

UNMISS 2022 Mandate Renewal

**Risks and Opportunities in an
Uncertain Peace Process**

Dr Adam Day, Dr Andrew E. Yaw Tchie & Liezelle Kumalo

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Co-authors

Dr Adam Day
Director of Programmes, UN University Centre for Policy Research

Dr Andrew E. Yaw Tchie
Senior Research Fellow and Head of the Training for Peace Project at the Norwegian Institute for International Affairs (NUPI)

Liezelle Kumalo
Researcher, Peace Operations and Peacebuilding Programme, Institute for Security Studies (ISS)

Contributing authors

Thea Willoch Njaastad
Research Assistant, Norwegian Institute for International Affairs (NUPI)

Sophie Buddenhorn
Carlo Schmid Intern, UN University Centre for Policy Research (UNU-CPR)

EPON series editor

Cedric de Coning
Research Professor, Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI)

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Visiting address: C.J. Hambros plass 2d
Address: P.O. Box 8159 Dep. NO-0033 Oslo, Norway
Internet: effectivepeaceops.net | www.nupi.no
E-mail: info@nupi.no
Fax: [+ 47] 22 99 40 50
Tel: [+ 47] 22 99 40 00

Executive Summary

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Ahead of the March 2022 renewal of the mandate for the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), the Effectiveness of Peace Operations Network (EPON) conducted an assessment focused on two core mandate areas: protection of civilians (PoC) and support for the peace process. Based on the assessment to follow, the report lays out several strategic considerations for the new UNMISS mandate:

1. **Contingency planning and preparedness:** The Mission has made significant progress in building contingency plans and preparedness for a future rise in violence. Given the uncertainty around the peace process, continuing to augment the Mission’s early warning and action capacities will be important.
2. **The benefits and limitations of mobility:** The Mission has developed a robust capacity to deploy quick reaction forces and temporary operating bases (TOBs) across much of South Sudan, which has enabled it to play an important role in mitigating violence in some situations. Useful, small, nimble constellations of forces are very unlikely to adequately address the kinds of violence sporadically committed by local militia groups or large-scale mobilisation of forces, as witnessed in 2013 and 2016. Nevertheless, maintaining the current troop levels may be important in allowing the Mission to position itself for a potential rise in tensions over 2022-23.
3. **A risk-based approach to the city and surrounding areas of Malakal:** The redesignation process has gone well so far, with no major incidents of violence related to the handover of the sites. The eventual redesignation of the PoC site at Malakal may prove the most difficult, given the elevated tension in the broader Malakal area. The Mission’s current decision not to proceed with redesignation is helpful in this regard,

and future discussions should be guided by a broad-based understanding of the risks in Upper Nile State.

4. **Subnational conflict resolution:** Some of UNMISS' most effective engagements have been in addressing subnational conflict. The 2016 relapse into civil war demonstrated that localised forms of violence can spread quickly, contributing to much larger-scale fighting. Identifying ways to rapidly bolster the civilian presence in hotspot areas – potentially developing and resourcing temporary presences that allow for greater civilian accommodation – could have a beneficial impact.
5. **A resource and personnel increase around elections:** UNMISS is already positioned to support the national elections and could use the process to amplify its broader role in the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (R-ARCSS). This will likely require an increase in resources and personnel in the 2022-23 period. In the lead up to the new mandate in 2022, the Security Council should be guided by the continuing assessment of the Mission leadership on the levels and kind of support that might be needed, including at national and subnational levels.
6. **A constitutional opening:** The R-ARCSS envisages a new constitution in place prior to elections. A new constitution could be a major step forward, opening the door to much-needed power-sharing arrangements, a framework to address national-level reconciliation, and a centre-periphery relationship that allows for a much more equitable distribution of wealth. This could be a real opportunity for the UN to play a constructive role (especially given the deep knowledge of constitutional processes of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG), Nicholas Haysom).
7. **Responsibility for inclusiveness:** The success or failure of the constitutional and electoral processes will hinge largely on the extent to which the South Sudanese population views them as legitimate. Here, UNMISS' work at the subnational level can play a vital role in increasing support for the peace process, including for governors' forums and other local processes to facilitate ground-up engagement with the R-ARCSS. It would be useful for the Council to highlight this work and accompany it with a clear message to the R-ARCSS parties that they bear responsibility for implementing an inclusive approach to the constitution and elections.
8. **A return to state-building?** While no one is seriously considering a complete return to a state-building mandate as in 2011, there may be a push by some Member States to include more capacity-building and support to state institutions in the upcoming mandate. The EPON report recommends caution in such deliberations: despite progress on the peace agreement, the South Sudanese Government is viewed with strong suspicion by many communities, especially those that were targeted during the war. Any capacity-building mandate should be careful to avoid being seen as "putting a finger on the scales" of a delicate inter-ethnic balance.

9. **Order from regional chaos:** It is very unlikely that the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) will play a robust or well-organised role in driving the peace process. Indeed, if current trends continue, the organisation may have even less capacity or focus on the R-ARCSS, further orphaning South Sudan at a time when political and operational progress is sorely needed. The African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council and the UN Security Council may need to revisit the roles and responsibilities allocated to the key players in this context, possibly identifying new areas for more direct support by the AU and UN. The constitutional and electoral processes offer an opening for such a discussion, and for a re-evaluation of how the broader international community may need to step into the gaps that exist among the regional players.
10. **Climate security:** South Sudan is deeply affected by climate change, from the desertification that has driven herding communities further south over recent decades to increasingly erratic rainfall patterns that have led to the flooding of major rivers across the country. The 2021 UNMISS mandate recognises the role of climate change in driving risks. Far more resources and attention will be needed, if the UN is to play a meaningful role in meeting the climate security challenges.
11. **Humanitarian risks:** The risks to humanitarian actors in South Sudan are worth mentioning as an area of concern for the Security Council. There are reports of increased intimidation and even violence against humanitarian actors, risks which could increase in the lead up to elections. Given UNMISS' mandate to facilitate humanitarian delivery, calls for the Mission to protect humanitarian actors may well grow.
12. **Women and youth:** Continuing threats to women and children will require UNMISS to maintain and expand its protection work in these areas. Preliminary research also indicates a persistent threat of sexual violence against women, girls and boys, while young men are frequent targets of recruitment into violent groups. Greater consideration could be given to these dynamics in the upcoming Council deliberations, especially given UNMISS' role in promoting more inclusive approaches to the peace process.
13. **Space for innovation and flexibility:** One of the key lessons from the 2018 EPON report and today is that UNMISS is capable of significant innovation and flexibility within the mandates given to it thus far. A recurrent message from Mission leadership and experts consulted was not to impede UNMISS with overly prescriptive mandate language. Particularly at a potentially volatile period with uncertainty over the election process, allowing the Mission space to move resources where they are most needed will be very important.

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 organisations 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 produces a series of reports that are shared with stakeholders including the UN, AU, and EU, interested national government representatives, researchers, and the general public. All the EPON reports are available via <https://effectivepeaceops.net>. 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 (UNPO) project and the Training for Peace (TfP) programme.



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