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On September 14, 2018, 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 Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA). This event was the ninth in a series of workshops examining how the activities included in peace operations' mandates can be better prioritized, sequenced, and grounded in a political strategy.

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.

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Prioritizing and Sequencing Peacekeeping Mandates: The Case of MINUSCA

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Introduction

The UN Security Council is expected to renew the mandate of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) in November 2018. Ahead of the renewal, the secretary-general commissioned an independently led strategic review of MINUSCA to inform his recommendations to the Security Council on the mission's mandate.

In this context, the International Peace Institute (IPI), the Stimson Center, and Security Council Report organized a workshop on September 14, 2018, to discuss MINUSCA's mandate and political strategy. This workshop offered a platform for member states, UN actors, and outside experts to develop a shared understanding and common strategic assessment of the situation in the Central African Republic (CAR). 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 and actions on the ground.

The first session of the workshop focused on the dynamics of the current political process in CAR, including challenges facing the African Initiative for Peace and Reconciliation and political obstacles at the local level. In the second session, participants identified several ideas to strengthen and adapt MINUSCA's mandate to help the mission advance its political strategy and achieve the Security Council's objectives in the coming year.

Conflict Analysis

Over the past year, overall levels of violence in CAR have decreased and MINUSCA has helped bring stability to several key areas, such as Bangassou and Bria. This has been achieved through comprehensive, multidimensional efforts at the local level, including support to local peace processes and community-led conflict resolution efforts, disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) and community violence reduction (CVR) programs, and the deployment of state authorities to recently stabilized areas. These activities are reinforced by MINUSCA's robust military operations to protect civilians from violence committed by armed groups and work by MINUSCA police to arrest high-profile perpetrators.

However, workshop participants highlighted several ongoing challenges. While levels of violence have decreased over the past year, violence against civilians remains a serious concern and attacks against humanitarian workers

have increased. This has restricted humanitarian access to many parts of the country. CAR's national security forces, especially the police and gendarmerie, do not have the capacity to maintain security in areas that MINUSCA has stabilized. Moreover, the national political process led by the African Initiative, local mediation and community dialogue processes spearheaded by MINUSCA, and competing dialogues between specific Central African armed groups are not adequately coordinated. In addition, current political processes and conflict dynamics do not sufficiently engage critical questions of national identity and the treatment of religious and ethnic minorities.

MULTIPLICITY OF DIALOGUE INITIATIVES

Participants reiterated the need for all actors—including the UN and MINUSCA—to better coordinate and integrate their political efforts with the African Initiative for Peace and Reconciliation in CAR. The African Initiative is a facilitation structure comprising representatives from the African Union (AU), the Economic Community for Central African States (ECCAS), the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR), and the governments of Angola, Chad, the Republic of Congo, and Gabon; the European Union, France, Russia, and the United States, among others, hold formal observer status. In MINUSCA's 2017 mandate (Resolution 2387), the Security Council reaffirmed that the initiative's July 2017 Roadmap for Peace and Reconciliation in CAR constitutes the primary framework for pursuing a comprehensive political solution.¹

However, workshop participants also recounted a new, separate dialogue pursued by the Russian and Sudanese governments with select armed group factions.² On August 28, 2018, in Khartoum, Sudan, Russia and Sudan facilitated preliminary talks between rival Central African militias, which resulted in the groups signing a “déclaration d'entente,” or statement of commitment to peace and stability in CAR. This mediation was not coordinated with the efforts of key actors. While the statement of commitment calls for the CAR

government to integrate the Russia-Sudan dialogue within the African Initiative, it is unclear to what extent the former will continue and how it will support the latter.

The fact that Sudan is supporting political efforts outside the scope of the regional framework undermines the African Initiative's central role and exacerbates an already complex political process in which key national actors have at various times made sometimes contradictory commitments to different stakeholders. This multiplicity of commitments has the potential to undermine the pursuit of an inclusive, comprehensive, and sustainable political solution.

DISCONNECT BETWEEN NATIONAL AND LOCAL POLITICAL DYNAMICS

The potential for sustainable peace in CAR is undermined by the disconnect between the national political process and both political processes and conflict dynamics at the local level. Local peace efforts supported by MINUSCA and the high-level dialogue undertaken by the African Initiative are also insufficiently connected.

Small, localized militias or criminal groups perpetrate much of the violence—including violence against civilians—throughout the country, and those groups have a wide variety of objectives and interests. Representatives from armed groups, including those who participate in the African Initiative, do not exert strong command and control over armed elements operating in the field. These dynamics make violence difficult to anticipate and peace difficult to negotiate, as leaders of armed groups participating in the national-level peace process may not have the power to deliver on promises to stop their allied fighters from committing violence against civilians or the state.

Moreover, while justice and accountability are among the most important issues for communities across CAR, many Central Africans are either unaware of or unsatisfied with how the national political process intends to address these questions. Some communities believe that the African Initiative will offer blanket amnesty to armed

¹ *Feuille de Route pour la Paix et la Reconciliation en RCA*, July 17, 2017, available at <http://rjdh.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/FEUILLE-DE-ROUTE-POUR-LA-PAIX-ET-LA-RECONCILIATION-EN-RCA.pdf>.

² The dialogue took place between ex-Séléka and anti-Balaka armed groups: the FPRC (Front Populaire pour la Renaissance de Centrafrique), the FPRC-CNDS (Conseil national de défense et de sécurité), the UPC (L'Unité et la paix en Centrafrique), the MPC (Mouvement patriotique pour la Centrafrique), and the Mokom wing of anti-Balaka.

groups, a belief that workshop participants indicated is not correct. More broadly, participants in local agreements believe that their interests are often not represented at the national level. Even if MINUSCA successfully supports agreements to halt local violence, limited national capacity—including in the security sector—may make these gains difficult to sustain.

TENSIONS BETWEEN THE POLITICAL STRATEGY AND THE USE OF FORCE

MINUSCA's successes in reducing violence over the past year have been the result of holistic protection strategies combining effective early warning, robust interventions to protect civilians, reinforcement of structures for preventing violence, regular community engagement, and dialogue with armed actors. Participants in the workshop noted, however, that MINUSCA is facing increased pressure from national actors to expand the conditions under which it uses force. Some political and community leaders in CAR envision military solutions to the crisis; they view MINUSCA as an extension of the national army and set expectations that the mission will use military means to completely eliminate militias. In select localities, MINUSCA is working with the Central African Armed Forces (FACA) to eliminate the threat of armed actors.

However, MINUSCA is neither authorized nor well-placed to use force with the objective of eliminating armed groups. These dynamics may pose a challenge to MINUSCA's impartiality and could undermine the mission's constructive roles in supporting political processes at the national and subnational levels. The success of CAR's political process is inherently linked to dialogue and the attempt to address concerns advanced by different armed groups.

LIMITED CAPACITY OF NATIONAL SECURITY FORCES

Over the past year, MINUSCA and its international partners have made progress in training and equipping the FACA, including improving their understanding of and adherence to international humanitarian and human rights laws. While MINUSCA has undertaken coordinated deployments with the FACA in select cases, the national army's capacity to deploy long-term across the country remains limited due to poor logistics

infrastructure. The government remains unable to supply its troops with food, water, salaries, and medical services any time they deploy outside the capital. These conditions put FACA troops in vulnerable positions and undermine their authority and capacity as guarantors of public security, as well as increase the risk that FACA troops will engage in predatory behavior to sustain themselves. Moreover, the FACA are deeply distrusted by many Central Africans; national troops have not been held accountable for violence they perpetrated during the 2012–2013 fighting, and they remain ethnically, religiously, and geographically unrepresentative of the Central African population.

In addition, while international efforts such as the European Union Training Mission (EUTM) have focused on training and equipping the FACA, comparable international support to the police and gendarmes has lagged. These internal security forces play a critical role in sustaining stabilization gains made by MINUSCA forces and allowing the mission to expand its efforts to other areas. Poor performance by the police and gendarmes and violations of international human rights law continue to undermine the ability of the state to deliver security and justice to its population.

QUESTIONS OF NATIONAL IDENTITY AND CITIZENSHIP

Thus far, the political process has done very little to address critical questions related to identity and citizenship for Central Africans—one of the most significant root causes of the conflict. The administration's early rhetoric focusing on reconciliation and social cohesion, as reflected in the outcomes of the 2015 Bangui Forum for National Reconciliation, has not been followed up with concrete action or even symbolic gestures to recognize marginalized religious and ethnic groups as citizens with equal rights. On the contrary, political and religious leaders continue to foment xenophobia and ethnic hatred in local-language media and national political fora including the National Assembly (often avoiding making such inflammatory statements in French to avoid international condemnation).

These issues manifest themselves in some Central Africans' daily struggles to receive identity cards or other administrative documents from the

state, in the lack of representation of Muslims and ethnic minorities within the security sector and civil service, and in the lack of outreach to Central African refugees in Chad and Cameroon. Over half a million Central African refugees remain in CAR's neighboring countries, and many do not feel they can return to CAR because their religious or ethnic identities make them targets. Many urban centers remain divided into religious and ethnic enclaves. Any sustainable political process will necessarily have to answer questions such as: Who is Central African? Who belongs in CAR? Who has the right to the benefits and services of the Central African state? Both symbolic and substantive progress toward answering questions of Central African citizenship and identity will be necessary for the political process to produce sustainable results. The political process has yet to demonstrate much progress in this regard.

EXTENDING STATE AUTHORITY

State capacity—demonstrated through the deployment of security forces and subnational administrative structures capable of delivering basic services—remains a pressing challenge for CAR. According to workshop participants, local government serves as an important entry-point for communities to engage with the state. Over the past year, MINUSCA has played a significant role in supporting the government's deployment of prefects and sub-prefects to communities outside of the capital. In addition, the mission has advocated for administrative decentralization through the passage of new legislation.

Participants recognized that, beyond its role in supporting temporary deployments, MINUSCA could not fulfill the Central African government's primary responsibility of delivering basic services. Peacekeeping operations generally do not possess the necessary expertise to lead on building state capacity and administrative services, and MINUSCA in particular faces significant resource and capacity constraints in its field offices. International actors working toward a comprehensive political strategy for CAR cannot ignore the extent to which issues such as natural resource governance and the state's economic foundations are central to long-term sustainability.

Prioritizing and Sequencing MINUSCA's Mandate and Activities

Participants at last year's workshop suggested that MINUSCA's mandate prioritize halting the slide toward instability and containing violence, which were the predominant concerns in 2017. Many participants at this year's workshop expressed the view that the mission has been successful in this regard. As violence in CAR has steadily declined over the past year, participants believed that the upcoming renewal of MINUSCA's mandate should shift the mission's focus from containing violence to cementing stability and addressing gaps in the broader political process. It should do so by strengthening MINUSCA's role in the African Initiative, broadening support to the national security forces, and explicitly addressing inclusivity, identity, and citizenship in its rhetoric and objectives.

STRENGTHEN MINUSCA'S ROLE IN CAR'S NATIONAL POLITICAL PROCESS

Participants highlighted that the mandate renewal process affords the Security Council an opportunity to strengthen MINUSCA's role throughout CAR's political processes. While the African Initiative has been somewhat successful at achieving consensus among the various regional powers, it has proven rather slow and inflexible due to its organizational structure. MINUSCA's work supporting political progress at the subnational level through local peace agreements has been effective at reducing violence in the short term but may prove unsustainable if not connected to national-level political conversations in Bangui.

Considering the comparative advantages of each of these actors at the regional and local levels, participants called for greater coordination and streamlining of the two processes. One participant encouraged the council to engage with its three African member states and the AU Peace and Security Council to consider a more formalized role for MINUSCA in the African Initiative. This could be achieved by including a member of MINUSCA's senior leadership or a member of the

secretary-general's High-Level Advisory Board on Mediation on the African Initiative's panel of facilitators. This kind of shift would institutionalize a direct channel for information flow between high-level negotiations and community-oriented processes.

Some participants noted that the "strategic objective" identified in MINUSCA's current mandate envisions the mission focusing on operations against armed groups, with less emphasis on the political process.³ Some participants highlighted that this strategic objective was appropriate for the mission's focus over the past year on containing violence but may need to be reconsidered now that the conflict dynamics have shifted. This strategic objective could be altered to reflect a stronger role for MINUSCA in the political process and a heavier emphasis on addressing root causes of the conflict. One recommendation encouraged the Security Council to reorient MINUSCA's support to the Central African government in order to help align its national security strategy with the dynamics and outcomes of the African Initiative process.

Similarly, some participants noted that the protection of civilians language in the current mandate may encourage a military-centric approach to protection rather than a holistic one grounded in a political strategy. The new MINUSCA mandate could be adapted to promote a more mission-wide approach to protection of civilians and strengthen the connection between MINUSCA's local protection work and that of the African Initiative.

BROADEN SUPPORT TO NATIONAL SECURITY FORCES

Participants proposed various recommendations to broaden MINUSCA's support to CAR's national security forces. As MINUSCA seeks to stabilize areas with high levels of violence against civilians, it must be able to confidently hand over the provision of security to national forces in areas it has already stabilized. However, the lack of logistics capacity to deploy FACA and other national security forces

has hindered this process. Some participants proposed that the Security Council authorize MINUSCA to provide logistics support to FACA, gendarmerie, and police to allow Central African forces to deploy in greater numbers. Participants identified limited bilateral support to police and gendarmes as a critical gap in the current international support packages for CAR. The council could use the mandate renewal process as an opportunity to encourage member states to provide more technical and financial support to these structures and should encourage MINUSCA to utilize its good offices in support of these efforts.

Participants also recognized that enhanced human rights training, monitoring, and accountability, combined with strong and consistent application of the UN Human Rights Due Diligence Policy, would be necessary for MINUSCA to increase its logistics support to the FACA and state security services, participate more frequently in joint operations, and ultimately hand over control of stabilized areas. Similarly, some participants proposed that MINUSCA encourage the FACA to recruit personnel more representative of Central Africans in order to promote trust between the population and the security sector.

ADDRESS IDENTITY AND CITIZENSHIP THROUGH POLITICAL PROCESSES

Finally, participants suggested that the Security Council should explicitly encourage the political process and national institutions to address identity and citizenship. Although Central Africans themselves must create a more inclusive vision of what it means to be Central African, international engagement can be helpful in advocating for the rights of minority groups and encouraging inclusive processes. Participants proposed that the Security Council should more forcefully urge the government of CAR to demonstrate both symbolic and substantive progress on the promises of reconciliation and social cohesion it made at the Bangui Forum. These efforts should encompass a holistic approach to identity—incorporating geographic, ethnic, and religious diversity—and

³ UN Security Council Resolution 2387 (November 15, 2017), UN Doc. S/RES/2387, para. 39.

could focus on promoting greater inclusion across CAR's military, police, gendarmerie, and civil service. The Security Council should also condemn those who incite sectarian division, hatred, and violence, including members of the government when necessary.

Some participants suggested the council incorporate additional language promoting inclusivity and representation into the mission's mandate. This could be added to the current mandate's language regarding support for the political process, extension of state authority, and security sector reform. This would help bridge the gap that some participants identified between MINUSCA's political and operational objectives and ensure that tasks related to building the capacity of Central African state institutions serve to reinforce an inclusive political process that addresses citizens' grievances and the root causes of conflict.

Conclusion

MINUSCA has achieved significant progress over the last year in protecting civilians, supporting local peace initiatives, and stabilizing volatile security dynamics in parts of the country where violence

persists. Participants considered this mission, among all UN peacekeeping operations, to be among the most adaptive to demanding conditions and operational constraints. Despite these significant achievements, MINUSCA faces serious challenges to consolidate its gains and advance a sustainable political process. A lack of unity across multiple political processes, disconnects between local and national dynamics, tensions between the political strategy and the use of force, weak capacity among CAR's national security forces and state authorities, and unresolved issues of identity and citizenship all constitute potential dangers for MINUSCA and for CAR.

In the upcoming mandate renewal, the Security Council can strengthen MINUSCA's position to directly confront these issues and support national and international partners in this common pursuit. Specifically, MINUSCA's mandate can be adapted and strengthened to facilitate a stronger political role for the mission, broaden collective support for CAR's security forces, and add language on the mission's role in supporting processes that promote an inclusive national identity and representative state institutions.

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