

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Assessing the Effectiveness

of the United Nations
Multidimensional Integrated
Stabilization Mission in the
Central African Republic / MINUSCA

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Assessing the Effectiveness of the United Nations Integrated Multidimensional Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA)

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Introduction and Executive Summary

Peace operations are among the most important international mechanisms for contemporary conflict management, but their effectiveness often remains the subject of confusion and debate in both policy and academic communities. Various international organisations, including the United Nations (UN), African Union (AU), and the European Union (EU), have come under increasing pressure to justify the effectiveness and impact of their peace operations.

To address this demand, in 2017, the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI), together with more than 40 research institutions, peacekeeping training centres, and think tanks from across the globe, established the Effectiveness of Peace Operations Network (EPON). The network aims to provide independent, collaborative and research-based information about the effectiveness of specific peace operations using a shared methodology across case studies.

This report on the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (known by its French acronym MINUSCA) follows the four other completed EPON reports to date on the AU Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUSCO), the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), and the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA).

EPON researchers apply a similar framework across all cases. Like the other reports, this study of MINUSCA aims to produce a comprehensive picture of the Mission's overall effectiveness,

and analyse the sources or causes of the Mission's impact. It does so by evaluating MINUSCA using EPON's three-part framework designed to facilitate comparative analysis across peace operations. Each EPON study presents: (1) a historical *conflict analysis* of the country and region in question, and (2) an overview of the *effects* of the peace operation, i.e., whether the operation is implementing its specific mandate, as well as a more general picture of how the country is faring, as assessed by the major human development, governance, and fragility indices. Finally, (3) EPON studies evaluate *six explanatory factors*, or causal variables: political primacy; mandates and resources; people-centred approaches; legitimacy and credibility; women, peace and security (WPS); and coordination with partners.

The EPON-MINUSCA co-authors gathered primary source evidence for this study, mainly during the months of June, July and August in 2019 at UN headquarters in New York and in the Central African Republic. Our team conducted approximately 200 interviews with people in and around the UN system concerning Central Africa. We continued with follow-up interviews and integrated new sources in the final drafting of this report. We present here a summary of the report's three parts: the historical conflict analysis, a discussion of MINUSCA's effects, and the six EPON explanatory factors.

1.1 Conflict Analysis

The Central African Republic is a large, lush, resource-rich, and landlocked country with approximately 4.5 million citizens. The country has yet to enjoy a single decade of stable, non-abusive political rule, but until late 2012, it had not experienced widespread killing among its citizens. France annexed and named the territory Ubangi-Shari in the 1880s, after decades of Arab slave raiding and trading, both of which left a legacy of societal distrust of outsiders. Rather than investing the territory under centralised French state control, France partitioned out *private concessions* to rapaciously exploitative commercial firms in an atypical colonial arrangement.

Owners of colonial concessions worked Central Africans to their deaths, while introducing new diseases, such that the population of 1880 was halved from 1.5 million to 750,000 by 1940. The lingering question of "who belongs" as part of the Central African nation pervades contemporary society, and new forms of concessionary politics have become a way of life. The deep colonial legacies of violent modes of power acquisition, concessionary politics, and distrust of external actors are not easy to overcome. COVID-19 presents Central African citizens with a set of new fears, understandably invoking previous harms brought by outsiders. External action – even well-intentioned – may sometimes inadvertently reinforce the negative effects of these legacies rather than mitigating them.

In the 1990s, members of the armed forces mutinied several times over issues of representation, inadequate salaries, and corruption. In response, starting in 1997, regional and international

actors deployed a series of different interventions. After François Bozizé seized power in 2003, the Central African Bush War smouldered from 2004-2007, resulting in displacement and uncertainty, but not large-scale death. Political corruption and intrigue continue to characterise relations in the capital city, Bangui, where about one-fifth of Central Africa's 4.5 million people reside.

The nature of the violent conflict experienced today in Central Africa is complex and not easy to categorise. Historically, tensions have arisen between landed farmers and herders seeking pastures for cattle-grazing, especially during the dry season from roughly December to May, but traditional agro-pastoralist mediation practices prevented conflicts from escalating past the local level. The country is also rich in minerals, such as diamonds, gold, and uranium, over which people have had disputes, but these too often remained localised.

Local disputes began to take on more overtly religious Muslim-Christian tones in the 2000s. Groupings eventually coalesced between the mainly Christian and animist, loosely allied and structured "Anti-Balaka," and the more hierarchically structured, mainly Muslim Séléka groups. Although the initial impetus for Séléka organising was to seek inclusion for people residing in the marginalised east, the movement shifted toward violence. In December 2012, the Séléka marched from the north, and took Bangui in a hugely destructive rampage, installing a new dictator, Michel Djotodia, by March 2013. Djotodia was unable to consolidate control, and uncertainty reigned.

The following year, the Central African Republic teetered on the edge of genocide as Anti-Balaka fighters sought revenge against the Séléka and perceived affiliates. Members of the Muslim community were killed, raped, and neighbourhoods looted. Most of the Muslim population fled their homes. Sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) committed by all parties was and remains a defining feature of this conflict, and sexual violence is more prevalent than killing. In the fighting between the Séléka and the Anti-Balaka, most government buildings and their contents were destroyed, including archives and official documents pertaining to land ownership and citizenry, rendering subsequent processes of economic recovery and justice extremely difficult.

Today's lingering, lower-level violence lies both between and within different religious and ethnic groups. Because Central Africa is large and does not have many paved roads, many groups share more political, economic, and social relations with neighbouring states – South Sudan, Sudan, Chad, Cameroon, the Republic of Congo (Congo-Brazzaville), and the Democratic Republic of Congo (Congo) – than with the capital city, Bangui.

The Central African Republic is in what we call a "cycle of insecurity." In this cycle, it is difficult if not impossible for average people to invest in work. If the productive sectors of society and government are not functioning, and schools are not educating citizens, prospects for future productive life diminish. As a Central African businessperson explained to us, "Anyone with means has a house in another country. No one can really invest here." With no tax base, it is

difficult to create internal security forces (les forces de sécurité intérieure, or FSI), courts, or other institutions of a regulatory, bureaucratic state. In turn, this basic state incapacity leads to further insecurity, political and economic dependency, and the vicious cycle worsens. The question for both outsiders and Central Africans is how to break the cycle.

1.2 MINUSCA's Mandate and Effects

In an attempt to stabilise the country and potentially break the cycle of insecurity, the UN Security Council authorised MINUSCA in April 2014, and the Mission became operational five months later. According to a scholarly index of all peace operations, MINUSCA's mandate is the most complex of the current missions.¹ The three original, priority tasks included: (1) the protection of civilians, especially women and children, under threat of physical violence (within its capabilities and areas of deployment), and identifying and recording threats and attacks against civilians; (2) support for the transition process (from the transitional government under Catherine Samba-Panza from 2013-15 to a constitutional referendum and elections in 2015-2016); and (3) the extension of state authority and the preservation of territorial integrity through technical assistance, mediation and national dialogue. The mandate also lists a variety of other provisions, including the authority to arrest spoilers and criminals. Over time, the mandate has shifted. The central task remains (1) the protection of civilians, including furthering the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda. Others include (2) providing good offices in support of the February 2019 peace agreement, (3) assisting with the 2020-21 elections, (4) protecting UN personnel and infrastructure, (5) a variety of tasks pertaining to extending and building state authority, (6) monitoring human rights, (7) enabling humanitarian aid delivery, and (8) assisting the Panel of Experts in monitoring the weapons trade and collecting information about violence and incitement to violence.²

In May 2015, the UN and partners supported the Bangui Forum – an attempt at a broadly inclusive peace forum to work on a set of principles on which the country could rebuild, including the demobilisation, disarmament and reintegration (DDR) of the armed groups. The peace held through the transition to the 2015-16 democratic elections. During the years 2014-16, MINUSCA engaged in what multidimensional peacekeeping missions tend to perform well – supporting political and peace processes, patrolling, information sharing, policing, mediating, building the physical state infrastructure, and facilitating the training of future civil servants. The work of the UN peacekeepers was complemented by special operations forces with compelling military capacity.

1 Elio Amicarelli and Jessica Di Salvatore, "Introducing the PeaceKeeping Operations Corpus (PKOC)" February 2, 2020, <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3530404>.

2 "Mandate," MINUSCA: United Nations multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic, April 22, 2020, <https://minusca.unmissions.org/en/mandate>.

In late 2016, the peace broke down for a variety of reasons, among them the military vacuum left by the departure of French Sangaris Special Forces and the AU-led Regional Task Force on the Lord's Resistance Army (AU RTF LRA) featuring American and Ugandan Special Forces deployed in the southeast (hunting LRA leader Josef Kony). The United States and Ugandan military forces in the southeast served as a deterrent – inadvertently – against armed groups targeting civilians and spoiling the peace. The French Sangaris Forces, however, had a specific mandate to exercise force to protect civilians. Peacekeeping missions such as MINUSCA are not structured to have an offensive or compellent military capacity like national or regional militaries.³ At the time, the Central African domestic security forces – the Central African Armed Forces (FACA), the national police, and gendarmerie – were unprepared to assume control, leaving a power vacuum.

Since no entity in Central Africa held a monopoly over the legitimate use of force, in 2017, violence against civilians and displacement resumed. MINUSCA adjusted quickly to react. The UN Security Council thus mandated MINUSCA to acquire a Portuguese Quick Reaction Force (QRF) and 900 additional troops in 2017. The Mission also shifted its political strategy toward fostering local peace committees, as well as engaging more in threat analysis and early-warning systems, and training uniformed personnel in the protection of civilians as well as the prevention of conflict-related SGBV. MINUSCA sent surge teams to a variety of towns to “reduce the risk of large-scale violence.”⁴ In Birao, Bria, and Ndélé, peacekeepers have also provided security to civilians seeking refuge near bases, reminiscent of the UN's protection of civilian camps in South Sudan. By 2018, the death rate declined again to mid-2014–2016 levels, indicating success in the Mission's strategic shifts.

Before the UN Security Council authorised MINUSCA, it created a Panel of Experts to monitor the arms embargo placed on the country.⁵ The Panel has monitored consistent and often increasing arms trafficking by armed groups, mainly across the borders with Sudan, Chad, and South Sudan. The underlying political economy of conflict – unfettered trafficking in arms and natural resources, accompanied by illegal taxation in areas not under the control of the government – means that the armed groups appear to be gaining in strength. Meanwhile, the government contends it is inhibited by international arms and resource embargos from assuming control.

After the dissolution of the Bangui Forum, some six partial peace accords were brokered. Finally, a breakthrough came in February 2019 when the government and all 14 armed groups signed a peace accord initiated by the AU, with buy-in from key regional organisations and states. MINUSCA, although a key facilitator of the process, was not designated a *guarantor* of the

3 Lise Morjé Howard, *Power in Peacekeeping* (Cambridge, UK; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

4 “S/2020/124” (2020), <https://undocs.org/S/2020/124>.

5 “S/RES/2127” (2013), https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4F-F96FF9%7D/S_res_2127.pdf.

accord, leading to some confusion about who would manage spoilers of the peace accord and how they would do so.

In November 2019, the UN Security Council granted MINUSCA formal authority to assist with implementation of the February 2019 accord. It also added the significant new tasks of ameliorating “institutional conditions,” controlling armed group activity, and assisting with the contentious upcoming elections, all without additional funding.⁶

In sum, if we take into consideration MINUSCA’s three initially mandated priority tasks: (1) the protection of civilians, (2) the support of a transitional political process, and (3) the restoration of state authority, the Mission has fulfilled the second task at the time of writing. The first and third tasks remain some of MINUSCA’s top priorities, and the operation has made significant progress on both fronts. MINUSCA has actively brought the civilian death rate down and prevented conflicts from escalating. It has helped in building and staffing prefectures, courts and prisons, and restoring the rule of law. Reforming the security sector, especially the military, has been more challenging, but there is important progress. Disarmament, demobilisation, reintegration, and repatriation (DDRR) of armed group members remains weak. As one interviewee explained to us, “armed groups still provide security in their areas.” Many armed groups also tax the people residing in the territories under their control.

Although the operation has made significant progress, especially in limiting conflict-related civilian death and building state capacity and institutions, advances remain tenuous, and setbacks are numerous. The Central African Republic remains among the lowest-ranked countries on the Human Development Index (HDI), with weak governing institutions, limited civil liberties and political rights, and a fragile political economy. These broad trends in the Republic are not unique in the region.

Despite the general trends that challenge peace in the region and in Central Africa’s history, the Mission has worked creatively and decisively to promote peace from both the bottom-up and the top-down. As of February 2020, however, approximately one-fifth of the Central African population remained displaced within and outside of the country. During our field visits to Bria, Bambari and Birao, interviewees expressed a sense of movement toward peace and hope for the Accord for Peace and Reconciliation (APPR), but many felt that the Muslim-Christian and ethnic divides were not ameliorating. The country also remains one of the most dangerous places in the world for foreign workers, with attacks on humanitarians occurring at an average of one per day in 2019.⁷ That said, the dangers that may arise if MINUSCA or humanitarian organisations were to depart remain high. MINUSCA has helped to prevent major atrocities and undemocratic transfers of power. Many interviewees, both in the Mission and in civil society,

6 In terms of other UNSC mandate alterations, in 2018, MINUSCA was the first mission to pilot a new “Comprehensive Performance Assessment System” (CPAS) in peacekeeping, designed to improve on-the-ground data collection in UN missions to monitor and improve impact.

7 S/2020/124.

expressed some version of the simple statement: “Without MINUSCA, there is no Central African Republic.”

1.3 The Six EPON Explanatory Factors

EPON reports hypothesise that six explanatory factors are the most important causal factors explaining the effectiveness of peace operations: political primacy, mandates and matching resources, people-centred approaches, legitimacy and credibility, women’s inclusion and protection, and coordination. We briefly recap our findings on each.

Political Primacy

After the spike in civilian deaths in 2017, it took MINUSCA about one year to adjust its strategy to reduce civilian killings successfully. MINUSCA took “political primacy” seriously. For example, it worked in a “bottom-up” political fashion to facilitate the establishment of local peace and reconciliation committees in 29 towns throughout the country. Realising that establishing local peace was insufficient, it joined with the AU’s “top-down” political strategy, helping to facilitate the conclusion of the regionally guaranteed February 2019 Peace Accord. The accord granted all 14 armed group leaders positions in the government, among other positive incentives through DDRR and the Special Joint Security Units (USMS). By using political means in bottom-up and top-down peace processes, augmented by civilian protection camps, arrests, training, enforcing UN Security Council sanctions – and some more coercive measures to neutralise spoilers, such as military operations conducted by the QRF – the Mission is effectively limiting violence against civilians.

Mandates and Matching Resources

MINUSCA’s mandate is the most complex of all current peace operations according to an impartial, scholarly index of mandates. Its budget is sizeable, but our interviewees noted several issues. First, MINUSCA’s yearly budget is approximately three times the size of the Central African Republic’s annual national budget. Many fear this is creating state dependency on the UN: “The state is dependent on MINUSCA, but MINUSCA doesn’t have the capacity of a state.” Second, the mandate does not enable MINUSCA or others to tackle three essential drivers of conflict in Central Africa: the illicit political economy with actors in neighbouring states that fuels the armed groups; increasing criminality (not always associated with armed groups); or the history of societal trauma. Third, many interviewees in the Mission lamented resource problems, such as inadequate cell phone networks, inadequate airlift and road vehicle capacity, a lack of drones, and poor road conditions, as well as language barriers. Fourth, some interviewees

estimated that Central Africa would need more than 11,000 FACA troops deployed in order to maintain security in the entire territory.

After three years of EU Training Mission (EUTM) training, however, only 1,400 have co-deployed with MINUSCA troops, and they are not sustainable without MINUSCA's support. There is international funding for about one-tenth of what military planners estimate the FACA needs. In short, missions are sometimes put in a double bind. They are accused of creating state dependencies, but at the same time, missions are often held accountable for the whole mandate (as we are doing in this analysis), even when they may have neither a well-fitting, implementable mandate, nor sufficient means.

People-Centred Approaches

MINUSCA has developed a variety of effective, people-centred programmes, especially in its policing efforts. It has actively and effectively recruited women to the reforming Central African police and fostered gender-mindful institution-building in supporting the development of the Central African Joint Rapid Response and Prevention Unit for Sexual Violence Against Women and Children (UMIRR). It has also effectively engaged community leaders in violence reduction. But at the same time, some average Central Africans may not see MINUSCA's approach as sufficiently people-centred as a whole. As MINUSCA develops increasingly aggressive ways to manage armed groups and spoilers, the Mission's militarily robust measures may come into conflict with efforts to foster people-centred approaches.

Legitimacy and Credibility

Legitimacy and credibility remain challenges for MINUSCA. Gaps in credibility and strategic communications, and misconduct, are problems that stem in part from underlying circumstances beyond the scope of the Mission, such as societal distrust of external actors and cultural and linguistic misunderstandings. Prior high levels of sexual violence and domestic abuse in the country, in addition to restrictions by troop contributors on establishing internal policing mechanisms to prevent sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) within peacekeeping missions, contribute to continuing instances of SEA in the Mission. International news about the Mission often highlights UN peacekeeper abuse from 2014-15 (mistakenly focusing on the UN, rather than on non-UN Sangaris Special Forces abuse). The continuing problem of SEA in MINUSCA, however, is mainly one that concerns *international* legitimacy, rather than domestic.

MINUSCA's *domestic* legitimacy issues in Central Africa seem to have a different source than SEA. MINUSCA does not generally poll well among Central Africans, as shown in the Harvard Humanitarian Initiative (HHI) public opinion polling. Although our five focus group interviewees had many positive evaluations and suggestions for MINUSCA, Central African citizens in Bangui often expressed a desire for MINUSCA to exercise greater force against

spoilers of the peace process. MINUSCA's legitimacy and credibility deficit appear to stem in part from the fact that rebel groups continue to arm and fund themselves through uncurbed illicit networks. Armed groups also continue to embark on massacres every four to six months (even if the attacks escalate less often now). These factors contribute to an ongoing and pervasive sense of instability, which undermines MINUSCA's credibility and legitimacy (and overshadows adjustments in any communication strategy).

Women, Peace and Security (WPS)

MINUSCA and the government of Central Africa are championing women's leadership by staffing high-level positions with women. Equality at the top, however, is not consistently filtering down through the ranks. Through the *Unité Mixte d'Intervention Rapide et de Répression des violences sexuelles* (UMIRR), MINUSCA is helping to develop national institutions to gather systematic and early-warning information that is integral to fostering gender equality and preventing gender-based violence. Supporting the creation and work of UMIRR is a significant sign of effectiveness in the WPS agenda, and ensuring that this new domestic institution functions into the future remains a priority.

Coordination

The underlying conditions for MINUSCA to function are both regional support and agreement among the permanent five members of the UN Security Council (P-5). Without these foundations, no peacekeeping mission will succeed. The AU played a key role in the negotiations leading to the February 2019 peace agreement; without AU support, there would not be such an agreement. Although the AU remains supportive, emerging tensions between the P-5 members threaten the peace and undermine the underlying, important common interests they all share. Central Africa is a poor country and its resources are hard to regulate and exploit, especially as long as armed groups and illicit networks control territory. Despite what we view as status-oriented disagreements, all P-5 members share important, underlying interests. They support the current political leadership, agree that stabilisation and peace are important collective goods and that power vacuums are dangerous, and share a common interest in curbing violent religious extremism and terrorism. Cooperation is still possible and remains a necessary condition for eventual peace in Central Africa.

Conclusions

In short, MINUSCA has made significant contributions to peace and security in the Central African Republic. For most of 2019, MINUSCA did not have the technical, mandated authority to assist in implementing the February 2019 Peace Accord, even though it continued supporting the peace. Spoilers attacked one another and civilians, but it was unclear who would

apply different types of consequences and under what authority – from political pressure to arrests, sanctions, and military counter-attacks. Compounding the confusion, Central Africa is planning for elections end of 2020. MINUSCA (and its partners in the UN Development Programme (UNDP)) have the mandate, but not adequate funding, to assist with the elections. In the wake of dis- and misinformation campaigns about both the elections and COVID-19, peace in the Republic is very fragile.

If MINUSCA is to have a chance of increasing its effectiveness, it must receive adequate funding to continue its vital work. It must also work at listening to and communicating better with Central Africans at all levels in order to increase mutual trust and build legitimacy. MINUSCA is currently helping to stabilise the country. Most likely, it will continue to meet this bar. It remains a crucial enabler of the peace process, reforming and building the capacity of state institutions, and facilitating the extension of state authority. In so doing, it has saved countless lives and contributed to a more stable region. The question now is whether the Mission will continue on the current, slow path of mere stabilisation, or whether the UN Security Council and other external actors will enable the Mission to move toward full implementation of its mandate, and eventual exit from a peaceful and prospering Central African Republic.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The Central African Republic has endured a traumatic history, largely at the hands of outside actors. The terrors of the Arab slave trade and French concessionary colonial rule resulted in the death of some half of the population. Violent political transitions and concessionary politics have been the norm since independence in 1960, but Central Africans had worked out many local and national methods to de-escalate and resolve disputes. Beginning in the mid-1990s and often during violent political transitions, small regional and/or international interventions deployed in an effort to assist in re-establishing peace and development. None was particularly effective. In late 2012, Central Africans turned on each other, in mass killing, rape, pillage, and displacement, and the country teetered on the edge of genocide. In 2014, following the African Regional (MISCA) and bilateral (French Sangaris) missions, the UN deployed the largest of all previous external interventions in Central Africa, MINUSCA, with nearly 15,000 total personnel.

MINUSCA has proven effective in many ways. As one focus group member explained, “The UN has done a lot of good. There are democratic institutions, thanks to the UN. Without MINUSCA we could not even live in Bangui. We could not get food. The UN has renovated buildings and improved others. The UN supported the Khartoum [APPR] accord.”

Although MINUSCA is known in the international press for problems of SEA, that is not what Central Africans discussed in our focus groups. Another focus group member summarised the thoughts of many:

If MINUSCA weren't here, there would be total chaos... MINUSCA is doing many things well: constructing roads and providing transportation, fighting against sexual violence, supporting the return of the state. Their human rights work is excellent. They

have good economic revitalisation projects. They support civil society and enable the free press. Journalists are free to say what they want here. It's just the question of security. MINUSCA does not provide security.⁸

If we measure MINUSCA's effectiveness against the letter of its mandate, it is apparent that members of MINUSCA have steadily worked toward implementation. The Mission has protected civilians and mitigated the plague of SGBV. MINUSCA has trained thousands of civil servants, police, and military personnel, and built and refurbished key buildings, thus extending state authority by building capacity. UNPOL and MINUSCA military forces have engaged in extensive outreach to women and girls and MINUSCA's troops, along with civilian counterparts, are increasing female engagement and leadership, both in the peace operation and in the Central African state. MINUSCA has enabled the delivery of humanitarian assistance, researched and upheld human rights, tracked violations of the arms embargo, and has assiduously worked to establish peace, employing both bottom-up inclusive, and top-down approaches. MINUSCA first worked locally, through the local peace and reconciliation committees, and more recently regionally and nationally, enabling the government and 14 official armed groups to sign and begin implementing the February 2019 APPR.

MINUSCA has worked to fulfil most dimensions of its complex mandate. At the same time, despite important and indisputable points of progress, nearly six years after MINUSCA's deployment, insecurity and instability remain palpable.

MINUSCA has worked to fulfil most dimensions of its complex mandate. At the same time, despite important and indisputable points of progress, nearly six years after MINUSCA's deployment, insecurity and instability remain palpable. The instability means that few Central Africans feel safe enough to invest in businesses, farms, or schools. Without production and learning, there is no tax base or way to build state institutions that might ensure security in the future. How might MINUSCA and other external actors reverse the historical trend and assist the Central African Republic in ways that are more effective?

We have provided evidence of the six EPON explanatory factors at work: political primacy, mandates and resources, people-centred approaches, legitimacy and credibility, WPS, and coordination. We conclude here by highlighting nine dimensions to consider. We address (1) the mandate's scope, (2) spoiler and armed group engagement, (3) political primacy and impartiality, (4) support for the APPR, (5) the 2020 elections, (6) the COVID-19 threat (7) P-5

⁸ Note, however, that some interviewees disagreed with the assessment that journalists are free to report as they want.

relations, (8) recommendations from Central African civil society, and (9) four options for the Mission's future.

6.1 MINUSCA's Mandate

The mandate is very long and comprehensive. Officials in MINUSCA often mused: “The MINUSCA mandate is just too large... we try to solve everything... we focus too much on the mandate... not enough building local capacities.” At the same time, however, many officials also felt that the Mission was not addressing the root causes of the conflict: polarised identity, “getting teachers educated and deployed,” youth recruitment into armed groups, and the political economy of the conflict. Most importantly, without curbing the illicit networks that trade in weapons and minerals, armed groups will continue to gain in number and in strength. The EPON team suggests that the UN Security Council works with MINUSCA, Central African leadership, the World Bank, and regional actors toward a joint strategy and a coordinated system for resource control and management.

6.2 Armed Groups and Spoiler Engagement

In Central Africa today, there are more official armed groups than when MINUSCA arrived, and they hold more territory now than in 2014 (although the government and MINUSCA have managed to gain some control in cities outside of Bangui). The problem of armed group proliferation and expansion is important in the Central African context. However, because this problem exists across several current large, multidimensional peace operations – most notably in Congo, Mali, and Darfur – it is not clearly a Central African, isolated domestic issue. The phenomenon of increasing armed group strength appears to be emerging as a systemic or structural one, and thus merits further EPON analysis and policy attention.

Another point for both specific and general consideration is how to manage spoilers to peace agreements. When non-state armed groups sign a peace accord, and then take actions against that accord, they move into the category of “spoiler.”⁹ All of the “big five” UN missions are confronting the problem of how best to manage spoilers to the peace processes (especially those who are motivated more by a financial than a political agenda).

MINUSCA has been conflicted in terms of how best to manage armed groups and spoilers. On the one hand, commendably, the first impulse has been to pursue “political primacy”. On the other hand, MINUSCA has been compelled to resort to the use of force to protect civilians against armed groups and spoilers. The force has had to assume a very robust posture since many

9 Stephen John Stedman, “Spoiler Problems in Peace Processes,” *International Security* 22, no. 2 (1997): 5–53, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2539366>.

of the regional MISCAs troops folded into MINUSCA (instead of possibly remaining separate, with a use-of-force mandate), and even more so after the departure of the French Sangaris in late 2016, and then the United States and Ugandan forces in early 2017.

Citing successful manoeuvres in Bambari and Bria to neutralise (chase out) armed groups from the town centres, several focus group participants said that there is a common perception that MINUSCA could defeat the armed groups if it chose to do so (and they were surprised it chose not to). At the same time, many mention the unsuccessful “Sukula” Mission in the PK-5 neighbourhood in Bangui in April 2018, which resulted in dozens of deaths and widespread anger against MINUSCA. (Note, however, that a somewhat similar mission to Sukula in early January 2020 in the PK-5 neighbourhood in Bangui by the Portuguese QRF was successful.¹⁰)

Over time, as state capacity increases, the Mission may help the government to extend its authority and control over more territory. In the meantime, unless something drastic changes, the government and the UN have little choice but to coexist with armed groups in this state of insecurity.

MINUSCA has successfully prioritised protecting civilians and establishing local peace agreements rather than liberating territory from armed groups. As Zahar and Mechoulan explain in a 2017 paper, “MINUSCA’s strategy to support local and national mediation could become a pilot project for similar engagements in other contexts.”¹¹ Peacekeepers by definition and design lack the capacity and resources to wage offensive, counterinsurgency campaigns against armed groups on the side of governments using a “clear, hold, build” strategy. Such counterinsurgency campaigns often result in sharp increases in civilian casualties and displacement, which are counter to UN interests and ethics. Moreover, because the Central African state and the UN lack the capacity to “hold” territory, even if the UN were to try to shoot its way to clearing territory, the same or other armed groups would probably fill the vacuum, or simply be displaced elsewhere. Considering these factors, we reason the Mission is correct to focus on political, mediation-oriented avenues for civilian protection, local peace agreements, building and extending state capacity, and security sector reform. Over time, as state capacity increases, the Mission may help the government to extend its authority and control over more territory. In the meantime, unless something drastic changes, the government and the UN have little choice but to coexist with armed groups in this state of insecurity.

10 Ahmed Idris, “Central African Republic: UN Steps in for Peace Efforts,” *Al Jazeera*, January 1, 2020.

11 Zahar and Mechoulan, “Peace by Pieces? Local Mediation and Sustainable Peace in the Central African Republic,” p. 38.

6.3 MINUSCA, Political Primacy, and Impartiality

Robust spoiler management leads directly to concerns about violating the three foundational rules of peacekeeping: consent of the parties, impartiality, and the limited use of force.¹² Dating back to peacekeeping's founding after World War II, the principles are the precursor to today's concept of "political primacy."¹³ Several MINUSCA officials expressed concern about undermining the principles of peacekeeping. At the same time, however, spoilers have been spoiling the peace; there is a legitimately elected government in Central Africa; the government does not have the capacity to secure the country; MINUSCA has a mandate to use force to protect civilians; and MINUSCA has the only sizeable military presence in the country. These factors tend to go against foregrounding basic peacekeeping principles or political primacy.

We recommend greater awareness of the slippery slope toward counterinsurgency, and away from the basic principles of peacekeeping, because most contemporary counterinsurgencies are neither effective nor successful.

Compounding the general challenges of pursuing political primacy, many Central Africans in our focus groups expressed the belief that MINUSCA *ought* to be using force: "MINUSCA should impose peace by using force." Another participant explained further, "Most Central Africans do not like MINUSCA because there are cases when they don't intervene."¹⁴ Central Africans appear to view MINUSCA's use of force as legitimate. A CLA elaborated:

Being part of MINUSCA and being Central African, I think that MINUSCA has to adapt its mandate to the real needs of the population. Peace has to be enforced when it is necessary and where there is a real threat to peace and to security of civilians. Protection of civilians has to be more robust when necessary. There are some armed groups who do not want peace, because they profit from the war economy. This is why politicians and MINUSCA should only speak to armed groups who really want peace, and enforce peace where it is necessary against the others. In Central Africa at this moment, we need peace enforcement if we want peace to succeed.

In other words, both the circumstances in Central Africa and Central African citizens themselves are pushing MINUSCA toward privileging force over politics and diplomacy. However,

12 Lise Howard, *Power in Peacekeeping*.

13 António Guterres, "Action for Peacekeeping," March 2018, <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/action-for-peacekeeping-a4p>.

14 Several focus group members also accused MINUSCA battalions from Christian-majority countries of siding with Central African Christians and Anti-Balaka groups, and battalions from Muslim-majority states of siding with Muslims and ex-Séléka groups.

we recommend greater awareness of the slippery slope toward counterinsurgency, and away from the basic principles of peacekeeping, because most contemporary counterinsurgencies are neither effective nor successful.

6.4 APPR Support

The recent peace agreement, the APPR, is a reason for hope, but it is fragile. Most of our interviewees felt that the APPR presents a positive framework, especially because it is the first agreement to enjoy not only armed group but also neighbouring state and regional buy-in. However, many interviewees were concerned about the processes of DDRR, and the mixed armed group-FACA security units (USMS). Many members of our focus groups did not approve the inclusion of armed groups in the government, and felt that civilians had to suffer more impunity as a price for peace. At the same time, however, interviewees were unclear about viable alternatives. There are no easy solutions to peace/justice trade-offs, but the Mission's new strategy of building peace processes both top-down and bottom-up is logical and appears to be bearing fruit.

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6.5 The 2020 Elections

The next Presidential and Parliamentary elections are to be held in December 2020, with the second round of Presidential elections (if needed) in early 2021. Many scholars and policy-makers have warned that elections in already-fragile states can be a destabilising cause for war.¹⁵ Former authoritarian rulers and coup-winners Bozizé and Djotodia have returned to foment discord within their historical bases of support. As one focus group member explained, "The elections will be disrupted by violence. There is a coalition of rebels but they are not all on the same page. I think we are heading toward a crisis. Everything will be demanded of Touadéra, but not he, nor the government, nor MINUSCA, nor can the EU make the elections successful." Another participant warned, "The armed groups do not want elections. They are going to resist." The elections are an important cause for concern.

15 Edward D. Mansfield and Jack Snyder, *Electing to Fight: Why Emerging Democracies Go to War* (MIT Press, 2007).

As of November 2019, MINUSCA has the mandate, but not sufficient funding, to assist in holding free and fair elections.

As of November 2019, MINUSCA has the mandate, but not sufficient funding, to assist in holding free and fair elections. As of May 2020, the Coronavirus threatens elections the world over. We deem that Central Africa, MINUSCA, and the EU have little choice but to continue elections preparations as best possible. Postponing or cancelling would produce even less trust in and legitimacy for the current authorities. However, the Mission must invest more in outreach and strategic communications to offset rampant and destabilising disinformation campaigns.

6.6 The Coronavirus and Peacekeeping

The world suffers from a lack of reliable scientific information about the Coronavirus, which increases the possibility of dis- and mis-information campaigns.¹⁶ A recent messaging effort in Central Africa sought to blame the Coronavirus on MINUSCA, dubbing it the “Minuscavirus.”¹⁷ The Central African Minister of Health has issued a code of conduct for reporting on the outbreak responsibly, among other efforts to counteract the “infodemic.”

These two factors – Central African historical distrust of disease-bearing foreigners and the fact that UN peacekeepers have spread disease elsewhere – contribute to growing tensions between Central Africans and foreigners associated with the UN.

Central Africans have a historical and justifiable social distrust in external actors given that 100 years ago, disease spread by foreigners contributed in part to the eradication of some half of the population. It is also true that UN peacekeepers inadvertently brought cholera to Haiti, which resulted in the deaths of thousands of Haitians.¹⁸ These two factors – Central African historical distrust of disease-bearing foreigners and the fact that UN peacekeepers have spread disease elsewhere – contribute to growing tensions between Central Africans and foreigners associated with the UN, regardless of any disinformation.

16 France24, “Conspiracy Theories and Fake News: Fighting the COVID-19 ‘Infodemic,’” April 26, 2020.

17 Jack Losh, “Foreigners Targeted in Central African Republic as Coronavirus Fears Grow,” *The Guardian*, April 10, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2020/apr/10/foreigners-central-african-republic-coronavirus-fears-grow>.

18 Jonathan M. Katz, “UN Admits Role in Cholera Epidemic in Haiti,” *New York Times*, August 17 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/18/world/americas/united-nations-haiti-cholera.html>.

MINUSCA's expressions of understanding and solidarity with Central Africans represent important steps toward building necessary mutual trust and cooperation.

The DSRSG in charge of humanitarian coordination, Denise Brown, explained, "Of course there's frustration. People's everyday lives are really difficult. They suffer from armed conflict, tuberculosis, horrible malaria, diarrhoea, and now all of a sudden there's something called the coronavirus that might arrive and infect lots of people... All of that contributes to tension. We need to understand that tension."¹⁹ MINUSCA's expressions of understanding and solidarity with Central Africans represent important steps toward building necessary mutual trust and cooperation.

According to the Central African health authorities and the World Health Organization, an Italian citizen infected with Coronavirus carried it to the Central African Republic on March 7, 2020.²⁰ The Coronavirus and resulting deaths have mainly hit countries where people move frequently for work and tourism, and where many people have comorbidities, such as heart disease and diabetes. At the time of this writing, people in countries with less contact with the outside world, such as Central Africa, have been safer than in the more developed world. Central Africa also has the advantages of low population density and a young population. Moreover, the African continent in general has more recent experience in effectively managing infectious diseases such as Ebola.²¹ The situation, however, may change.

The only way for more people in the world to be safe from the virus is for a vaccine to be available to everyone who may want one, that it be distributed equitably, and at a low or no cost. Such an occurrence, however, may be a long time away. In the short term, peacekeepers are taking every precaution to prevent the spread of disease. As the Head of UN Peacekeeping, Jean-Pierre Lacroix, has explained, peacekeepers must stay the course.²² The alternative of peacekeepers departing conflict zones would undoubtedly be even more destabilising and result in more deaths.

6.7 The P-5

As it stands now in Central Africa, the permanent five members of the UN Security Council are unified in their support for the elections, the APPR, and the incumbent government, despite status-oriented disagreements. Although tensions between the US, Russia, and China are on

19 Jack Losh, "Foreigners Targeted in Central African Republic as Coronavirus Fears Grow."

20 "Central African Republic Confirms First Coronavirus Case - WHO," Reuters, March 14, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/health-coronavirus-centralafrica-idUSL8N2B62KD>.

21 "Mapping COVID-19 Risk Factors," Africa Center for Strategic Studies (blog), accessed June 19, 2020, <https://africa-center.org/spotlight/mapping-risk-factors-spread-covid-19-africa/>.

22 Jean-Pierre Lacroix, "UN Peacekeepers Must Stay the Course," April 23, 2020, The Global Observatory, International Peace Institute. <https://theglobalobservatory.org/by/jean-pierre-lacroix/>.

the rise, the three powers share important common interests in Central Africa and in fragile states in general. For example, they all agree that peace is a collective good; stable, open markets are effective drivers of development; and domestic and global institutions should work to curb violent extremism and terrorism. This unity is of critical importance for peace in the Central African Republic and elsewhere. It is also critical that the P-5 work toward greater transparency in their political and economic dealings in Central Africa if they want MINUSCA to implement its mandate effectively and successfully. A successful peace operation lies in everyone's official state interest.

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6.8 Central African Voices

In this report, we have sought to gather the evaluations of Central Africans themselves on the effectiveness of MINUSCA. Central Africans offered a wide variety of opinions and ideas for MINUSCA. We present here a brief summary of suggestions not yet made elsewhere in this report:

Assisting Youth

- "We need more support for young victims. They will become perpetrators tomorrow... there should be two options if you're a victim: go to justice or to a fund."
- "We would like an international activist exchange program to learn how activism is done in other countries."
- "There is a general problem of a common national conscience. People should ask themselves more: what can I personally do for helping my country in the direction of peace? The best way to develop such a conscience is to develop a national education policy."
- "Youth unemployment is a huge challenge - these unemployed youth are very vulnerable to armed group recruitment. [MINUSCA should] focus on them."

Collaborating on Capacity Building

- “MINUSCA should collaborate more with the population, and explain better what they are doing.”
- “MINUSCA should train more community and administrative leaders.”
- “Many people do not have ID cards. We need a national registration.”
- “Perhaps MINUSCA could help us more with roads, water, electricity, and education.”
- “Can MINUSCA help the government to facilitate the return of the displaced?”
- “MINUSCA should stop hiring only cleaners and chauffeurs. Central Africans can do more than that.”

Bolstering Security

- “We need FACA to ensure security along the transhumance corridors.”
- “The cause of the arms embargo was that there were too many weapons. The state could not control the flow, and the population should not be over-armed. But today people still possess weapons [while the FACA do not]. There should be serious DDR so that the weapons are not in neighbourhoods. Only then should we speak of lifting the embargo.”
- “MINUSCA should deploy more police closer to the population.”
- “Patrols of UNPOL are an important factor for bringing security to Bangui because the population of Central Africa does not trust FSI and FACA yet.”
- “Many seem to ignore the problem of human trafficking. We want to stop that from happening. Traffickers use the fragility in Central Africa and move across Sudan, Libya and Europe.”
- “The Jihadists are coming here. There aren’t many yet, but it’s happening... MINUSCA is not prepared.”

6.9 Final Reflections and Four Options for MINUSCA’s Future

Some Central Africans and international actors have, in effect, asked MINUSCA to substitute for the Central African state. This peace operation cannot perform such a role, because it does not have the mandate, the means, or the legitimacy. MINUSCA does have the capacity to *assist* the state in re-building. As one UN official explained, “The presence of the state opens the possibility of stability. That is why we are focused on increasing the state presence, through prefectures, justice and corrections, and deploying FACA and FSI to help open markets, schools, and health clinics.” However, the end of the Mission is not in sight.

In terms of monopolising legitimate violence to establish a state, MINUSCA, the FACA, and the armed groups all remain weak. Although MINUSCA is beginning to make headway in protecting civilians using a robust posture, it is difficult to ignore that the Mission was most effective in 2014–2016, when it was accompanied by a separate military presence (with a limited mandate to attack anyone who attacked civilians). This division of labour allowed MINUSCA to focus on the more political, institutional, and developmental aspects of peacekeeping.

MINUSCA has saved countless civilian lives, helped to ensure the transitional administration in 2014–16, and is assisting in the extension of state authority – the three top tasks in its mandate.

Since 2019, all members of MINUSCA’s senior leadership – the SRSG, DSRSGs, Police and Force Commanders – are new to their offices, and many members of the Senior Management Team are women. EPON is encouraged by the possibility that the new and diverse leadership might bring new energy and ideas. A recent report by the International Crisis Group notes progress in APPR implementation.²³ MINUSCA has saved countless civilian lives, helped to ensure the transitional administration in 2014–16, and is assisting in the extension of state authority – the three top tasks in its mandate. A senior Central African official explained, “Do you know that without MINUSCA, today we would not be talking about CAR as a country? These men and women give their best to help us have a country.” Although MINUSCA has faced and will continue to confront many challenges, the Mission remains a vital force for peace and stability in the Central African Republic and in the region. We sketch four possible options for MINUSCA’s future below.

1. Downsize or withdraw immediately

This option would open up a power vacuum with dangerous consequences. MINUSCA helped to prevent a possible genocide against the Muslim community, but would-be *genocidaires* are still active.²⁴ On the other side, Muslim extremist movements have gained a foothold in Africa, from Al Shabaab in the East to Boko Haram, Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), and others in the West. The Central African Republic lies at the halfway point between East and West Africa and it is rich in natural resources, including the uranium used to make France’s first nuclear weapon. For now, the groups in the East and West are not united, and the world must prevent such an occurrence. We do not view withdrawal as a realistic option. The other three options, however, are.

23 ICG, “In Search of the State in the Central African Republic,” March 13, 2020.

24 Ty McCormick, “One Day We Will Start a Big War,” *Foreign Policy*, February 5, 2017.

2. Stay the course

MINUSCA was designed with stabilisation in mind – indeed, the word is used in its very title. MINUSCA has stabilised Central Africa. It could continue on this course, preventing high levels of civilian deaths and slowly extending state authority. The end, however, is not in sight.

3. External partners step up

Ending the conflict in Central Africa in the near future would require external partners to step up, both economically and militarily. In terms of the economy, external partners could rein in the illicit trade in natural resources that fuels the armed groups (and corruption), while bolstering economic development, such as they did in Sierra Leone and Liberia. Militarily, all of the recent large, multidimensional peacekeeping missions that successfully implemented their mandates and exited were co-deployed with formal, parallel military forces that provided spoilers with clear consequences for violent behaviour (this pattern occurred in Eastern Slavonia/Croatia, Timor Leste, Sierra Leone, Côte d'Ivoire, and Liberia). France played such a role in Central Africa from 2014-16, and may once again, but its history with Central Africans is fraught. An impartial, French-speaking country with significant air capacity (Canada, for example) could effectively fill this void, and allow peacekeepers to focus on what peacekeepers have tended to perform best, which is not military operations, but rather assisting with state-building. This formula for the division of labour is what has worked most effectively in the past, but it may not be an option for MINUSCA.

4. Build and augment from within

Alternatively, MINUSCA could augment both its communications and spoiler management strategies from within. MINUSCA has a legitimacy deficit with Central Africans that it must take seriously if it wants to foster political progress. MINUSCA could also work more with the government and society to foster greater awareness of Muslim marginalisation and enhance Muslim inclusion (especially with regard to the upcoming elections). In terms of managing spoilers using military coercion, MINUSCA's Portuguese QRF has proven effective, but it is very small. Augmenting MINUSCA's compellent capacity from within (rather than dividing the labour with an external, non-UN force, as in option 3 above) could provide a workable solution, allowing time for the peace deal to take hold, and eventually paving the way for MINUSCA's departure from a peaceful and prosperous Central African Republic.

About EPON

Peace operations are among the most important international mechanisms for contemporary conflict management. However, their effectiveness remains the subject of confusion and debate in both the policy and academic communities. Various international organizations conducting peace operations, including the United Nations (UN), the African Union (AU), and the European Union (EU), have come under increasing pressure to justify their effectiveness and impact. Although various initiatives are underway to improve the ability to assess the performance of peace operations, there remains a distinct lack of independent, research-based information about the effectiveness of such operations.

To address this gap, the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI), together with over 40 partners from across the globe, have established an international network to jointly undertake research into the effectiveness of peace operations. This network has developed a shared methodology to enable the members to undertake research on this topic. This will ensure coherence across cases and facilitate comparative research. The network will produce a series of reports that will be shared with stakeholders including the UN, AU, and EU, interested national government representatives, researchers, and the general public. Over time, this project will produce a substantial amount of mission-specific assessments, which can be used to identify the key factors that influence the effectiveness of peace operations. This data will be made available via a dedicated web-based dataset that will be a publicly available repository of knowledge on this topic.

In 2018, four pilot case studies were undertaken – in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), Mali (MINUSMA), Somalia (AMISOM) and South Sudan (UNMISS). The results of these initial research studies are being shared at international seminars in Addis Ababa

(African Union HQ), Brussels (European Union HQ) and in New York (United Nations HQ). The network partners have reviewed the pilot experiences and refined their research methodology, and the missions identified for the 2019 studies are: the UN mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA), the joint AU-UN hybrid mission in Darfur (UNAMID), the UN Verification Mission in Colombia and the EU and OSCE missions in Ukraine.

The network is coordinated by NUPI. Many of the partners fund their own participation. NUPI has also received funding from the Norwegian Research Council and the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs to support the Network and its research, including via the UN Peace Operations project (UNPOP) and the Training for Peace (TfP) programme.

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The Central African Republic is emerging from a long history of slave raiding and trading, French concessionary colonialism, and authoritarian political rule. In December 2012, tensions escalated into civil war characterised by sexual and gender-based violence and near-genocidal fighting. The United Nations Security Council authorised the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) to deploy in September 2014, under Chapter VII of the UN Charter.

The Mission has the most complex of all current peacekeeping mandates. Of the three primary tasks in MINUSCA's original mandate: (1) protecting civilians, (2) overseeing a political transition, and (3) extending state authority, the operation has fulfilled the second task, and is effectively working toward achieving the first and third. The Mission has helped to avert wide-scale killings and possible genocide, mitigate sexual violence, monitor human rights, protect vital humanitarian aid delivery, enable the development of female participation and leadership, build state capacity (especially in policing and justice), and enable democratic elections.

In a creative, "bottom-up" approach to peace, the 15,000 members of MINUSCA have helped to establish dozens of local peace and reconciliation committees. Regional powers and MINUSCA have complemented this approach with a "top-down," high-level, peace process that resulted in the landmark February 2019 Peace Accord. Several groups, however, continue to spoil the peace. Armed groups control 75-80% of this lush, resource-rich, and land-locked country. The political economy of the conflict tends toward strengthening armed groups and spoilers. MINUSCA remains unpopular among many Central Africans. Dis- and misinformation about the upcoming 2020-21 elections and COVID-19 continue to undermine progress. MINUSCA is helping to stabilise – providing a vital service to the country, region, and world – but it will be difficult to fully implement its mandate and depart a peaceful and prosperous Central Africa anytime soon.