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# Prioritization and Sequencing of Security Council Mandates: The Case of UNMISS

FEBRUARY 2022



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On February 2, 2022, the International Peace Institute (IPI), the Stimson Center, and Security Council Report organized a virtual workshop to discuss the mandate and political strategy of the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS). This discussion was part of a series of workshops that examine how the activities included in peace operations' mandates can be better prioritized, sequenced, and grounded in political strategy. This was the fourth consecutive year in which these partners convened discussions around the UNMISS mandate negotiations. This meeting note was drafted collaboratively by IPI, the Stimson Center, and Security Council Report. It summarizes the main points raised in the discussion under the Chatham House rule of non-attribution and does not necessarily represent the views of all participants. The project is funded with the support of the German Federal Foreign Office.

## Introduction

The UN Security Council is expected to renew the mandate of the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) in March 2022. Deliberations on UNMISS's mandate arrive as South Sudanese stakeholders and the UN are accelerating preparations for crucial governance milestones at the heart of the country's political transition, as outlined in the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS). Yet despite this crucial moment in the transition, international attention and support for the country are wavering, in part due to the relatively limited progress on implementing the R-ARCSS and urgent security and humanitarian crises elsewhere in the Horn of Africa. Beyond the upcoming governance milestones, UNMISS also continues to engage on a wide range of issues across the country, underpinned by the three-year strategic vision the Security Council articulated in the mandate it adopted for UNMISS in March 2021.<sup>1</sup>

In this context, the International Peace Institute (IPI), the Stimson Center, and Security Council Report co-hosted a virtual roundtable discussion on February 2, 2022, to discuss the mission's mandate. This roundtable offered a platform for member states, UN stakeholders, civil society representatives, and independent experts to share their assessments of the situation in South Sudan in a frank and collaborative environment. The discussion was intended to help the Security Council make more informed decisions with respect to the prioritization and sequencing of UNMISS's mandate and the mission's strategic orientation and actions on the ground.

Several participants agreed that UNMISS's mandate, strategic vision, and priorities remain relevant for the coming year. Considering that the country's transitional period is expected to conclude in 2023, discussions gravitated toward identifying concrete actions that UNMISS and the Security Council can take to support South Sudanese stakeholders in meeting crucial milestones in these final stages of the political transition.

Participants raised several points for consideration during the upcoming negotiations on UNMISS's mandate renewal:

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<sup>1</sup> The three-year strategic vision is "to prevent a return to civil war in South Sudan, to build durable peace at the local and national levels, and to support inclusive and accountable governance and free, fair, and peaceful elections in accordance with the Revitalised Agreement." UN Security Council Resolution 2567 (March 12, 2021), UN Doc. S/RES/2567 (2021), para. 2.

On the political transition:

- Affirm the relevance of the Security Council's strategic vision for South Sudan while also considering scenarios for UNMISS's engagement after the end of the country's political transition in 2023;
- Strengthen the language around the R-ARCSS to encourage progress on implementation;
- Emphasize the mission's advantages in linking local-level intercommunal dialogue with political stakeholders at the community, state, and national levels;
- Outline priorities for political and technical support to the constitution-drafting process; and
- Codify UN electoral support based on priorities outlined in the recent Security Council presidential statement and the secretary-general's electoral needs assessment report.

On the protection of civilians:

- Continue reinforcing the linkages between UNMISS's protection of civilians work and its support to the political transition;
- Acknowledge and support UNMISS's revised protection of civilians strategy, including the roles of enhanced political engagement and of strategic communications; and
- Include additional language on the prevention of and accountability for sexual and gender-based violence.

On climate and security:

- Encourage the mission to incorporate climate-sensitive analysis into all aspects of mandate implementation.

On troop and police deployments:

- Maintain existing uniformed troop and police ceilings as set in Security Council Resolution 2567; and
- Encourage troop- and police-contributing

countries to deploy additional uniformed and civilian women peacekeepers, including through mixed-gender engagement platoons.

## Conflict Analysis

South Sudan's political transition, which began in 2018 following the signing of the R-ARCSS, is approaching a decisive juncture. Progress on the agreement's outstanding provisions and benchmarks has been limited due to political fragmentation and continued fighting between non-signatory movements and government security forces. As a result, necessary elements involving constitutional and electoral reform, security sector reform, and transitional justice have yet to be addressed. This stalled progress jeopardizes the timeline for the formal end of the transitional period, including the drafting of a new constitution and convening of national elections in 2023. Alongside these national political dynamics, South Sudan faces continued protection concerns at the subnational level, deteriorating humanitarian conditions worsened by climate change, and regional stresses stemming from crises in Ethiopia, Somalia, and Sudan.

## Political Dynamics

Persistent disagreements over the implementation of the R-ARCSS and worsening political factionalism and fragmentation among South Sudan's political elites, including breakaway factions of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army In-Opposition (SPLM/A-IO), raise serious concerns about the state of the governance transition.<sup>2</sup>

While the Revitalised Transitional National Legislative Assembly was reconstituted in late August 2021, the government has made little progress in establishing the state legislative assemblies and national commissions.<sup>3</sup> Implementation also lags when it comes to the institutional reforms and revenue-allocation arrangements agreed upon under Chapter 4 of the R-ARCSS.<sup>4</sup> None of the transitional justice institu-

<sup>2</sup> UN Security Council, *Situation in South Sudan—Report of the Secretary-General*, UN Doc. S/2021/1015, December 7, 2021, paras. 12–14.

<sup>3</sup> Reconstituted Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission (RJMEC), "On the Status of Implementation of the Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan for the Period 1<sup>st</sup> July to 30<sup>th</sup> September 2021," Report No. 012/21, p. iv. The R-ARCSS stipulated that the transitional government shall review all national legislation, including the Investment Promotion Act (2009), Banking Act (2010), Anti-Corruption Commission Act (2009), and Petroleum Revenue Management Act (2012). Due to delays in the formation of the various specialized committees entrusted with overseeing, reviewing, and providing legislative oversight, the establishment of national commissions has been delayed.

<sup>4</sup> "Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS)," September 12, 2018, pp. 43, 52.

tions have been established, apart from limited recent progress toward establishing the Commission for Truth, Reconciliation and Healing.<sup>5</sup> Some participants underscored that continued delays in implementing the transitional security arrangements (Chapter 2 of the R-ARCSS) are the biggest impediments to the political transition. They emphasized that continued violations of existing arrangements and lack of progress on unifying the country's various security forces into the South Sudan People's Defence Forces (SSPDF) reflect limited political will to address the issues that have fueled persistent cycles of violence.<sup>6</sup>

Discussions on the country's political situation centered on two critical processes likely to unfold over the coming months: the constitution-drafting process and the organization of national elections, which are expected to be completed by the end of 2023. Both were framed as highly sensitive processes. While they have the potential to reshape the relationship between the people of South Sudan and their government, they could also jeopardize South Sudan's limited progress on ending armed violence if they do not materialize. The constitution-drafting process will need to make significant progress before elections can take place, but preparations for both will need to occur simultaneously given the limited time left in the transition period.

One participant stressed that the new constitution should help define the country's institutions and could codify important provisions of the R-ARCSS into law. Some noted recent progress on the constitution-drafting process, including the series of multi-stakeholder consultations the government organized in 2021 and the approval of the Constitution-Making Process Bill 2020/2021 by the Council of Ministers (i.e., the transitional cabinet) in October.<sup>7</sup> Others mentioned that free, fair, and credible elections, which were initially scheduled for 2022 but have already been delayed by one year, could help the country exit the inherently fragile

period of political transition. But elections are destabilizing activities, and, as the Security Council noted in its October 2021 presidential statement, the Transitional Government of National Unity must still pass legislation and achieve several technical milestones before elections can be held.<sup>8</sup>

Participants also considered the difficult political climate in which these crucial developments will unfold. Tensions between some political leaders have subsided, and the Community of Sant'Egidio has led talks between the South Sudanese government and hold-out opposition groups; however, talks have not taken place since July 2021.<sup>9</sup> Sparked by many of the commitments in the R-ARCSS, more South Sudanese women are represented in many of the country's political institutions and processes; however, the minimum thresholds for female participation have not been met due to lack of political will by various political parties. Numerous participants emphasized the broader erosion of civic space by national authorities (including censorship, harassment, and arbitrary detentions) and the potential impact this could have on organizing free and fair elections. Others highlighted the continued challenges of intercommunal violence, fueled in part by the lack of peace dividends in the form of economic development.

## Armed Conflict Dynamics and the Protection of Civilians

While armed violence stemming from national political divisions has subsided over the past few years, South Sudanese civilians continue to experience high levels of subnational violence.<sup>10</sup> This is in part due to persistent fighting between the South Sudanese government and non-signatory armed movements. Localized violence is also driven by "factional fighting, intercommunal and intracomunal competition, lack of security and resource scarcity."<sup>11</sup> One participant drew attention to cattle

5 RJMEC, "On the Status of Implementation of the R-ARCSS," p. iv; UN Security Council, *Situation in South Sudan—Report of the Secretary-General*, UN Doc. S/2021/784, September 9, 2021, para. 9.

6 RJMEC, "Transitional Security Arrangements Remain Stalled, Frustrations Growing," December 9, 2021.

7 "South Sudan Begins Consultation on 'Permanent Constitution,'" Radio Tamazuj, September 8, 2021; Obaj Okuj, "Cabinet Approves Constitution-Making Process Bill," Eye Radio, October 18, 2021.

8 These include security arrangements, legal definition of the electoral system, boundary delimitation, a national census, the composition of the National Electoral Commission, and funding for election operations. See: UN Security Council Presidential Statement 2021/20 (October 27, 2021), UN Doc. S/PRST/2021/20.

9 Sant'Egidio, "South Sudan, Peace Talks at Sant'Egidio," July 19, 2021.

10 One participant estimated that there was a 42 percent decrease in civilian casualties between 2020 and 2021.

11 UN Doc. S/2021/1015, para. 19. See also: Dan Watson, "Surface Tension: 'Communal' Violence and Elite Ambitions in South Sudan," Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), August 19, 2021.

raids in two villages in Jonglei state on January 23, 2022, that resulted in thirty-two deaths.<sup>12</sup> In the final months of 2021, UNMISS reported that attacks by community-based militias were the “primary source of violence affecting local populations, accounting for 78 per cent of civilian casualties.”<sup>13</sup>

Participants spent much of the workshop discussing UNMISS’s protection strategies. Over the past two years, UNMISS has redesignated four of the five protection of civilians (POC) sites as traditional camps for internally displaced persons (IDPs) and transitioned them to government oversight, including in Bor, Wau, Juba, and Bentiu. The mission continues to provide physical protection to approximately 34,000 civilians at its POC site in Malakal, Upper Nile state. With the redesignation of its POC sites, UNMISS’s approach to physical protection is now focused on enhanced mobility. This new “hub-and-spoke” model depends on the more frequent use of temporary operating bases, patrols, comprehensive early-warning systems, and engagement platoons. According to one participant, UNMISS used approximately 125 different temporary operating bases throughout South Sudan over the course of 2021.

In this context, some participants emphasized that UNMISS has a comparative advantage in its ability to link local-level intercommunal dialogues with political stakeholders at the state and national levels. They highlighted that the mission could reduce violence and better engage with communities by supporting community-oriented peace agreements and reconciliation efforts, even if these efforts are not always successful. One participant emphasized the positive effect of the mission’s female engagement teams on intercommunal dialogue. There have also been some instances where the mission has been able to use its good offices to quickly engage senior political leaders in Juba when the risk of localized violence escalates. UNMISS’s role in fostering inclusive political

engagement is critical for protection efforts considering the linkages between political developments at the national and state levels and localized outbreaks of armed violence.<sup>14</sup>

Despite this progress, some participants noted that UNMISS continues to face an uphill battle in mitigating localized violence. Some emphasized the need to continuously link localized protection efforts to the mission’s overarching political strategy, which has not always happened. Another participant referenced the attacks in Jonglei state on January 23 as emblematic of the kinds of challenges UNMISS confronts in quickly responding to subnational violence.<sup>15</sup> These protection challenges are exacerbated by South Sudan’s limited progress in holding perpetrators of violence accountable.

## Humanitarian Conditions

Humanitarian conditions in South Sudan are likely to worsen in the coming months, amplifying the strategic and operational challenges confronting UNMISS. As of January 2022, there are 8.3 million people in need within South Sudan, with an estimated 2 million IDPs, as well as 2.3 million South Sudanese refugees outside the country, making it the largest refugee crisis on the African continent.<sup>16</sup>

Multiple participants stressed the diverse and devastating impacts of climate change across South Sudan.<sup>17</sup> The country has faced both droughts and floods, with extreme flooding affecting 835,000 people since May 2021.<sup>18</sup> Even without major weather events, this flooding has had an outsize impact on displacement and access to humanitarian supplies.

Participants also stressed that humanitarian workers struggle to secure access to populations in need and are at risk of attack. Between early September and early November, 2021, UNMISS recorded eighty-nine incidents that impeded

12 “UN Mission Calls for Probe into Deadly Attack in South Sudan,” *UN News*, January 25, 2022.

13 UN Doc. S/2021/1015, para. 66.

14 Joshua Craze, “How South Sudan’s Peace Process Became a Motor for Violence,” *New Humanitarian*, February 3, 2022.

15 UNMISS, “Statement by UNMISS on the Situation in Baidit in Jonglei State, South Sudan,” January 25, 2022.

16 UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), “South Sudan Humanitarian Snapshot,” January 2022.

17 Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, “Climate, Peace and Security Fact Sheet: South Sudan,” March 11, 2021.

18 OCHA, “South Sudan Humanitarian Snapshot,” January 2022.

humanitarian access, including ambushes, looting, and destruction of supplies.<sup>19</sup> One participant, however, highlighted the recent decline in violations of UNMISS's status-of-forces agreement with the South Sudanese government as an indicator of somewhat improved access.<sup>20</sup>

## Regional Dynamics and International Support

Some participants highlighted the important role of regional dynamics and international partners in shaping the current situation in South Sudan. Multiple speakers noted the formal role of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) as a guarantor for the R-ARCSS and the role of the African Union (AU) in exerting political pressure to advance the peace process. While UNMISS's good offices, political affairs, and civil affairs activities are invaluable components of the UN's political strategy, close coordination with these partners is critical. However, the crises in the Central African Republic, Ethiopia, Somalia, and Sudan have drawn IGAD and the AU's attention away from South Sudan.

At the international level, some participants stressed that South Sudan's prominent international partners and financial supporters are hoping to see much more progress on implementing the R-ARCSS. One participant also stressed that the Security Council's position on the situation in South Sudan remains unified, as exemplified by the October 2021 presidential statement.

## Prioritizing and Sequencing UNMISS's Mandate

Participants largely agreed that UNMISS's strategic vision and mandated priorities detailed in Security Council Resolution 2567 (2021) remain fit for purpose. Some noted that the Security Council will likely need to use the upcoming mandate renewal to detail how the mission should support the constitution-drafting process and the organization of the upcoming elections. Others encouraged UNMISS to use its mandate to continue

reinforcing the linkages between its POC activities and its support to the political transition. While many participants noted the value of the three-year vision endorsed by the Security Council, some felt that the new mandate should already begin considering how the UN will engage after the political transition. Finally, some participants urged the Security Council to tackle issues of climate and security more directly in the upcoming mandate, though they acknowledged that this effort would face strong political headwinds.

## Strategic Vision and the Political Transition

Participants encouraged the Security Council and UNMISS to continue channeling their efforts toward achieving the mandate's three-year strategic vision for South Sudan. They noted that there is no need for any immediate changes to the strategic vision's text considering that March 2022–2023 is only the second year of this vision and thus a moment to reinforce its implementation. Some participants shared that UNMISS has developed a strategy to implement the strategic vision across five of the mission's priority areas: supporting efforts to achieve the benchmarks of the R-ARCSS, contributing to a safe and secure environment, conducting political engagement, promoting the rule of law and access to justice, and strengthening strategic partnerships.

Participants raised numerous issues for the Security Council and mission to consider to adapt their engagement on South Sudan's political transition. One participant encouraged the council to begin deliberating on scenarios for the possible end of South Sudan's political transition following the elections and to use the upcoming mandate to emphasize long-term priorities. Participants also encouraged the Security Council to reinforce the mandate's language calling for the expedient implementation of the R-ARCSS's outstanding provisions. One participant cautioned that the UN and other international partners should call for South Sudanese stakeholders to embrace a holistic approach to implementing the agreement instead of a "piecemeal approach" focused only on the

19 UN Doc. S/2021/1015, paras. 31–32.

20 Ibid., para. 88.

areas where progress is lagging. Participants also encouraged the Security Council to remain unified in its support of the mission's strategic vision and to leverage its political influence in support of upcoming political milestones.

## Constitution-Drafting Process and Electoral Support

Two of the most significant changes to UNMISS's mandate will relate to the mission's support to the upcoming constitution-drafting process and the anticipated elections. The Security Council will need to carefully articulate the priorities and scope of the mission's work in both areas. While UNMISS will need to secure the government's support for these priorities, it must also safeguard its impartiality on these politically sensitive processes. Participants encouraged UNMISS to use its convening power and presence across the country to ensure inclusivity and grassroots participation in the constitution-drafting process. The anticipated collaboration between the AU, IGAD, and the UN on a "trilateral evaluation of the electoral and constitution-making needs" may help align the organizations' diplomatic and technical efforts more effectively over the coming months.<sup>21</sup>

UNMISS's current approach to election support is based on the UN secretary-general's report on the electoral needs assessment mission conducted in 2021 and the Security Council's presidential statement endorsing its findings and recommendations.<sup>22</sup> UNMISS has begun undertaking the core tasks in phase one of the approach, including establishing an integrated electoral assistance team mandated to provide early technical support. The upcoming mandate presents an opportunity for the Security Council to codify this electoral support strategy (including on specific provisions like election-related early-warning mechanisms and capacity-building priorities) and to begin laying the groundwork for further collaboration with the South Sudanese government on phase two. Some

participants stressed that UNMISS's election support to South Sudan should be under continuous review, particularly if restrictions on freedom of expression and the erosion of civic space persist.

## Protection of Civilians

Participants encouraged UNMISS to continue reinforcing its comprehensive protection of civilians strategy. One participant explicitly noted that the Security Council should retain the mission's existing force levels from Resolution 2567 (a troop ceiling of 17,000 personnel and a police ceiling of 2,101 personnel), suggesting that these levels provide UNMISS sufficient capacity to be flexible in responding to threats to civilians across the country. One of the participants stated that the mandate should include a greater focus on the prevention of and accountability for sexual and gender-based violence. Some participants noted that the upcoming mandate could also acknowledge UNMISS's revised POC strategy and its multi-tiered protection efforts, including the role of enhanced political engagement and of strategic communications. By linking intercommunal violence and the political transition, UNMISS's protection strategy should reinforce efforts to bring non-signatory armed groups into the fold while also prioritizing inclusive, locally driven peace processes.

Some speakers also noted that the Security Council, in partnership with the countries that contribute troops and police to UNMISS, should strive to increase the number of uniformed and civilian women peacekeepers. Some speakers emphasized the value of female engagement teams given the mission's move toward mobile protection, which relies on community engagement and early warning to facilitate decisions on where to deploy. One participant stressed, however, that community engagement responsibilities should not be given only to women in the mission but should be seen as part of a whole-of-mission approach to protection.

<sup>21</sup> African Union, "Communique of the 1060<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Peace and Security Council (PSC) Held on 25 January 2022 on the Situation in South Sudan," February 1, 2022.

<sup>22</sup> UN Security Council, *Letter Dated 15 July 2021 from the Secretary-General Addressed to the President of the Security Council*, UN Doc. S/2021/661, July 16, 2021, Annex: "Electoral Needs Assessment for South Sudan"; UN Doc. S/PRST/2021/20.

## Climate and Security

Participants urged the Security Council to use the upcoming mandate to affirm the connection between the security situation in South Sudan and climate change. At its most aspirational, the council could mandate the mission to incorporate climate-sensitive analysis into assessments of threats to civilians and barriers to humanitarian access and into the design of its peacebuilding and dialogue initiatives. Most participants acknowledged, however, that current Security Council politics may not allow UNMISS's mandate to include specific provisions on the topic.<sup>23</sup>

Some speakers were not discouraged by this political roadblock, noting that UNMISS already has some operational space to engage on climate and security issues. In January 2022, the mission (with support from the UN Development Programme) announced that it was recruiting a full-time climate and security adviser within the Office of the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Political Affairs to help operationalize the mandate's existing language on climate issues. Participants emphasized the need for the mission to remain active in this area.

## Conclusion

With critical governance milestones and the conclusion of the R-ARCSS transition rapidly approaching, UNMISS's support to South Sudan remains as important as ever. The past year has witnessed the UN peacekeeping operation continue to adapt its political, protection, humanitarian, and human rights support to the evolving context. Although widespread, nationalized armed conflict has subsided, escalating levels of localized violence continue to exacerbate already tenuous humanitarian conditions.

Overall, UNMISS's mandate continues to position the UN to provide relevant and sustained support over the coming year. The mission's strategic vision and the pillars of its mandated activities will likely remain the same. Potential adjustments to the mandate will likely focus on detailing the mission's support to the upcoming constitution-drafting process and election cycle. The Security Council also has an opportunity to reinforce language on the mission's role in promoting inclusive dialogue and protecting civilians through diverse approaches, including enhanced mobility and political dialogue. Finally, UNMISS has an opportunity to be a leader among UN peace operations in systematically integrating climate and security analysis across all its mandated priorities.

<sup>23</sup> Florian Krampe and Cedric de Coning, "Does Russia's Veto Mean Climate Security Is Off the Security Council Agenda?" *IPI Global Observatory*, December 13, 2021; Security Council Report, "The UN Security Council and Climate Change," June 21, 2021.

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**777 United Nations Plaza, New York, NY 10017-3521, USA**  
TEL +1-212-687-4300 FAX +1-212-983-8246

**52-52 Harbour House, Bahrain Financial Harbour**  
**P.O. Box 1467, Manama, Bahrain**

[www.ipinst.org](http://www.ipinst.org)