

Walking a Tightrope: The Transition from UNAMID to UNITAMS in Sudan

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Cover Photo: A team from UNAMID's governance and community stabilization section is escorted to the Birka area of North Darfur for a peace conference, February 1, 2018. Mohamad Almahady/UNAMID.

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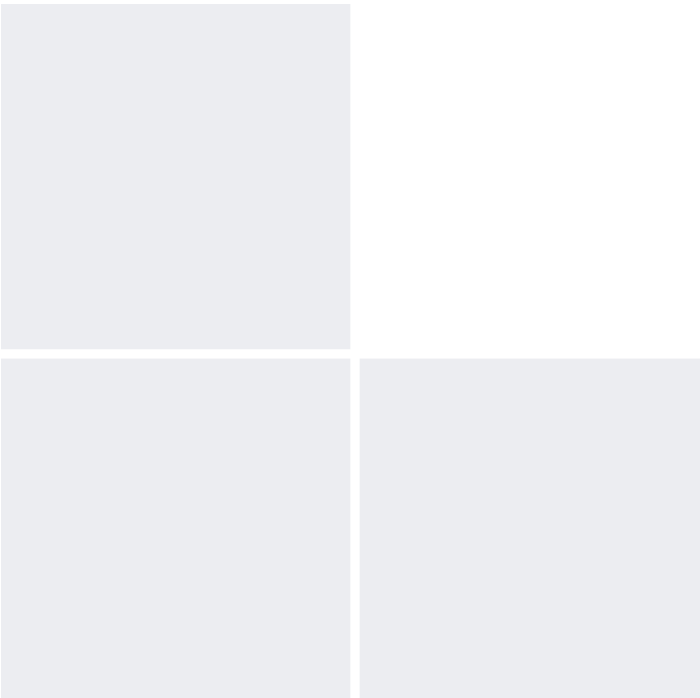
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ABBREVIATIONS

DJSR	Deputy joint special representative
DPO	UN Department of Peace Operations
DPPA	UN Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs
DSRSG/RC/HC	Deputy special representative of the secretary general/resident coordinator/humanitarian coordinator
IDP	Internally displaced person
IMF	International Monetary Fund
JSR	Joint special representative
OHCHR	Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights
PBC	UN Peacebuilding Commission
PBF	UN Peacebuilding Fund
SLA-AW	Sudan Liberation Army–Abdul Wahid al-Nur
SLF	State liaison function
SPLM-N	Sudan People’s Liberation Movement–North
SRF	Sudan Revolutionary Front
SRSG	Special representative of the secretary-general
UNAMID	African Union–UN Hybrid Operation in Darfur
UNCT	UN country team
UNITAMS	UN Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan

Executive Summary

The UN's transition in Sudan started out in 2014 as a process to close the African Union–United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID) in the face of waning international support and overwhelming pressure from an autocratic regime. But in 2019, Sudan's revolution and ongoing political transition radically transformed how the UN engages with Sudan. UNAMID's closure in December 2020 and the start-up of a new special political mission, the UN Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan (UNITAMS), now constitute one of the most complex reconfigurations the organization has ever attempted.

Sudan's revolution shifted the boundaries of discussions on the UN transition, both in the Security Council and within Sudan. Council members achieved consensus on the broad political objective of providing international support to the country, but clear differences emerged over how to translate this objective into a concrete strategy. Sudanese constituencies also held starkly different views on how the UN should support the country, which were brought into sharp relief by the UN's efforts to ensure national ownership. Balancing among these different viewpoints forced the UN to make difficult decisions, particularly on protecting civilians in Darfur.

Planning for UNITAMS's start-up and UNAMID's exit laid bare the competing visions within the UN system of how the organization should support Sudan. It also exposed the challenges of overcoming deeply entrenched bureaucratic cultures to deliver on ambitious mandates through a “whole-of-system” approach. Moreover, this phase of the transition revealed the urgent need both for financial support to help reorient from humanitarian aid toward peacebuilding and development and for increased cooperation among the UN, the transitional government, member states, and other multilateral organizations to navigate the volatile geopolitical environment.

The UN finds itself walking a tightrope as it reconfigures its support to Sudan during the country's fragile political transition. UNITAMS has an ambitious mandate but insufficient resources to immediately deliver on all its priorities. Although UNAMID's exit has been planned for years, the relatively swift termination of its peacekeeping mandate comes at a sensitive moment: a partial peace agreement and

persistent threats to vulnerable populations would normally suggest the value of continuing a UN peacekeeping mission, not hastening its exit. The reconfiguration also comes in the midst of a pandemic and at a moment when Sudan's transitional government is facing increasing pressure to meet its population's aspirations.

The UN has forged a clear but narrow path for supporting Sudan's transition. But the risks are also palpable, and falling off this tightrope could have devastating consequences for the organization and the country. In order to sustain the UN's reconfiguration in Sudan while supporting Sudan's own political transition, the UN should consider the following:

- Articulating a forward-looking political compact with Sudan to guide UN support to the political transition;
- Rapidly expanding support for urgent peacebuilding and protection priorities in Darfur;
- Continuously evaluating the UN's operational presence and substantive impact outside of Khartoum;
- Encouraging the Sudanese government to provide regular updates on the implementation of the Juba Peace Agreement and its national protection of civilians plan;
- Providing frequent, detailed assessments of UNAMID's drawdown and liquidation;
- Undertaking a nationwide campaign to raise awareness of UNITAMS; and
- Considering additional reforms to the UN's peace and security pillar on mission planning processes.

In addition, to support the efforts of the UN and the Sudanese transitional government, UN member states could consider the following:

- Increasing financial support to coherently address Sudan's peacebuilding and development needs;
- Maintaining a close relationship between the UN Security Council and the AU Peace and Security Council on Sudan; and
- Sustaining international attention on Sudan's transition and maintaining UN support.

Introduction

The UN's ongoing transition in Sudan is among the most complex reconfigurations the organization has ever attempted. Drawing down the African Union–United Nations Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) has been a priority for the organizations since 2017, but Sudan's political revolution in April 2019 and the subsequent installation of a transitional government radically transformed the context. The UN spent the ensuing months conceptualizing a new vision of UN support and created a new peace operation in June 2020—the UN Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan (UNITAMS). With the Sudanese transitional government lobbying the UN to resume UNAMID's closure, the UN Security Council terminated the mission's mandate on December 31, 2020. The deployment of UNITAMS began in October 2020, and the mission began delivering on all its strategic objectives at the start of January 2021 (see Figure 1 for a timeline of the UN transition).

The past twenty months of UN engagement in Sudan epitomize the complexity of transitioning contemporary peace operations. Despite agreement on the goal of supporting a successful Sudanese political transition, there was not consensus on the kind of support the UN should provide. The UN had to radically change its transition concept from the possible withdrawal of UNAMID with no follow-on operation to a UN presence anchored in an integrated special political mission. The UN also had to constantly balance divergent political interests among the Sudanese government, Sudanese society, Security Council members, international partners, and even the UN system itself.

The overarching goal of sustaining support to Sudan throughout its political transition has guided the UN in navigating the past twenty months. But UNAMID's departure risks exacerbating the

fragilities and uncertainties inherent to this moment. Sudan's transition is entering a delicate phase. The population is pressuring political leaders to deliver on the revolution's aspirations even as economic and humanitarian conditions are worsening. And despite spending over a decade in pursuit of an elusive political settlement, UNAMID closed mere weeks after the signing of a landmark but incomplete peace agreement and amid rising levels of violence across Darfur.

UNITAMS has an ambitious, nationwide mandate. However, its limited footprint, lack of uniformed personnel, and light approach to programming positions the UN to have a fundamentally different role in the country than it did with UNAMID. Accompanying the political process, mitigating the potential for a security vacuum, and helping the entire UN system pivot toward integrated peacebuilding and development support are

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monumental tasks. The new mission will need to find its footing amid sensitive domestic debates on democratic governance, security sector reform, and human rights. UNITAMS will

also need to foster a robust partnership with the UN country team (UNCT) in Sudan, even as the UN's resources and capacity decrease. The coming months will be crucial not only for ensuring the sustainable transition of the UN but also for supporting Sudan's own transition.

This paper examines the ongoing UN transition in Sudan, focusing on the establishment of UNITAMS and UNAMID's exit from Darfur.¹ It covers the period between November 2019, when the UN set this new phase of its transition in motion, and January 1, 2021, when UNAMID's mandate expired and UNITAMS became fully operational. The paper evaluates this period across four themes pertinent to the transition of UN peace operations: the creation of a shared political vision for the transition, national engagement in the process, efforts to comprehensively plan the transi-

¹ This research is grounded in an extensive desktop review, participation in closed-door events related to Sudan and UNAMID's transition, and thirty-two interviews conducted from May to November 2020. Interviews with UN and AU officials, member-state representatives, and independent experts took place by phone or video teleconference with individuals located in New York City; Addis Ababa, Ethiopia; and Khartoum and Zalingei, Sudan. This paper is part of a larger IPI project on UN transitions and is complemented by similar case studies on the UN peacekeeping transitions in Côte d'Ivoire, Haiti, Liberia, and Darfur and a crosscutting issue brief identifying trends and lessons from recent transition processes.

tion, and the dynamics of international financial support and partnerships.² It concludes by offering recommendations to guide the UN and its member states in sustaining the UN transition over the coming months.

A Shared Political Vision

The UN had to recalibrate its entire approach to the peacekeeping transition in Sudan on the fly. The transition started out in 2014 as a process to close UNAMID in the face of waning international support for the mission and overwhelming pressure from an autocratic regime that wanted it gone. This transition quickly became one of the UN's most complex reconfiguration processes ever.³ Sudan's revolution in 2019 radically transformed how the UN engages with Sudan and shifted the boundaries of debate and compromise in the Security Council. Council members achieved consensus on the broad political objective of providing international support to the country. However, clear differences emerged among Security Council members and between the council, the Sudanese transitional government, and senior UN leadership about how to translate this objective into a concrete strategy.

A Revolutionary Shift in the Security Council's Engagement with Sudan

Prior to the April 2019 revolution, discussions on Sudan in the Security Council were confined to conflict zones, UNAMID's operations, the Darfur peace process, and the disputed region of Abyei.⁴ UNAMID's exit was implicitly designed to work around the limitations of a council that could only engage on a small segment of Sudanese politics and

of a government that viewed the UN with suspicion, or even hostility. Isolated by international sanctions and an International Criminal Court indictment, Omar al-Bashir was not considered to be a viable partner for development support or large-scale investment by the traditional donor community. As a result, council members had fundamentally different views about the end state of the UN peacekeeping mission, with limited space for peacebuilding and development support and virtually no space for engagement on governance reform, the protection of civilians, justice, and human rights. These tensions would have severely constrained the UNCT had UNAMID exited the country in June 2020 as initially planned.⁵

But the revolution in Sudan provided the UN an opportunity to reorient its approach. It took some time for the Security Council to embrace this shift following the ouster of Bashir. Even after the massacre in Khartoum on June 3, 2019, when at least 128 protesters were killed by Sudanese security forces, some council members were reluctant for the body to discuss national political developments and delayed the adoption of a press statement.⁶ In August 2019, however, agreement on Sudan's constitutional declaration, which became a de facto political settlement, provided an entry point for the Security Council and signaled the transitional government's intent to normalize diplomatic relations.⁷

Efforts to articulate a new vision for the UN transition unfolded in a fragile domestic space. The revolution and early stages of Sudan's transition accelerated competition over political and economic power between different constituencies in the transitional government. Decades of marginalization and inequality brought about by the

2 These categories were derived from previous IPI research on UN peacekeeping transitions. See: Daniel Forti and Lesley Connolly, "Pivoting from Crisis to Development: Preparing for the Next Wave of UN Peacekeeping Transitions," International Peace Institute, July 2019.

3 This complexity related to the absence of a viable political settlement, persistent protection threats and humanitarian concerns, and a nonintegrated mission and UN country team presence. For more information about earlier stages of the UN transition in Sudan, see: Daniel Forti, "Navigating Crisis and Opportunity: The Peacekeeping Transition in Darfur," International Peace Institute, December 2019.

4 Discussions on Abyei focused on the UN Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA). The council also discussed Sudan in the context of the Sudan sanctions committee and Sudan's impact on the Central African Republic and South Sudan.

5 UN Security Council Resolution 2429 (July 13, 2018); Adam Day, "Peacekeeping Without a Partner: A Review of UNAMID's Political Strategy in Darfur," UN University Centre for Policy Research and Stimson Center, September 2020.

6 United Nations, *Security Council Press Statement on Sudan*, UN Doc. SC/13836, June 11, 2019; Security Council Report, "April 2019 Monthly Forecast on Sudan (Darfur)," March 29, 2019.

7 Permanent Mission of Sudan to the UN, "H.E. Prime Minister Dr. Abdalla Adam Hamdok Remarks at the High-Level Debate of the 74th Session of the General Assembly," New York, September 27, 2019, available at <http://statements.unmeetings.org/GA74/SD-EN.pdf>.

extreme concentration of power and influence persisted, with many communities outside of Khartoum not seeing any tangible difference in their lives months after the revolution. Preliminary democratic reforms confronted long-standing debates over identity, the role of religion in governance and society, and historical disputes over land and resources that were exacerbated by climate degradation. Civilians in hotspots in Darfur continued to face physical attacks, sexual and gender-based violence, and human rights violations.

After months of cautious engagement, the Security Council used UNAMID's mandate renewal in October 2019 as the first discreet signal of its intention to forge a new relationship with Sudan.

The implicit objective of this new approach was to support a successful and sustainable political transition, a goal that was made explicit months later.⁸ The importance of such a clear political objective in guiding the UN transition cannot be overstated, particularly given the historical divergences on Sudan among the council's five permanent members.

Support to Sudan's peace process became an easy point of convergence for the Security Council and was the first thrust of renewed political support.⁹ Sudan's constitutional declaration describes comprehensive peace as an immediate priority. The transitional government opened talks with the members of the Sudan Revolutionary Front (SRF) and other allied movements in October 2019 under the mediation of South Sudan.¹⁰ From that point until August 2020, negotiations between the transitional government and the SRF made incremental progress, often blowing past overambitious deadlines. These efforts culminated in a provisional

agreement in early September 2020 and the signing of a final agreement on October 3rd; the Security Council welcomed its adoption a week later.¹¹ But while the Security Council quickly came to consensus around the peace process and the subsequent agreement, divisions quickly emerged on the details of future UN support to Sudan.

Translating a Political Objective into a New Mission

Translating a broad political objective into concrete action required frequent negotiations between Security Council members and the Sudanese transitional government, multiple visits to Sudan by UN and AU officials, and detailed planning within the UN system. Divergences among council members led to the adoption of two separate mandates, one to establish UNITAMS (Resolution 2524) and one to extend UNAMID's mandate from October 2020 until the end of December 2020 (Resolution 2525).

The process began in October 2019 with the publication of a UN-AU joint special report that presented the parameters for a new political strategy for Sudan and options for a follow-on configuration to UNAMID. It identified six priorities for a future UN civilian presence, as agreed to by the UN, AU, and Sudanese transitional government: the peace processes, Sudan's broader constitutional transition, peacebuilding and civilian protection in marginalized areas, and economic and humanitarian assistance.¹² With UNAMID's mandate set to expire on October 31, 2019, and considering the Sudanese transitional government's request for additional time to finalize its own views, the Security Council extended UNAMID's mandate until October 2020.¹³

The importance of a clear political objective in guiding the UN transition in Sudan cannot be overstated.

⁸ UN Security Council, *Special Report of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission and the Secretary-General of the United Nations on the African Union–United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur and a Follow-on Presence*, UN Doc. S/2020/202, March 12, 2020, para. 48; UN Security Council Resolution 2524 (June 3, 2020).

⁹ UN Security Council Resolution 2495 (October 31, 2019), para. 3(i).

¹⁰ The SRF is a coalition of armed movements including the Justice and Equality Movement, the Sudan Liberation Movement–Minni Minawi, the Sudan Liberation Movement–Transitional Council, the Sudanese Alliance Movement, the Sudan Liberation Forces Alliance, and the Sudan Liberation Movement. It also includes a faction of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement–North (SPLM-N) led by Malik Agar.

¹¹ United Nations, *Security Council Press Statement on the Juba Peace Agreement (Sudan)*, UN Doc. SC/14323, October 9, 2020.

¹² UN Security Council, *Special Report of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission and the Secretary-General of the United Nations on the African Union–United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur*, UN Doc. S/2019/816, October 17, 2019, paras. 38–46.

¹³ The AU Peace and Security Council had previously extended the mandate until June 2020. Forti, "Navigating Crisis and Opportunity," p. 22.

Box 1. The Juba Peace Agreement and the Hamdok-al-Hilu Agreement¹⁴

The Juba Peace Agreement between the transitional government and the Sudan Revolutionary Front (SRF) is a first step in Sudan's pursuit of a comprehensive, inclusive, and final peace. The agreement is comprised of separate protocols signed bilaterally between the transitional government and various Sudanese armed movements, including a protocol on national issues and region-specific protocols on Darfur, South Kordofan and Blue Nile (the Two Areas), North Sudan, East Sudan, and Central Sudan.

The agreement extends Sudan's transitional period by at least thirty-nine months, beginning in October 2020. It outlines the steps for a constitution-drafting process and a national dialogue and provides for a regionally based federal system of governance. National elections are expected to take place after the ratification of a new constitution. The agreement also details power-sharing provisions for Sudan's Sovereign Council, transitional legislature, and council of ministers.¹⁵

The regional protocols cover security arrangements (including permanent cease-fires), power- and wealth-sharing mechanisms, and processes for justice, reconciliation, and accountability. The protocol for Darfur mandates the deployment of a 12,000-strong security-maintenance force comprising forces from the transitional government and armed groups, the restoration of Darfur's regional status, and the launch of a Darfur development fund with an annual budget of \$750 million over ten years.

Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok and the leader of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement–North (SPLM-N), Abdelaziz al-Hilu, agreed on a separate declaration of principles on September 4, 2020.¹⁶ Al-Hilu had pulled out of the Juba Peace Process in July over disagreements over the role of General Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo (Hemedti) in the negotiations and over the final language about the separation of state and religion. The declaration of principles emphasized that “the constitution should be based on the principle of ‘separation of religion and state’” and included provisions on a cessation of hostilities and wealth and power sharing.¹⁷ While Sudan's Sovereign Council initially supported the agreement, subsequent divisions between its civilian and military officials reflected a delicate political balance.¹⁸

Resolution 2495 also asked the UN and AU to prepare a special report to recommend courses of action for UNAMID's drawdown and “options for a follow-on presence” that reflected the views and needs of the transitional government.¹⁹

Various processes between November 2019 and March 2020 informed the details of UN support and the new mission's mandate. These included the November 2019 meeting of the Tripartite Coordination Mechanism on UNAMID, a visit by

a multidisciplinary UN team to Sudan in December 2019, a multi-stakeholder forum convened by the German government (in its capacity as a co-penholder on the Darfur file at the Security Council), and an internal mapping exercise led by the UN special adviser on Sudan, Nicholas Haysom.

Sudan submitted two letters to the UN secretary-general in January and February 2020 that detailed its requests for UN support. These had an outsize

14 International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA), “Summary and Analysis of the Juba Agreement for Peace in Sudan,” October 2020; UN Security Council, *Special Report of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission and the Secretary-General of the United Nations on the African Union–United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur and a Follow-on Presence*, UN Doc. S/2020/1115, November 13, 2020, paras. 3–6.

15 The Sovereign Council is an eleven-member, collective head of state that includes five members nominated by the former Transitional Military Council (TMC), five by the Forces for Freedom and Change (FFC) coalition, and one civilian jointly appointed by both. General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, former chair of the TMC, is chairing the council for the first twenty-one months, and a civilian nominated by the FFC will chair it for the final eighteen months. The council is responsible for confirming appointments to other branches of the government and commands the armed forces. Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok serves as head of government and chairs a cabinet of twenty ministers, all civilians except for the two security portfolios.

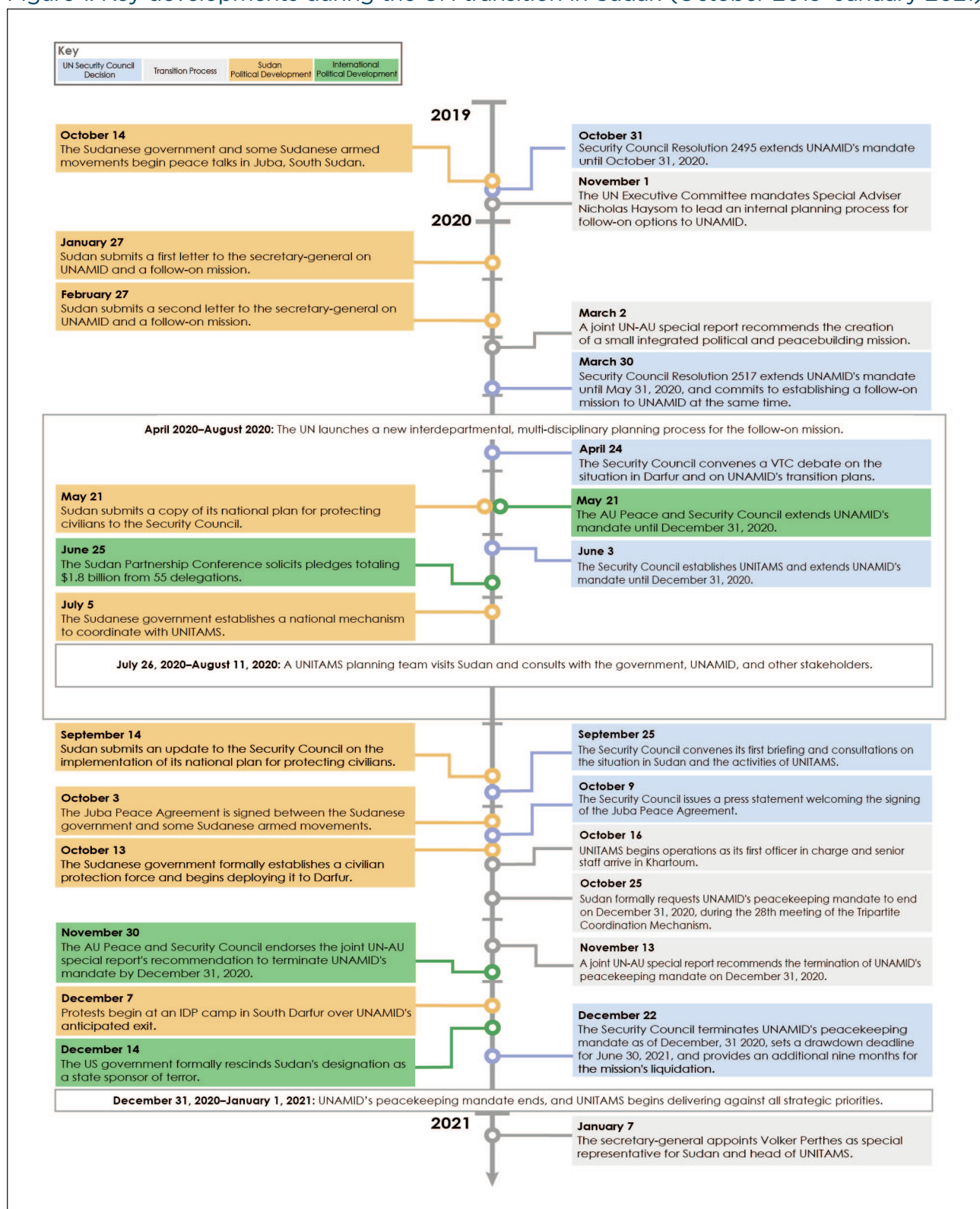
16 The SPLM-N is a prominent armed movement based in the Sudanese states of Blue Nile and South Kordofan.

17 “Sudan Govt, SPLM-N Al Hilu Sign Declaration of Principles Agreement,” Radio Tamazuj, September 4, 2020; “Joint Agreement between Abdalla Hamdok and Abdelaziz Adam Alhilu,” September 3, 2020 (On file with author).

18 “Sudan's Transitional Authority Endorses Hamdok–Hilu Agreement on Peace Talks,” *Sudan Tribune*, September 14, 2020; “Kiir, Hemetti Discuss Resumption of Peace Talks with SPLM-N al-Hilu,” *Sudan Tribune*, January 11, 2021.

19 UN Security Council, Resolution 2495 (October 31, 2019).

Figure 1. Key developments during the UN transition in Sudan (October 2019–January 2021)



influence on the UN Secretariat's recommendations to the Security Council in March 2020 and set the boundaries for subsequent negotiations. Comparing the two letters offers insight into how the Sudanese authorities viewed the future of the UN transition.

The January 27th letter was a comprehensive request from Prime Minister Hamdok that covered developments in the constitutional transition and proposed substantive priorities and the operational configuration for a new mission.²⁰ The letter explicitly asked for a Chapter VI peace support operation in the form of a special political mission, with an integrated presence and a countrywide footprint. It also detailed six broad substantive areas for the new mission to engage on. Some of the letter's specific requests suggested that the prime minister foresaw a relatively active mission, including through "regular monitoring" of the constitutional benchmarks, human rights monitoring, and the protection of civilians.²¹

The February 27th letter stood in stark contrast to its predecessor.²² Though also signed by the prime minister, the concise document was framed as "conclusions reached by the Government of Sudan" after "intensive consultations," a signal that the first letter did not have widespread support within the transitional government. The letter discussed substantive priorities in less detail and omitted references to the constitutional declaration and monitoring of its implementation, cease-fire monitoring, support to legal and judicial reforms, human rights monitoring, the protection of civilians, and the deployment of police advisers. While it did not discuss the mission's operational footprint, the letter built on previous assumptions that any follow-on UN presence would be exclusively civilian.

The Sudanese transitional government's desire to see UNAMID closed was implicit in both letters.

The government had long viewed the presence of a Chapter VII peacekeeping operation as a scourge domestically and a blemish on its international reputation. The transitional government that came into power following the revolution used its desire for more international support as a lever: it welcomed a new peace operation (something that had previously been a political impossibility) in exchange for a firm decision on UNAMID's exit. But while the letters reflected the government's skill in navigating Security Council politics, they also exposed sharp internal divides.

At the same time, the UN Departments of Peace Operations (DPO) and Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA) engaged in heated debates about whether to propose mission configurations with formed police units, which were ultimately resolved at the highest levels. Senior UN leaders allegedly decided against presenting these options because the Sudanese transitional government had explicitly requested a political mission in its formal and informal communications to the secretary-general, and because the UN confronted severe reputational risks if it advocated for a strong protection of civilians mandate but could not muster the capabilities or resources to meet the accompanying expectations.²³ This balancing of political interests encapsulates the pressures UN officials face in conforming to a host state's preferences while meeting the expectation of presenting rigorous and diverse options to the Security Council.

These divides both within the Sudanese transitional government and within the UN influenced the parameters of Security Council negotiations. While Germany and the UK (the co-penholders on the Darfur file) used the first letter to advocate for an expansive follow-on presence, the second letter's rollback of language had a "tremendous influence" on which ideas could receive support in the council.²⁴ Member states and UN officials alike

20 UN Security Council, *Letter Dated 28 January 2020 from the Chargé d'Affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of the Sudan to the United Nations Addressed to the President of the Security Council (Annex)*, UN Doc. S/2020/77, January 28, 2020.

21 Some of the specific provisions included: "Support for the implementation of the Constitutional Declaration; regular monitoring of the implementation of its key benchmark...; the repatriation and reintegration of internally displaced persons and refugees; reconciliation among communities; peace dividends; transitional justice, the protection of civilians and capacity-building of the national police force, including through deployment of United Nations, African Union and other police advisers, as appropriate. Human rights monitoring and capacity-building for national institutions." Ibid.

22 UN Security Council, *Letter Dated 20 March 2020 from the Permanent Representative of the Sudan to the United Nations Addressed to the President of the Security Council (Annex)*, UN Doc. S/2020/221, March 20, 2020.

23 Interview with UN official, June 2020.

24 Interviews with UN Security Council members, June–July 2020.

struggled to reconcile the letters' competing positions, and some council members relied on this ambiguity to pursue their own national interests.²⁵ Russia, for example, objected to a version of the UNITAMS mandate that referenced the January 27th letter. The permanent mission of Sudan formally withdrew the January letter as a formal Security Council document, likely because it opened a political avenue for some council members to consider a more expansive mandate for a new mission than it may have wanted.²⁶

The March 2020 UN-AU joint special report was intended to propose options for a new follow-on mission to UNAMID, as requested in Security Council Resolution 2495. It outlined political objectives, identified potential risks, proposed modalities of support, and linked the mission start-up to UNAMID's drawdown. Its analysis largely aligned with the Sudanese transitional government's second letter and the principles outlined in the October 2019 joint report. It emphasized the core objectives of supporting the constitutional transition, the peace process, peacebuilding, and economic reform and recovery. The report also elaborated on specific principles that should inform the new mission's design.²⁷

However, the report did not comprehensively engage on difficult questions related to the protection of civilians. While it established that the protection of civilians would be one of the principles for the new mission, it focused on "civilian protection," not physical protection. It noted that providing physical protection "would require a very significant deployment, commensurate with the size of the area of operations. Short of this, a post-UNAMID mechanism would not be in a position to provide such protection and should

therefore not be expected to do so."²⁸

Therefore, in deference to the Sudanese transitional government's request, the report only recommended one viable option: a civilian political and peacebuilding mission. It did not discuss options for missions with different combinations of uniformed and nonuniformed personnel, including formed police units, that internal analyses had proposed.²⁹ It also ruled out the options of UNCT with no mission and of a robust peacekeeping presence. This narrow approach was not easy to reconcile with the report's documentation of persistent conflict drivers, intercommunal tensions, and human rights violations against civilians in Darfur.

Around the same time, a leaked internal working draft resolution authored by Germany and the UK reflected a contrasting approach to the next mandate by proposing that the new mission have a uniformed police component of up to 2,500 personnel and a reserve military capacity not exceeding one battalion for a quick-reaction force.³⁰ This draft had not been shared informally either with the Sudanese transitional government or with other Security Council members prior to its leak. After the leak, diplomatic engagement with the transitional government became more complex, with Sudanese diplomats resisting discussions about uniformed components even more strongly.³¹ Although the council was scheduled to adopt a mandate for the new mission by March 31, 2020 (as per Resolution 2495), it rolled over the existing mandate for two months to allow for more substantive discussions and to better understand the impact of COVID-19 on UNAMID's operations.³²

Many of the divisions over the future of UN

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ See: UN Doc. S/2020/77/Corr.1. For more information, see: Security Council Report, "Resolutions on the UN/AU Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID) and the Establishment of a Follow-on Mission," June 3, 2020.

²⁷ These included: a country-wide mandate, a timeframe limited to the duration of Sudan's transitional period, innovation in terms of the UN's peace and security, development tools and partnerships, a light footprint based on accompaniment, flexibility to sequence priorities and tasks based on developments in the country, an integrated and unified UN structure, a strong partnership with the African Union but not a hybrid operation, a civilian protection model, and a central focus on gender equality and women, peace, and security. See: UN Doc. S/2020/202, paras. 56–65.

²⁸ Ibid., para. 64.

²⁹ UN police play an important role in executing protection of civilians mandates, particularly in transition settings when military components are drawn down and the host country emphasizes strengthening the rule of law, security sector reform, and community engagement. For more information, see: Charles Hunt, "Protection through Policing: The Protective Role of UN Police in Peace Operations," International Peace Institute, February 2020.

³⁰ Working document on file with author, March 22, 2020.

³¹ Interview with independent expert, May 2020; Interview with representatives of UN Security Council members, May–June 2020.

³² UN Security Council Resolution 2517 (March 30, 2020).

engagement spilled into the open during an April 24, 2020, Security Council video teleconference on UNAMID, which was the first opportunity for the council to formally discuss the UN-AU special report. Some Security Council members immediately supported the report's recommendations and the Sudanese transitional government's requests, citing the principles of host-state consent and national ownership of the transition process. Others pushed back, raising concerns about how the UN should respond to rising violence and tensions in Darfur—a reflection of healthy skepticism about Sudan's ability to fill the protection gap left by UNAMID.³³ Ultimately, consensus formed around the mandate of UNITAMS, which largely aligned with the recommendations in the UN-AU special report and the Sudanese transitional government's February letter.

While the Security Council had only committed to adopting a mandate for the new mission, not to addressing the future of UNAMID, politics around the protection of civilians made it impossible to discuss one mission without the other.³⁴ The co-penholders initially sought to combine the mandates of UNITAMS and UNAMID into one resolution but ended up separating them because of disagreements over the future of uniformed peacekeepers in Darfur. The Sudanese transitional government requested that UNAMID close in October 2020, as per Resolution 2495, a position backed by China, Russia, and the three African members of the Security Council. Other council members proposed extending UNAMID's mandate and maintaining its troop and police ceilings until May

The mandates did not elucidate a clear end state for UN-mandated engagement in Sudan or suggest how the Security Council would balance or prioritize competing political priorities.

31, 2021, as a security buffer while the transitional government increased its capacity to protect civilians. This deadlock was broken by the AU Peace and Security Council's communiqué on UNAMID, which extended the AU's mandate for the mission until December 31, 2020; the Security Council endorsed this compromise.³⁵ While the final day of negotiations was a “rollercoaster experience,” with edits to the draft texts lasting until the final minutes before the two resolutions were “put into blue,” the Security Council adopted two resolutions on UNITAMS and UNAMID on June 3, 2020.³⁶

Resolution 2524 established UNITAMS as an integrated transitional assistance mission with four strategic priorities: assisting the political transition; supporting the peace processes; contributing to

peacebuilding, the rule of law, and civilian protection; and mobilizing economic and humanitarian assistance. The mission would provide technical assistance and advisory support to Sudanese officials and was expected to start delivering on all its

mandated objectives by January 1, 2021, at the latest. UNITAMS is headquartered in Khartoum, with regional offices in Darfur, South Kordofan and Blue Nile (the Two Areas), and East Sudan.³⁷

Resolution 2525 streamlined UNAMID's strategic priorities to focus exclusively on the protection of civilians in Darfur. It requested systematic cooperation between UNAMID and UNITAMS on transition planning at both the substantive and operational levels. It also emphasized UNAMID's role in supporting the Sudanese transitional

33 The UK and the US, along with Niger, South Africa, Tunisia, and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines (the A3+1 grouping) asked the Secretariat for additional analysis of protection issues and additional options for mission configurations, including for a mission with a uniformed police component. Belgium, Indonesia, and the United States also called for the Security Council to establish a mission with uniformed police components. See: UN Security Council, *Letter Dated 28 April 2020 from the President of the Security Council Addressed to the Secretary-General and the Permanent Representatives of the Members of the Security Council*, UN Doc. S/2020/336, April 29, 2020.

34 UNAMID's mandate, as per Resolution 2495 (2019) remained valid until October 31, 2019. Interviews with representatives of UN Security Council members, June–July 2020.

35 AU Peace and Security Council Communiqué CMXXVII (May 21, 2020).

36 Interview with representative of UN Security Council member, June 2020. Security Council members adapted the traditional voting procedures for resolutions in March 2020 in response to the restrictions imposed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Following the presentation of a draft resolution in blue, each delegation had to provide its written votes to the UN Security Council Affairs Division during one non-extendable twenty-four-hour window. For more information, see: UN Security Council, *Letter Dated 27 March 2020 from the President of the Security Council Addressed to the Permanent Representatives of the Members of the Security Council*, UN Doc. S/2020/253, March 31, 2020.

37 UN Security Council, *Report of the Secretary-General on the Situation in the Sudan and the Activities of the United Nations Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in the Sudan*, UN Doc. S/2020/912, September 17, 2020.

government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The resolution set a deadline of October 31, 2020, for another UN-AU special report with "recommendations on the appropriate course of action regarding the drawdown of UNAMID, taking into account the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic."³⁸

The two mandates reflected the compromises made by Security Council members in their effort to translate a broad vision into a concrete direction for the UN transition. Grounded in the common objective of supporting Sudan's political transition, UNITAMS is well positioned to channel UN political and technical support to governance, peacebuilding, and the rule of law. Both mandates overlapped in their presentation of the two missions' immediate political, peacebuilding, and civilian protection priorities and strived to promote the seamless transition of their substantive work. However, the mandates did not elucidate a clear end state for UN-mandated engagement in Sudan or suggest how the Security Council would balance or prioritize competing political priorities.

Some of the geopolitical competition that influenced the mandate negotiations spilled over into the process for approving a special representative of the secretary-general (SRSG) for UNITAMS. Sudan initially refused to consent to the appointment of Special Adviser Haysom, the secretary-general's initial choice in June 2020. Disagreements between Russia, the UK, and the US over appointments to the UN Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO) then allegedly led Russia to place an informal pause on the potential nomination of a French diplomat as an alternative candidate until September, when he was no longer available.³⁹ The UN secretary-general identified five candidates for another shortlist in November and announced the appointment of Volker Perthes in early January 2021—nearly seven months after UNITAMS was mandated and three months after it began deploying to Sudan.⁴⁰

The absence of an SRSG for nearly six months was detrimental to UNITAMS's planning and deployment. It prevented the mission from smoothly navigating interdepartmental politics, determining and sequencing mission priorities, articulating draft mission benchmarks, and recruiting senior leaders and staff on schedule. It also handicapped the UN's engagement with the Sudanese authorities, despite the presence of UNAMID's joint special representative (JSR) and deputy joint special representative (DJSR) until December 31, 2020. Because of the delay, multiple officials expressed concern that the UN missed opportunities to constructively engage on political developments in Khartoum and minimize forum shopping by the Sudanese among various international partners, especially considering that the mission only has a medium-term mandate.⁴¹

The Juba Peace Agreement as the First Step toward Renewed Political Support

Situating the Juba Peace Agreement as one of the initial tentpoles of UN political engagement creates opportunities and risks for the next stage of the UN transition. Prime Minister Hamdok and his civilian-led cabinet invested significant political capital in prioritizing peace and restarting talks with the SRF, which had been dormant in the hands of the AU High-Level Independent Panel (AUHIP). Compared to previous peace agreements signed by the former regime, the new transitional government demonstrated a more genuine commitment to the principles of equality and democracy, suggesting it may approach some of the envisioned reforms seriously.

Perhaps most importantly, the agreement has provided momentum for the next stage of the political transition. The Sovereign Council and Council of Ministers appended the agreement as an annex to the constitutional declaration weeks after

38 UN Security Council Resolution 2525 (June 3, 2020), para. 11.

39 Colum Lynch and Robbie Gramer, "Big-Power Rivalries Hamstring Top U.N. Missions," *Foreign Policy*, July 22, 2020; "Moscow Blocks French Candidate to Head UN's New Sudan Mission," *Africa Intelligence*, September 11, 2020.

40 "Five Candidates in Race to Lead UNITAMS in Khartoum," *Africa Intelligence*, November 5, 2020; Interview with representative of UN Security Council member, November 2020; UN Secretary-General, "Statement: Mr. Volker Perthes of Germany—Special Representative for Sudan and Head of the United Nations Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan," January 7, 2021.

41 Interviews with UN officials, July–August 2020.

it was signed, providing an impetus to begin implementing some provisions but also sparking a domestic debate.⁴² Hamdok's agreement on a framework for negotiations with Abdelaziz al-Hilu on September 3rd also suggested the possibility of opening new, albeit sensitive, avenues to solidify support for the peace agreement.⁴³

For all the positive aspects of the agreement, it also amplified certain risks for the political transition. The Sudan Liberation Army–Abdul Wahid al-Nur (SLA-AW), the only Darfur-based armed movement with fighters in the Jebel Marra, refused to participate in the peace process.⁴⁴ The Juba Peace Agreement thus did not remove one of the most persistent roadblocks to reaching a sustainable political settlement and improving security in Darfur. One analyst predicted that the “current peace negotiations will have little effect on levels of violence.”⁴⁵ The Juba Peace Agreement has also been characterized as “highly complex” because the regional protocols that were negotiated bilaterally also have national implications, which may expose inconsistencies between certain provisions.⁴⁶

Civilians across Darfur and the Two Areas had limited opportunities to participate in the peace process, which was nominally between transitional government officials in Khartoum and the leaders of the armed movements, who themselves had weak links to their communities. Citizens demonstrated throughout Darfur in June and July 2020 over the lack of tangible benefits from the peace process.⁴⁷ This perception only began to change slightly following the appointment of civilian walis

(governors) at the end of July 2020. UNAMID helped 120 Darfuri citizens (including 50 women) to offer input into the Juba process; this included a delegation of twenty representatives from women's networks across Darfur who attended the negotiations and presented a position paper. However, these attempts were not complemented by any formal structure within the peace process.⁴⁸

The Juba Peace Agreement may also run the risk of deepening existing patterns of elite-driven power structures and bargaining within the transitional government and the security forces. Its implementation could complicate the already delicate balance of power among political elites in Khartoum as the SRF's leaders assume formal roles in the transitional institutions and all leaders potentially jockey

for power ahead of the eventual elections.⁴⁹ And absent major financial contributions to help implement the agreement—estimated by the signatory armed movements at approximately \$13 billion

over ten years—the transitional government will be unable to deliver on these reforms.⁵⁰

Despite consensus around the UN's role in supporting the peace process, the Security Council will need to walk a fine line in positioning itself vis-à-vis other political development during Sudan's transition. Fostering consensus in the council will be difficult as Sudan begins to navigate issues related to inclusive governance, justice and accountability, human rights, gender equality, and security sector reform—the more delicate parts of its political transition. Because the Security Council will be cautious and defer to Sudanese

Fostering consensus in the Security Council will be difficult as Sudan begins to navigate the more delicate parts of its political transition.

42 UN Doc. S/2020/1115, para. 5; “Civil society orgs warn Sudan govt against implementing peace agreement,” *Radio Dabanga*, October 17, 2020.

43 “Sudanese Government Rejects Religion Workshop Recommendations: SPLM-N Hilu,” *Sudan Tribune*, November 3, 2020; “Kiir, Hemetti Discuss Resumption of Peace Talks with SPLM-N al-Hilu,” *Sudan Tribune*, January 11, 2021.

44 UN Security Council, *Letter Dated 14 January 2020 from the Panel of Experts on the Sudan Addressed to the President of the Security Council*, UN Doc. S/2020/36, January 14, 2020; Dan Watson, “Riders on the Storm: Rebels, Soldiers and Paramilitaries in Sudan's Margins,” *Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project* (ACLED), August 27, 2020.

45 Watson, “Riders on the Storm.”

46 International IDEA, “Summary and Analysis of the Juba Agreement for Peace in Sudan,” p. 5.

47 Nafisa Eltahir and Khalid Abdelaziz, “Sudan Peace Talks Offer Little Hope for Protesters in Darfur,” *Reuters*, July 29, 2020.

48 UN Doc. S/2020/202, para. 8; UN Doc. S/2020/1115, para. 9.

49 “Hamdok Forms Sudan's Second Transitional Cabinet,” *Sudan Tribune*, February 9, 2021; Jean-Baptiste Gallopin, “A Chance for Peace? The Impact of the Juba Peace Deal on Sudan's Fragile Transition,” *War on the Rocks*, September 22, 2020; UN Security Council, *Report of the Secretary-General Situation in the Sudan and the Activities of the United Nations Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in the Sudan*, UN Doc. S/2020/1155, December 1, 2020, paras. 5–6.

50 UN Security Council, *Reports of the Secretary-General on the Sudan and South Sudan—Remarks by Mr. Jean-Pierre Lacroix, Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations*, UN Doc. S/PV.8761, September 25, 2020.

stakeholders, it is unlikely it will engage collectively without specific requests from the parties or the outbreak of a crisis. This caution could negatively impact UNITAMS during its early months, as it can only support the implementation of the Juba Peace Agreement if requested to do so by the Sudanese parties.⁵¹ Clarity on the council's next political priorities will thus be crucial.

National Engagement During the Transition

Inclusive national engagement throughout UN transitions is necessary for supporting the host state in recommitting to its responsibilities, aligning expectations between the UN and national actors, and building a common understanding of peacebuilding and development priorities.⁵² Sudanese ownership has been a defining principle throughout this period of the UN transition. But striving for national ownership has forced the UN to make difficult decisions, particularly on protecting civilians in Darfur. It has also underscored Sudanese constituencies' starkly different views on how the UN should support the country. This section examines the evolution of Sudan's engagement with the UN and its impact on the roles of UNAMID and UNITAMS.

Shaping A New Relationship between Sudan and the UN

Sudan's relationship with the UN system has gradually shifted from adversarial to cautiously constructive. Former President Bashir and his government viewed the UN and UNAMID with suspicion, dating back to the failed negotiations to re-hat the AU Mission in Sudan (AMIS) as a UN

mission between 2006 and 2007. Sudanese authorities capitalized on political and bureaucratic opportunities to weaken UNAMID and inhibit the implementation of its mandate.⁵³ UNAMID's initial transition concept was designed with limited Sudanese participation because the transitional government wanted UN peacekeepers to leave as quickly as possible.⁵⁴ But the political revolution opened a window of opportunity for the UN and the Sudanese transitional government to reset relations.

Sudan's constitutional declaration shifted the parameters for UN support, as it articulated a coherent vision for countrywide reforms, many of which aligned with UN peacebuilding and development expertise.⁵⁵ Explicit references to Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace, and security and the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) suggest that the parties negotiating the constitutional declaration saw political benefit in aligning Sudan more closely with international frameworks.

Prime Minister Hamdok also committed to ending his government's isolationist foreign policy and repairing its regional and international relationships.⁵⁶ UN Secretary-General António Guterres reciprocated by investing significant political capital in establishing a constructive dialogue with Sudan. While Hamdok was nominated by Sudan's Transitional Military Council and the Forces for Freedom and Change coalition primarily for his economic expertise and background as an apolitical Sudanese civil servant, his experience as a former UN official was also considered an asset in helping Sudan reposition itself vis-à-vis the multilateral system.⁵⁷ These new relationships not only fostered trust between senior political leaders

51 UN Security Council Resolution 2524 (June 3, 2020), para. 2(ii)b.

52 Forti and Connolly, "Pivoting from Crisis to Development," p. 5.

53 See examples in: Day, "Peacekeeping Without a Partner"; Sofia Sebastián and Aditi Gorur, "U.N. Peacekeeping and Host-State Consent," Stimson Center, March 2018; Patryk I. Labuda, "With or Against the State? Reconciling the Protection of Civilians and Host-State Support in UN Peacekeeping," International Peace Institute, May 2020; and Ralph Mamiya, Wibke Hansen, et al., "Assessing the Effectiveness of the United Nations–African Union Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID)," Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, October 2020, pp. 76–78.

54 Forti, "Navigating Crisis and Opportunity," pp. 6–9.

55 These include support to national independent commissions on justice, peace, human rights, and elections and issues related to comprehensive peace for the whole country.

56 Permanent Mission of Sudan to the UN, "H.E. Prime Minister Dr. Abdalla Adam Hamdok Remarks at the High-Level Debate of the 74th Session of the General Assembly."

57 Sudanese Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok was acting executive secretary for the Economic Commission for Africa (officially part of the UN senior leadership group) when current UN Secretary-General António Guterres assumed office in January 2017. See: UN Interoffice Memorandum, "Enhancing Performance in the Peace and Security Pillar," January 3, 2017. See also: Khalid Abdelaziz, "Sudan Opposition to Nominate Economist Abdalla Hamdok as PM: Sources," Reuters.

but also created an atmosphere for engagement that permeated the UN system.

The UN also had to adjust to a Sudanese government that represented a wider array of interests. The revolution opened space for Sudanese with more diverse backgrounds, expertise, and political interests to join both the civil service and the military.⁵⁸ Given the slow process of reconstructing government institutions, different officials have presented different national objectives and negotiating positions throughout the UN transition. Some Sudanese officials remain distrustful of UN support because of their negative personal experiences with UNAMID, complicating the initial engagement of UN officials and Security Council members.⁵⁹ However, the establishment of the Executive Committee for Coordination with UNITAMS in July 2020 was meant to help establish a more consistent line of engagement at both the federal and state levels.⁶⁰

Likewise, until the official appointment of the SRSG for UNITAMS, the Sudanese had to engage with many UN counterparts who lacked coherence or a clear direction. UN leadership in the country—including UNAMID’s JSR and DJSR, the UNCT’s resident coordinator, and heads of agencies, funds, and programs—all maintained working relationships with various counterparts in the transitional government. In New York, the under-secretaries-general for DPO and DPPA and former Special Adviser Haysom all had varying institutional responsibilities and interests on the Sudan file.

The UN’s emphasis on building working relationships with Sudanese counterparts in Darfur during the initial stages of UNAMID’s reconfiguration helped sustain local ownership even after the revolution. UNAMID provided technical and logistical support to the Juba peace process, and its JSR remained politically engaged on the margins.

The DJSR frequently convened meetings with communities across Darfur to discuss the UN’s ongoing transition and its potential impact on them. Consultative mechanisms built into the state liaison functions (SLFs)—UNAMID-funded projects implemented jointly by the mission and the UNCT—allowed the Sudanese transitional government to work with the UN to identify priorities, design activities, and monitor impact.⁶¹

Unpacking the Protection Question in Darfur

Sustaining the protection of Darfuri civilians was a central component of the UN transition. As UN peacekeeping operations do not substitute for a host government’s primary responsibility to protect civilians, transitions present an important opportunity to support national authorities so that peacekeepers are no longer needed.⁶² Debates about UNAMID’s future raised questions about whether the mission’s swift departure would jeopardize the UN and AU’s decade-long investment in protecting civilians in Darfur. They also reflected deep concerns about whether the transitional government’s strong assertion of its sovereignty could be matched by the reforms needed to fulfill its protection responsibilities and whether the Sudanese security forces, which have long perpetrated human rights abuses, could build trust and effectively safeguard civilians. In mandating the mission’s exit, the Security Council was implicitly tolerating a certain level of violence against civilians and increasing the risk of a security vacuum in Darfur after December 2020. It also exposed a gray zone for the UN in protecting civilians in transition settings: the UN had to balance the security and reputational risks of its withdrawal against context-specific interpretations of its protection mandate, as well as the political imperative to support the host state and encourage

58 Philipp Jahn, Gerrit Kurtz, and Peter Schumann, “How the New UN Mission in Sudan Can Succeed,” *IPI Global Observatory*, August 25, 2020.

59 Interviews with UN member-state representatives, June–July 2020; Interviews with UN officials, July–September 2020.

60 The Executive Committee comprises fifteen officials and is led by Ambassador Omer al-Sheikh. The Committee has representatives from the government Departments for Political Administration, Peace Management and Peacebuilding, Economics and Social Issues, Military Intelligence, and Operational Support. “Sudan Establishes National Mechanism for Coordination with UNITAMS,” *Sudan Tribune*, July 5, 2020; Sudanese transitional government statement on July 5, 2020 (on file with author).

61 This was done through a 5+8 mechanism involving the eight UN agencies, UNAMID, and multiple Sudanese government entities and through dedicated workshops convened jointly by the transitional government and different UN agencies for each SLF project area. See: Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance and United Nations Sudan, “UN/AU Transition in Darfur: Lessons from Assistance on Rule of Law and Human Rights through the State Liaison Functions,” December 2020, p. 39.

62 Damian Lilly, “Considering the Protection of Civilians during UN Peacekeeping Transitions,” *International Peace Institute*, January 2021.

stronger national ownership over protection.⁶³

Uncertainty about UNAMID's future was accentuated by its tenuous standing and legacy in Darfur. The mission's protection efforts—the most prominent aspect of its mandate—have been widely documented as being imperfect, but they were nonetheless appreciated by Darfuri civilians.⁶⁴ In contrast to the Sudanese transitional government's desire to quickly close UNAMID, ninety-eight Sudanese citizens and civil society organizations sent a petition to Prime Minister Hamdok in May 2020 requesting the UN to extend its Chapter VII peacekeeping mandate in Darfur.⁶⁵ Similar demands continued throughout the year, and Darfuri civilians and internally displaced persons (IDPs) across the greater Jebel Marra region began protesting UNAMID's imminent closure in December 2020.⁶⁶

UNAMID had a two-pronged transition strategy before the revolution: in the Jebel Marra, where most ongoing fighting was concentrated, it retained its traditional peacekeeping mandate, including the protection of civilians, while in the rest of Darfur, its mandate was limited to peacebuilding. The mission continued this approach after the revolution. But in comparison to the beginning of its transition, UNAMID's relatively diminished capacity rendered it a shell of

In mandating UNAMID's exit, the Security Council was implicitly tolerating a certain level of violence against civilians and increasing the risk of a security vacuum in Darfur.

its former self and limited its effectiveness across all mandated areas. While the mission was mandated to provide in extremis peacekeeping support across Darfur, it had limited analytical and early-warning capabilities outside of the Jebel Marra.⁶⁷ This approach's drawbacks were made evident by UNAMID's limited response to a massacre in El Geneina, West Darfur, at the end of December 2019.⁶⁸

Sudan's creation of a national strategy for the protection of civilians added another layer to these debates (see Box 2). National protection

frameworks are an emerging practice recognized by the UN that national authorities can use to systematically improve their protection of civilians policies and capabilities.⁶⁹ Sudan is the first country hosting a peacekeeping

operation to develop a national protection strategy and submit it to the Security Council.⁷⁰ The transitional government prepared and submitted it as a formal document in May 2020, just days before the council adopted the resolutions on UNITAMS and UNAMID. The strategy reflects the transitional government's commitment to assume full responsibility for the protection of civilian and was explicitly prepared "in anticipation of the Council's consultations on the forthcoming draft resolution on the exit of [UNAMID] and the mechanism that

63 UNAMID leaders had different interpretations of the geographic scope of the mission's protection responsibilities between 2019 and 2020. See Namie Di Razza, "Accountability System for the Protection of Civilians in UN Peacekeeping," case study on Darfur, available at <https://www.ipinst.org/2020/12/the-accountability-system-for-the-protection-of-civilians-in-un-peacekeeping>.

64 Mamiya, Hansen, et al. "Assessing the Effectiveness of the United Nations–African Union Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID)," pp. 63–74; Interviews with UN officials, June–August 2020.

65 "Petition from Sudanese Civil Society Organizations to the Prime Minister of Sudan, His Excellency Abdalla Hamdok," May 4, 2020, available at <https://www.dabangasudan.org/uploads/media/5eb3c01ab52e3.pdf>; Niemat Ahmadi, "Pulling Peacekeepers From Darfur Will Be a Murderous Mistake," *PassBlue*, May 27, 2020.

66 "Darfur Sit-in against UNAMID Withdrawal Continues," *Radio Dabanga*, December 14, 2020; "Protests against Withdrawal of Darfur Peacekeeping Mission UNAMID," *Radio Dabanga*, December 30, 2020.

67 For more information, see: Forti, "Navigating Crisis and Opportunity," pp. 7–8. Between July and December 2020, the mission had 1,570 civilian staff, approximately 42 percent of whom were at the professional level, and 6,500 deployed uniformed personnel. Between July 2018 and June 2019, the mission had had approximately 2,400 civilian staff. UN General Assembly, *Financing of the African Union–United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur*, UN Doc. A/74/833, May 2, 2020; UN General Assembly, *Financing of the African Union–United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur*, UN Doc. A/74/627, December 24, 2019; Interviews with UN officials, June–October 2020.

68 For more information about this event and UNAMID's response, see: Di Razza, "Accountability System for the Protection of Civilians," case study on Darfur.

69 The UN secretary-general urged member states to develop national policy frameworks on protecting civilians as the first recommended action in his 2018 and 2019 annual reports on the protection of civilians. See: UN Security Council, *Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict—Report of the Secretary-General*, UN Doc. S/2018/462, May 14, 2018; UN Security Council, *Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict—Report of the Secretary-General*, UN Doc. S/2019/373, May 7, 2019; International Peace Institute, workshop on "Protection of Civilians in the Context of Peace Operations: Translating UN Policies into National Frameworks," New York, November 12, 2019; Shannon N. Green, Lee Sutton, and Ashelyn Pindel, "Closing the Gap: Implementation of Protection of Civilians Policies," Center for Civilians in Conflict, October 2020.

70 Afghanistan, which hosts a UN special political mission, has acknowledged that it has a national protection policy but has not released the document publicly. See: Green, Sutton, and Pindel, "Closing the Gap."

Box 2. Sudan's National Strategy for the Protection of Civilians⁷¹

Sudan's national protection strategy details the transitional government's commitment to improve its protection capabilities and the protective environment in Darfur, based on the constitutional declaration and international human rights and humanitarian law. It presents a multidimensional approach to protection that encompasses planning, prevention and response, civilian- and security-oriented approaches, institution building, individual training, and community dialogue. While the strategy focuses on Darfur, some of the reforms are expected to apply nationally.⁷²

The strategy discusses eight issues: (1) displaced persons and refugees; (2) the rule of law and human rights; (3) disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration; (4) combating violence against women and children; (5) humanitarian work; (6) conflict avoidance and resolution mechanisms; (7) nomads and herders; and (8) reconstruction, development, and essential services. Some issues are disaggregated into "objectives" and "activities," while others are simply a collection of policy goals or service-delivery targets. The transitional government also established a National Protection Committee to oversee the strategy's implementation.

Multiple UN officials characterized the strategy as a wish list.⁷³ It does not clearly indicate how the issues are to be prioritized, detail the timeframes for implementation, indicate which Sudanese stakeholders are responsible for implementing various provisions, describe accountability measures, or mention the financial resources needed. UN officials also highlighted the lack of a framework for translating certain provisions from the regional to the national level.

The strategy's impact will largely depend on the transitional government's political will and capacity to implement it. The government proactively submitted a quarterly update on the strategy's implementation to the Security Council in September 2020, a demonstration of its public commitment to implementation.⁷⁴ This self-report detailed legislative and operational achievements (such as trainings and workshops, patrols, police recruitment drives, and legal reforms), as well as challenges to implementation in each issue area.

will succeed it to support the transition."⁷⁵

The transitional government's decision to submit the strategy as a formal Security Council document demonstrated its diplomatic skill in maneuvering the UN to strengthen its case for UNAMID's exit. The strategy's strong assertions of Sudanese sovereignty are couched in assurances that the government has the political will and capacity to meet international standards for protecting civilians.⁷⁶ The strategy also signals the transitional government's newfound willingness to improve relations with its population and to start engaging

the UN and other international actors on protection issues, in stark contrast to the former government.⁷⁷

Moreover, the strategy provides the UN and international partners with a concrete basis for supporting Sudanese protection priorities. For example, the Security Council mandated UNITAMS to support the transitional government in implementing and monitoring the strategy. Various UNAMID initiatives are reflected in the government's updates on the implementation of the strategy and in the November 2020 joint UN-AU special report.⁷⁸ UNAMID also helped the

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² UN Security Council, *Letter Dated 14 September 2020 from the Permanent Representative of the Sudan to the United Nations Addressed to the President of the Security Council (Annex)*, UN Doc. S/2020/901, September 22, 2020.

⁷³ Interviews with UN officials, June–September 2020.

⁷⁴ UN Doc. S/2020/901.

⁷⁵ UN Security Council, *Letter Dated 21 May 2020 from the Permanent Representative of the Sudan to the United Nations Addressed to the President of the Security Council (Annex)*, UN Doc. S/2020/429, June 1, 2020.

⁷⁶ For example, see the minimum elements for a national protection policy framework prescribed by the UN secretary-general in his 2018 annual report on the protection of civilians in armed conflict. UN Doc. S/2018/462 (Annex 1).

⁷⁷ Interview with UN official, July 2020.

⁷⁸ UN Doc. S/2020/1115, paras. 20–24.

transitional government roll out a Darfur-wide protection monitoring framework and physically protect civilians at all sixty camps and IDP sites in the region.⁷⁹

The establishment of a 12,000-person joint protection force for Darfur, as provided for in the Juba Peace Agreement, is perhaps the most significant and uncertain component of Sudan's efforts to reassert its protection responsibilities. This force will comprise 6,000 members from the state security forces (i.e., the military, Rapid Support Forces, and police) and 6,000 members from the other Juba Peace Agreement signatories.⁸⁰ It was formally established on October 13, 2020, and began deploying to three UNAMID sectors and eighteen UNAMID team sites in Darfur.⁸¹ Its first prominent deployment was to Gereida, South Darfur, in late December 2020 following a series of pastoralism-related clashes.⁸²

The joint protection force presents serious human rights risks. The Sudanese transitional government characterized its anticipated 6,000 members as “mostly police officers,” but it acknowledged that other parts of the Sudanese security sector, including the Rapid Support Forces, would also feed into the joint force.⁸³ Many of the fighters from the armed movements who are on the force were most recently serving as mercenaries in Libya and South Sudan.⁸⁴ Moreover, a lack of trust between the population and state security institutions (especially the Rapid Support Forces)—as well as ongoing clashes between state security forces and the SLA-AW—may constrain the joint security force from accessing certain hotspots or IDP camps.⁸⁵

UNITAMS's civilian protection mandate gives the mission space to support implementation of the

peace agreement and Sudan's national protection strategy while advising and building the capacity of justice and security institutions. UNITAMS will also work with other UN entities to coordinate a UN-wide civilian protection strategy across the country. But how it chooses to engage with the joint security force, and what resources it has to prioritize this engagement, may influence the extent of the UN's engagement on the protection of civilians in Sudan in the coming years.

Compared to UNAMID, there are clear limitations to UNITAMS's support to the protection of civilians. UNITAMS envisions protecting civilians through political engagement, the provision of good offices, policy and advisory support, and advocacy, including through cooperation with Sudan's National Protection Committee. It will also leverage the UNCT's efforts to build the protection capacity of national institutions. But there are limits to the transitional government's willingness to engage with UNITAMS on protection issues, and the UN has less leverage on this issue following UNAMID's departure. As one example, the government rejected a UNAMID proposal to collocate military advisers with Sudanese security personnel to “provide advisory support on protection issues.”⁸⁶

The End of UNAMID

The underlying tensions over strengthening Sudanese ownership while continuing to support protection in Sudan played out in the final debates over resuming UNAMID's drawdown and exit. The DPPA/DPO Sudan Integrated Operational Team led an internal working group to draft the October 2020 special report and prepared multiple options for keeping international peacekeepers in Darfur.⁸⁷ However, the Sudanese transitional

79 UN General Assembly, *Budget for the African Union–United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur for the Period from 1 July 2020 to 30 June 2021—Report of the Secretary-General*, UN Doc. A/75/597, November 13, 2020, para. 43.

80 International IDEA, “Summary and Analysis of the Juba Agreement for Peace in Sudan,” pp. 28–29.

81 UN Doc. A/75/597, para. 9.

82 “Darfur Tribal Fighting Leaves 15 Dead,” *Radio Dabanga*, December 28, 2020; “Sudan Deploys Troops in South Darfur after Tribal Violence—Report,” Reuters, December 27, 2020.

83 UN Doc. S/2020/901, para. 5; International Peace Institute, “Virtual Roundtable on the UN Transition in Sudan and UNAMID Mandate Renewal,” November 2020.

84 UN Doc. S/2020/36, pp. 15–28; Watson, “Riders on the Storm.”

85 International Peace Institute, “Virtual Roundtable on the UN Transition in Sudan and UNAMID Mandate Renewal,” November 2020.

86 UN Doc. S/2020/1115, para. 24.

87 These allegedly included having a six-month substantive drawdown period and a six-month liquidation; keeping UNAMID's physical protection mandate and removing all other substantive tasks; and creating a small international monitoring presence under the leadership of a regional organization, possibly the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD). Interviews with UN officials, October 2020; “Sovereign Council Ousts UN Peacekeepers from Darfur,” *Africa Intelligence*, November 20, 2020.

government used the meeting of the UNAMID Tripartite Coordination Mechanism later that month to reiterate its explicit and “unequivocal position” that UNAMID’s mandate should end on December 31, 2020.⁸⁸

The UN and AU used the November 2020 special report to highlight spikes in fighting between armed movements and state security forces and rising intercommunal violence as realities of the “inherent fragility of any major political transition.”⁸⁹ But the two organizations deferred to Sudan’s explicit requests for UNAMID to leave by presenting only one option and recommendation: “for the termination of the UNAMID mandate as of December 31, 2020 and the full operationalization of the UNITAMS presence.”⁹⁰

Security Council negotiations on the final resolution on UNAMID in December 2020 unfolded similarly to those on Resolution 2525 six months earlier. The substantive components of the resolution largely followed the parameters outlined in the joint special report on the transition of peacebuilding support in Darfur from UNAMID to UNITAMS and the logistics of UNAMID’s drawdown. In an effort to facilitate a gradual mission transition, the co-penholders explored options for extending UNAMID’s mandate into 2021 while terminating its Chapter VII functions at the end of 2020. However, the Sudanese transitional government did not support this approach, and its position was supported by China, Russia, and the three African members of the council.⁹¹

Resolution 2559, adopted unanimously on December 22, 2020, terminated UNAMID’s mandate and ended its protection responsibilities in Darfur as of December 31, 2020.⁹² It requested all mission personnel be withdrawn by June 30, 2021,

except for those required to complete the liquidation process. It also authorized the “retention of a guard unit from within UNAMID’s existing footprint” to protect only mission personnel, facilities, and assets through the duration of the liquidation process. The Security Council requested that the mission and the Sudanese transitional government finalize a revised agreement to ensure “the principle of civilian end-use and the security and physical integrity of the handed-over UNAMID team sites and assets [to non-UN entities].”⁹³

These developments expose the tensions the UN confronts when trying to sustain national engagement on protecting civilians during a transition. Member states and the UN grappled with a difficult

Member states and the UN had to minimize the risk of a “physical security cliff” in Darfur while supporting the transitional government’s priority of ending UNAMID’s mandate.

tradeoff throughout this process: how to minimize the risk of a “physical security cliff” in Darfur by maintaining a useful but hamstrung mission while supporting the transitional government’s priority of ending UNAMID’s mandate and championing its

nascent protection efforts.⁹⁴ The UN confronts tangible reputational and operational risks if security in the region deteriorates over the coming months, especially as UNAMID is drawing down and UNITAMS is starting up. How the UN navigates this delicate environment could impact the sustainability of its reconfiguration in Darfur, and possibly in the entire country.

Comprehensive Planning for the Transition

Planning this new stage of the UN transition became a Herculean task for the entire organization. It required simultaneously creating a new mission during a global pandemic, adapting existing transition processes to a radically different context, and preparing for the drawdown of a

88 UN Doc. S/2020/1115, para. 41.

89 Ibid., para. 50.

90 Ibid., para. 43.

91 Security Council Report, “Resolution on the UN/AU Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID),” *What’s in Blue*, December 21, 2020.

92 UN Security Council Resolution 2559 (December 22, 2020).

93 Ibid.; UN Doc. S/RES/2559 (2020), para. 10.

94 Lilly, “Considering the Protection of Civilians during UN Peacekeeping Transitions,” pp. 12–14.

decade-old mission.⁹⁵ This section will discuss the evolution of transition planning for UNITAMS's start-up and UNAMID's exit. The debates that unfolded within the UN from late 2019 through 2020 demonstrated that different parts of the system held competing visions of how the UN should support Sudan. They also exposed the challenges of overcoming deeply entrenched bureaucratic cultures to deliver on ambitious mandates through a "whole-of-system" approach.

The Three Phases of UNITAMS's Start-up

UNITAMS's planning process can be divided into three phases. The first phase unfolded between November 2019 and March 2020, the period between the adoption of Security Council Resolution 2495 and the submission of the joint UN-AU special report. The UN's Executive Committee asked Special Adviser Haysom to lead internal and external consultations, conceptualize options for a new mission, and prepare the organization's recommendations to be submitted in the March 2020 special report.⁹⁶ Haysom and a small interdisciplinary UN team convened consultations in New York, Khartoum, and Addis Ababa throughout December 2019 and January 2020. These discussions culminated in a draft non-paper that was narrow in scope, with a limited set of recommendations. According to multiple UN officials, the report did not have the entire system's buy-in and did not draw from substantive analyses on Sudan from other parts of the organization.⁹⁷ While UN officials attempted to harmonize the report's findings with other inputs into the March 2020 special report, the process exposed the substantive and operational divisions within the UN system that would become prominent later on.

The second phase began in late March 2020, when the under-secretaries-general for DPPA and DPO appointed a senior UN official to lead implementation of the secretary-general's planning directive on

transitions and lead an interdepartmental, multidisciplinary Sudan Planning Team.⁹⁸ The team was housed in DPPA/DPO's Eastern Africa Division and backstopped by a planning secretariat comprising one officer from the division's Horn of Africa Team and another from its Sudan Integrated Operational Team. While Special Adviser Haysom remained the principal official leading strategic discussions, a director-level official from outside the Eastern Africa Division was appointed as the leader of the planning team and assumed day-to-day responsibilities.

The ensuing planning process, which took place between April and August 2020, was broadly consultative, especially considering that much of the organization was operating under work-from-home orders. It involved more than eighty officials from twenty-five UN departments, offices, agencies, funds, and programs spread across New York, Addis Ababa, Khartoum, and Darfur. Participants were divided into five thematic clusters, with one official from each department appointed to each.⁹⁹ Each cluster had co-leads from different departments who facilitated the discussions; the cluster co-leads participated in a weekly core group meeting convened by the Sudan Planning Team, which served as the penholder. The leader of the Sudan Planning Team also consulted with the AU and the World Bank and participated in the biweekly meetings of the UNAMID/UNCT Joint Transition Cell.

The goal of this process was to elaborate a draft mission concept that would provide strategic guidance on what the new mission would look like. Overall, UN officials involved in the planning process characterized it as inclusive and participatory, especially considering the depth of the substantive issues discussed and the number of departments involved.¹⁰⁰ The final mission concept paper proposed guiding principles, key assumptions, and risks and detailed the mission's possible objectives and priorities. This planning process

⁹⁵ These processes were covered extensively in Forti, "Navigating Crisis and Opportunity."

⁹⁶ UN Executive Committee Decision 2019/67, November 2019.

⁹⁷ Interviews with UN officials, June–August 2020.

⁹⁸ The planning directive was issued on April 6, 2020. See: UN Doc. S/2020/912, para. 26.

⁹⁹ The five clusters were: (1) political; (2) protection and peace implementation; (3) peacebuilding, human rights, and rule of law; (4) development—humanitarian nexus; and (5) mission support. Interviews with UN officials, May–August 2020.

¹⁰⁰ Interviews with UN officials, June–August 2020.

began months before the Security Council established UNITAMS, forcing a slight adjustment midway to align with the parameters of the mandate.

After finalizing the mission concept paper, DPPA led a small mission to Sudan from late July to early August. Its objectives were to validate the draft mission paper, consult with Sudanese counterparts, the UNCT, and UNAMID, and begin preparing UNITAMS's organizational structure. Even though its travel to Sudan was delayed by nearly two months, the team still managed to participate in more than one hundred consultations on the ground.¹⁰¹ Despite being welcomed by many parts of the transitional government, Sudanese military intelligence denied the team's requests to visit a UNAMID temporary operating base and an IDP site in Golo, Central Darfur.¹⁰²

The third phase of the planning process focused on operationalizing the draft mission concept. It was led by the Sudan Planning Team's secretariat, with limited inputs from DPO, OHCHR, and other Secretariat departments. In contrast to the extensive conceptualization process, development of the budget and staffing table was left to a much smaller team. The final products were included in the secretary-general's September 2020 report to the Security Council and submitted to the UN General Assembly's Fifth Committee.¹⁰³

UNITAMS is expected to pursue its mandate across nine priority areas. The mission's SRSG is overseeing work on the political transition and implementation of the peace agreement, and the deputy SRSG/resident coordinator/humanitarian coordinator (DSRSG/RC/HC) is overseeing UNITAMS's support to peacebuilding, civilian protection, and prevention and coordinating the

UNCT.¹⁰⁴ Although Resolution 2524 asked the Secretariat to prepare core and contextual benchmarks for the secretary-general's first report to the Security Council, the secretary-general requested an extension.¹⁰⁵ The Secretariat proposed a budget of \$34.3 million and a staff of 269.¹⁰⁶ UNITAMS expects to largely be a capital-based mission with small regional and satellite offices outside of Khartoum.

Competing Visions of UN Support during the Planning Process

The process for planning UNITAMS reflected fundamental disagreements among different parts of the organization over how the UN should support Sudan. Two overarching ideas for UNITAMS emerged during the planning process. One was that UNITAMS would be a vehicle for targeted political engagement with a wide range of national stakeholders driven largely by a Khartoum-centric UN presence; the other was that UNITAMS would focus on building on UNAMID's people-centered work and expanding peacebuilding efforts across the country through a significant civilian deployment.¹⁰⁷ In theory, the UN was well positioned to blend both models of support and draw on the full range of substantive expertise, financial mechanisms, and operational approaches from across DPPA and DPO.¹⁰⁸ Nonetheless, persistent interdepartmental divisions between DPPA and DPO influenced the planning process and constrained UNITAMS within a narrow operational model.

Some parts of the planning process were intentionally designed to foster integration and innovation. For example, the creation of an expansive Sudan

101 UN Security Council, *Letter Dated 23 July 2020 from the Secretary-General Addressed to the President of the Security Council*, UN Doc. S/2020/749, July 28, 2020; UN Security Council, *Letter Dated 27 August 2020 from the Secretary-General Addressed to the President of the Security Council*, UN Doc. S/2020/868, September 1, 2020; UN Doc. S/2020/912; Interview with UN officials, August–September 2020.

102 UN Doc. S/2020/912, Annex I, para. 22.

103 UN Doc. S/2020/912; UN General Assembly, *Proposed Programme Budget for 2021: United Nations Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in the Sudan*, UN Doc. A/75/6(Sect. 3)/Add.7, October 23, 2020.

104 UN Doc. S/2020/912, para. 29.

105 UN Doc. S/2020/868.

106 The financial envelope would be seventh largest of the UN field-based special political missions, and the civilian staffing would be sixth largest. Of the staff, 68 percent will be deployed to Khartoum, 17 percent to Darfur, 9 percent to the Two Areas, and 5 percent to East Sudan. UN Doc. A/75/6(Sect. 3)/Add.7.

107 Interviews with UN officials, May–July 2020; Mamiya, Hansen, et al., "Assessing the Effectiveness of the United Nations–African Union Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID)," p. 103.

108 Marc Jacquand, "UN Reform and Mission Planning: Too Great Expectations?" International Peace Institute, November 2020, pp. 4–8; Ian Martin, "Lessons from the High-Level Panel's 2015 Review for the Future of Peace Operations," IPI Global Observatory, September 30, 2020.

Planning Team was an effort to collaborate with nearly all parts of the UN system. Similarly, the decision to appoint a planning team leader from outside of DPPA/DPO's Eastern Africa Division was an effort to reduce the potential for interdepartmental struggles. However, conceptual differences and political interests among the departments were exacerbated by coordination challenges, limited integration, and differences in mission planning capabilities.¹⁰⁹

Terminology debates were the most obvious sign of these divisions. Officials involved in the planning process were concerned that DPPA quickly placed UNITAMS in the conceptual bucket of a “special political mission.”¹¹⁰ This framing had implications for the mission's departmental leadership and political ownership, its substantive priorities and functions, its operational footprint, and its financial envelope.¹¹¹ While UNITAMS does not have uniformed personnel, the Security Council did not frame it as a special political mission. Resolution 2524 describes UNITAMS as a “transitional assistance mission” and does not reference Chapter VI of the UN Charter—an attempt to incentivize the Secretariat to embrace all possible tools within the UN's peace and security pillar when designing the mission.¹¹²

Internal pressure to ensure that UNITAMS had a light footprint became another point of division. The mission's proposed light footprint was first mentioned in the October 2019 joint UN-AU special report, likely as a point of comparison to UNAMID's expansive footprint in Darfur.¹¹³ But neither the March 2020 UN-AU special report nor

Sudan's letters to the UN secretary-general offered more detail on what this meant in terms of the mission's design, staffing, or budget.¹¹⁴ Without this detail, “light footprint” became synonymous with a small, capital-centric mission. The practical implication is that the mission was only provided 20 to 30 percent of the staff and resources needed to implement all of the priorities laid out in the mission concept paper (see Figure 2 on the staffing and budget of UNITAMS).¹¹⁵ These tensions also reflected ambiguity over the perspective of Sudanese authorities. It is uncertain to what degree the Sudanese authorities shared the UN's understanding of the light-footprint approach. One UN official who participated in the July–August mission to Sudan expressed the view that some in the transitional government interpreted the light footprint as a civilian-led operation, but one that could still deliver on all areas of requested support.¹¹⁶

Debates over UNITAMS's budget also reflected different readings of the broader political environment surrounding the financing of UN peace operations. UNAMID had been the poster child for expensive and inefficient operations, and a handful of member states' desire to close the mission was driven by cost concerns. Some senior UN officials were sensitive to the organization's financial challenges and the limited political support for funding new, large missions.¹¹⁷ As a result, the decision to propose a light mission was made with one eye on the UN Fifth Committee. Other officials felt that this was an example of the organization putting function before form. As one official commented, “It's a big mistake to assume there's no money and to take

Conceptual differences and political interests among UN departments were exacerbated by coordination challenges, limited integration, and differences in mission planning capabilities.

¹⁰⁹ Unlike DPO, DPPA does not have a dedicated mission planning capacity.

¹¹⁰ Special political missions can be divided into three broad categories based on their political objectives and the stage of conflict at which they are generally deployed: (1) missions deployed in an active armed conflict with a mediation role; (2) missions deployed after a peacekeeping mission or after a peace deal to support the consolidation of peacebuilding gains; and (3) missions deployed with a prevention role, often with a regional, open-ended mandate.

¹¹¹ Special political missions are funded through the UN's regular budget, while peacekeeping operations are funded through a separate budget.

¹¹² Interviews with representatives of UN Security Council members, May–July 2020.

¹¹³ The report stated that the follow-on presence should have “a light presence and geographical footprint.” UN Doc. S/2019/816, para. 46.

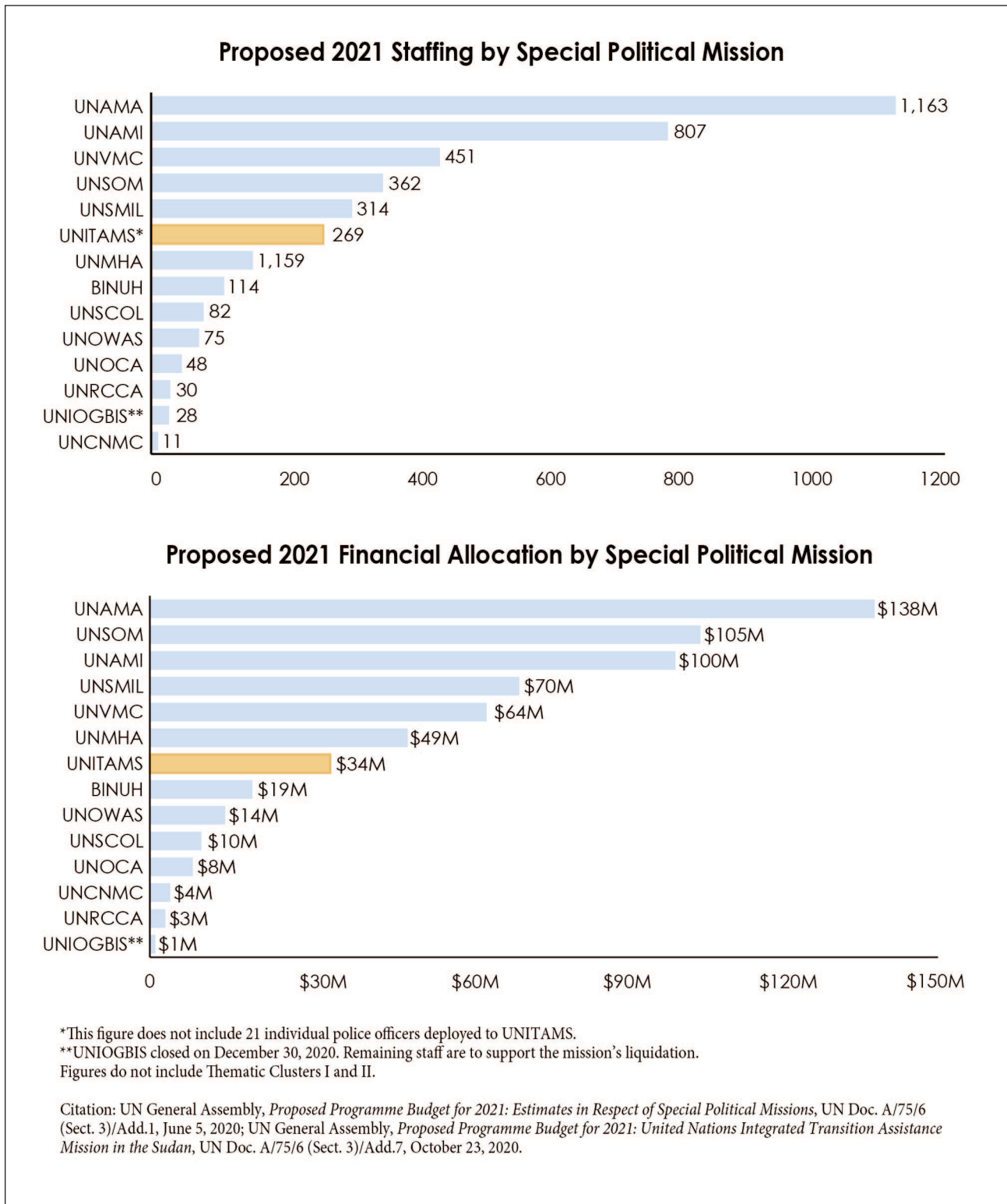
¹¹⁴ The first letter requests that the new mission be “innovative, agile, coordinated and light” and take a modular approach to designing its footprint. The second letter makes no mention of anything related to the mission's footprint.

¹¹⁵ Interviews with UN officials, August–October 2020.

¹¹⁶ Interview with UN official, September 2020.

¹¹⁷ Jake Sherman, “To Align Peacekeeping Mandates and Resources, Improve the Link Between the Security Council and Fifth Committee,” *IPI Global Observatory*, December 9, 2019.

Figure 2. Staffing and budget of UNITAMS in comparison to other special political missions



this as your major assumption and build around making everything as cheap as possible.... It's wrong to just say, 'We are in a financial crisis, so we are just planning for a handful of advisers.'"¹¹⁸

Disagreement was even more apparent when it came to UNITAMS's programmatic funding.¹¹⁹ DPPA had never requested programmatic funding for a political mission from member states, a reflection of divergent budgeting practices between DPPA and DPO and skepticism that member states would make a budgetary mechanism traditionally used for peacekeeping available to political missions.¹²⁰ This changed when UNITAMS successfully requested \$1 million to support peacebuilding in the Two Areas, which was widely considered a worthwhile effort to catalyze programming in a part of Sudan where other UN entities had a limited presence.

However, various parts of the UN system disagreed over whether UNITAMS should have asked for additional programmatic funding for Darfur. Some officials in DPPA believed that existing UN Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) projects in Darfur and a short-term continuation of the activities of the SLFs (discussed below) would make member states reluctant to allocate additional funding. Other entities within the UN's peace and security pillar felt that additional funding could help scale up protection-related programming and avoid a potential financial cliff in Darfur. They pointed to the approval of the \$1 million for peacebuilding in the Two Areas as a signal that the Fifth Committee would consider detailed proposals and that UNITAMS should have pushed the envelope further and risked rejection instead of preemptively limiting the funding at its disposal.

UN officials expect UNITAMS's budget and staff to grow in 2022 as it develops more detailed plans and

increases its operational activities following UNAMID's exit.¹²¹ But at the moment, UNITAMS's budget is noticeably smaller than that of other UN field-based political missions. UNITAMS is expected to undertake a "building-block" approach, meaning that it should continually reprioritize and adapt to specific needs articulated by the Sudanese. However, it will struggle to simultaneously engage on many of the ambitious areas of its mandate without explicit support from the transitional government and the Security Council, which will then require additional resources from the Fifth Committee.¹²²

Strengthening Integration and Countrywide Mandate Delivery

While attention naturally gravitated toward UNITAMS's start-up, this was only one stage in the transition process. Integration between an exiting UNAMID, UNITAMS, and the UNCT is essential for the long-term sustainability of the UN transition. Conceptualizing and planning a new mission is complex in the best of cases.¹²³ Doing so during a multiyear transition that was already underway and was originally grounded in a fundamentally different political reality is even more daunting.

Sudan's revolution and the creation of a new political mission gave the UNCT a window to realign its development support. The existing UN development assistance framework is for 2018–2021, but it was endorsed by the former government and is therefore out of step with the transitional government's priorities.¹²⁴ Renegotiating this framework will be a lengthy process because it is co-owned by the UN and the government. Resolution 2524 provides for a useful alternative, as it requests UNITAMS and the UNCT to base their cooperation on "an Integrated Strategic Framework (ISF) or equivalent."¹²⁵ The UN will use

118 Interview with UN official, July 2020.

119 Programmatic funding is an increasingly common tool for UN peacekeeping operations to help them fund a limited number of projects that support mandate implementation and are not prioritized by development partners.

120 Eugene Chen (@telegramwriter), "The absence of programmatic funding in SPM budgets doesn't stem from legislative restrictions, but more from persistent myths as well as divergent practices between units at HQ handling peacekeeping and political missions," Twitter, November 16, 2020. <https://twitter.com/telegramwriter/status/1328370270562885633>.

121 International Peace Institute, "Virtual Roundtable on the UN Transition in Sudan and UNAMID Mandate Renewal," November 2020.

122 Jahn, Kurtz, and Schumann, "How the New UN Mission in Sudan Can Succeed."

123 See: Jacquand, "UN Reform and Mission Planning."

124 UN development assistance frameworks were replaced by UN sustainable development cooperation frameworks in 2019. Government of Sudan and UN Country Team in Sudan, "Sudan United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF), 2018–2021," available at https://sudan.un.org/sites/default/files/2019-10/Sudan_UNDAF_En_2018-2021-E-Ver.pdf.

125 Integrated strategic frameworks are useful UN planning tools that help missions and UNCTs align their political, programmatic, and financial tools in pursuit of joint priorities. UN Security Council Resolution 2524 (June 3, 2020), para. 4.

early 2021 to develop this framework, which should help UNITAMS and the UNCT swiftly align their efforts in support of the mission's mandate and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

UNITAMS's mission concept largely depends on a UNCT that has the willingness and capacity to engage in programming across the country.¹²⁶ But the process for planning UNITAMS unfolded without a system-wide, common analysis of whether the UNCT has the right programmatic and operational footprint to meet Sudan's needs. The UN had originally planned to map the capacity of the UNCT in early 2019, but bureaucratic tensions, a lack of dedicated funding, the revolution, and movement restrictions related to COVID-19 delayed the process.¹²⁷ The capacity-mapping exercise, which was finally completed by the UN's Joint Transitions Project at the end of 2020, assessed the UNCT's existing capacity against the transitional government's priorities and the peacebuilding priorities outlined in Resolution 2524.¹²⁸ It also identified areas where the UNCT will need to increase its capacity.

While the capacity-mapping exercise will be useful in early 2021, the UN would have benefitted from completing it earlier in the transition. Having the findings in advance of the mission planning process may have helped the UNCT more effectively scale up to meet the anticipated gaps following UNAMID's exit. The findings could also have informed the UN's resource-mobilization efforts and the Security Council's design and prioritization of the mission's mandate.

UN integration during the next phase of the transition will depend on whether UNITAMS is able to

build on existing peacebuilding efforts across Darfur. Building on the lessons of the SLFs, UNITAMS is expected to create a single mechanism for UN peacebuilding support that prioritizes Darfur and the Two Areas (see Box 3).¹²⁹ However, it is not expected to be a direct replication of the SLF model used in Darfur.¹³⁰

With peacebuilding as one of the central focuses of UNITAMS's mandate, the UN is now grappling with how to translate temporary modalities like the SLFs into more sustainable initiatives, especially as the mission will rely on programming capacity from the UNCT. Some officials suggested that UNITAMS's planning process following UNAMID's departure focused disproportionately on the modalities for providing peacebuilding support instead of the objectives of this support.¹³¹

Aligning UNITAMS and the UNCT's efforts on civilian protection, human rights, and the rule of law should be an important area for progress for the UN in 2021. Some officials suggested that the UN had yet to articulate common protection objectives for ongoing SLF projects. This is in part because peace operations and UNCTs approach protection from different angles: UNITAMS is focused on politically sensitive issues related to preventing violence against civilians, providing security and justice services, documenting conflict dynamics, and promoting human rights and accountability. The UNCT, by contrast, focuses on providing livelihood support and basic services through development and humanitarian approaches. Strengthening UN efforts to protect civilians in Darfur after UNAMID's exit depends on how UNITAMS and the UNCT improve their programmatic alignment.

Integration between an exiting UNAMID, UNITAMS, and the UN country team is essential for the long-term sustainability of the UN transition.

126 Interviews with UN officials, July and October 2020. This concern was also pointed out in the context of UNAMID's withdrawal from Darfur. See: UN Doc. S/2020/912, para. 31.

127 The capacity-mapping exercise done for the UN in Liberia at the end of UNMIL's transition is seen as a model for evaluating substantive, staffing, and operational needs during a UN reconfiguration. See: Michael Lund, Lisa Lange, Jane O. Yeobah, and Andrew Dunbrack, "Mapping UNCT Technical and Operational Capacities to Support the UN Commitments in the Liberia Peacebuilding Plan," United Nations in Liberia, May 2017.

128 UN Doc. S/2020/1155, para. 33.

129 UN Security Council Resolution 2524 (June 3, 2020), para. 7.

130 The SLFs are UN programmatic activities jointly implemented by UNAMID and UN agencies working in Darfur. The SLFs are resourced through programmatic funding from UNAMID's annual budget. For more information, see: UNAMID, "The State Liaison Functions (SLFs)," available at https://unamid.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/the_state_liaison_functions_slfs.pdf.

131 Interview with UN official, October 2020; Email correspondence with UN official, January 2021.

Box 3. The role of the state liaison functions in supporting the UN transition in Darfur

The state liaison function (SLF) initiatives in Darfur tell an important story about the UN transition in Sudan. These initiatives were a tangible effort at integrated mandate delivery between UNAMID and the UNCT that expanded the reach of UN agencies, funds, and programs into Darfur. The SLFs financed over \$45 million in projects that directly responded to drivers of violence, promoted dialogue, built domestic peacebuilding capacities, and developed infrastructure, reorienting the UN away from exclusively humanitarian funding in Darfur.¹³² They achieved this in a fluid political environment and difficult operational landscape with the flexible, adaptable support of more than one hundred UNAMID staff.¹³³ Frequent consultations between the UNCT, UNAMID, and transitional government officials (led by the Sudanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs) helped facilitate collective Sudanese ownership over the SLFs' priorities, activities, and impact—an important ingredient for successful peacebuilding.¹³⁴

Operational difficulties in implementing the SLF model speak to broader challenges of joint mission-UNCT programming. Missions and UNCTs have “different way[s] of understanding the problem, operating, financing, [and] implementing projects,” which has consistently been a challenge in Darfur.¹³⁵ Short-term project cycles, administrative difficulties in setting up collocating arrangements, and competition for mission funding all challenged the medium-term viability of the SLF model. This was also the first time that UN agencies in Sudan had worked in an integrated setting, contributing to additional growing pains.

UNAMID's exit creates the risk of a significant and immediate drop-off in peacebuilding support throughout Darfur. Because the SLFs are funded by assessed contributions to UN peacekeeping, the end of UNAMID's peacekeeping mandate also terminated budgetary support for projects that had not been completed as of January 2021. Security Council Resolution 2559 encourages the UNCT, with support from UNAMID, to oversee and close unfinished projects.¹³⁶ In addition, UNITAMS submitted a funding request estimated between \$600,000 and \$1.6 million to finance the continuation of SLF activities through 2021.¹³⁷ Nonetheless it will be challenging for the UN to use these stopgap measures to sustain the most impactful initiatives while it develops medium-term solutions.¹³⁸

Smaller but Wider: Recalibrating the UN's Operational Footprint

The UN faces a challenge in aligning UNITAMS's ambitious national mandate with its operational footprint: the UN is getting smaller in Sudan but has to spread itself wider. As a result, the UN risks falling short of the high expectations Sudanese actors and international partners have for the mission, especially in 2021. But while the recalibra-

tion process will likely present short-term challenges, it could also help the UN sustain its support to Sudan over the long run.

UNITAMS's start-up began in October 2020 with the deployment of senior officials and the recruitment of temporary staff.¹³⁹ The initial deployment is concentrated largely in Khartoum and will likely expand to smaller regional and subregional hubs by mid-2021. While there are plans for UNITAMS

132 UNAMID, “State Liaison Functions Data Mapping,” available at: <https://bit.ly/32ltvSX> ; Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance and United Nations Sudan, “UN/AU Transition in Darfur.”

133 Ibid., p. 10.

134 Interview with UN official, July 2020.

135 Interview with UN official, July 2020. Forti, “Navigating Crisis and Opportunity,” pp. 12–14; Mamiya, Hansen, et al., “Assessing the Effectiveness of the United Nations–African Union Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID),” pp. 95–97.

136 UN Security Council Resolution 2559 (December 22, 2020), paras. 8–9.

137 Email correspondence with UN official, January 2021.

138 For constructive recommendations on sustaining the work of the SLFs, including through direct coordination with UNITAMS, see: Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance and United Nations Sudan, “UN/AU Transition in Darfur.”

139 These include an officer in charge who will concurrently serve as the director of the Office of Support to the Political Transition at UNITAMS, the interim chief of staff, the interim chief of mission support, and other priority substantive mission support and security personnel. UN Doc. S/2020/1155, para. 32; Interviews with UN officials, October 2020.

and the UNCT to collocate, the limited number of staff and smaller overall budgets mean that these countrywide integrated operations will not have as much capacity as the SLFs did in Darfur.¹⁴⁰ With most of UNITAMS's staff based in Khartoum, the UN will also depend on air transport to remain mobile and deploy specialists outside of the capital.¹⁴¹

UNITAMS and the UNCT are in the process of developing integrated operations. UNITAMS will have a light support component since it is not housing uniformed personnel, and many nonessential functions will likely be undertaken remotely from the UN service centers in Brindisi and Entebbe.¹⁴² UNITAMS and the UNCT will eventually take over service functions historically provided by UNAMID, including health and medical support, flights and ground transportation, fuel procurement, maintenance, and communications. Challenging logistical handovers are not unique to the UN in Sudan: missions frequently provide financial, staff, and operational support to UN agencies, and transition periods often require UNCTs to rapidly scale up their support capacity to compensate. But in Sudan, the UN urgently needs to resolve these issues before the rainy season begins in May 2021, particularly in Darfur and the Two Areas, where the UNCT has a comparatively lighter presence.

Simultaneously drawing down UNAMID and starting up UNITAMS also has implications for the delivery of UNITAMS's mandate in Darfur. UNITAMS's start-up team benefitted from collaboration with UNAMID in the final quarter of 2020, but by the second half of 2021, UNITAMS and the UNCT will have to take on responsibility for air

operations, logistics, medical support, and other operational requirements as UNAMID completes its withdrawal.¹⁴³ Resolution 2559 requests UNAMID and UNITAMS to share information and analysis, leverage each other's resources, and prevent the duplication of efforts.¹⁴⁴ This offers an entry point for UNAMID to continue providing logistical support as UNITAMS gets set up in Darfur. However, the mission will have to balance this support with its first priority of ensuring a smooth drawdown and liquidation.¹⁴⁵

While the Sudanese transitional government has been firm in its request that UNAMID's mandate end on December 31, 2020, it understands that the mission's liquidation and exit will be a complex logistical and bureaucratic endeavor requiring flexibility and adaptation.¹⁴⁶

UNAMID is planning a sequenced process for closing locations, repatriating uniformed personnel, and reducing the number of civilian personnel, initially prioritizing less volatile

areas.¹⁴⁷ Not only will the UN need to repatriate thousands of uniformed personnel and hand over or liquidate a decade's worth of assets, but it will need to do so in a challenging operational environment while accounting for the movement constraints imposed by the annual rainy season and the COVID-19 pandemic.¹⁴⁸ UNAMID has already started to liquidate some of its strategic assets and transfer them to UN agencies so that they can continue operating in Darfur.¹⁴⁹ However, there is an expectation that UNITAMS will not assume control over the vast majority of physical locations. This is partially because it will have fewer personnel, but it is also symbolic: UN officials want to reinforce the notion that UNITAMS and

The UN needs to balance UNITAMS's ambitious national mandate with its operational footprint: the UN is getting smaller in Sudan but has to spread itself wider.

140 These integrated operations will be located in El Fasher, Zalingei, Nyala, Kadugli, Kauda, El Damazin, Kassala, and Port Sudan. *Ibid.*, para. 37.

141 Air transport was provided by UNAMID until the end of its formal drawdown and will later be covered through the UNITAMS budget, in concert with the UN Humanitarian Air Service and World Food Programme. UN Doc. A/75/6(Sect. 3)/Add.7, para. 41; Interview with UN official, October 2020.

142 UN Doc. A/75/6(Sect. 3)/Add.7, para. 39.

143 *Ibid.*, paras. 38–41.

144 UN Security Council Resolution 2559 (December 22, 2020), para. 8.

145 Email exchange with UN official, November 2020.

146 International Peace Institute, "Virtual Roundtable on the UN Transition in Sudan and UNAMID Mandate Renewal," November 2020.

147 UN Doc. A/75/597, para. 21.

148 For example, this will require moving hardware from Darfur to Port Sudan on the other side of the country.

149 For example, UNAMID has sold some of its road maintenance equipment to the World Food Programme to ensure greater continuity in the UNCT's operations in Darfur.

UNAMID are separate missions and that UNITAMS intends to be closer to the Sudanese communities it serves.¹⁵⁰

A transparent liquidation process needs to be accompanied by a responsible and well-managed handover process that sustains the UN's engagement and does not exacerbate threats to civilians.¹⁵¹ Looting and misuse of former UNAMID team sites that were handed over to Sudanese authorities in 2019 invited heavy scrutiny by Security Council members.¹⁵² In response, UNAMID has worked with local authorities to analyze property rights and local deed papers for the land occupied by the remaining team sites to establish ownership, ensure compensation, determine whether the land should go to a civilian or a government entity, and document this agreement.¹⁵³ If the UN and local actors propose transferring assets to a civilian component of the Sudanese government, the UN intends to conduct a phased handover during UNAMID's drawdown.¹⁵⁴

International Financial Support and Partnerships

UN transitions do not take place in a vacuum, and their sustainability depends on support from UN member states and other international partners. Financial contributions to both the host country and the UN can help reorient from humanitarian aid toward peacebuilding and development support. Closer coordination between the UN, the host government, member states, and other multilateral organizations can also help mitigate the impact of volatile geopolitical changes on the transition. Such support and cooperation are essential to the ongoing UN transition in Sudan, especially considering the transitional govern-

ment's efforts to stave off economic crisis in a volatile region.

The UN's Role in Mobilizing Financial Support

Mission drawdowns often occur under tenuous economic circumstances as the host country assumes more ownership over national development efforts.¹⁵⁵ Indeed, Sudan's macroeconomic crisis is one of the greatest threats to its political transition.¹⁵⁶ Mobilizing and coordinating development support are traditional areas of UN engagement and an explicit part of UNITAMS's mandate. The mandate also asks the UN to align the efforts of its agencies, funds, and programs with those of bilateral donors and international financial institutions in support of the mission's objectives.

UN financial engagement during the transition is taking place at two levels: high-level political engagement and a reorientation of support away from a predominantly humanitarian portfolio toward a better balance between humanitarian, peacebuilding, and development priorities.

High-level UN attention to Sudan began on the margins of the UN General Assembly in September 2019. Deliberations during a high-level event on Sudan highlighted the centrality of economic recovery to a sustainable political transition and the role of international partners in "creating conducive conditions for economic recovery."¹⁵⁷ This offered a multilateral platform for Sudan to begin engaging other member states outside of the formal constraints of the Security Council.

Senior UN leaders also advocated on behalf of the Sudanese authorities to the international financial institutions. On April 8, 2020, Prime Minister Hamdok made an emergency appeal to the

150 While the UN is planning for UNITAMS's presence in El Fasher (the largest presence anticipated in Darfur) to be located on the UNAMID super camp for the first six months, it is intended to find its own premises starting in July 2021 in order to convey the perception that UNITAMS is a distinct entity from UNAMID. Interview with UN official, October 2020; UN Doc. A/75/6(Sect. 3)/Add.7, para. 38.

151 International Peace Institute, "Virtual Roundtable on the UN Transition in Sudan and UNAMID Mandate Renewal," November 2020.

152 Forti, "Navigating Crisis and Opportunity," pp. 20–21; UN Security Council, Resolution 2495 (October 31, 2019), para. 6; UN Doc. S/2020/202, paras. 36–40, UN Security Council Resolution 2525 (June 3, 2020), para. 6.

153 Interview with UN official, October 2020.

154 UN Doc. A/75/597, para. 22.

155 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), "Mission Drawdowns: Financing a Sustainable Peace: Sustaining Gains and Supporting Economic Stability post UN Mission Withdrawal," March 2020.

156 UN Doc. A/75/6(Sect. 3)/Add.7, para. 13(b).

157 Office of the UN Secretary General, "Note to Correspondents: Outcome Document of the United Nations General Assembly High-Level Event on Sudan," September 28, 2019.

Box 4. Sudan's fragile economy and designation as a state sponsor of terror

Sudan's multifaceted economic challenges are the product of decades of poor governance and corruption. Political and military elites connected to the former regime have historically controlled the vast majority of financial resources, and government expenditures have disproportionately gone to security institutions at the expense of social services or productive economic sectors.¹⁵⁸ High levels of poverty and socioeconomic inequality persist, particularly in areas beyond Khartoum. Decades of oil revenues dried up following South Sudan's secession in 2011, leading to rising inflation and making government subsidies for food staples, fuel, and electricity unsustainable. Sudan accumulated an international debt burden estimated at around \$57 billion in 2020.¹⁵⁹

This deep economic suffering sparked the nationwide protests in December 2018 that culminated in the downfall of the former regime. While economic recovery is one of the transitional government's immediate priorities, the crisis has deepened since it assumed office, capped by Sudan's declaration of an economic state of emergency in September 2020.¹⁶⁰ Persistent protests over worsening economic conditions underscore the threat these economic challenges pose to political stability.¹⁶¹

These economic challenges have been especially difficult to manage because of Sudan's relative isolation from international financial support. With arrears to the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), and African Development Bank of approximately \$3 billion, Sudan's engagement with international financial institutions had been restricted. Moreover, the US government's designation of Sudan as a state sponsor of terror has posed financial and political hurdles. The listing prohibited the government from receiving debt relief and loan packages from international financial institutions and constrained foreign direct investment.¹⁶² It also limited the potential for UN agencies to receive large amounts of development funding because of bilateral partners' domestic restrictions. Following the revolution, the US government signaled its desire to delist Sudan in recognition of its political progress.¹⁶³

Negotiations on the delisting were slow and delicate and got wrapped up in Sudanese and American domestic politics. There had been long-standing disagreements over the Sudanese government's legal responsibility to compensate American victims for its complicity in the al-Qaida bombings of the US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998 and the USS Cole in 2000. The push by the administration of former US President Donald Trump for Sudan to normalize relations with Israel created additional political complications in Sudan.¹⁶⁴ While the ensuing agreement between Sudan and Israel prompted the US to delist Sudan as a state sponsor of terror, it also exacerbated political tensions among Sudanese political actors.¹⁶⁵ After months of negotiations, Sudan was formally delisted by the US government on December 14, 2020, and the US Congress passed a legal peace resolution days later.¹⁶⁶ The delisting will likely enable Sudan to secure more bilateral development and security aid and to receive debt relief from the World Bank and IMF.

158 International Crisis Group, "Financing the Revival of Sudan's Troubled Transition," June 22, 2020, p. 3; "Military Business Activities Are 'Unacceptable,' Says Sudan's Hamdok," *Sudan Tribune*, December 15, 2020.

159 International Crisis Group, "Financing the Revival of Sudan's Troubled Transition"; International Monetary Fund, "Sudan: Staff-Monitored Program—Press Release; Staff Report; and Statement by the Executive Director for Sudan," October 23, 2020, p. 26.

160 "Sudan Declares State of Economic Emergency after Sharp Fall in Currency," Reuters, September 10, 2020.

161 "Protests against Fuel and Bread Shortages across Sudan," *Radio Dabanga*, November 2, 2020; ACLED, "Danse Macabre: Revolution and Counter-revolution in Post-oil Sudan," October 12, 2020; UN Doc. S/2020/912, paras. 7, 12–16.

162 Hilary Mossberg and John Prendergast, "What Happens When Sudan Is Removed from the U.S. Terror List?" United States Institute of Peace, February 6, 2020.

163 US Department of the Treasury, "Sudan and Darfur Sanctions," August 11, 2020, available at <https://home.treasury.gov/policy-issues/financial-sanctions/sanctions-programs-and-country-information/sudan-and-darfur-sanctions>; Office of the UN Secretary General, "Note to Correspondents: Outcome Document of the United Nations General Assembly High-Level Event on Sudan," September 28, 2019.

164 Robbie Gramer, "Trump to Remove Sudan From Terrorist List, Following Behind-the-Scenes Pressure on Israel," *Foreign Policy*, October 19, 2020; Atlantic Council, "Experts React: Sudan and Israel Reach Historic Peace Agreement," October 23, 2020; Nicholas Bariyo, "Israel Peace Deal Shakes Sudan's Fragile Transition," *Wall Street Journal*, October 31, 2020; Payton Knopf and Jeffrey Feltman, "Normalizing Sudan-Israel Relations Now Is a Dangerous Game," Brookings Institution, September 24, 2020.

165 UN Doc. S/2020/1155, para. 16.

166 US Congressional Research Service, "Sudan's Removal from the State Sponsors of Terrorism List," November 9, 2020; US House of Representatives, *Title XVII: Sudan Claims Resolution Act, Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021*, HR 133, 116th Cong. (2020).

secretary-general for his continued support in engaging the World Bank, IMF, and other financial institutions in securing funds for Sudan's response to COVID-19.¹⁶⁷ The office of the secretary-general immediately sent letters to the heads of the World Bank and IMF. Despite receiving a negative response from the IMF given the organization's bureaucratic restrictions, one UN official characterized the same-day turnaround of the letter as "unprecedented" and a strong show of support for Hamdok.¹⁶⁸

This engagement culminated in the Sudan Partnership Conference in June 2020, co-organized by the governments of Sudan and Germany, the European Union, and the UN. While structured as a traditional donor conference, the co-organizers intentionally framed it as a "partnership conference" to acknowledge that political reform, peace, and economic recovery were interrelated.¹⁶⁹ Pledges during the conference totaled over \$1.8 billion (62 percent of which were considered new contributions) and were earmarked for social protection, development, the COVID-19 response, and humanitarian aid.¹⁷⁰ A follow-up partnership conference is planned for May 2021 in Paris.

International financial institutions also used the conference to signal their long-term support for Sudan.¹⁷¹ In the following months, the World Bank endorsed a new country engagement strategy that prioritized Sudan's reengagement with international financial partners and contributions to a "new social contract," including \$200 million to Sudan's Family Support Programme.¹⁷² The IMF

and Sudan agreed on a staff-monitored program in September 2020 that provided a foundation for debt relief and long-term international borrowing.¹⁷³ While these reforms may help Sudan rectify some of the structural challenges facing its economy, they may also impose "a significant economic burden on the Sudanese public" through cuts to public services and government subsidies.¹⁷⁴

A realignment of development priorities is the second pillar of the UN's financial support to the transition. Humanitarian aid accounted for 67 percent of the \$942 million in official development assistance Sudan received in 2018.¹⁷⁵ There is still a significant gap between bilateral aid and Sudan's peacebuilding and development needs, especially considering the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the humanitarian sector and donor countries' aid budgets. Going forward, the UN will focus on ensuring coherence among donors and supporting their gradual realignment from a humanitarian-dominant approach to a better balance between humanitarian, peacebuilding, and development activities.¹⁷⁶

The UN Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) will likely have a growing role in mobilizing peacebuilding and development funding across the country. The PBF is currently supporting eight projects (six of which are for Darfur) designed to support the peace process, democratic governance, the rule of law, durable solutions, and community-level peacebuilding, budgeted at \$49.6 million for 2020–2023.¹⁷⁷ These projects are implemented by UN agencies, funds, and programs and complement

167 Office of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Sudan, Letter to António Guterres on "Support for Sudan to Contain the Spread and Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic," April 8, 2020 (on file with author).

168 Interview with UN official, May 2020; International Crisis Group, "Financing the Revival of Sudan's Troubled Transition," p. 3, footnote 3.

169 See: Cameron Hudson, "The Sudan Partnership Conference: A Turning Point for Sudan," Atlantic Council, June 26, 2020; "Final Communiqué of the Sudan Partnership Conference," Berlin, Germany, June 25, 2020, available at <https://togetherwithsudan.de/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/20200625-Joint-Communiqué-Final-published.pdf>.

170 Of the \$1.839 billion pledged, approximately \$500 million is expected to go toward the Family Support Programme; \$482 million toward humanitarian support; and \$800 toward development. To some stakeholders, however, it was unclear how much of the pledged amount was new or had already been committed. Pledges also varied significantly in terms of whether they would be directed to the Sudanese transitional government or to UN agencies, funds, and programs. Interviews with UN officials, July 2020. See: IMF, "Sudan: Staff-Monitored Program," p. 5.

171 World Bank, "World Bank Group President David Malpass: Remarks at the Sudan Partnership Conference," June 25, 2020, available at <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/statement/2020/06/25/world-bank-group-president-david-malpass-remarks-at-the-sudan-partnership-conference>.

172 World Bank, "Country Engagement Note for the Republic of Sudan," Report No. 152835 SD, September 10, 2020, available at <http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/879871602253859419/pdf/Sudan-Country-Engagement-Note-for-the-Period-FY21-FY22.pdf>.

173 "Sudan: Staff-Monitored Program."

174 UN Doc. S/2020/1155, para. 22.

175 Sudan's humanitarian response plan for 2019 estimated a funding requirement of \$1.1 billion for the year. By comparison, the country's UN development assistance framework for 2018–2021 (signed by the UN and the former government) estimated that \$1.4 billion would be needed for that three-year period. According to the report, UN agencies projected that they only had 18 percent of the necessary resources on hand. See: OECD, "Mission Drawdowns," pp. 59–60.

176 UN Doc. A/75/6(Sect. 3)/Add.7, para. 44.

177 These include UN Peacebuilding Fund projects 00121172, 0011947, 00119470, 00119468, 00119467, 00119469, 00121172, and 00125403. See: UN Multi-partner Trust Fund Office, "Peacebuilding Fund," available at <http://mptf.undp.org/factsheet/fund/PB000>; and UN Peacebuilding Fund document for Project 00119469, p. 10.

the ongoing SLF projects in Darfur.¹⁷⁸ PBF initiatives are intended to be short-term and catalytic in nature, enabling the UN to respond quickly to specific needs on the ground while providing a proof-of-concept for other donors to make long-term investments.

UNITAMS will use the new multi-partner trust fund of the Sudan Financing Platform to mobilize “long-term programmatic support and flexible funding” for peacebuilding issues.¹⁷⁹ The new fund will eventually consolidate existing mechanisms into a “Peacebuilding and Stabilization Window” including the Sudan Financing Platform and the Darfur Community Peace and Stability Fund.¹⁸⁰ This mechanism will likely face delays in becoming fully operational until the mission’s DSRSG/RC/HC is put in place and can help oversee the establishment of a streamlined governance architecture and build relations with other donors and the international financial institutions.

There is an onus on the UN to work with Sudanese officials and international partners to forge a common understanding of the comparative advantages and limitations of each funding vehicle.

It remains to be seen whether the UN can ensure coherence across these funding vehicles. There is an onus on the UN to work with Sudanese officials and international partners to forge a common understanding of each vehicle’s comparative advantages and limitations to avoid duplication and mitigate gaps in support.

Fostering Partnerships to Help Sustain the UN Transition

Sudan’s political transition is unfolding in a volatile regional environment. To engage effectively, the UN needs to navigate sensitive geopolitical dynamics. Coordinated partnerships between the

UN and other actors can help the organization sustain its support while mitigating the impact of external political developments.

Sudan’s civilian leaders have committed to reversing decades of isolation from Western countries and international financial institutions to secure much-needed economic support. At the same time, some countries have sought to exert political and economic influence over different Sudanese stakeholders in pursuit of their national interests.¹⁸¹ Sudan’s military and civilian leaders maintain strong ties with various countries in the Horn of Africa, the Gulf, and the broader Middle East and North Africa region, and some figures in Sudan’s military have developed even stronger relationships with stakeholders in the United Arab

Emirates and Saudi Arabia since the revolution.¹⁸² The negotiations with the US over delisting Sudan as a state sponsor of terror and normalizing relations with Israel underscored the delicate task of navigating these relationships.

Growing entanglement between the country’s financial needs and competing foreign interests could fragment financial support to Sudan and jeopardize its political transition.

Sudan also has to navigate growing tensions among its neighbors. The dispute between Ethiopia, Egypt, and Sudan over the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam and the US government’s attempts to mediate a solution “exacerbated rivalries in Khartoum between camps that are variously sympathetic to the Egyptian or Ethiopian positions.”¹⁸³ Sudan’s economic situation could become even more precarious over the coming months without a sustainable agreement.¹⁸⁴ The rapidly escalating

¹⁷⁸ Interview with UN official, July 2020.

¹⁷⁹ UN Doc. A/75/6(Sect. 3)/Add.7, October 23, 2020, para. 27.

¹⁸⁰ UN Doc. S/2020/1155, para. 36; UNDP, “Sudan Financing Platform Multi-partner Trust Fund: Terms of Reference,” November 2019, available at <http://mptf.undp.org/factsheet/fund/4SD00>; UNDP, “Annual Report 2019: Darfur Community Peace and Stability Fund (DCPSF),” available at <http://mptf.undp.org/factsheet/fund/DPS00>.

¹⁸¹ Jean-Baptiste Galopin, “Bad Company: How Dark Money Threatens Sudan’s Transition,” European Council on Foreign Relations, June 2020, pp. 7–8; “Sudan’s Normalization with Israel Looks Like an American ‘Quid Pro Quo,’” *World Politics Review*, October 26, 2020.

¹⁸² Sima Aldardari, “The Politics of Gulf Aid to Sudan,” Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington, September 22, 2020; Jean-Baptiste Galopin, “The Great Game of the UAE and Saudi Arabia in Sudan,” June 16, 2020, Project on Middle East Political Science.

¹⁸³ For background, see: International Crisis Group, “Nile Dam Talks: A Short Window to Embrace Compromise,” June 17, 2020; United States Institute of Peace, “Final Report and Recommendations of the Senior Study Group on Peace and Security in the Red Sea Arena,” October 2020, p. 9.

¹⁸⁴ African Union, “Communiqué of the Extraordinary African Union (AU) Bureau of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government Video-Teleconference Meeting on the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD),” June 26, 2020; Ola Owajori, “The African Union Needs to Resolve Ethiopia’s Dam Dispute,” *Foreign Policy*, September 24, 2020.

conflict between Ethiopia's federal government and the Tigray People's Liberation Front poses grave humanitarian and security threats for Sudan and the broader region. Over 60,000 Ethiopian refugees have fled into Sudan since the crisis broke out in early November.¹⁸⁵

These dynamics could threaten the sustainability of the UN's transition in three ways. First, a stable security environment that "does not lead to a major escalation of violence" is an assumption underpinning UNITAMS's early operations.¹⁸⁶ Second, changing political allegiances in the region could disincentivize the Sudanese government, the military, or other political forces from implementing reforms in support of democratic governance and peace. And third, the growing humanitarian spillover from Ethiopia in East Sudan could draw domestic and international attention away from other peacebuilding and development priorities. Sustained armed conflict in Ethiopia could also destabilize Sudan.

How the UN mitigates these challenges will depend on the effectiveness of its partnerships with other member states and multilateral organizations. While some partnerships have proved fruitful over the past year, others have shown the urgency of stronger coordination. As the UN secretary-general noted in October 2020, "UNITAMS will significantly rely on partnerships with international actors to support the priorities of the Sudanese authorities."¹⁸⁷

One emerging forum is the Friends of Sudan

group. This informal contact group was formed during the early stages of Sudan's political transition by the transitional government, eighteen other member states, and seven multilateral organizations.¹⁸⁸ The group has met on nine occasions between May 2019 and January 2021, with sessions focused on political and economic issues related to Sudan's transition. Although the discussions do not produce binding outcomes, they have offered a more inclusive diplomatic forum than the Security Council.¹⁸⁹ These discussions have also been complemented by the Khartoum-based Sudan International Partners Forum, a coalition of ambassadors to Sudan that is envisioned to align "international engagement on humanitarian, development and peace-building issues at a national level."¹⁹⁰ Former Special Adviser Haysom actively worked with the group to coordinate economic support for Sudan in the run-up to the

June 2020 partnership conference.

The AU is expected to play an important political role in Sudan even as it loses the institutional capacity of UNAMID. There was little appetite in New York to continue this hybrid arrangement in any follow-on presence, reflecting the operational and political tensions involved in running UNAMID.¹⁹¹ Although UNITAMS will be a UN-led operation, the UN and the AU have already agreed to establish a high-level coordination mechanism.¹⁹² In fact, the AU's consistent focus on the political transition and the peace process arguably gives it more leverage over sensitive political issues than the UN.¹⁹³ This leverage, along with strong coordination between the UN and AU,

A stable security environment that "does not lead to a major escalation of violence" is an assumption underpinning UNITAMS's early operations.

185 UN Refugee Agency, "UNHCR Sudan Ethiopia Situation: Daily New Arrivals Updates (Eastern Sudan Border)," January 25, 2021, available online at: <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/82978>.

186 UN Doc. A/75/6(Sect. 3)/Add.7, para. 13.

187 Ibid., para. 15.

188 The Friends of Sudan include the African Development Bank, African Union, Canada, Egypt, Ethiopia, European Union, France, Germany, IMF, Italy, Japan, Kuwait, League of Arab States, Netherlands, Norway, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Spain, Sudan, Sweden, United Arab Emirates, UK, UN, US, and World Bank. Interviews with UN officials, July 2020.

189 Gerrit Kurtz, "An International Partnership for Sudan's Transition: Mobilizing Support, Preventing Instability," German Council on Foreign Relations, June 2020.

190 UN Coordination Support Office, "Establishing the Sudan International Partners Forum (SIPF): Professional Secretariat Project Document—RCO Sudan 2019," December 2019, available at <https://info.undp.org/docs/pdc/Documents/SDN/SIPF%20SECRETARIAT%20Project%20Document%20Revision%20December%202019.pdf>.

191 Forti, "Navigating Crisis and Opportunity," p. 4; Mamiya, Hansen, et al., "Assessing the Effectiveness of the United Nations–African Union Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID)," pp. 78–79.

192 UN Doc. A/75/6(Sect. 3)/Add.7, para. 15.

193 Interviews with UN officials, May and July 2020.

will likely be especially important as Sudan begins implementing the Juba Peace Agreement and launching the constitution-drafting process. The AU Peace and Security Council focused its discussions throughout 2020 on both UNAMID and Sudan's political transition.¹⁹⁴ As chair of the AU Assembly in 2020, South Africa also mediated the dispute over the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam. The AU has committed to expanding its regular presence in Khartoum and its countrywide post-conflict reconstruction and development work, with the AU Peace and Security Council requesting the deployment of a technical assessment mission to the country earlier in 2020.

The UN Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) could also offer a platform for international coordination. While the former Sudanese government requested support from the PBC in anticipation of UNAMID's exit, the new authorities have not appealed to the PBC for similar support.¹⁹⁵ However, the PBC has increasingly been focusing on mission transitions, as highlighted by the preparatory meeting on transitions as part of the 2020 review of the UN peacebuilding architecture and the focus on transitions in the UN's 2020 report on peacebuilding and sustaining peace.

Coherent UN support to UNITAMS will also depend on the extent to which the mission and its leaders can foster "close collaboration" with the other peace operations and special envoys in the region: the UN Interim Security Force in Abyei, the UN Mission in South Sudan, the UN Support Mission in Libya, the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic, and the UN Special Envoy for the Horn of Africa.¹⁹⁶ Information sharing will be crucial to analyze trends related to the movement of people (including pastoral, migratory, and refugee movements), arms, and resources across the Sahel and the Horn of Africa. The regional envoys could also help sustain international attention and engagement during periods of

waning attention, as the UN Office for West Africa and the Sahel did during the UN peacekeeping transitions in Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire.¹⁹⁷

Conclusions and Recommendations

The UN finds itself walking a tightrope as it reconfigures its support to Sudan during the country's fragile political transition. UNITAMS has an ambitious mandate but insufficient resources to immediately deliver on all its priorities. Although UNAMID's exit has been discussed for over two and a half years, the relatively swift termination of its peacekeeping mandate comes at a sensitive moment: a partial peace agreement and persistent threats to vulnerable populations would normally suggest the value of continuing a UN peacekeeping mission, not hastening its exit. The UN is attempting a challenging reconfiguration by expanding its development and peacebuilding efforts into new parts of the country while gradually downsizing its footprint in Darfur.

All of this is happening at a decisive juncture in the country's transition. The tenuous governing coalition faces increasing pressure to deliver on the aspirations and reforms of the 2019 constitutional declaration. Sudan's security apparatus does not have the trust of the country's most vulnerable populations even as it is taking on the sole responsibility to protect them. And the massive macroeconomic challenges, humanitarian needs, and social fault lines that sparked the revolution in 2018 have only been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.¹⁹⁸

Sudan's journey toward sustainable peace and development will depend, in part, on effective UN support. Though the UN is only one of many international actors engaging with Sudan, its decades of peacekeeping, peacebuilding, and humanitarian support to the country make it an

194 AU Peace and Security Council Communiqué CMXXXI (June 17, 2020); AU Peace and Security Council Communiqué CMVI (January 30, 2020); AU Peace and Security Council Communiqué CMXXVII (May 21, 2020).

195 AU Peace and Security Council Communiqué DCCLXXVIII (June 11, 2018), para. 12.

196 UN Security Council Resolution 2524 (June 3, 2020), para. 12.

197 Daniel Forti and Lesley Connolly, "The Mission Is Gone, but the UN Is Staying: Liberia's Peacekeeping Transition," International Peace Institute, December 2018; Alexandra Novosseloff, "Lessons Learned from the UN's Transition in Côte d'Ivoire," International Peace Institute, December 2018.

198 Nicholas Haysom, "Sudan and COVID-19: The Timing of the Pandemic Was Especially Cruel," African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD), September 2020.

important partner. Moreover, a successful and sustainable political transition in Sudan could signal that the UN can play a similar role in supporting other countries that undergo revolutions and complex governance transitions. But the risks are also palpable; falling off this tightrope could have devastating consequences for the organization and for Sudan.

This initial phase of the UN transition in Sudan offers important considerations for the UN and its member states as they plan and implement other mission transitions. First, it demonstrates the complexity of unifying international political engagement and translating high-level support into concrete action. The Security Council's flexibility in adapting the transition to changing circumstances and mandating a new mission in Sudan suggests that deadlock among its most powerful members can break quickly following changes in a domestic context. But despite the council's unanimous support for a successful Sudanese transition, there will likely be large differences among its members over how to articulate an end state for the UN and balance competing political priorities. How UNITAMS undertakes its work—and the political support it receives from the Security Council in doing so—will be crucial in determining how Sudan builds democratic institutions and a culture of inclusive governance, promotes justice and accountability, and transforms its security sector. The past year has also underscored that the UN transition is directly and indirectly impacted by many actors, especially neighboring countries and other countries in the subregion, other multilateral organizations, and bilateral partners.

Second, the UN transition in Sudan encapsulates the tensions around pursuing national ownership in a transition setting. When the priorities of the host country, the Security Council, and the UN system do not align—especially on sensitive issues related to the protection of civilians—how do Security Council members and senior UN leaders strike a balance? This was a persistent challenge throughout discussions on UNAMID's exit and the design of UNITAMS. The Sudanese transitional government's refusal to extend UNAMID or consider a multidimensional follow-on mission outweighed internal UN analyses that raised

protection concerns in Darfur and proposed ways to mitigate them. At key stages of the transition process, Security Council members and senior UN leaders made political tradeoffs by accepting certain levels of risk to civilians in order to support the transitional government's approach. These decisions have opened the UN to reputational risks and, at worst, could widen a security vacuum that would jeopardize the organization's decade of peacekeeping investments in Darfur.

Third, the UN's experience in Sudan highlights both progress and persistent challenges in planning for mission transitions. Efforts to engage in a system-wide mission planning process should be replicated in the future. These were particularly laudable considering that the domestic context changed radically years into an ongoing transition. However, attempts to pursue more integrated and coordinated transition planning ran into entrenched bureaucratic roadblocks. Despite efforts to make the process innovative and draw upon capabilities from the entire UN system, it got mired in rigid, dichotomous views of peacekeeping operations and special political missions. Boxing UNITAMS into a predetermined model of support limited the UN's capacity to sustain peace in Sudan.

These developments also laid bare entrenched institutional cultures within the UN's peace and security pillar. Debates over departmental ownership, resources, and modalities for the new mission reflected not only DPPA and DPO's competing visions of UN support for Sudan but also the long-standing divisions between them. Reforms of the UN's peace and security architecture in 2019 were designed to eliminate these divisions. While it may be unreasonable to expect massive changes to decades of institutional practice in just two years, senior UN leaders will need to continue working to change bureaucratic cultures in the hope of deploying more flexible, innovative, and context-specific missions.

Finally, both the UN's reconfiguration and Sudan's political transition are brushing up against the harsh reality of massive financial shortfalls. In previous transition settings, the UN was concerned with dwindling donor attention. But with Sudan, levels of development aid and bilateral investment

are likely to grow in the coming years, especially following the US government's delisting of Sudan as a state sponsor of terror. Nonetheless, Sudan's macroeconomic conditions are precarious, and its development and humanitarian needs significant. The government's inability to meet the basic needs of its population was a driver of the revolution, and the transitional government is keenly aware that it is in a race against time to address these concerns. But the UN and other international partners will likely be stretched thin by Sudan's simultaneous need for macroeconomic support, peacebuilding and development assistance, humanitarian aid, and support to the Juba Peace Agreement. UNITAMS has a limited budget and operational presence, and UN-run mechanisms like the Peacebuilding Fund and the Sudan multi-partner trust fund are meant to be stopgaps rather than sustainable sources of funding. How the UN helps the country navigate this terrain and coordinate its partners will be crucial in determining the long-term sustainability of Sudan's political transition and peace agreements.

The UN will need to build trust with Sudanese authorities and people across the country while managing expectations about what it can and cannot deliver.

To ensure a sustainable transition from UNAMID to UNITAMS, the UN will need to build trust with Sudanese authorities and people across the country while managing expectations about what it can and cannot deliver, particularly in its first year. UN agencies, funds, and programs will need to significantly scale up their capacity and expand their presence outside of Khartoum. UNITAMS will need to identify immediate priorities while preparing for a potentially volatile transition over the coming years. Part of how this unfolds will depend on which types of support the Sudanese transitional government and the parties to the Juba Peace Agreement explicitly request from the UN. The Sudanese people will be the ultimate arbiters of what constitutes a successful political transition. Over the coming months, the Security Council will need to articulate clear baselines for measuring progress that align with the constitutional declaration and the Juba Peace Agreement and to encourage national ownership over these areas.¹⁹⁹

But perhaps the most immediate concern for the UN is mitigating the potential fallout in Darfur from UNAMID's exit. The mission is leaving at a moment when national political developments are contributing to rising violence in the region. Implementing the new peace agreement will require transformative shifts in Darfur's administration, security, and economy, which, if done successfully, may threaten existing power structures and lead to even more violence. In light of the persistent humanitarian and socioeconomic challenges, Darfur's IDPs and other vulnerable civilians have depended on UNAMID's security presence and will not easily trust Sudan's security forces.

Sustaining the UN reconfiguration while supporting Sudan's own political transition will require a range of strong and coherent initiatives from the organization and its member states. The following

recommendations are offered to help in these efforts.

Recommendations for the UN System

Articulate a forward-looking political compact with Sudan to guide UN support to the political transition: In order to translate the Security Council's support for Sudan's "peaceful, stable, democratic and prosperous future" into concrete action, the UN should agree on a forward-looking political compact with the Sudanese people for the duration of the country's political transition. This should be prepared in close consultation with the Sudanese transitional government and different segments of Sudanese society. This compact should outline the parameters for what the UN and the Sudanese would consider to be a successful political transition, along with the minimum conditions for UNITAMS to end its engagement. It should also identify how the mission can sequence its mandate, benchmarks for the Security Council, and potential gaps in UN support across the country. UNITAMS is particularly well placed to leverage the UN's

¹⁹⁹ Jahn, Kurtz, and Schumann, "How the New UN Mission in Sudan Can Succeed."

convening power and facilitate an inclusive process for developing this compact. An inclusive approach will help Sudanese stakeholders navigate the reforms embedded in the constitutional declaration and begin addressing sensitive issues related to civilian-led democratic governance, human rights, and security sector reform. The compact should be revisited routinely in consultation with all sectors of Sudanese society.

Rapidly expand support for urgent peacebuilding and protection priorities in Darfur: While UNITAMS and the UNCT are already prioritizing the unfinished activities of the state liaison functions and developing a medium-term peacebuilding framework, there is an urgent need to scale up investment in these efforts to minimize the potential for a destabilizing security gap. The UN should work with local government authorities, civil society organizations, and community leaders to develop projects in protection hotspots in Darfur. Additional investment by the Peacebuilding Fund would offer a lifeline until the envisioned multi-partner trust fund is operational and sufficiently resourced. These projects could be developed in close coordination with the AU's Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Development Division, which has a mandate to work closely with the Sudanese transitional government in these areas.

Continuously evaluate the UN's operational presence and substantive impact outside of Khartoum: While UNITAMS has initially been designed to have a capital-heavy presence, its ultimate success will depend on changes in Darfur, the Two Areas, and East Sudan. To pursue a successful political transition, the country will need to rectify the long-standing exclusion and marginalization of its peripheries. As UNITAMS envisions its initial efforts at political engagement and technical advice, it should be forthright in evaluating what additional support or resources may be needed to better implement its mandate. These may include additional satellite offices, a larger budget for programmatic activities, or more flexible resources for support services and mobile operations, especially following UNAMID's liquidation. It also needs to cooperate closely with the offices of UN agencies, funds, and programs throughout the country to track and analyze changes in local security conditions.

Encourage the Sudanese government to provide regular updates on the implementation of the Juba Peace Agreement and its national protection of civilians plan: UNITAMS should support the Sudanese government in preparing regular reports to the Security Council on both frameworks. These reports would complement the secretary-general's quarterly reports on Sudan and the activities of UNITAMS, which should also have dedicated subsections on these issues. The Sudanese transitional government's September 2020 and February 2021 updates to the Security Council on its national protection of civilians plan sets a precedent and could be a model for host-state engagement with the council during transitions. These updates should also identify emerging implementation gaps and areas where international support or financial resources are needed. Reports on the national protection of civilians plan should detail deployments and operations by the Sudanese joint protection force and assess how these efforts protect civilians. The Sudanese government could also use these reports to clarify the specific roles and types of support it wants UNITAMS to provide over the coming year.

Provide frequent, detailed assessments of UNAMID's drawdown and liquidation: UNAMID's exit from Sudan will be operationally and logistically demanding. While the UN has set an ambitious target of a six-month drawdown and another nine months for liquidation, the COVID-19 pandemic, Sudan's rainy season, and persistent insecurity in the greater Jebel Marra region could delay these timelines. Quarterly reports on UNITAMS to the Security Council will already feature an annex on UNAMID's drawdown and liquidation, as requested by Resolution 2559. To complement these reports, the Department of Operational Support (DOS), DPO, and DPPA should convene monthly consultations and briefings with Sudanese officials and UN member states to provide concrete updates on the drawdown and liquidation process. These should focus on base and asset handover arrangements between UNITAMS, the UNCT, and Sudanese civilian entities. They should also assess changes in the security conditions in areas from which UNAMID has withdrawn, as well as the impact of COVID-19 on the drawdown and liquidation process. The UN should strive to identify the

potential reputational risks of unanticipated delays in the drawdown and repatriation process, especially since UN uniformed personnel who may be physically present in the region do not have a mandate to intervene to protect civilians.

Undertake a nationwide campaign to raise awareness of UNITAMS: The UN should prioritize building relationships between the new mission and Sudanese communities across the country during the first six months of its deployment. UNITAMS and the UNCT should use this campaign to explain the mission's mandate, clarify expectations about the UN's anticipated presence and operations in different parts of the country, and begin building relationships with populations that are underrepresented in Khartoum. This campaign could use a mixed methodology, combining public community dialogues, meetings with local government officials and civil society representatives, social media, digital communications, and print media.

Consider additional reforms to the UN's peace and security pillar on mission planning processes: Despite recent institutional reforms and the spirit of innovation behind the creation of UNITAMS, the UN's peace and security pillar is still characterized by institutional silos, rigid bureaucratic cultures, and divergent operational capacities. Limited cooperation and integration between DPPA and DPO throughout the complex planning process in Sudan ultimately constrained UNITAMS's operational deployment. Mitigating such challenges in the future may require additional reforms that address various substantive, operational, and financial issues. While an assessment of the broader UN architecture for mission planning is beyond the scope of this paper, a recent report on this subject offers useful recommendations.²⁰⁰ Its proposals to reduce fragmentation among different reform initiatives that impact mission planning, incentivize interdepartmental cooperation during the budgeting process, and reposition DPO's planning capabilities as a shared service are all worth exploring.

Recommendations for Member States

Increase financial support to coherently address Sudan's peacebuilding and development needs:

There is a growing risk that Sudan will confront a financial cliff during its transition, even in a new era of donor enthusiasm and bilateral investment. There are significant shortfalls in funding for humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding priorities. This makes it imperative for Sudan and its international partners to build a common understanding of which bilateral and multilateral mechanisms of financial support are best positioned to achieve certain goals. UN member states should work with UNITAMS and the UN Secretariat to develop a financial strategy for supporting Sudan and sustaining the UN transition.²⁰¹ This would help not only prioritize limited resources but also forecast financial flows for the coming years. It would also promote clearer alignment between different funding instruments, including the Peacebuilding Fund, the anticipated multi-partner trust fund, bilateral funding agreements, annual support to UN agencies, funds, and programs, and extrabudgetary support to DPPA.

Maintain a close relationship between the UN Security Council and the AU Peace and Security Council on Sudan:

The UN and AU should continue aligning their political efforts on Sudan even after UNAMID's closure. Both organizations are planning to coordinate their operational engagement through a high-level coordination mechanism. But for this partnership to be effective, the UN Security Council and the AU Peace and Security Council need to align their political strategies.²⁰² Cooperation between these two bodies should continue at both the formal and informal levels. Formally, the two councils should strive to align their regular discussions on Sudan so that they fall within ten days of each other. In addition, Sudan should remain on the agenda of the annual consultations between the two councils (likely to take place in October 2021). Informally, the three

200 See: Jacquand, "UN Reform and Mission Planning," pp. 16–17.

201 This kind of financial strategy for transitions was an idea first introduced in a March 2020 OECD report. See: "Mission Drawdowns," pp. 35–37.


202 Daniel Forti and Priyal Singh, "Toward a More Effective UN-AU Partnership on Conflict Prevention and Crisis Management," International Peace Institute and Institute for Security Studies, October 2019.

African members of the Security Council can maintain the connection between Addis Ababa and New York outside of formal meetings, whether by sharing documents and analysis or aligning diplomatic messaging following a crisis.

Sustain international attention on Sudan's transition and maintain UN support: While the Security Council is expected to host quarterly briefings on UNITAMS, other international fora can provide political solidarity. The Friends of Sudan group should remain a prominent vehicle for international coordination, and its rotating hosts could help share the operational burden and political responsibilities of this mechanism among member states. This group should be complemented by frequent meetings of the Khartoum-

based Sudan International Partners Forum. New York-based delegations could also consider developing their own informal coordination group to align efforts between their capitals, Khartoum, and UN headquarters. In addition, the Sudanese government could request more direct support from the UN Peacebuilding Commission if it sees utility in a more formal and inclusive process. Finally, member states could sustain attention on the transition through the lessons-learned study requested in Security Council Resolution 2559. Security Council members should ensure that this study is submitted as a formal council document and disseminated publicly.²⁰³ They could also convene informal discussions, including Arria-formula meetings, on its findings and lessons for future UN transitions.

203 The 2018 lessons-learned report on the UN Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI) offers a useful precedent for this practice. See: UN Security Council, *Special Report of the Secretary-General: Role of the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire*, October 29, 2018, UN Doc. S/2018/958.



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