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Prioritization and Sequencing of Security Council Mandates: The Case of UNAMID

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STIMSON

On May 23, 2019, 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–African Union Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID). This event was the twelfth 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. The information and analysis is premised on developments up to May 23rd, and does not reflect the June 3rd attacks against civilians in Khartoum or the June 6th decision by the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council to suspend Sudan from all AU activities.

Introduction

The UN Security Council is expected to renew the mandate of the United Nations–African Union Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID) in June 2019. In this context, the International Peace Institute (IPI), the Stimson Center, and Security Council Report organized a workshop on May 23, 2019, to discuss UNAMID’s mandate and political strategy. This workshop provided a forum for member states, UN stakeholders, and outside experts to share their assessments of the situation in Darfur. The discussion was intended to help the Security Council make more informed decisions with respect to the strategic orientation, prioritization, and sequencing of the mission’s mandate and actions as it prepares for its transition.

The first session of the workshop focused on the evolving political and security situation in Darfur. It included analysis of the fragile security gains in Darfur, the implications of Sudan’s ongoing national political transition for the Darfur region, divisions within the international community with respect to Darfur and Sudan, and the challenges facing the mission’s drawdown and reconfiguration.

In the second session, participants discussed recommendations for UNAMID’s upcoming mandate, many of which revolve around its ongoing drawdown and transition by June 2020. For the short term, participants urged the council to provide UNAMID with the flexibility to maneuver in the dynamic national environment, including providing space for a “brief halt” in transition activities. For the medium term, participants highlighted the importance of using the mandate to consolidate recent gains made by UNAMID and the UN country team and to begin identifying options for future UN engagement in Darfur. Finally, participants emphasized that the mandate should articulate a clear political strategy for the UN and other actors (including the African Union) that prioritizes long-term peacebuilding and development efforts, including through clarifying and prioritizing UNAMID’s benchmarks.

Conflict Analysis

While violence and insecurity in Sudan’s Darfur region have noticeably decreased in recent years, the ongoing peace process has stalled, security gains are tenuous, and the underlying causes of conflict have not been resolved. Meanwhile, the country’s uncertain political transition—the removal of President Omar al-Bashir from power in April 2019, the installment of the extraconstitutional Transitional Military Council (TMC), and the ongoing

negotiations over its handover to civilian rule—has had significant political and security implications for the Darfur region.

Amid this uncertainty, UNAMID continues to face challenges as it undertakes its own transition. These include the absence of a peace agreement involving all armed groups in Darfur, uncertainty over the legitimacy of the mission's national partners and the potential militarization of the handover process, a lack of clarity on the mission's benchmarks, and the UN country team's significant funding and capacity gaps. These dynamics are further complicated by divisions within the international community, including competing views about the future of Sudan and its political leadership and disagreement in the Security Council over whether (and how) the national political transition risks aggravating instability in Darfur.

FRAGILE SECURITY GAINS

One of the main justifications for the drawdown of UNAMID has been the notable improvement in the security situation in Darfur. In general, violence in Darfur has decreased significantly since 2014 and 2015, and the UN has not observed significant reversals of security gains in areas UNAMID has vacated.

However, these gains remain fragile and uncertain, as underscored by several participants. Nearly two million people remain displaced in Darfur. Pockets of violence continue to flare up in Jebel Marra, where clashes between the Sudan Armed Forces and the Sudan Liberation Army–Abdul Wahid (SLA-AW) continue. Several opposition parties and armed groups are waiting to see what happens during the political transition. Rising instability in neighboring Chad and Libya raises the risk that violence in the region will become intractable: for example, there is already evidence of collaboration between armed groups in Darfur and Libyan General Khalifa Haftar's forces in southern Libya.¹

IMPLICATIONS OF THE NATIONAL POLITICAL TRANSITION

Dynamics in the Darfur region are complicated by the political transition currently taking place at the national level. On April 11th, following months of

popular protests and a national state of emergency, Sudanese security forces deposed President Omar al-Bashir and established an extraconstitutional Transitional Military Council (TMC), currently headed by General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan. These changes were insufficient to address the protesters' demands, however, and peaceful demonstrations, sit-ins, and strikes continue throughout the country. The AU Peace and Security Council initially imposed a fifteen-day deadline for the military to hand power to a civilian-led authority, and extended that deadline an additional sixty days on April 30th. Slow progress in negotiations between the TMC and the Forces of Freedom and Change—a coalition of political parties and civil society associations at the forefront of protests throughout 2019—is increasing tensions throughout the country.

These national dynamics have implications for the Darfur region. The TMC's vice president, Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo (also known as Hemeti) heads the Sudanese military's Rapid Support Forces (RSF), a militia that has been systematically implicated in crimes and abuses throughout Darfur. The RSF has consolidated power during the transition and is now active in security operations across the country. Hemeti and the RSF may use the ongoing negotiations to consolidate political power and its position within the country's security apparatus, and may resort to violence in both Khartoum and Darfur if they cannot secure their interests through nonviolent means. At the same time, communities in Darfur may actively resist the RSF's stronger role in Sudan and demand greater justice and accountability from any new administration.

Meanwhile, efforts to revitalize the Doha peace process have stalled. The AU High-Level Implementation Panel, currently in the political lead, suspended its Addis Ababa consultations in December 2018, which sought to address the outstanding disagreements between the non-signatories of the DDPD and the Sudanese government. The Sudan Call alliance of opposition parties and armed groups are now waiting to see what happens during the political transition. Signatory and non-signatory armed groups do not trust the TMC to uphold commitments made by the

¹ UN Security Council, *Final Report of the Panel of Experts on the Sudan Established Pursuant to Resolution 1591 (2005)*, UN Doc. S/2019/34, January 10, 2019.

previous regime, including those in the DDPD. There are concerns that violence in Darfur could reignite if negotiations do not produce tangible outcomes related to civilian leadership of transitional arrangements, reform of election-related legislation, and other issues.

These dynamics have the potential to reverse fragile security gains in Darfur. The RSF allegedly used violence against protestors in Nyala in May 2019. Political discord has intersected with other conflict drivers in Darfur to aggravate tensions, including between protesters and other civilians. A violent confrontation between rival youth groups in the Kalma internal displacement camp on April 13th, which resulted in sixteen deaths, allegedly broke out over tensions between supporters of the Bashir regime and those of the SLA-AW armed group. Demonstrations across the country have similarly taken on intercommunal dimensions, including in Saraf Umrah, North Darfur.

These developments have implications for UNAMID. The mission is now operating in conjunction with an extraconstitutional government, calling into legal question its efforts to bolster state capacity and restore state authority in Darfur. UNAMID also now finds itself transferring protection responsibilities to the military, and potentially to elements of the RSF, which have been historically predatory toward the civilian population. The fact that armed groups have withdrawn their agreement to restart peace talks in Doha directly undermines UNAMID's ability to deliver on its core priority to mediate on the basis of the DDPD. Finally, new spikes in violence in Darfur indicate the potential for violence against civilians to increase.

CHALLENGES FOR UNAMID'S EXIT STRATEGY AND TRANSITION

In UNAMID's most recent mandate (Resolution 2429), the Security Council "took note" of the UN secretary-general and AU Commission chairperson's recommendation (in UN Doc. S/2018/530) that the mission work toward full withdrawal by June 2020 and liquidation by December 2020. While this was not an explicit confirmation of this timeline, Security Council members, the AU Peace and Security Council, and

both the UN Secretariat and the AU Commission have nonetheless worked tirelessly toward meeting these proposed deadlines. Over the past year, UNAMID has begun implementing a strategy to meet these deadlines and preparing national stakeholders for its eventual transition. Core components of this transition include accompanying and capacitating the Sudanese government to reassume its protection and governance responsibilities, handing over physical presences in Darfur to government officials, and working to strengthen the capacities of the UN country team. However, several remaining factors pose a challenge to UNAMID's exit strategy.

First, the biggest difficulty facing UNAMID's transition is that the underlying causes of conflict remain unresolved, and efforts to forge a sustainable peace agreement have stalled. Many participants recognized that there is a risk that UNAMID could depart without a comprehensive political agreement in place involving all armed groups. Others highlighted that even with a commitment to the Doha peace process and agreement on an implementation roadmap, UNAMID's transition will leave significant protection, human rights, peacebuilding, and development challenges that require long-term solutions. This will place pressure on the UN and AU to ensure the transition positions national actors to accomplish as many of these priorities as possible—a task made more uncertain by the ongoing political transition.

A second challenge is the militarization of Sudan's subnational governance structures and the resulting impact on UNAMID's drawdown plan and exit strategy. One component of the transition involves the establishment of "state liaison functions" through which UNAMID collocates with national counterparts to bolster state capacity to govern and provide services to the people of Darfur. In addition, UNAMID's drawdown plan entails the handover of team sites (UN bases) to Sudanese officials in line with the UN human rights due diligence policy.² However, some participants expressed concern that, since the imposition of the state of emergency in February 2019, UNAMID has been handing over these responsibilities and infrastructure to military actors rather than civilians. There were concerns that these dynamics

2 UN Security Council, *African Union–United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur*, UN Doc. S/2019/44, January 14, 2019, paras. 53–54.

could undermine the progress the mission has made on improving security in the region and delegitimize UNAMID's handover and drawdown.

A third challenge relates to UNAMID's benchmarks and requests from the Security Council for greater clarity and prioritization in the mission's exit strategy. Participants highlighted the value of the benchmarks first proposed by the secretary-general in October 2018 (in UN Doc. S/2018/912). They also argued that the council's negotiations in advance of Security Council Presidential Statement 2018/19 improved members' understanding of the mission's strategic direction. However, some participants underscored the importance of greater clarity on the role of the benchmarks in the context of UNAMID's transition.

Finally, gaps in substantive expertise, funding, and logistics gaps confronting the UN country team in Sudan remain a critical concern. Although the UN has sought to strengthen the capacities of agencies, funds, and programs in Sudan (including through use of UNAMID's programmatic budget), there are significant concerns about long-term financial support for the UN country team, due in part to its reliance on voluntary contributions. As the mission withdraws, the UN country team is now in the process of scaling up its efforts in parts of Darfur. However, UNAMID provides significant access-related support, including flights and security, which the UN country team will not be able to rely on once the mission exits.

DIVISIONS WITHIN AND THE INFLUENCE OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

There continues to be a lack of consensus within the Security Council on how to address violence in Darfur. This is further complicated by an international community that is divided on its strategies and approaches to Darfur and in Sudan more broadly. Some participants highlighted that the Gulf crisis has spilled over into Sudan: different states are now influencing the political transition by backing various factions of the Sudanese security forces. Others highlighted the complexity of regional dynamics and the role of neighboring countries, including Chad, in Darfur. Although these dynamics were not discussed in detail in the workshop, participants did note that they compli-

cated the council's efforts to provide consensus-driven strategic guidance to UNAMID regarding its priorities and its transition.

Recommendations for UNAMID's Mandate

Given the current political volatility in Sudan and its implications for the Darfur region, participants considered how the Security Council can adapt UNAMID's mandate to the changing dynamics. This conversation focused on two main questions: First, how do the conditions in Darfur and Sudan impact UNAMID's trajectory to withdraw by June 2020? And second, what can the mission do in its remaining time to solidify the gains it has made?

Many participants urged the council to provide the mission with enough flexibility in its mandate to adjust (or potentially halt) its short-term transition activities in response to national-level political volatility. Participants also encouraged the council to use the upcoming mandate to lay the groundwork for a future UN presence in Darfur to undertake necessary follow-on political, peacebuilding, development, and protection tasks. Finally, it was suggested that the council and the UN Secretariat clarify their intentions with regards to UNAMID's benchmarks.

EMPOWER UNAMID TO ADJUST TO CHANGING DYNAMICS

In Resolution 2429, the Security Council highlighted two conditions that may warrant revisiting UNAMID's drawdown timeline: (1) if there were a significant change in the security situation in Darfur, and (2) if key indicators were not fulfilled. In the workshop, participants noted how recent developments in Khartoum had the potential to change the security situation in Darfur. They also highlighted delays in the fulfillment of key indicators—specifically with regards to the implementation of the DDPD process—that had been exacerbated by the national political transition.

Participants debated whether these developments would impact UNAMID's drawdown timeline. Considering the fluid nature of developments on the ground, they felt uncomfortable making a definitive conclusion on this point. Instead, some suggested that the council consider a

“brief pause” in order to afford the mission the flexibility to adjust the pace of its drawdown in response to the outcomes of the political transition. This was deemed all the more important because UNAMID’s mandate is set to expire on the same day as the AU Peace and Security Council’s deadline for the TMC to hand over power to a civilian-led transitional government (June 30). One participant considered the possibility of the Security Council authorizing a technical rollover of the mandate until the results of the current negotiations in Khartoum are clearer.

PREPARE FOR A POST-UNAMID DARFUR

Many participants also called for the council to use the upcoming UNAMID mandate to set out a medium-term political strategy for the Darfur region. Several participants posited that this strategy should include political, peacebuilding, and protection elements.

On the political front, the UN should be prepared to work closely with the AU as it leads efforts to revitalize Darfur’s peace process, including the possibility of a formal cooperation mechanism. Participants also acknowledged that any follow-on presence would likely require capacity for cease-fire monitoring and for disarmament and demobilization. In terms of peacebuilding, participants highlighted the need to continue addressing the underlying drivers of conflict in Darfur. On protection, participants noted continued intercommunal violence, widespread displacement, and the militarization of state authorities in Darfur as threats to civilians. They called for the UN to continue monitoring and reporting on violence and human rights abuses in the region, while recognizing that the drawdown of the mission will limit access. One participant proposed the establishment of a standalone office for the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights—likely to be a contentious issue.

Participants called on the council to request that the secretary-general produce options for its

consideration regarding a follow-on UN presence in Darfur once the mission leaves. Some encouraged the Secretariat to consider a special political mission as one possible configuration. One participant cautioned against setting up the UN for an indefinite presence in Darfur, however. Participants also highlighted the need for the international community to increase financial support to both the UN country team and the Darfur Development Strategy once UNAMID departs.

CLARIFY THE BENCHMARKS

Finally, one participant proposed that the council consult the Secretariat to clarify which of the mission’s benchmarks are intended to be achieved prior to its exit and which are intended to be longer-term goals for the country. Depending on the results of these consultations, the council may decide to provide more clarity on these benchmarks in the upcoming UNAMID mandate. This would help the council eventually determine whether “key indicators” have been met or whether it should revisit UNAMID’s transition timeline.

Conclusion

Sudan is at a crossroads. The shifting political winds may have significant implications for the Darfur region, even if their direction is not yet clear. Anecdotal evidence suggests that tenuous security gains are at risk of reversal. UNAMID now finds itself drawing down in a fluid and politically uncertain, if not volatile, situation.

Against this backdrop, the Security Council should give the mission the flexibility it needs to navigate the fast-paced political situation, identify short-term benchmarks, and articulate a medium-term strategy. The council should also begin considering options for a post-UNAMID international presence in Darfur to address remaining political, peacebuilding, protection, and development needs to ensure that Darfur continues on the path toward sustained peace.

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777 United Nations Plaza, New York, NY 10017-3521, USA

TEL +1-212-687-4300 FAX +1-212-983-8246

Freyung 3, 1010 Vienna, Austria

TEL +43-1-533-8881 FAX +43-1-533-8881-11

52-52 Harbour House, Bahrain Financial Harbour

P.O. Box 1467, Manama, Bahrain

www.ipinst.org