. They believed that many of the individuals targeted did not have financial assets outside East Africa or the need to travel abroad, and many states in the region were unable or unwilling to implement the sanctions effectively.

However, workshop participants identified the deteriorating security situation as an opportunity to influence South Sudan's neighbors. In particular, the flow of refugees from South Sudan into

Ethiopia and Uganda has created unrest, and tensions are growing between refugees and host communities. The Security Council and other member states should use this window of opportunity to apply pressure on Uganda, Ethiopia, and Kenya to pursue an inclusive revitalization strategy and influence President Kiir to halt the violence and meet his political commitments in order to pave the way for the mission to implement its mandate.

MISTRUST OF INTERNATIONAL INTERVENTIONS

Throughout South Sudan, a culture of suspicion toward UNMISS and other international interveners permeates all levels of society. There is a general perception within the population and the conflict parties that the international community is ignorant of the many historical, political, and cultural dynamics at play. This mistrust has been heightened by a successful propaganda campaign led by President Kiir, who has used UNMISS as a political scapegoat. The UN mission, from its side, also displays a certain mistrust of the host government and the ruling coalition, which it views as responsible for fueling the conflict and attacking civilians.

This mistrust has undermined UNMISS's ability to deliver on its mandate and engage with locals outside Juba. The mission should further develop a people-centric approach to peacekeeping with the goal of building confidence through interaction with the local population and improving people's understanding of the mission's objectives and activities.

Prioritization and Sequencing

UNMISS's current mandate authorizes four main pillars for the mission: protection of civilians, human rights monitoring, support to the delivery of humanitarian assistance, and support to the political process. Additionally, it mandates the regional protection force (RPF), authorized in the aftermath of the breakdown of the peace agreement that saw widespread violence in Juba in July 2016, to provide security in and around the capital. Participants noted that this general framework remains relevant, given the situation on the

ground. However, the discussion yielded several key recommendations on how to prioritize, and deprioritize, certain aspects of these pillars.

SUPPORT TO LOCAL AND NATIONAL POLITICAL PROCESSES

Sustainable peace in South Sudan can only be built through engagement and dialogue not just among elites but also between elites and ordinary citizens. Given the fragmentation and localization of political dynamics, UNMISS should focus on anticipating threats to civilians on the local level and pursuing inclusive and effective political solutions that adequately address local grievances. Any attempts to revitalize the 2015 peace agreement or pursue alternative mediation efforts must incorporate linked local, national, and regional approaches.

Due to the disconnect between the elite-led IGAD political processes and local grievances, workshop participants identified a key opportunity for UNMISS to address the political gap between elites and ordinary citizens through its political engagement and conflict management work at the local level. Participants proposed that UNMISS could embark on an initiative to link local-level perspectives and processes to national processes (such as the national dialogue or the constitutional reform processes), ensuring that local voices are heard at the national level and their grievances addressed.

UNMISS's vast footprint throughout the country and strong civil affairs component represent a comparative advantage in engaging with local stakeholders. UNMISS should use this comparative advantage to pursue dialogue and mediation at the local level to address local grievances and to link these local-level processes and voices to national and regional processes. As one participant articulated, UNMISS should work to build "a culture of discussion," engaging with armed groups and local populations to address their grievances and slowly build a foundation for sustainable peace.

Conversely, the mission is currently mandated to undertake other activities in support of the political process for which the time may not be right. The current mandate authorizes the mission to support the electoral process through support to the National Elections Commission. President Kiir is eager to move forward with elections, as an

electoral victory would legitimize the ruling government.

However, roughly one-third of the country's population is displaced and would likely be unable to participate in the democratic process. Moreover, the ruling coalition would likely be able to manipulate the electoral results. If President Kiir and the ruling coalition win the elections, they would likely feel empowered to abandon any commitments made through the IGAD-led political process, to further marginalize the opposition, and to consolidate power throughout the country. These conditions would not be conducive to the peace and security the mission is mandated to support. The Security Council should therefore consider whether it is appropriate at this time for UNMISS to support the National Elections Commission.

A similar question could be raised regarding the mission's mandated support to security sector reform and disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration of former combatants. One participant raised concerns that conditions were not conducive to these activities and that the mission should suspend its efforts on those agendas to focus its resources on more urgent tasks.

Finally, the Security Council could consider broadening the mandated language on support to the political process and highlight the need to start building a "culture of discussion." Instead of identifying the specific mechanisms and processes that the mission should support, the Security Council could identify broad objectives for the mission (such as linking local, national, and regional efforts and ensuring that parties abide by their commitments). This would give the mission the flexibility to support any mechanisms or processes and pursue any activities that would advance those objectives and to adapt as the IGAD-led process (over which the mission has little influence) unfolds.

PROTECTION OF CIVILIANS

One of the key areas in which UNMISS can continue to make a difference is preventing and stopping violence against civilians. The anticipated government campaign against rebel forces with the onset of the dry season presents an urgent need for protection. In addition to continuing to secure the protection of civilians sites, UNMISS should therefore focus its protection efforts on preventing

or mitigating the anticipated campaign of the SPLA. The guerilla tactics of the opposition or the scorched-earth tactics of the government present serious challenges for the UN mission. In this context, protection of civilians will require greater force projection (facilitated by the peacekeepers expected to be freed up to move outside the capital by the deployment of the rapid protection force), as well as a civilian-led preventive approach using forecasting analysis, such as those provided by human rights early-warning systems.

LOCALIZED HUMAN RIGHTS EFFORTS

UNMISS's human rights work remains a key aspect of its mandate and should continue to be prioritized. The mission should consider options for using its human rights monitoring activities strategically to address impunity and sources of violence at the local level. Informing local populations about their rights and local perpetrators about potential accountability mechanisms could help to reduce violence, engage local communities in dialogue, and discourage potential combatants from taking up arms. However, such a focus would risk creating more animosity toward the mission.

REGIONAL PROTECTION FORCE

The regional protection force could be a welcome addition to UNMISS's capabilities, despite its slow deployment (currently 1,000 out of 4,000 soldiers) and the friction it has created with the host government. However, the additional peacekeepers in this force need to be effectively utilized within UNMISS's military component. The Security Council should ensure that the rapid protection force is effectively integrated into the mission's overall protection of civilians strategy. This could include using it to secure the capital, freeing up other UNMISS troops to project their capacity into the rural communities that are worst affected by the violence.

Conclusion

Given the current state of the conflict dynamics and violence against civilians in South Sudan, UNMISS continues to operate in crisis mode, constantly "fighting fires" and working to mitigate violence as the dynamics on the ground morph and new hotspots emerge. This will most likely remain the landscape for the coming year. In a context where there is no real peace to keep, UNMISS has been reduced to a conflict moderation and violence mitigation operation. As one high-level participant noted, the timeline for sustainable peace in South Sudan should not be measured in years, but in decades. Therefore, activities usually associated with classic peacekeeping operations should be postponed in favor of those focused on local mediation, engagement with the South Sudanese population, and reduction of widespread violence against civilians. In this context, it is not yet feasible for UNMISS to substantively support peace-building activities that will pave the way for the mission's eventual exit.

The gaps in the IGAD-led political process offer UNMISS the opportunity to play a more active role at the local level. The Security Council should consider broadening UNMISS's pillar of "support to the political process," allowing it more flexibility as political dynamics change and the 2015 peace agreement is revisited. The council should call for UNMISS to engage more directly at the local level to address local grievances causing violence and to link local voices and perspectives to national processes. To accomplish the increasingly difficult task that UNMISS faces, it needs renewed support from the international community and the members of the Security Council.

Agenda

Thursday, November 9, 2017

9:00–9:15 **Opening Remarks**

9:15–11:00 **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 South Sudan. 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 South Sudan tell us about the drivers of the conflict? What is the political strategy underlying UNMISS's current mandate? Is that political strategy still viable, or does it need to be revised? What are the primary obstacles to successful implementation of the power-sharing agreement? What are the primary obstacles to the successful transfer of tasks to the government and to the country team? What mission capabilities and approaches have proven effective at influencing the conflict? What is the current understanding of local capacities and effective local arrangements for peace? How can the Security Council remain engaged in support of UNMISS's political strategy?*

Chair

Ian Martin, *Security Council Report*

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 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 UNMISS's mandate better allow the mission to adapt to changing conditions on the ground?*

Chair

Aditi Gorur, *Stimson Center*

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