

Case Study 2

PEACEKEEPING WITHOUT A PARTNER

A Review of UNAMID's Political Strategy in Darfur

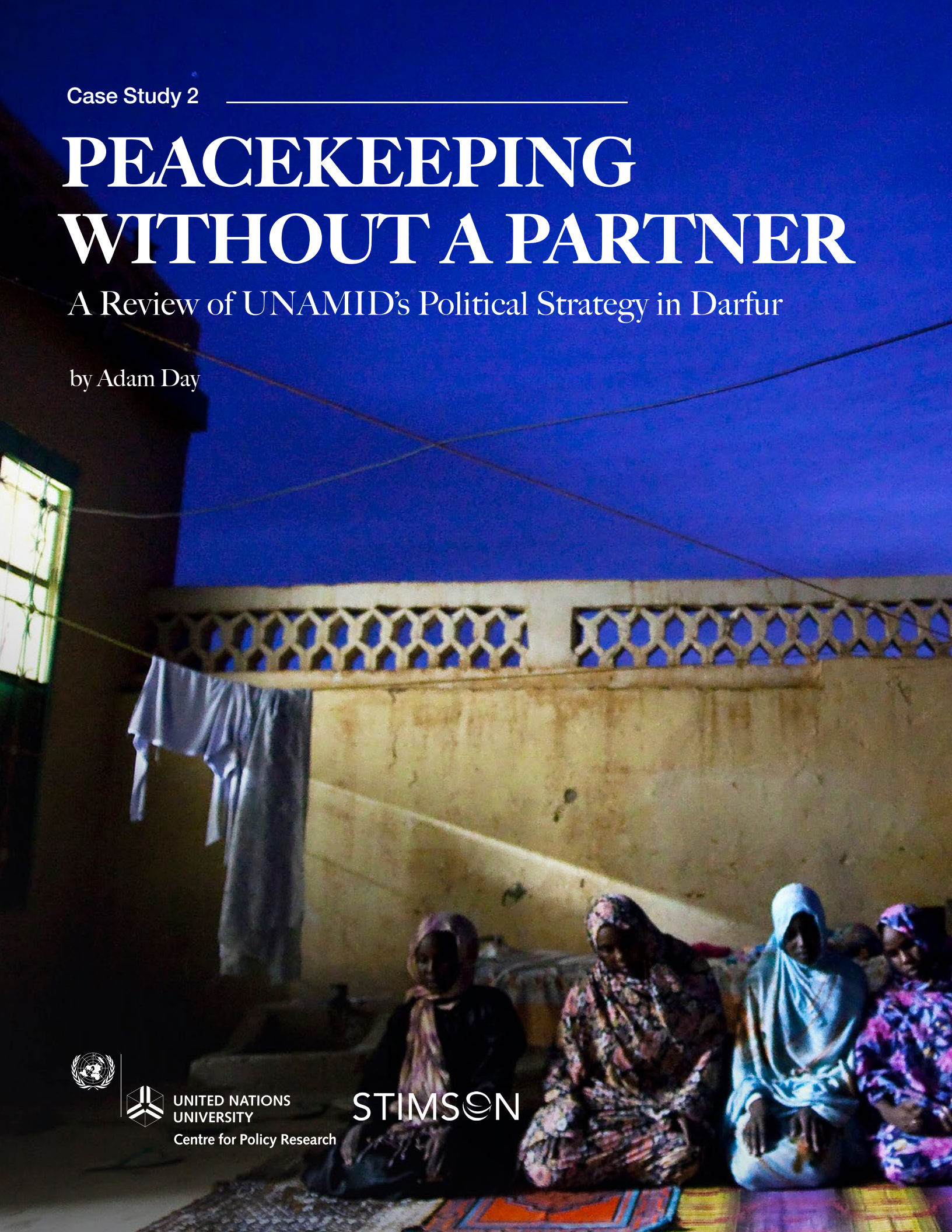
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This case study was developed to inform *The Political Practice of Peacekeeping* by Adam Day, Aditi Gorur, Victoria K. Holt and Charles T. Hunt - a policy paper exploring how the UN develops and implements political strategies to address some of the most complex and dangerous conflicts in the world. **Adam Day** is Director of Programmes at United Nations University Centre for Policy Research. In 2008, the author served as a political officer in the Office of the Joint Special Representative for UNAMID, also serving as a political officer on the Darfur Integrated Operational Team in the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations from 2009-2010. The author would like to thank Michael Gaouette, former head of the UN Darfur Integrated Operational Team, and Daniel Forti, Senior Policy Analyst at the International Peace Institute, for reviewing this study. Any errors are those of the author.

The establishment of the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID) in 2007 was the outcome of a highly contentious, complex process that broke new ground for the UN in a number of ways. For the first time, the UN and African Union (AU) were mandated by the Security Council jointly to oversee a peacekeeping operation, one that not only took over from a pre-existing AU-led mission (the African Union Mission in Sudan – AMIS), but also co-existed with another UN peacekeeping mission in the country (UNMIS) and a distinct UN-AU mediation process for Darfur. From its outset, UNAMID faced enormous challenges, including a host Government overwhelmingly unwilling to accept its deployment into Sudan, a massive displaced population that remained at acute risk to attacks by the belligerents, and a peace agreement that was essentially dead on arrival with the parties.

The extraordinarily difficult starting conditions for UNAMID did not get easier over its 13-year life in Darfur. Successive attempts to broker a peace deal resulted in new agreements, but none that gained broad based buy-in from the main parties to the conflict, while risks to civilians continued across the subregion. And throughout most of its deployment, the mission was severely hampered by a non-cooperative host Government that prevented its freedom of movement, restricted personnel coming into the mission and frustrated many day-to-day operations. Even after the 2019 coup – which ended the 30-year reign of President Bashir and ushered in a new governing coalition – the Darfur peace process has remained fragile, with continued fighting in parts of the region. Today, there are nearly as many internally displaced people in Darfur as there were in 2007, the peace

process remains largely unimplemented, and the mission has struggled to execute its mandate to protect civilians. Already beginning a draw down set to finish in October 2020, UNAMID is likely to complete its time in Darfur with relatively little progress on the political aspects of its mandate.

This study examines UNAMID's political mandate in Darfur, paying particular attention to the ways in which the mission developed strategies during different phases of its deployment. The driving question behind the study is: *How did the Security Council, UN Secretariat, and mission leadership develop politically-driven strategies at key moments in the mission's lifespan?* It explores three different moments in UNAMID's tenure in Darfur: (1) its initial mandate in 2007, which provided the mission with its overall set of objectives, including support to the Darfur Peace Agreement;¹ (2) the 2014 shift of mandate to support the Doha Declaration of Peace for Darfur;² and (3) the period from 2018 to late 2019, during which the Council called for UNAMID to develop an exit strategy from Darfur, including eventually in the context of the new Government that came into power in Sudan in 2019. For each period, the study examines how the Council's mandate was translated into a new strategic direction for the mission, with particular attention to the demands on the mission to support the Darfur peace process. It also looks at how the other mission priorities – such as protection of civilians (PoC), facilitation of humanitarian assistance and human rights monitoring – were balanced alongside the political work of the mission.

Based on this analysis, the report offers some broader lessons for peace operations, including for the Security Council, the UN Secretariat and mission leadership.



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Three Key Moments in UNAMID's Political Life

This section analyses three key moments in UNAMID's tenure in Darfur, examining how each Security Council mandate was formed, translated into a plan by the Secretariat and the mission, and then implemented on the ground. It concludes that in all three moments (2007, 2014 and 2018), there was extremely limited space for UNAMID to play a direct political role on the peace process, and as a result few opportunities to craft a mission-wide political strategy. In some cases, the mission was not able to generate a mission plan at all; in others, strategic direction and guidance was developed in an iterative fashion amongst the Council, AU and UN secretariats, and the mission.

Phase I The Mission Begins

UNAMID's initial mandate was shaped in large part by three related factors: the pre-existing deployment of AMIS, deep divisions within the Security Council, and strong resistance by the Government of Sudan to any UN-led intervention in Darfur. Examining these together, this section argues that UNAMID's political role was at most a secondary consideration of the Security Council, contributing to an unclear mandate and a challenging starting point for the mission's work on the peace process. This in turn meant that for its first years, UNAMID struggled to develop a mission strategy, focusing mainly on

the challenges of its deployment and leaving the political process almost entirely to the separate Joint AU/UN mediation.

MANDATING UNAMID

By mid-2003, the war in Darfur had resulted in tens of thousands of deaths and more than two million displaced persons, prompting an international outcry and hurried efforts by the AU to broker a ceasefire between the main rebel groups and the Government of Sudan. The September 2003 ceasefire agreement signed in N'Djamena became the basis for the deployment of AMIS in early 2004, which was mandated to monitor the agreement, facilitate humanitarian delivery and contribute to improved security.³ Comprised of roughly 2,000 troops, less than 500 military observers and 800 unarmed civilian police, AMIS was a thin line of defence between the so-called *janjaweed* militias and the millions of vulnerable Darfuri civilians. Recurrent attacks on AMIS forces resulted in dozens of AU fatalities, while the mission was hampered by chronic shortfalls in funding, equipment and well-trained police.⁴

In May 2006, pressed by the AU, two of the rebel groups and the Government signed the Darfur Peace Agreement, committing the parties to a ceasefire, disarmament of the pro-government militias, power- and wealth-sharing arrangements, and a Darfur-wide dialogue process to broaden participation in the peace process.⁵ This was, however, only a very partial agreement that lacked buy-in from the rebels and the Government (not to mention the rebel groups that did not sign), and did little to lessen the continued violence in Darfur. Calling the situation a threat to international peace and security, the UK, US, France and several elected members of the Security Council⁶ co-sponsored a proposed resolution on a UN peacekeeping force that would deploy 17,000 troops and 3,000 police under a Chapter VII (Action with Respect to the Peace, Breaches of the Peace and Acts of Aggression) mission, reinforcing AMIS and mitigating the risks of further large-scale civilian deaths.⁷ In response, China, Russia and Qatar abstained from the vote, arguing that deployment of such a force without the consent of the Government of Sudan would be a violation of

the country's sovereignty.⁸ President Bashir also reacted negatively to the proposed resolution, publicly withholding consent and likened it to a form of "Western colonization."⁹ The AU – of which Sudan was of course a member – remained lukewarm to the resolution, wishing to retain strategic control over the peacekeeping forces deployed in Darfur.¹⁰ This meant no resolution was passed for nearly a year.

In July 2007, the Security Council unanimously passed Resolution 1769, calling for the creation of an AU-UN hybrid force to replace AMIS, eventually calling it the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID).¹¹ In order to assuage the concerns of China, Russia, Sudan and the AU, several important modifications were made to the previous draft resolution. Perhaps most importantly, UNAMID was to have "an African character," a fairly vague term that was interpreted to mean that the troops deployed would be mostly African, key leadership positions within the mission would be held by Africans and that the AU would maintain a strategic partnership with the UN in guiding the mission (though the UN retained sole control over the operational chain of command). The Council also dropped previous language related to the threat of sanctions if Khartoum did not accept the force, and punitive language related to Khartoum's obstruction of humanitarian aid.¹²

The core mandate of UNAMID was drawn from a joint UN/AU report,¹³ elements of AMIS' mandate and a report of the UN Secretary-General of July 2006.¹⁴ On its face, the mandate was broad and ambitious, calling on UNAMID to:

- Contribute to security conditions to allow for humanitarian delivery and return;
- Protect civilians under imminent threat;
- Assist in the implementation of the Darfur Peace Agreement, and monitor the 2004 ceasefire agreement;
- Assist in the political process, including to support the AU/UN Joint Mediation;
- Contribute to a secure environment for economic reconstruction and development;

- Contribute to the promotion of human rights;
- Assist in the promotion of rule of law, including institutional support; and
- Monitor the Sudan/Chad/Central African Republic border.

The resolution was also specific on how the Security Council expected UNAMID to support the political process, articulating the following tasks as part of its Good Offices function:

- Support to the AU/UN Joint Special Representative (JSR) for Darfur, and the mediation efforts of the Special Envoys of the AU and European Union (EU);
- Support and monitor implementation of the Darfur Peace Agreement and any subsequent agreements;
- Participate in and support the main bodies established by the Darfur Peace Agreement, including through technical and logistical support;
- Facilitate the conduct of the Darfur-Darfur Dialogue and Consultation mechanism laid out in the Darfur Peace Agreement;
- Assist the referendums laid out in the Darfur Peace Agreement;
- Ensure complementary implementation of all peace agreements in Sudan; and
- Liaise with UNMIS and the AU on implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement for Sudan.¹⁵

On its face, UNAMID's mandate appears to carve out a clear political role for the mission in support of the peace process; however, the reality was much murkier. Here, it is worth highlighting that UNAMID was mandated to support the AU's lead role in the peace process, given the central role of the AU in brokering the Darfur Peace Agreement and its standing with the parties.¹⁶ The types of support demanded from the mission were in reality much less political and much more technical/logistical, especially its support to the Joint AU/UN Mediation Team leading talks with the parties. In fact, by establishing a separate mediation team outside of UNAMID's command

structure, the message was a fairly clear one, expressed by a former official of a Security Council Member State: "We saw UNAMID as the cars, the planes and the money to underpin a peace process being run mainly by the AU; we didn't necessarily like it, but that was the reality."¹⁷

Rather than an overtly political role, several experts noted that UNAMID was established primarily to carry out many of the tasks that AMIS had been unable to perform due to its capacity shortfalls. Here, the large military component of the mission (nearly 20,000 troops) and mandate to protect civilians and facilitate humanitarian delivery reflected an overriding focus of the Security Council on the security situation, while the political process was what one UN expert called "aspirational background noise."¹⁸ Instead of playing an active role in the peace talks amongst the parties, the Council oriented UNAMID more towards a preparatory and supportive role; for example, the most direct tasking of the mission was to facilitate the Darfur-Darfur Dialogue and Consultation, a process designed to broaden civil society buy-in to an eventual expansion of the Darfur Peace Agreement into an agreement amongst all belligerent groups in Darfur. While important, this was at least one step removed from the main action of the negotiations, which were envisaged by the Council as a separate process led by the Joint Mediation.

OPERATIONS WITHOUT STRATEGY

Within the UN Secretariat, the bulk of the preparations for UNAMID were focused on the thorny issue of host State consent, particularly with regard to the deployment of troops into Sudan, leaving little room to translate the mandate into a political strategy for the peace process. President Bashir was clearly unwilling to accept the earlier formulations of a UN-led mission, and it was only after a concerted diplomatic effort – including at a meeting between Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and the Sudanese Foreign Minister – that Khartoum grudgingly agreed to the deployment of the hybrid mission with an African character.¹⁹ At the same time, the UN's efforts to keep the AU on board with the deployment of the mission meant that gradually the UN ceded nearly all of the political role to the AU. "There was no possibility to orchestrate a common political strategy," a



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former senior UN official said, “because we used up all our energy just trying to get people into Darfur.”²⁰

In New York, an Integrated Operational Team – composed of political officers, military, police, logistics and human resources – was formed in 2007 to support the deployment and strategic direction of UNAMID. This team managed a heavy lift from an operational standpoint: in a very short period of time, the UN had to generate roughly 20,000 troops from African countries, many of which did not have the logistics or the training to deploy quickly. Coordination with the African Union added another layer to the Secretariat’s work, given that the strategic guidance given to UNAMID needed to be consulted and often cleared in Addis. This overriding focus on operational deployment of the mission meant that the Secretariat generated little political guidance to the mission in the first years of its deployment. “For the Secretariat, UNAMID’s biggest political challenge was getting into Darfur and moving troops around – there wasn’t really much bandwidth for thinking of what the mission might do on the political process,” one

former member of the Secretariat said.²¹ Another former UN official was even more critical: “the UN leadership assumed that UNAMID’s operational presence in Darfur would create political leverage and a role for the mission, but that simply never happened.”²²

On the ground, the mission leadership was equally concerned with UNAMID’s operational challenges, with little scope to develop a political strategy for engagement. The JSR, a Congolese former minister serving in his first peacekeeping mission, did not develop a mission-wide strategy for UNAMID during his tenure leading the mission. While some parts of the mission did have strategic documents (for example the force had a military concept of operations based on Resolution 1769), there was no overarching Mission Concept for UNAMID in its first years. Midway through 2008, a seasoned UN official was brought in as the civilian Chief of Staff, helping to develop more rigorous planning for the mission, and in February 2009 the mission issued a directive on PoC. However, no political or mission-wide strategy was developed or disseminated in the first years of the mission.

This does not mean the mission was completely unengaged politically in Darfur. The head of UNAMID's political section at the time, a dynamic personality who later joined President Mbeki's mediation team supporting the political process for Sudan and South Sudan, deployed political officers to the different Darfuri states ostensibly in support of the Darfur-Darfur Dialogue and Consultation provisions of the peace process. UNAMID also supported the visits of the Joint Mediation Team, including by facilitating direct talks with the rebel group leadership around Darfur, while the UNAMID force regularly met with the signatories to the ceasefire to encourage further commitments to the peace process. However, a range of experts and UN officials involved at the time agreed that these kinds of activities did not rise to the level of serious political engagement with the main parties to the conflict, or much influence over the course of the talks. "UNAMID was never positioned to do political work in Darfur or Khartoum," a former senior UN official said. "How could the mission develop a political strategy when it had no role to begin with?"

The combination of recurrent operational challenges, a heavy security focus by the UN Secretariat and the mission leadership, and an unclear political role in Darfur meant that UNAMID did not develop political strategy during its first two years of deployment. It was only in 2010, in the context of the South Sudan referendum and a broader reconfiguration of the UN presence across Sudan, that the Secretariat initiated a strategic review of the mission, resulting in a mission plan. But even then, as the subsequent sections illustrate, UNAMID struggled to carve out a political role for itself in the peace process.

Phase II

A Shift Towards the Political

In 2011 an apparent breakthrough occurred in the political process for Darfur, as several rebel groups and the Government of Sudan signed the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur (DDPD). This was combined with a decision to fold the joint mediation role into that of the JSR of UNAMID,

placing the mission ostensibly in a far more central role to the political process. However, like its predecessor, the DDPD suffered from a lack of meaningful buy-in by the parties, many of whom continued to fight openly in Darfur over the next two years while others remained outside the process. Frustrated by a lack of progress on the peace process, in 2013 the Security Council called for a joint AU-UN strategic review of UNAMID, focused in large part on its role vis-à-vis the peace process.²³

The review painted an extremely pessimistic picture of the situation on the ground and pointed to the limited scope for UNAMID to impact the peace process.²⁴ Specifically, the review noted that UNAMID was unable to perform its three core political functions: (1) support to the signatory parties of the DDPD; (2) engagement with the Government and the rebel movements to promote negotiations; and (3) support to Darfur-based internal dialogue and consultations. The review stated that UNAMID had been unable to move the signatories forward due to delays in the implementation of the agreement and the absence of a more inclusive political settlement with non-signatories. Lack of unity across the rebel movements as to how talks should proceed had left the process stagnant, while divergent views across the international community had failed to produce pressure on the parties. The review called for a renewed focus on UNAMID's role in supporting the DDPD, with a top priority given to its work in mediating between the Government and the non-signatory armed movements. It also laid out clear political benchmarks for the parties to achieve relative to the peace process, with UNAMID playing a direct brokering and monitoring role.

The AU/UN strategic review was so impactful the Security Council immediately endorsed its findings, without the usual haggling over terms and outside of its usual mandate renewal cycle.²⁵ The resolution gave UNAMID three priority areas: protection, mediation between the Government and the non-signatories, and mediation of local level conflict, all of which the Council suggested were in support of the DDPD. This constituted a significant shift for UNAMID, placing greater emphasis on its role in the political process, and dropping other issues; in fact, the Council



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specifically instructed the mission to de-prioritize a range of tasks that had been included in the mission's original mandate, including support to rule of law institutions and the police.

The way in which Resolution 2148 was created suggests a significant shift from earlier mandates for UNAMID. Here, the Council had requested a joint strategic review from the secretariats of the AU and the UN, which ultimately proposed a revamping of the political role of UNAMID. The subsequent resolution essentially endorsed the findings of the review without modification. "We wrote UNAMID's mandate," one UN official stated, "the Council accepted everything we had in the review."²⁶ The Council also required that the UN and AU jointly report on progress against these priority areas every year, with a six-month review between reports in addition to the regular reporting of the Secretary-General. As described below, this frequency of reporting became one of the most important ways in which UNAMID's strategic direction was set, largely by the UN and AU headquarters.

FACTS ON THE GROUND

While the 2014 Security Council mandate articulated a more overtly political role for UNAMID, several factors affected its ability to translate the mandate into a viable political strategy. Firstly, in early 2014, President Bashir implemented Operation Decisive Summer, an offensive into North and South Darfur aimed at eradicating the rebel strongholds and ending their ability to challenge the State. Between 2014 and mid-2015, the Sudanese army launched a series of large-scale operations into Darfur, destroying the operating capabilities of the major armed groups across most of the region and displacing tens of thousands of civilians in the process.²⁷ In the wake of these attacks, Bashir declared the war in Darfur to be over, closing off further negotiations with non-signatory parties and essentially ending any prospect for a renewed political process under the DDPD. Instead, he launched a national dialogue process under Sudanese auspices, without any direct demand on UNAMID. "By the end of Operation Decisive Summer, there was no mediation to be



done,” a former UN official stated.²⁸ Here, the key role articulated by the Security Council for UNAMID – mediation between the Government of Sudan and the non-signatory armed groups – had been largely foreclosed by facts on the ground.

Secondly, the position of Khartoum in the international arena was shifting rapidly as Sudan became less of a pariah State. Facing a deepening financial crisis in 2014-15, Khartoum was increasingly desperate to rebuild its status with the international community, rid itself of crippling sanctions, and draw donor assistance. Bashir reached out to Arab allies, joined the Saudi-led coalition on Yemen and disowned its relationship with Iran. The Sudanese Government also offered its assistance in the fight against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIS), aligning with the US and other major powers in the hopes of improving its status with the West. As the European refugee crisis took hold, Sudan also became an important migration point, a place where European powers saw value in supporting the Khartoum to prevent onward migration. “This big shift in attitude towards Sudan meant that the Western powers were much less interested in shoving a peace agreement down Bashir’s throat,” one UN official said. “It meant that when Khartoum said negotiation with the rebels was over, most of the major powers just accepted it.”²⁹ Several UN officials working on the Darfur file at the time similarly noted that the Council dynamic reflected this lack of eagerness to push a peace process too hard while Khartoum was helping far more high-profile issues like the fight against ISIS. Again, this left UNAMID with less scope to play the political role envisaged by the Council mandate.

Thirdly, the AU began to take a much more overt leadership role on the political track. While UNAMID and the Joint Mediation had both been established on the basis of a partnership between the AU and the UN, the relationship between the two entities was never smooth on Darfur. As early as 2008, the AU created the African Union High-Level Panel on Darfur (AUPD), led by former South African President Thabo Mbeki, to essentially chart out a separate track for its own political engagement. In 2009, the AUPD’s 125-page report entitled “Darfur: the Quest for Peace, Justice and Reconciliation” recommended a wide range of steps Khartoum and the parties to the conflict should take to achieve peace.³⁰ On the basis of this report, the AU publicly announced a roadmap of its own for a global political settlement for Darfur, renaming the AUPD the African Union High-Level Implementation Panel (AUHIP) and designating it as the lead entity on the political talks. “This was a clear indication from the AU that it didn’t see the UN as a major player in the Darfur peace process,” an expert pointed out.³¹ In August 2014, just as the Council was articulating a more central role for UNAMID in the DDPD, a high-level AU, UN and Intergovernmental Authority for Development (IGAD) meeting agreed that AUHIP should take a lead role in bringing the armed movements into a national dialogue with Khartoum. “From that point on,” a former UN official noted, “all of the meetings with the opposition groups, armed groups and other players in the Darfur conflict were conducted by AUHIP, not UNAMID.”³²

Finally, by 2014 the bulk of New York’s focus on UNAMID was on reducing its size and cost. From 2014 to 2018, UNAMID’s staffing was reduced by roughly 40 per cent, while the budget dropped



from USD \$1.3 billion to \$400 million during that period.³³ “We were consumed with trimming the monster,” a UN official involved in the UNAMID file said. “Most of the energy was directed at putting the mission on a severe diet.”³⁴ Here, the relationship between UNAMID and the Secretariat was often strained, as the mission resisted ever-increasing cuts to its budget, which it saw as reducing its capacities to deliver on its mandate. According to several UN officials, one of the ways the mission resisted was by avoiding any development of a Mission Concept or strategy. “UNAMID saw strategic planning as yet another way for Headquarters to pare them back, because once a new strategic planning process was started, the Secretariat would start asking what resources were really needed for reaching these goals.”³⁵ This meant that for the 2014-2017 period, UNAMID developed no mission-wide strategy, despite the clear call for a political role in the DDPD.

MANAGING UP AND DOWN

Instead of a traditional mission strategy, the Secretariat began to use its regular AU/UN reporting requirements to the Council as a *de facto* strategic plan. In April 2014, the AU/UN special report on Darfur proposed a modification of the mission’s benchmarks, including related to the peace process.³⁶ In endorsing these benchmarks, the Council requested similar AU/UN reporting on an annual basis, with reviews every six months. “We [the Secretariat] created a cycle with the mission and the Security Council,” a former senior member of the Darfur team in New York said, “where the mission’s mandate implementation was fully captured in the benchmarks. We would travel to Darfur four

or five times a year, be sure the mission had a chance to feed into the process, but also use the visits as a way to give strategic direction to the mission based on these reports.”³⁷

Basing the strategic direction to the mission on regular reporting to the Council meant that UNAMID’s approach was constantly being updated. Rather than a static document with a two-year end state (typical of mission strategies in the UN), UNAMID was guided by a report that contained the latest updates on the political and security situation. This allowed for gradual changes to be made to the strategy, including where the political emphasis would fall for the mission. For example, as the impacts of Operational Decisive Summer became increasingly clear, the importance of the political negotiations in the DDPD shrank, while intercommunal violence rose significantly. Recognizing this shift, the 2016 special AU/UN report recommended that UNAMID shift its focus towards protecting the newly displaced populations and resolution of intercommunal violence.³⁸ As one expert on the UN said, “The Secretariat helped the Council recognize that the elite political process wasn’t something UNAMID could really influence, so it was able to change the mission’s priorities towards intercommunal violence, without causing a huge ripple in Council dynamics because it was based on the AU/UN recommendation.”³⁹ Another expert captured the role of the Secretariat: “Headquarters found a way to manage up to the Security Council through these joint reports, and also to manage down to the mission.”⁴⁰ This role of the Secretariat became even more important during the shift towards drawing down UNAMID and developing an exit strategy for the mission.

Phase III

Leaving Darfur

For many Darfur experts, UNAMID's exit had become an inevitability well before the Security Council formally took up the issue in 2014. Chronic shortcomings in the mission's ability to protect civilians, lack of progress on the political negotiations, and an inability to prevent resurgent intercommunal violence following the signing of the DDPD all contributed to a growing sense of frustration and a willingness of the Council to consider drawing UNAMID to a close. "By 2014, the writing was on the wall," a former UNAMID official said, "the mission had to go."⁴¹ How the Security Council mandated the eventual transition of the mission, and how this mandate was translated into a strategy for UNAMID in the lead up to the 2019 coup, is the principle focus of this section.

PROTECTION AND PEACEBUILDING

In August 2014, soon after the joint AU/UN report on Darfur, the Security Council issued a resolution that explicitly mentioned an exit strategy for UNAMID. The core request was for the UN to identify those tasks that could be progressively handed over to the UN Country Team (UNCT), based on an assessment of where it had a comparative advantage.⁴² The Council also asked the Secretary-General to provide recommendations for an exit strategy for UNAMID, and on how a future mission might be configured. In the same resolution, the Council clearly shifted UNAMID's focus away from the political track, demanding that the mission give priority use of resources to protecting civilians and to facilitating humanitarian access.⁴³ "From that point on," a UN official noted, "most of the forward planning on UNAMID was focused on how to keep protecting civilians, drawing down the troops, and transitioning tasks to the country team. There wasn't really any focus on the peace process."⁴⁴

Over the next two years, the situation in Darfur changed significantly, with a direct impact on the transition plan: the Khartoum-led Operation Decisive Summer led to a dramatic reduction in the number and size of armed groups

operating in the region, but also a resurgence of intercommunal conflict. Rather than focus on the national-level political process or mediation with the non-signatory groups, the Council pushed UNAMID towards protection and the progressive handover of peacebuilding tasks to the UNCT. Resolution 2363 (2017) was the clearest indication of this shift: UNAMID was tasked to pursue a two-prong approach, military security in the central Jebel Marra area and intercommunal peacebuilding in the rest of the region.⁴⁵ While UNAMID's role in supporting the mediation was still listed as a priority area, according to several experts involved in the process, it had been moved almost entirely to the back burner. "The AU was leading the political track, there was no real expectation that UNAMID would be seriously involved in the talks," one expert noted.⁴⁶

One year later, Resolution 2429 (2018) built on this two-pronged approach and laid out a "whole of system" concept for the transition. Here, UNAMID was to collocate with the UNCT in each of Darfur's states, creating State Liaison Functions (SLF) that would deliver peacebuilding programming for communities and service delivery for displaced persons. According to a senior UN official involved in the transition planning, this approach reflected the realities of Darfur at the time. "Large parts of Darfur hadn't seen conflict in years; when we asked them what they wanted they said water, schools, roads, not peacekeeping and not more talks."⁴⁷

Largely neglected in these plans was any high-level political role for UNAMID vis-à-vis the DDPD. In private meetings between the AU and the UN, senior AU officials reportedly suggested UNAMID quietly let go of any attempts to engage with the non-signatory parties, to "let the mediation slip into a coma."⁴⁸ And while the JSR did continue to spend a significant proportion of his time in Khartoum meeting with the leadership of various groups (in fact, his office moved to Khartoum as part of the transition concept), the dominant focus of the mission quickly became the transition out of Darfur.⁴⁹ Meetings of the Working Group for UNAMID's Exit in Khartoum became a key point of contact between the mission and the Government, but they focused almost exclusively on issues like troop reductions and asset transfers, offering few opportunities for the mission to engage meaningfully on the political process.⁵⁰

END DATE NOT AN END STATE

The underlying concept for UNAMID's exit was largely developed within the UN Secretariat, subsequently consulted with UNAMID's leadership and the AU, and then produced as a recommendation to the Security Council. "In New York, it became clear that UNAMID was phasing out, and the Secretariat designed the two-prong approach to help it reconfigure quickly into a peacebuilding presence," one senior UN official said. And while there was relatively clear agreement between the UN and AU secretariats on the two-year timeframe for this draw down, differences of view existed within the Security Council and UNAMID's leadership. "There was a big disconnect between Headquarters and the mission leadership in terms of the transition," a Security Council official noted. "And there was a feeling, including within some of the Council, that the Secretariat was rushing things, making decisions and then assuming we'd sign off on them."⁵¹ While the Council only ever "took note" of the recommendation that UNAMID end its substantive mandate by June 2020, there was a strong sense that this timeframe was driving the process.

Concern about the timeframe was echoed by many in UNAMID itself, who claimed a two-year horizon for the transition was much too short, especially given the continuing violence in Jebel Marra and the large numbers of newly displaced people from Operation Decisive Summer. "It meant UNAMID was driven by an end date, not an end state," one expert said, highlighting that the timeframe for the transition became the overriding concern.⁵² As the military draw down began in earnest – dropping the overall number of troops in Darfur from more than 15,000 to just over 4,000 in a two-year period – some in the mission worried that UNAMID would be left without crucial protection capacities at a fragile moment and little scope to provide a security guarantee for the peace process. "We had major armed groups refusing to participate in the DDPD, a real need to keep a peace process going, and open conflict in the Jebel Marra region, but UNAMID was still drawing down as fast as it could," one expert said.⁵³

TRANSITION PLANNING

Putting in place a transition plan for UNAMID was an enormous undertaking, one that consumed the bulk of the mission's energy from 2017 until the 2019 coup. A range of coordination and planning structures were put into place, including senior-level forums for UNAMID and the UNCT in the field, regular meetings of the Darfur Integrated Task Force in New York and occasional meetings of the Tripartite Coordination Mechanism comprised of the UN, AU and Sudanese leadership in Khartoum.⁵⁴ This was supported by the Joint Transitions Team from New York, a relatively new group drawn from the Department of Peace Operations (DPO), the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA), and the UN Development Programme (UNDP).

By July 2018, this activity had resulted in the development of a Mission Concept for UNAMID's transition, largely following the two-pronged approach described above.⁵⁵ The Concept articulated a continuing role for UNAMID in support of the DDPD, including engagement with the Government and the non-signatory movements (indeed the Mission Concept notes that the JSR's relocation to Khartoum reflects the priority placed on the peace process). But in more concrete terms, the Mission Concept suggested that UNAMID would focus on the more local level on implementation of the DDPD, prioritizing rule of law, community reconciliation, service delivery, and durable solutions for internally displaced person.⁵⁶ "The transition concept kept the DDPD as a reference point, but only really the parts that included local work on peacebuilding," a UN official involved in the process said. "There was no real contemplation of who would take on the political aspects of the peace process that had been assigned to UNAMID, because there was a sense that the AU had already taken over the talks."⁵⁷

A COUP, A PAUSE, A LETTER

In April 2019, long-simmering popular discontent with President Bashir erupted into a mass protests and a coup whereby the military removed Bashir and his National Congress Party (NCP) from power. The installation of a



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transitional military council in Sudan resulted in continuing protests, harsh crackdowns and short-term suspension of Sudan from the AU.⁵⁸ In response to the extremely volatile moment in Sudan, the UN and AU conducted a joint strategic assessment to Sudan, focused on UNAMID's continued role and eventual draw down. While it recognized that the seismic shifts in Sudan called for the mission to adjust to the new realities in the country, it also suggested that the mission should continue to plan for its exit by the end of 2020.⁵⁹

The joint AU/UN report issued at a moment of significant divisions amongst the Security Council about the future of UNAMID. A group of Member States including Germany and the UK (co-pen-holders on the Sudan), Poland, Belgium and France saw the Sudanese crisis as an opportunity to slow down the mission's exit; in contrast, Russia, China, Kuwait and Indonesia demanded that the transition continue along the timeframe articulated in Resolution 2429.⁶⁰ During its June 2019 deliberations, the AU Peace and Security Council issued a communiqué extending UNAMID's mandate for 12 months

and endorsing the continued closure of sites as part of the mission's draw down.⁶¹ However, the African members of the Security Council soon transmitted an additional request to the Security Council, that UNAMID's draw down should be "paused."⁶² This recommendation was taken up by the Council, which issued a July 2019 resolution temporarily pausing the draw down process, but not modifying the overall draw down period for the mission.⁶³

Amidst this wrangling over dates (which took place over a long period from September 2019 to June 2020), "the key political question became what would the follow-on presence in Darfur be: would it be another security-focused mission, something more focused on peacebuilding, or something that would support the political process?"⁶⁴ It is worth flagging here that, prior to the 2019 coup, there was very little appetite within the Council for another peace operation to succeed UNAMID. Even as consensus grew on the need for some kind of mission, there were divisions within the Council, with some members pushing for a more protection-focused mission

(possibly with a Chapter VII mandate) and others demanding an end to peacekeeping in Darfur. In this context, newly elected Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok wrote two letters to the Security Council – the first in February and the second in March 2020 – which laid out Sudan’s request for a follow-on presence in Sudan: while the first letter articulated a much broader scope of activity for the UN across Sudan, the second laid out a more limited set of tasks that would include support for the peace negotiations taking place between the Sudanese parties, facilitation of humanitarian aid and technical support to Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration processes.⁶⁵

It is worth noting here that most of these Council deliberations took place far from the dynamics of Khartoum, while the AU and IGAD were far more directly involved. Several experts pointed out that this distance from the political process in Sudan meant that the Council negotiations were disconnected from the realities on the ground, and largely done without input from the Sudanese leadership.⁶⁶ Here, because UNAMID had not developed strong relations with the powerbrokers in Khartoum, the mission did not provide an entry point to the Council either.

AN OPPORTUNITY

At the time of writing, the Security Council had authorized a new political mission in Sudan, while UNAMID was continuing its planned draw down within the expected timeframe.⁶⁷ For UNAMID, the political landscape changed significantly. “UNAMID is now actively involved in the talks [between the Darfuri parties and the Sudanese Government] in Juba. The mission is much more central to the process that it was previously,” one expert on UNAMID said.⁶⁸ Others suggested that UNAMID was still largely a peripheral player, offering technical support more than substantively guiding the process, while the Council has remained almost totally unengaged on the Juba talks.

It remains to be seen whether the future UN presence is better able to execute its political tasks, but there are some early signs that it will. The new Government has demonstrated far greater openness to the UN playing a role in the peace process. And for its part, the UN has deployed one of the most capable and knowledgeable UN officials to Khartoum to lead the planning process for a new mission. As one Security Council member noted, “The stars are much better aligned this time around for a mission that will be able to meet expectations.”



|| _____ Key Findings

UNAMID is widely known as one of the UN's most challenging peacekeeping experiences in the history of the UN. In discussions with experts within and outside the UN, there was near consensus that the hybrid AU/UN model did not generate the kind of strategic partnership between the organizations that would have been required for the mission to have gained real leverage in Sudan. Those directly involved in the day-to-day running of the mission almost uniformly referred to it in negative terms, highlighting the mission's reputation for poor performance, its difficult relationship with the host Government, and the lack of meaningful progress on the peace process during its tenure in Sudan.

As this study has demonstrated, many of the mission's shortcomings were the result of factors beyond its control. A divided Security Council meant UNAMID's mandates were more often

the result of political expediency and lowest common denominator thinking than any kind of strategic vision on the part of the Council. Indeed, one expert insightfully noted that the Council's strategy on Darfur was "designed to lay the groundwork for peacekeepers, not for peace."⁶⁹ Hemmed in on all sides, UNAMID suffered chronic obstructionism from Bashir's Government, frequent neglect from the AU and ever-increasing difficulties of attracting talented staff. The result, from the point of view of UNAMID's political role in Darfur, has been a mission overwhelmingly concerned with its own operational survival, struggling to overcome massive barriers to host Government consent to its very existence in country, and without the kind of concerted international and regional backing that would have been needed for it to press the conflict parties towards peace. There may be lessons too about mandating peace operations at the subnational level – the fact

that UNAMID was constrained to Darfur may well have contributed to its limited political leverage with national actors.

Nonetheless, the UNAMID experience offers a range of interesting and potentially important findings in terms of a peacekeeping mission's political role in a challenging conflict environment. As the UN has increasingly found itself in what Richard Gowan has called "the peacekeeping quagmire" – settings where peacekeepers are deployed with little prospect of overseeing a successful peace process – lessons from missions like UNAMID are more important than ever.⁷⁰ With this in mind, the following lessons may be of more general applicability:

1 Weight is not leverage

With an operating budget of USD \$1.3 billion, nearly 20,000 troops, and an expansive mandate across Darfur, UNAMID initially appeared to be an attempt to gain leverage through size. If anything, however, the enormous costs of deploying (often poorly trained) troops into a region that did not enjoy strong host State consent meant that the mission tended to cash its political chips on operation concerns. As one former senior UN official expert put it, "by the time we had used up our juice getting two civilians through the visa gauntlet and some of our troops' kit out from quarantine, there was no juice left to ask the Government for anything."⁷¹ In fact, there may well be an inverse relationship between the size of a peacekeeping mission and the political leverage it enjoys, as its assets in country are more easily translated into *de facto* hostages than any kind of pressure point on the parties to the conflict.

2 No means no

From 2006 onwards, President Bashir was at best a reluctant host to UNAMID, more often acting as an overt barrier to the mission's success. "It was clear Bashir saw UNAMID as a Trojan horse for the West, a way to get European spies into Darfur, bolster the [International Criminal Court] case against him, and try to topple his Government," one expert noted. In the face of enormous international pressure to deploy something into

Darfur, the Security Council and the secretariats of the UN and AU appeared willing to imagine host State consent rather than achieve it. The result was a mission that spent nearly all of its energy overcoming the thousand daily cuts of an obstructionist host State, drafting notes verbales to extricate containers from impoundment, quietly removing senior staff from the mission area to avoid public expulsion, asking vainly for flight clearances that were never forthcoming in time for a rapid protection response. The lesson here is for the Council and the Secretariat to do more to test host State consent before deploying a mission, to be willing to send small, fact-finding missions to define the scope of possibility for a peace operation before spending USD \$1 billion on a mission that cannot implement its mandate.⁷²

3 Dual/dueling bosses

The decision to mandate a joint AU/UN mission was seen at the time as a necessary step to garner consent from both Khartoum and Addis Ababa for UNAMID's establishment. However, it does not appear that the Security Council had a clear vision for how the two organizations would work together at the strategic level on Darfur, instead appearing to choose hybridity as a way of punting the question of strategy. As a result, the UN and AU often seemed more dueling than dual, more concerned with who would control direction of the mission than in arriving at a common vision for Darfur. The result was that UNAMID was gradually stripped of its political role, which moved towards the AU over time, leaving the mission with enormous operational responsibilities but little traction. As the UN and AU again consider how the two organizations may cooperate on the Darfur file for the follow-on presence, they should reach clear agreement at the highest level on roles, responsibilities and expected outcomes.

4 Support vs. service provision

UN peace operations can play enormously influential roles via the support they offer to conflict parties, whether technical, advisory, logistics or Good Offices. Throughout much of UNAMID's tenure, its mandate to support the



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peace process has been relegated to a technical and logistical one that has not translated into more direct influence. For example, its support to the Joint Mediation and the AUHIP-led talks was seen by many experts as little more than transport and convening space, without giving UNAMID much stake in the talks themselves. However, its more recent role in supporting the talks between the armed groups and the Government of Sudan in Juba have been viewed by some as somewhat more influential, allowing UNAMID to help shape the scope of discussions more than previous efforts. Both the Security Council and the Secretariat should consider how different forms of support in the various peacekeeping settings today might be calibrated to maximize leverage in political processes.

5 Partial peace agreements

UNAMID was established on the back of an incomplete peace agreement, characterized more by its non-signatories than its participants.⁷³ Here, the Council appeared to treat the peace agreement as “just a way to get boots on the

ground,” rather than part of a broader strategic approach to resolving the conflict in Darfur. As a result, the bulk of the mission’s political work was directed at expanding the participation and inclusiveness of the peace process, mediating towards a common position between the non-signatories and the Government. While a laudable task, it is not clear that this was the best role for a large multidimensional peacekeeping mission that was also tasked with protecting civilians, facilitating humanitarian aid, reporting on human rights and building up rule of law capacities.

6 A strategy vs. strategic direction

Through much of UNAMID’s history, it did not have a Mission Concept or did not employ a mission-wide strategy to guide all components. However, from around 2014 to present, the AU and UN secretariats appear to have effectively used their annual reporting requirements to set the strategic direction for UNAMID in an iterative process with the Security Council. Here, the gradual refinement of mission benchmarks in

the UN/AU reports have become a consistent reference point for Council mandates and have become integral to the strategic direction of the mission. While this does not necessarily replace the need for a mission strategy at the field level, the practice is one that could be considered for application beyond UNAMID. It may also be worth considering the process to produce the transition concept as a possible model for strategy-making.

7 Full car, empty driver's seat

In discussions with a range of actors including the Security Council, the AU/UN secretariats, and mission staff, it was often unclear where a strategy should be developed. Those within UNAMID rankled at the tendency of the Secretariat to set the strategic direction for the mission, arguing that it had paved the way for a precipitous draw down at a time of uncertainty for Sudan. In contrast, several UN staff in the Secretariat complained that the UNAMID leadership was reticent to develop its own political strategy, while the AU often appeared willing to develop its own approach in parallel to the UN. This points again to the lack of common vision at the highest levels

of the UN and AU on the purpose of UNAMID, but also to a more mundane need for clear articulation of roles and responsibilities from the outset of a peace operation.

8 Leverage in the transition

“UNAMID has never been more relevant than when it is headed out of Darfur,” one UN expert stated, noting that the mission’s transition to peacebuilding has given the UN new status within the country. While most transitions are thought of as a winding down and loss of influence in country, there can often be moments where the UN can utilize the fluidity of a transitional moment to reposition itself. In the case of Darfur, that may involve a recalibration of the UN’s role in the broader Sudan discussions, a recasting of the UN’s peacebuilding role in Darfur, and a renewed relationship with Khartoum following the 2019 coup. Rather than think of transitions as largely operational processes to reduce the footprint of the UN in-country – or worse, a handover of tasks to other actors – the UN should think of the reconfiguration of its presence as an opportunity to gain greater political leverage.⁷⁴

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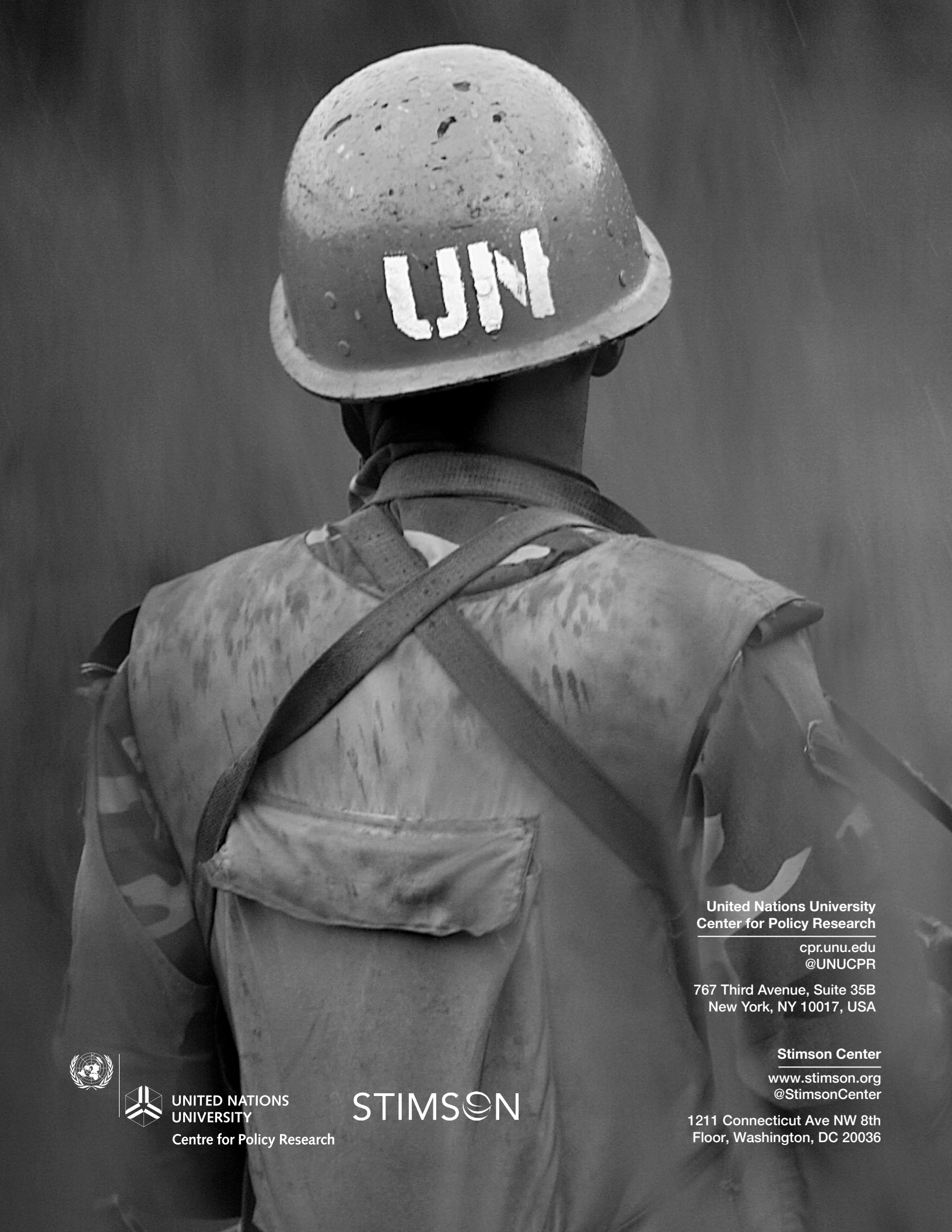
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