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Prioritizing and Sequencing Peacekeeping Mandates: The Case of MINUSCA

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STIMSON

On September 10, 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 Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA). This event was the thirteenth 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 project is funded with the support of the government of Germany.

Introduction

The UN Security Council is expected to renew the mandate of the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) in November 2019. In this context, the International Peace Institute (IPI), the Stimson Center, and Security Council Report organized a workshop on September 10, 2018, to discuss MINUSCA's mandate and political strategy.

This workshop offered a platform for member states, UN staff, 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 current conflict dynamics in CAR, including progress on and obstacles related to the security situation, the political process, the restoration of state authority, and efforts to address the root causes of the conflict. In the second session, participants put forward ideas for how 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.

Context Analysis

The past year has seen a reduction of organized violence in CAR and notable progress in advancing the political process and restoring and extending state authority. However, challenges remain under each of these objectives, including persistent low-level insecurity, violations of the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in CAR (APPR), and difficulty redeploying civilian state administrators outside of Bangui. Moreover, almost no progress has been made on addressing the underlying drivers of violence, including challenges related to identity, citizenship, and inclusion.

SECURITY SITUATION

The security situation continues to improve. The decline in the civilian casualty rate that began in 2018 has continued throughout 2019. Causes for the decline in violence include advancements in the peace process at the national and local levels, as well as the presence of fewer civilians in conflict-affected areas due to mass displacement. Although skirmishes persist, large-scale battles between armed groups have decreased in frequency and intensity.

Nonetheless, persistent, low-level insecurity remains in both rural areas and major cities, including Bangui.¹ Extortion, kidnapping, and low-casualty attacks occur on a daily basis. Both signatory and non-signatory armed actors maintain roadblocks and collect illegal taxes. Criminality threatens civilians' security and access to markets throughout the country. Instances of armed groups harassing government officials and illegally detaining civilians undermine security and state authority.

Moreover, the humanitarian situation remains dire. Nearly three million people require humanitarian assistance, and nearly two million are food insecure.² One in four Central Africans is displaced and more than 600,000 are seeking refuge in neighboring countries—one of the highest displacement rates in the world.³

POLITICAL PROGRESS AND THE PEACE AGREEMENT

The past year has also seen tangible progress in the political process, though challenges persist. In February 2019, the government of CAR and fourteen armed groups signed the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in CAR (APPR). In March 2019, President Faustin-Archange Touadéra formed an inclusive government and appointed leaders of armed groups to key advisory posts, in keeping with the APPR. The president also signed decrees establishing national and prefectural monitoring and implementation mechanisms and the legal framework for the joint security units agreed to in the APPR.

As for progress on transitional justice and reconciliation, the Special Criminal Court, established in 2015 to investigate serious crimes committed in the country since 2003, held its inaugural session in October 2018. The government has also made several public statements supporting the establishment of the Commission on Truth, Justice, Reparation and Reconciliation agreed to in the APPR.

Regional engagement remains strong. In March 2019, the African Union (AU) successfully mediated a solution to a schism among signatories to the APPR regarding armed groups' representation in government. In April 2019, representatives from MINUSCA, the UN Regional Office for Central Africa (UNOCA), and the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) conducted a joint mission to CAR.

Despite this progress, implementation of the APPR remains a challenge. Instead of transitioning into political parties, signatory armed groups appear to be rearming themselves, and several have openly violated the terms of the agreement. Moreover, poor monitoring and accountability mechanisms have yielded weak responses to these violations. The APPR's infeasible time frames for achieving key provisions have exacerbated this problem, as signatories have plausible excuses for missing deadlines.

Additionally, most Central Africans are critical of the APPR. Participants familiar with the local situation highlighted the widespread public perception that the government is weak for having conceded so much to the armed groups in return for so little—a sentiment supported by recent research.⁴ Dissatisfaction over inclusion of the leaders of armed groups in the government has led to protests. Weak buy-in from the public undermines the implementation of the APPR and the broader security situation.

EXTENSION OF STATE AUTHORITY

There has also been progress in the extension of state authority, particularly with regard to security sector reform and the redeployment of security forces outside of Bangui. According to some participants, CAR now has a functioning security sector governed by a solid democratic framework. In the past year, the Central African Armed Forces (FACA) deployed outside of Bangui for the first time since the onset of the conflict in 2013, with 1,438 troops stationed in sixteen locations outside

1 Human Rights Watch, "Central African Republic: Armed Group Kills 46 Civilians," July 18, 2019.

2 UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, "UN Calls for Urgent Humanitarian Funding and Protection of Civilians in the Central African Republic," Press Release, September 4, 2019.

3 UN Refugee Agency, accessed October 15, 2019, available at https://data2.unhcr.org/fr/situations/car#_ga=2.72722138.892129643.1568921141-2121886752.1568921141.

4 International Crisis Group, "Making the Central African Republic's Latest Peace Agreement Stick," June 18, 2019.

of the capital as of June (out of a total force of 7,087).⁵ With support from MINUSCA, the FACA now largely adhere to codes of conduct on the protection of civilians and avoid predation. Participants noted, however, that the FACA would likely be unable to effectively provide security or operate according to human rights standards without continued support. The number of police officers has also risen, reaching 3,686 as of June, with 1,024 serving outside of Bangui.⁶ Without the presence and strong support of MINUSCA, this progress would not have been possible.

However, the government and the mission have struggled to redeploy civilian administrators outside of Bangui. Some progress has been made, with 3,418 civil servants active outside of the capital as of January, including all sixteen prefects and the majority of sub-prefects.⁷ Mission staff report that civil servants are generally trusted by the public. However, staffing and budget shortfalls limit effective public service delivery. Some participants also noted that many civil servants do not demonstrate the necessary ethos, treating the position as a source of income rather than a civic duty.

These challenges facing the civilian administration could create a crisis of confidence for the government. The growing military and police presence has sharpened communities' hope that criminality will be quelled, justice will be served, and the state will deliver basic health and education services—expectations the civilian branches of the government are currently unable to meet.

STATUS OF THE ROOT CAUSES AND DRIVERS OF VIOLENCE

While progress has been made on the security situation, the political process, and the extension of state authority, almost no progress has been made on addressing the root causes and main drivers of violence. Issues related to identity, citizenship, and inclusion of marginalized groups remain unaddressed. Minority groups, particularly Muslims, continue to be systematically excluded from government and prevented from returning to their places of origin on the basis of their identity.

While there has been forward movement on establishing the Commission on Truth, Justice, Reparation and Reconciliation in part due to pressure from international partners, national ownership of and political will to pursue the reconciliation process remain minimal.

Additionally, development efforts have been short-term and have not been adequately supported by a longer-term strategy for job creation and economic revitalization. The investment of the World Bank and others in short-term job creation has helped prevent outbreaks of violence, but little has been done to support CAR's ability to sustain itself economically. Renewed donor support is necessary to finance the government's National Recovery and Peacebuilding Plan (2017–2021), which is designed to direct national and international support toward promoting development and restoring livelihoods.

Prioritizing and Sequencing MINUSCA's Mandate

At the strategic level, MINUSCA's current mandate and priorities reflect the situation on the ground and local needs. Participants agreed that MINUSCA's strategic priority to reduce the threat posed by armed groups in CAR remains highly relevant. MINUSCA's current mandate and posture have generally given the mission the flexibility it needs to respond to evolving conflict dynamics and political developments.

Most participants did not envision large changes to MINUSCA's mandate. Instead, the discussion centered on small adjustments to adapt the mission to the current situation without sacrificing flexibility. These included authorizing MINUSCA to support the APPR and reinforce the political process by engaging on broader reconciliation and inclusion efforts; strengthening the mission's mandate to restore and extend state authority; mandating MINUSCA to support elections; and authorizing MINUSCA to coordinate international partners in CAR. Participants also universally stressed that MINUSCA should conduct all its

5 UN Security Council, *Report of the Secretary-General on the Central African Republic*, UN Doc. S/2019/498, June 17, 2019, para. 49.

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid., para. 46; UN Security Council, *Report of the Secretary-General on the Central African Republic*, UN Doc. S/2018/611, June 18, 2018, para. 3.

mandated activities in an inclusive manner and work wherever possible to increase the inclusiveness of the political process and advocate for minority and marginalized communities.

SUPPORTING THE POLITICAL PROCESS

Participants suggested strengthening MINUSCA's mandate to support a strong and inclusive political process, which would send a strong message to the parties about their responsibility to comply with the peace agreement. Many recommended that MINUSCA be explicitly authorized to support the APPR, including by monitoring violations and holding the signatories accountable. Some specified that the mandate's language should make it clear that the mission can and should use all necessary means to support the APPR, including the use of political engagement or, when necessary, force to incentivize compliance. This may necessitate shifting toward a more mobile and flexible peacekeeping presence to protect civilians and monitor the cease-fire.

However, some participants warned of possible tensions between an explicit authorization to support the implementation of the APPR and other priorities in MINUSCA's mandate. For example, the mission could find that its political support for the APPR conflicts with its mandate to protect civilians or to promote human rights. If signatories attack or threaten civilians, the mission could be torn between responding to the threat and maintaining a positive working relationship with these signatories. Moreover, the shift toward a more mobile posture for the mission's force could conflict with community engagement efforts. Participants suggested that having MINUSCA train the joint security units to conduct mediation could prevent cease-fire violations without further undermining armed groups' perceptions of MINUSCA's impartiality. Another issue is the risk of undermining human rights protections in an effort to pursue disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR). Participants therefore recommended that MINUSCA strictly vet all combatants participating in the DDR process.

Participants also brainstormed ways for MINUSCA's mandate to help the mission address some of the weaknesses of the APPR, including insufficient inclusion of civil society and lack of

complementarity with local-level peace processes. Suggestions included mandating MINUSCA to sensitize the Central African population about the APPR and to build local buy-in; authorizing MINUSCA to support a broader political process outside of the auspices of the APPR; and requesting MINUSCA to use the agreement's local-level implementation committees to facilitate dialogue on good governance and inclusion at the local level, including the return of displaced persons. These recommendations highlight the need for MINUSCA and the UN to engage with the peace process using a holistic approach that goes beyond the APPR and includes political reform, economic development, and bottom-up reconciliation. In addition to giving MINUSCA greater flexibility, these steps would enable it to address issues necessary to securing broader public buy-in to the peace process.

EXTENDING STATE AUTHORITY

Some suggested strengthening MINUSCA's mandate to restore and extend state authority. Many argued that MINUSCA should receive more financial and logistical support from partner organizations with a long-term presence in the country and a comparative advantage in state building to help the government deploy state administrators and undertake core state functions. Other suggestions included mandating MINUSCA to develop stronger mechanisms for resolving land and property disputes, authorizing the mission to train the FACA in mediation and prevention of election-related violence, and mandating the mission to go beyond surface-level conflict and engage with the government and population on fundamental questions of state building.

SUPPORTING ELECTIONS

Many recommended that MINUSCA be mandated to provide all necessary assistance for the 2021 elections. The importance of the elections was repeatedly highlighted; one participant pointed out that elections are constitutionally mandated, while another argued they could provide an opening to address structural issues related to identity and marginalization. Agreeing that Central African authorities lack the capacity to hold elections on their own, many participants advocated that MINUSCA have a mandate and budget to provide

logistical and security support to the elections. As of now, the government of CAR's lack of funds and the international community's insufficient financial support risk compromising the timeline for elections. Many also highlighted that these elections should allow internally displaced persons and refugees to vote. Even if these challenges are successfully overcome, participants acknowledged the limitations of successful elections alone in achieving structural peace.

COORDINATING INTERNATIONAL PARTNERS

Some participants noted the need for MINUSCA to continue to play a leading role in coordinating and ensuring strategic cohesion among the diverse array of international actors working to stabilize CAR. First, many suggested that the Security Council praise regional support to the Central African peace process and encourage continued regional engagement.

Second, participants noted the plethora of actors providing support to the CAR's security sector, including the mission itself, the European Union, and the governments of France, Russia, and the US. Highlighting the risk of fragmentation of international support, attendees advocated that MINUSCA leverage its unique role as an impartial security actor to coordinate among these actors at the strategic level.

Finally, participants suggested that MINUSCA strengthen its partnerships with international peacebuilding and development actors to address the root causes and drivers of violence. This may include working with the World Bank and other development actors to develop a longer-term strategy for revitalizing and sustaining CAR's economy. It could also involve engaging peacebuilding partners, including the Peacebuilding Fund, in advancing inclusion and reconciliation.

Conclusion

The past year has seen significant and high-profile progress toward the Security Council's objectives in CAR. MINUSCA's concrete and relevant strategic objectives and its mobile and flexible posture have allowed it to respond to shifting priorities and adapt to local developments. Insecurity has decreased, the political process has moved forward, and the redeployment of more accountable security forces and public administrators continues.

However, significant challenges to the sustainability of these achievements remain. Persistent, low-level insecurity threatens civilians and undermines the political process. The APPR is frequently violated by armed groups and enjoys little public buy-in. As security and civilian state representatives redeploy outside of Bangui, their capacity to deliver services to the population remains extremely limited. Almost no progress has been made in addressing the root causes of the conflict such as issues pertaining to identity and inclusion.

For the upcoming year, the Security Council must equip MINUSCA with a broader mandate that enables it to cement gains and overcome the challenges facing political and peacebuilding efforts in a flexible manner. Recommendations for doing so include authorizing MINUSCA to support the APPR (while continuing to address the agreement's weaknesses); strengthening the mission's mandate to financially and logistically support the redeployment of well-trained, high-quality public administrators and civil servants; mandating the mission to provide all necessary support for the upcoming elections; encouraging the mission to continue its efforts to connect local reconciliation efforts to the national political process; and authorizing the mission to coordinate international partners in CAR.

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