

The background image shows a dusty street in a village. In the foreground, a man in a blue shirt leads a donkey pulling a cart. In the middle ground, a white Toyota truck with 'TOYOTA' on the back is being driven, followed by a white SUV with 'UN' on the back. Another white SUV with 'UNAMID 1906' on the back is visible. In the background, there are simple buildings and trees.

Assessing the Effectiveness

of the United Nations-African Union
Hybrid Operation in Darfur
(UNAMID)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Publisher: Norwegian Institute of International Affairs

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ISBN: 978-82-7002-349-3

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Executive summary

The African Union Peace and Security Council (AUPSC) and the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) deployed the United Nations-African Union Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID) in 2007 to address a conflict between the Government of Sudan and rebel groups that led to conditions that some characterised as a genocide. UNAMID initially deployed to Sudan with an authorised strength of nearly 20,000 troops and more than 6,500 police, the largest peacekeeping operation in the world at the time. Today, less than one quarter of that force remains, concentrated largely in the Jebel Marra area. With 1.6 million internally displaced persons (IDPs), a deep humanitarian crisis exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, and rising levels of violence, Darfur in 2020 is far from being a stable place as UNAMID – the AU and UN’s most important crisis prevention tool on the ground – appears set to depart.

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The years since UNAMID’s deployment witnessed a moribund peace process and, between 2014 and 2016, a scorched-earth military campaign by the government against the rebels that killed thousands of civilians. By 2017, faced with a hostile government that made further progress unlikely as well as waning interest and tightening budgets from powerful countries, the UNSC and AUPSC initiated UNAMID’s transition and a fairly rapid drawdown, with a view to an end date for UNAMID in 2020.

The scenario on which the transition concept was based, however, was never realised, as Sudan underwent momentous political change in 2019. A popular uprising against the ruling system beginning in December 2018 deposed the country's long-time leader, President Omar al-Bashir, in April 2019. A transitional government and a military-civilian Sovereign Council now seek to rescue a struggling economy, reform a repressive security and justice system, and make peace with the people on Sudan's peripheries. The government and two of the three main Darfur rebel groups endorsed their latest peace agreement in late August 2020 in Juba ("Juba Agreement"). The Juba Agreement offers the best hope for peace in Darfur in more than a decade, but it also creates risks as non-signatories jockey for power.

Violence in Darfur has increased since the fall of al-Bashir, with more than 77,000 people newly displaced from mid-2019 to mid-2020, and the UN's new political mission in Sudan, the UN Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan (UNITAMS), much delayed in its deployment. Despite significant risk to Darfur's stability, strong voices in the UNSC and the Sudanese government continue to advocate for UNAMID's closure by the end of 2020.

UNAMID's impact 2007-2017

UNAMID's mandate evolved from a more expansive set of tasks that reflected the comprehensive language of the Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA) in 2007 to a focus in 2014 on three strategic priorities that remained valid until 2020: (1) mediating between the government and non-signatory armed movements; (2) protecting civilians, monitoring human rights, and facilitating humanitarian assistance; and (3) providing support to the mediation of community conflict.

The Mission's experience shows how difficult it is to execute mandates and to maintain the trust of the population when protection, human rights, and inclusive politics run counter to government policy.

Overall, this assessment finds that, faced with obstruction from the host government, almost no political leverage and a volatile security situation, UNAMID had a modest impact on the situation in Darfur during its first decade, with very limited impact in some areas. This was despite the fact that the Mission dutifully fulfilled mandated tasks in many areas. The Mission's experience shows how difficult it is to execute mandates and to maintain the trust of the population when protection, human rights, and inclusive politics run counter to government policy.

To understand UNAMID's impact in Darfur, it is important to recognise that the Mission lacked key factors generally considered necessary for success. First, the al-Bashir government

objected to UN peacekeepers from the outset, consenting only after protracted negotiations, but never truly cooperated with the Mission, engaging instead in persistent and strategic obstruction. Second, international stakeholders, including the AU and UN, did not have a consistent political approach to the Sudanese government on Darfur. This resulted in a mission that lacked the strategic backing to play an effective political role or to push against government restrictions vigorously. The Mission was also charged with supporting and implementing two deeply flawed peace agreements that it had little role in designing, the DPA and the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur (DDPD). Finally, UNAMID never received many of the key military enablers that were part of its original conception and faced shortfalls in military and police operational capacity throughout its tenure.

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Support for the political process

The political work to resolve the Darfur conflict preceded UNAMID's deployment, continued during its tenure, and appears set to continue after the Mission leaves. The fact that the government and two of the three original rebel groups only recently concluded the latest peace deal, 17 years after the Darfur conflict began, is a testament to the political gridlock involved. In this respect, UNAMID had little impact in mediating the conflict, though it was no more or less successful than its predecessors and its co-mediators during that time. The Mission nonetheless contributed significantly to bringing Darfuri voices, including those of women and civil society representatives, to political discussions that might otherwise have been the sole province of politicians and soldiers.

Protecting civilians, promoting human rights, and facilitating humanitarian access

There are two simple, opposing narratives for UNAMID's impact in civilian protection. Firstly, that UNAMID failed in its single-most important mandate, hampered by an obstructive government, by Mission leadership too willing to bend to the government's demands, and by troops unwilling to take action even when they were present at the site of violations. Alternatively, UNAMID could be viewed as implementing its protection mandate as well as any other peace operation – almost none of which use any proactive force to protect civilians, much less use force against host government proxies – and by remaining on the ground, even in a compromised state, saving tens of thousands of lives. Both of these narratives have truth to them, though the final judgment lies somewhere in between.

The continued importance of UNAMID's imperfect protection is reflected in the concern many communities have expressed at the imminent withdrawal of the Mission.

While the al-Bashir government obstructed UNAMID's protection and human rights efforts in countless ways, the AU and the UN never showed the same persistence in standing up to the Sudanese government's harassment as the government did in restricting the Mission. UNAMID also had its share of protection failures, tragic incidents in which peacekeepers took no action despite clear threats to civilians. These failures resulted in deaths and losses that should not be forgotten.

At the same time, UNAMID succeeded in deterring the worst abuses of the civilian population in Darfur, protecting thousands of people and facilitating the distribution of humanitarian assistance. The continued importance of this imperfect protection is reflected in the concern many communities have expressed at the imminent withdrawal of UNAMID and in their belief that the presence of UNAMID provides them with some degree of protection and security.

Managing intercommunal conflict and supporting institutions

While best known for its mandate to protect civilians, UNAMID was also mandated to mediate intercommunal conflict and to support local institutions, including the institutions created by the DPA and DDPD. The Mission has carried out important work in these areas, and there is hope that these efforts will be reinvigorated under the transitional government.

For a decade, UNAMID lacked a key ingredient for peacebuilding: a committed government partner.

Fundamentally, however, these tasks were peacebuilding mandates and, for a decade, UNAMID lacked a key ingredient for peacebuilding: a committed government partner. Mediating intercommunal conflict is immensely difficult when the government has armed one set of communities as a proxy militia. Supporting local rule-of-law institutions, such as traditional courts, is similarly challenging when the government has spent more than a decade replacing respected community leaders with its loyalists. Training government police is also a questionable approach to improving security in IDP camps when IDPs have lost trust in government authority. For all of these reasons, UNAMID's potentially important work in mediating local conflict and supporting local institutions made only modest progress, but shows greater promise in the new political landscape.

Lessons, challenges and the way forward

The primacy of coherent politics

The degree of western media coverage that accompanied UNAMID's deployment may have implied that the Mission had strong political backing from the UN, AU and other international stakeholders. The ensuing years, however, showed that each international actor had different expectations and objectives for the Mission and different goals in dealing with the Government of Sudan. This swiftly and severely undermined the Mission's credibility with the government, the rebels and ultimately with the population. As a result, the Mission was frequently attacked, harassed and challenged, with little response from the UNSC or AUPSC beyond rote and ineffective condemnations.

The political process also suffered from a lack of coherence among the AU, UN, the US and other international actors, each of whom had their own political approach to Darfur. Particularly in the early years of the conflict, numerous and sometimes competing envoys were involved, including UNAMID, a separate AU-UN Joint Chief Mediator, the AU High-level Panel on Darfur (later the AU High-level Implementation Panel), as well as bilateral initiatives and forums. While the peaceful resolution of conflict is always ultimately in the hands of the parties, this created opportunities for the Sudanese government to play a variety of international actors off of one another and to disrupt what was initially significant political attention and pressure.

Host state consent and cooperation

UNAMID was severely impacted from the outset as it struggled to get the government's legal consent to deploy and had to function without government cooperation. Host nation consent is a bedrock principle of peacekeeping, yet the legal formality of consent to a peace operation can easily be conflated with the host nation's willingness to cooperate with a mission on the ground. While UNAMID's planners knew that working with the al-Bashir regime would be challenging, the Sudanese government made clear just how wide the grey zone of cooperation can be and how it can be used to obstruct operations.

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There is no clear answer as to what UNAMID should have done with regard to these issues and there are many counterfactual alternatives (the most extreme of which was withdrawal of the Mission). However, without real host government commitment or incentives to bring the

reluctant host government on board, a process-oriented approach to managing consent may have limited impact. The UNSC and its future missions will need to recognise that the proposed core priorities of a peace operation – whether the protection of civilians (POC), human rights or mediation – need to have a significant degree of commitment from the government. The ability – and at times leverage – to foster such commitment highly depends on maintaining political focus.

The hybrid partnership

UNAMID's hybrid design, while originally a compromise, created opportunities for greater political leverage that evolved over time, but took many years to mature. The hybrid partnership was always a political rather than an operational one and should be recognised as such. Every interlocutor with whom the study team spoke agreed that, for routine operational purposes, UNAMID was effectively a UN mission: its structures, processes and procedures – military, police and civilian – were all based on UN operations. However, the AU brought political advantages when engaging with the Sudanese government, often delivering messages that would have been difficult for the UN to send.

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The inconsistent political approaches of the AU and UN to Darfur in the Mission's early years, along with the lack of experience in both the AU and UN with this type of collaboration, prevented the benefits of the hybrid approach from being fully realised. The hybrid partnership became more effective from 2014 onwards, as joint ways of working became more established, and the AU and UN approaches to Darfur became more coherent. While the recently mandated UNITAMS (June 2020) will be a UN mission rather than an AU-UN hybrid, the political partnership with the AU remains highly relevant as the new mission navigates a complex relationship with a new government whose preferences are still very much shaped by sovereignty concerns.

Exit without peace

The UNAMID experience highlights that good transition planning is important, but that the UNSC and Secretariat should be wary of attaching fixed dates to situations that remain fluid and unpredictable. The Mission's planned exit (underway at the time of writing) was prompted by a hostile government that made advancing mandate objectives appear unlikely, waning UN Member State interest, and budgetary constraints rather than progress towards an inclusive peace. Sudan's popular uprising then fundamentally changed the political situation.

The uncertainty created by al-Bashir's fall has increased violence in Darfur while the new political dispensation has created new opportunities for cooperation with the government. Yet discussions on UNAMID's exit remain based on fixed dates rather than conditions-on-the-ground, resulting in an apparent disconnect between the peace and security situation in Darfur and the continued political momentum of UNAMID's exit.

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UN Country Team cooperation through the State Liaison Functions

During its transition, UNAMID and the UN Country Team (UNCT) established State Liaison Functions (SLFs), seconding UNAMID staff and using the assessed peacekeeping budget for programmatic activities implemented by UN agencies. While this may sound like a small and logistical step in an era of "integrated" peacekeeping missions, it is nothing short of a bureaucratic and budgetary miracle. (The fact that UNAMID was not an integrated mission makes this approach even more remarkable). While the SLF concept was a pilot and can be improved upon, it stands as an important proof-of-concept for what can be accomplished through cooperation among UN entities and creative approaches from Member States. This kind of forward-thinking and willingness to experiment will be required in effectively supporting the transformation in Sudan and steering the transition from UNAMID to a follow-on presence in a situation that comes with unique political opportunities but also enormous challenges and risks.

Recommendations for future support to Darfur

The recently endorsed peace agreement in Juba, South Sudan, offers the greatest hope for peace in many years, but stability in Darfur is far from certain. As with previous agreements, key armed constituencies are not signatories, including the rebels led by Abdul Wahid al-Nur, who refused to join the process, and Arab militias, which have never had representation in any of Darfur's peace processes. The region is far more militarised than it was 20 years ago, and the political changes will undoubtedly create winners and losers, creating risks of escalation. The Juba Agreement provides an important framework, however, that the UN and AU should support. The Agreement sets out different roles for the UN, which could be filled by UNAMID or UNITAMS, but require a sufficient field presence. In all cases, this report emphasises a flexible and agile approach that retains a strong connection to the political discussions in Khartoum as well as to security developments on the ground.

Advice to the joint security force

One of the UN's most important roles in Darfur could be providing advice and capacity-building to the joint security force between the Government of Sudan and the signatory rebel groups, a 12,000-strong unit that the Juba Agreement calls for establishing by January 2021. This joint security force will have a set of important responsibilities around law and order and protection, which may prove challenging given the questionable disciplinary records of elements on both sides. Advising this force will include political, strategic and training roles, but fundamentally this should be recognised as a political enterprise rather than a technical exercise.

Monitoring

Monitoring of the Juba Agreement's implementation by the UN is both a requirement of the Agreement and an important role for fostering sustainable peace. The first months and years of the Juba Agreement will be critical for building trust between the government, signatory rebels, non-signatory rebels, and the population. The UN can serve as an impartial actor should disagreements arise between the rebel and government elements of the joint security force. Identifying and mediating such disputes early on will be vitally important to avoid a relapse into conflict.

Human rights capacity

Human rights capacity will be crucial for protection in Darfur. UNAMID should continue its human rights monitoring as long as possible, and any successor (whether UNITAMS or another configuration) should work closely with the Sudan country office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCR). The fact that the strongest military actor in Darfur, the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), has a history of human rights abuses creates serious concerns. A continued monitoring presence for conflict early warning and human rights monitoring remains important. Such a monitoring presence could operate alone or in cooperation with state authorities, including any prosecutor or Special Prosecutor, national human rights body, or other relevant national or state organs.

Residual protection issues

While stability has improved in Darfur since the worst periods of the conflict, protection concerns remain. The government has submitted a protection of civilians strategy to the UNSC that reflects internationally accepted standards and practices. It is a solid foundation for the new government and an important step to which many countries should look. The strategy lacks key details, however, and raises concerns that the good intentions of its drafters may not be realised on the ground. The UN should not lose sight of the need to empower the government, while

also supporting protection needs where the government may need time to fill that role. While the government appears to prefer a Chapter VI mission at the time of writing, there are strong arguments in favour of retaining, ad interim, a limited international military and formed police capacity in Darfur in support of government protection efforts.

State-society liaison and support to the police

Many communities in Darfur, particularly in IDP camps, remain distrustful of authorities, yet a sustainable peace in Darfur requires a reinvigorated political dialogue between the government and various Darfur communities. In the near term, supporting trust-building through a liaison function is a potentially important role for the UN and an essential function to realise the complex negotiations that will be required for durable solutions for IDPs. While this need not be management or physical protection of the IDP camps, the presence of a mission (on at least a mobile basis) can facilitate relations with authorities. Continuing UNAMID's work around community policing and police reform will be important in this respect.

Local conflict resolution

With many protection concerns originating in intercommunal dynamics, an independent and impartial conflict resolution capacity is important. As the January 2020 violence in El Geneina showed, there is currently no single government actor that fills such an independent and impartial role. Building trust in such an actor (whether at the state or national level) is crucial, and the government should be part of these activities. However, a UN presence will have an important role to play. Trust in security institutions in Darfur will also turn on the success of a security sector reform process that begins in Khartoum and extends to all corners of the country.

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 research studies were shared at international seminars in Addis Ababa (African Union), Geneva, New York (United Nations), Washington D.C., Oslo, and Stockholm.

The network partners have reviewed the pilot experiences and refined their research methodology, and the missions identified for the next series of studies are: the UN mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA), the joint AU-UN hybrid mission in Darfur (UNAMID), the UN peacekeeping force in Cyprus (UNFICYP), 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 United Nations-African Union Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID) began its deployment to Sudan in 2007 in the midst of widespread violence. UNAMID was the largest peacekeeping operation in the world at the time. Its drawdown and transition began a decade later, and today less than one-fifth of that force remains, concentrated in a small area in central Darfur.

The intervening years witnessed a moribund peace process and a scorched-earth government military campaign against Darfuri rebels that killed thousands of civilians. A popular uprising against the ruling system erupted in December 2018, and in April 2019, Omar al-Bashir, who had ruled Sudan since 1989, was deposed. The new transitional government and military-civilian Sovereign Council are now seeking to rescue a struggling economy and make peace with the people on Sudan's peripheries. While the recently endorsed Juba Agreement brings new hopes for peace in Darfur, the way forward remains far from certain. With nearly two million IDPs, a deep humanitarian crisis, and rising levels of violence, Darfur in 2020 is far from being a stable place as UNAMID—the African Union and United Nations' most important tool for security and stability—appears set to depart.

This report assesses UNAMID's impact over a ten-year period (2007-2017) and across its three strategic priorities: mediating between the government and non-signatory armed movements; protecting civilians, monitoring human rights, and facilitating humanitarian assistance; and supporting the mediation of community conflict.

The report also makes observations and draws lessons from UNAMID's transition (2017-2020), a process still underway and for which it is too early to assess the definitive impact. Reflecting upon UNAMID's unique features, the report includes lessons from the hybrid nature of the operation, as well as from the challenges posed by fragile host-nation cooperation. It draws on existing analyses and data as well as more than 140 interviews and focus group consultations with 700 community members in Darfur.