

UNITED NATIONS PEACE OPERATIONS ON STATE-BUILDING AND GOVERNANCE IN POST-CONFLICT AFRICAN STATES: A CASE STUDY OF SOUTH SUDAN

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Abstract

This study examines the role of United Nations (UN) peace missions in state-building and governance when recovering from conflicts, focusing on South Sudan grappling with post-independence challenges in 2011 due to ongoing violence and political turmoil that disrupted governance efforts. The United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) is crucial in promoting peace and rebuilding the state structures. The study delves into the roles and shortcomings of UNMISS in fostering stability and curbing violence while bolstering governance structures. It also investigates the dynamics among the UN mission's local governance entities and international stakeholders by employing a qualitative methodology approach to shed light on achievements and hurdles, with suggestions to boost the efficiency of upcoming UN peacekeeping ventures in akin scenarios. The results emphasise the importance of collaboration between actors and domestic organisations to uphold lasting peace and governance in African nations emerging from conflict.

Keywords: United Nations Peace Operations, UNMISS, Political Stability, South Sudan, Governance.

Introduction

The United Nations peace missions have played a role in resolving conflicts and aiding in establishing governments across different regions globally. These missions have influenced Africa due to the region's standing conflicts and weak governmental structures. South Sudan exemplifies the difficulties and hurdles in rebuilding a nation after conflict. Since gaining independence in 2011, South Sudan has faced strife, unrest, and governance issues. The main goal of the UNMISS is to promote peace and stability in the region. This study delves into how UNMISS has influenced the development of state institutions and governance in South Sudan. It highlights how effective UN peacekeeping missions are with African nations while highlighting their constraints.

Due to conflicts and political turmoil, South Sudan has faced challenges in its path to independence and building a state. The Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) signed in 2005 to end the Sudanese Civil War and pave the way for South

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Sudan's independence marked a milestone in the country's history. Despite the beginning that came with South Sudan breaking away from Sudan as an independent nation after secession from its parent country, it was soon overshadowed by internal rifts and power struggles. In December 2013, a fierce confrontation broke out between supporters of President Salva Kiir and those backing former Vice President Riek Machar. This conflict plunged the nation into a war marked by atrocities and a severe humanitarian emergency.

Considering the increasing unrest and urgent needs of the people in the region, the UN Security Council created UNMISS in July 2011 to promote peace and stability and lay the groundwork for progress in South Sudan. The mission was tasked with safeguarding civilians, overseeing human rights issues, aiding in efforts, and backing up the execution of the CPA. Despite these ambitious goals, UNMISS faced significant challenges, including limited resources, a volatile security environment, and complex political dynamics.¹

In South Sudan's context, UNMISS's work has centred on fostering harmony. They have aided in talks between opposing factions and endorsed peace treaties to deter worsening conflicts. For instance, the organisation brokered the Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (ARCSS) in August 2015. While the initial agreement brought optimism for peace, various obstacles hindered its execution, and violence erupted again in July 2016. This showcased the nature of peace efforts and the complexities of upholding peace deals within divided societies.

One of the goals of UNMISS has been to minimise conflict and safeguard civilians. The mission's effectiveness in this regard has been mixed.² UNMISS has shielded displaced individuals (IDPs) by providing sanctuary at Protection of Civilians (PoC) sites and guaranteeing their safety and essential services access amidst violent upheavals. However, critics highlight UNMISS's failure to halt attacks beyond these designated sites. For example, the attack on the Terrain Hotel in Juba in July 2016, where UN peacekeepers failed to respond effectively to the assault on civilians, including international aid workers, underscored significant gaps in the mission's capacity to protect those at risk.³

UNMISS has faced challenges in aiding governance setups in South Sudan. They focus on boosting institutions' capabilities and fostering the rule of law. Struggles persist due to issues like corruption and weak institutional structures that hinder progress significantly. The mission's objectives face setbacks as human rights violations go unchecked without accountability, and a prevailing culture of impunity persists. For example, despite the establishment of the Hybrid Court for South Sudan, progress towards accountability for atrocities committed during the conflict has been slow, reflecting broader challenges in building effective and credible governance structures.⁴

Operating in a setting such as South Sudan poses various obstacles for UNMISS. The logistical hurdles from infrastructure and rugged terrain make the mission more challenging. Moreover, the political landscape in South Sudan and on a scale shapes the mission's success. The shifting dedication of figures to the peace agreement and the involvement of neighbouring countries bring further intricacies to UNMISS objectives.

Effective communication and collaboration among UNMISS and local and international stakeholders are vital in ensuring the mission's success. Practical cooperation with local governments, regional organisations, and international stakeholders is essential for addressing the multifaceted challenges in South Sudan.⁵ Interactions like these can be challenging due to conflicting priorities and tensions between parties involved in peacebuilding efforts in South Sudan.

While UNMISS has significantly contributed to promoting stability and supporting governance in South Sudan, numerous challenges remain.⁶ The mission's experiences underscore the importance of adaptive strategies, robust cooperation, and comprehensive support mechanisms to enhance the impact of UN peace operations. The lessons from South Sudan can inform future peacekeeping missions in Africa and beyond, contributing to the broader international peace and security discourse.

Impact on Political Stability

The UNMISS has played a significant role in promoting political stability in the region. However, its impact has been profound and limited due to the complex and dynamic political landscape.⁷ Since its establishment, UNMISS has been actively involved in facilitating dialogue between conflicting parties, supporting peace agreements, and working towards preventing the further escalation of violence. However, these efforts have met varying degrees of success, often hindered by the country's entrenched divisions and power struggles.⁸

UNMISS has enhanced stability in South Sudan by facilitating the Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (ARCSS) in August 2015. This was a crucial step towards resolving the civil war issue in December 2013 and setting up a transitional national unity government. UNMISS collaborated with IGAD and other global allies to support the peace talks by offering technical assistance throughout the negotiation process. The signing of ARCSS initially sparked hope and positivity as the conflicting factions pledged to halt hostilities and participate in discussions.

Despite the achievements of ARCSS, the implementation encountered obstacles that brought to light the significant hurdles in attaining lasting political stability in South Sudan. The interim government formed as per the agreement encountered difficulties operating due to a lack of trust and conflicting interests of leaders that hindered collaborative governance. The fragile peace was disrupted in July 2016 when violence erupted in Juba between forces of President Salva Kiir and those

supporting former Vice President Riek Machar. The increase in violence not only caused a crisis but also showed the challenges UNMISS faces in upholding peace agreements and stopping the return to conflict.

UNMISS's efforts to bring stability to South Sudan face challenges due to the culture of impunity and lack of accountability for crimes committed during the conflict period. There have been attempts to encourage justice and reconciliation through initiatives like setting up the Hybrid Court for South Sudan; however, progress has been sluggish. The commitment to holding perpetrators has been inconsistent, resulting in offenders escaping punishments. This lack of consequences has fuelled violence cycles and hampered attempts to establish a secure and harmonious political landscape.

UNMISS does not help broker peace deals but strives to establish a favourable setting for grassroots-level political discussions and reconciliation efforts. The mission supports peace projects within communities to deal with issues and build trust among ethnic and political factions. While these local initiatives have had some success in decreasing community conflicts and enhancing unity, their ability to influence political stability has been constrained by national power conflicts and the central government's challenges in backing and carrying out these grassroots peace initiatives effectively.

The inconsistent attitude of South Sudan to the peace initiative has also been an obstacle to UNMISS endeavours. The political turmoil in South Sudan is frequently fuelled by ethnic conflicts among the ruling class, who value their authority and sway more than cohesion and peace. To illustrate this point further, the collapse of the 2016 peace pact was partially caused by the reluctance of leaders to negotiate and distribute power equitably, resulting in a resurgence of strife and forced displacement. UNMISS faces challenges in upholding stability due to internal factors that necessitate the mission to adjust and refine its tactics to navigate the evolving political environment.

The situation becomes more intricate for UNMISS due to the influence of neighbouring countries and global players like Uganda and Sudan. These countries have stakes in South Sudan and have sometimes backed peace initiatives or contributed to conflict by aiding various factions politically and militarily. UNMISS has had to navigate these external influences while maintaining its neutrality and mandate to support peace and stability.⁹

While UNMISS has made significant strides in promoting political stability in South Sudan, its impact has been constrained by its deep-rooted political divisions, the culture of impunity, and key leaders' fluctuating commitment to peace. The mission's experiences highlight the critical need for sustained international support, comprehensive peacebuilding strategies, and strong political will from South Sudan's leaders to achieve lasting stability. The lessons from UNMISS's efforts in South Sudan can provide valuable insights for future UN peace operations in similarly complex and volatile environments.¹⁰

Violence Reduction Efforts

The UNMISS has prioritised violence reduction and the protection of civilians as central components of its mandate. These efforts have been commendable and challenging, reflecting the complexities of operating in a volatile and fragmented conflict environment. The mission's initiatives to mitigate violence and safeguard civilians have yielded significant results in some areas while highlighting critical gaps and limitations.¹¹

UNMISS has established Protection of Civilians (PoC) sites as one of its primary strategies for reducing violence and protecting vulnerable population. These sites have provided refuge to hundreds of thousands of internally displaced persons (IDPs) fleeing conflict. Establishing these PoC sites has been a critical intervention, as they offer a secure environment where civilians can access essential services such as food, water, healthcare, and education.¹² For instance, during the height of the civil war in 2013 and subsequent years, these sites were lifeline for those escaping the brutal fighting between government and opposition forces. The presence of UN peacekeepers in and around these sites has deterred attacks and provided a sense of security for the displaced population.

However, the protection provided by PoC sites has also faced significant challenges. The capacity of these sites has often been overwhelmed by the sheer number of IDPs, leading to overcrowding and deteriorating living conditions. Furthermore, while PoC sites offer protection within their boundaries, UNMISS has struggled to extend a similar level of security to civilians in remote and conflict-affected areas outside these enclaves. The mission's limited mobility and the vast, often inaccessible terrain of South Sudan have hampered its ability to respond swiftly to emerging threats and protect civilians in isolated regions. For example, in the town of Malakal in February 2016, a PoC site was attacked, resulting in the deaths of dozens of civilians and highlighting the vulnerability of even these protected areas to armed assaults.¹³

UNMISS has also undertaken patrols and peacekeeping operations to reduce violence and maintain security in conflict-prone regions. These efforts have included long-duration patrols to deter violence, protect humanitarian workers, and facilitate safe access to aid. In areas like Bentiu and Bor, UNMISS patrols have helped stabilise local security situations, allowing for humanitarian assistance and the return of displaced persons. These operations have created safer environments and reduced immediate threats to civilians.¹⁴

Despite these efforts, the mission's effectiveness in reducing violence has been impeded by several factors. One major challenge is the limited number of peacekeepers relative to the vast and often hostile territory they are securing. South Sudan's size and the dispersed nature of its conflict zones make it difficult for UNMISS to maintain a pervasive and effective presence. Additionally, the complex and fluid alliances among armed groups, as well as the proliferation of weapons, complicate

efforts to enforce peace and reduce violence. For instance, the eruption of violence in Juba in July 2016, despite the presence of UN peacekeepers, underscored the difficulties in controlling sudden and intense outbreaks of fighting.

The mandate of UNMISS to use force for civilian protection has also raised contentious issues. While peacekeepers are authorised to use all necessary means to protect civilians, implementing this mandate has often been inconsistent.¹⁵ The reluctance to engage militarily in certain situations due to concerns over neutrality and potential repercussions has sometimes left civilians vulnerable. The attack on the Terrain Hotel in Juba in July 2016, where UN peacekeepers were criticised for their inadequate response to protect civilians, including international aid workers, is a stark example of the mission's struggles to execute its protective mandate effectively.

Efforts to reduce violence have also included initiatives to address the underlying causes of conflict and promote reconciliation. UNMISS has supported local peace dialogues and reconciliation processes, aiming to build trust and resolve disputes at the community level. These initiatives have seen varying degrees of success. In some areas, local peace agreements facilitated by UNMISS have led to temporary reductions in violence and improved relations between conflicting groups. However, the broader impact of these local initiatives has often been limited by the ongoing national-level conflict and the lack of sustained political commitment to peace from critical leaders.¹⁶

UNMISS's efforts to reduce violence and protect civilians in South Sudan have demonstrated significant achievements and critical limitations. The mission's establishment of PoC sites, peacekeeping patrols, and support for local reconciliation processes have provided crucial protection and stability in certain areas. However, the challenges of operating in a vast, conflict-ridden environment, resource constraints, and complex local dynamics have hindered the mission's overall effectiveness. The experiences of UNMISS underscore the need for comprehensive strategies that combine immediate protection efforts with long-term initiatives to address the root causes of violence and build sustainable peace.

Support for Governance Structures

The UNMISS has been tasked with supporting the development of governance structures in a country that has faced profound political instability and conflict. This support is crucial for building a stable and functional state, yet it has encountered numerous challenges and limitations. UNMISS's involvement in fostering governance structures has included efforts to enhance governmental capacities, promote the rule of law, and assist in establishing key institutions.¹⁷ Despite these efforts, the path to effective governance in South Sudan has been fraught with obstacles, reflecting the complexities of state-building in a fragile post-conflict environment.

One of the core areas of UNMISS's support has been helping build and strengthen governmental institutions. The mission has provided technical assistance and capacity-building programmes to improve the functioning of the government and its various branches. For example, UNMISS has worked with the South Sudanese government to develop and implement policies related to security sector reform, public administration, and judicial processes. These efforts have included training programmes for government officials and support for developing administrative systems necessary for effective governance.⁸

However, the effectiveness of these initiatives has often been undermined by the pervasive issues of corruption, weak institutional frameworks, and lack of political will. South Sudan's government has struggled with endemic corruption and mismanagement, which have severely hampered the implementation of reforms and the establishment of a transparent and accountable administration. The international community, including UNMISS, has faced challenges in addressing these issues. For instance, despite the mission's support for judicial reforms, the country's judiciary remains largely ineffective and corrupt, with many high-profile corruption and human rights abuses remaining unresolved. This persistent lack of accountability has undermined public trust in government institutions and stymied efforts to build a functional state.

UNMISS has also supported the establishment of rule of law mechanisms, including creating the Hybrid Court for South Sudan. This court was designed to address serious crimes committed during the conflict and to promote accountability and justice. While the Hybrid Court represents a significant step towards addressing impunity, its establishment and operationalisation have been slow and difficult. The court has faced numerous delays, including challenges in securing sufficient funding and political support, impeding its ability to deliver timely justice. The slow progress of the court reflects broader challenges in building effective and credible governance structures in South Sudan.

The mission's efforts to promote the rule of law and human rights have also encountered significant challenges. UNMISS has supported human rights monitoring and advocacy, working to document and address violations. Despite these efforts, the protection of human rights in South Sudan remains a serious concern, with widespread abuses reported by various organisations. The lack of progress in advancing human rights and justice highlights the broader difficulties faced in creating a stable governance framework in a country where the rule of law is frequently undermined by ongoing violence and political instability.

Additionally, UNMISS has attempted to support local governance and community-based initiatives to foster stability and build trust between communities and the state. The mission has facilitated local peace dialogues and supported community-based organisations to address grievances and promote social cohesion. For example, initiatives aimed at mediating disputes between different ethnic groups and supporting local governance structures have successfully reduced local conflicts

and fostered a sense of community engagement. However, these local efforts often struggle to achieve a broader impact due to the overarching national-level disputes and the inability of the central government to support and sustain local governance initiatives effectively.

The interactions between UNMISS and the South Sudanese government have also been marked by tension and challenges. The relationship between the mission and the government has often been strained, with accusations of bias and interference. This strained relationship has sometimes hindered UNMISS's ability to support governance efforts and implement its mandate effectively. The government's lack of cooperation and resistance to external assistance have further complicated efforts to build and strengthen governance structures.

While UNMISS has made significant efforts to support governance structures in South Sudan, its impact has been limited by various factors, including corruption, weak institutions, and political resistance. The mission's initiatives to build governmental capacities, promote the rule of law, and support local governance have faced significant obstacles, reflecting the broader challenges of state-building in a conflict-affected environment. The experiences of UNMISS underscore the need for a comprehensive approach that addresses the immediate need for governance support and the underlying issues of corruption and political instability. Future efforts to support governance in South Sudan and similar contexts will need to consider these complexities and seek more effective ways to promote sustainable and accountable governance.

Challenges and Obstacles

The UNMISS has faced many challenges and obstacles in stabilising the country and supporting state-building. These difficulties stem from logistical constraints, complex political dynamics, and security issues, significantly impacting the mission's effectiveness and ability to achieve its objectives.¹⁹

One of the primary logistical challenges faced by UNMISS is the vast and rugged terrain of South Sudan. The country's extensive and often inaccessible landscapes and a lack of infrastructure have complicated the mission's operations. For example, South Sudan's road network is sparse and poorly maintained, making it challenging for peacekeepers to travel between regions and respond quickly to emerging threats. During the conflict, this logistical difficulty was evident when UNMISS struggled to provide timely assistance and protection to communities affected by violence. The mission's inability to reach remote areas exacerbated the vulnerability of civilians and hindered efforts to maintain peace and stability across the country.²⁰

Another significant challenge is the volatile security environment in which UNMISS operates. The ongoing conflict and violence have created a hazardous environment for peacekeepers. The mission has faced frequent attacks from armed

groups, which have endangered both peacekeepers and civilians. For instance, the attack on the UN base in Bor in April 2014, where armed forces targeted the base, resulting in casualties and damage, underscored the severe risks faced by UNMISS personnel. Such incidents not only jeopardise the safety of peacekeepers but also disrupt the mission's operations and diminish its capacity to protect civilians effectively.²¹

The complex political dynamics within South Sudan have also posed substantial obstacles to the mission's success. The country's internal power struggles and factionalism have complicated the establishment of a functioning government. The civil war between President Salva Kiir's government and opposition forces led by Riek Machar is a prime example of how deeply entrenched political divisions can undermine peacekeeping efforts. Despite UNMISS's attempts to mediate and support peace agreements, the underlying political tensions and lack of consensus among critical leaders have often resulted in the failure of these agreements and a relapse into violence.²² The 2016 peace agreement collapse and the subsequent outbreak of violence in Juba demonstrated the difficulty of achieving lasting political stability in the face of such entrenched divisions.

Corruption and lack of political will have further impeded UNMISS's efforts to support governance and state-building. The South Sudanese government has been plagued by corruption and mismanagement, which have hindered the effective implementation of reforms and undermined the rule of law. For example, the widespread embezzlement of funds and lack of transparency in the allocation of resources have prevented the development of essential services and infrastructure. UNMISS's attempts to assist in governance reforms and capacity-building have been stymied by these pervasive issues, as the lack of commitment from government officials has often rendered such efforts ineffective.²³

Additionally, the mission has faced challenges coordinating with various international and regional actors. The involvement of multiple external stakeholders, each with their interests and priorities, has sometimes led to conflicting approaches and goals. For instance, the involvement of neighbouring countries with vested interests in South Sudan's conflict, such as Uganda and Sudan, has complicated the peacekeeping efforts. These external influences have sometimes exacerbated the conflict or diverted attention away from effective peacebuilding initiatives. UNMISS has had to navigate these complex relationships while maintaining neutrality and effectiveness.

The mission's mandate and rules of engagement have also posed challenges in terms of operational flexibility and effectiveness. While UNMISS is authorised to use force to protect civilians, the implementation of this mandate has often been constrained by neutrality issues and the need to avoid escalating conflicts. For example, during the 2016 conflict in Juba, UNMISS's cautious approach to using force and its reluctance to intervene decisively in clashes between rival factions were criticised for failing to prevent widespread violence and protect civilians effectively.

The constraints on the mission's operational freedom have sometimes limited its ability to respond proactively to threats and maintain security.²⁴

The challenges and obstacles faced by UNMISS in South Sudan underscore the complexities of peacekeeping and state-building in a highly volatile and fragmented environment. Logistical constraints, security risks, political divisions, corruption, and coordination issues have all significantly impacted the mission's effectiveness. Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach that includes improving logistical support, enhancing security measures, fostering political reconciliation, and ensuring effective coordination among international and regional actors. The lessons from UNMISS's experiences in South Sudan can provide valuable insights for future peacekeeping missions in similarly complex and challenging contexts.

Interactions with Local and International Actors

The success of UNMISS is intricately linked to its interactions with local and international actors. The mission's ability to navigate these relationships has been critical in shaping its impact and effectiveness. However, the dynamics of these interactions have been both beneficial and problematic, influencing the overall success of peacekeeping and state-building efforts in South Sudan.²⁵

One of the critical aspects of UNMISS's interactions with local actors is its relationship with the South Sudanese government. Both cooperation and tension have characterised this relationship. On one hand, UNMISS has worked closely with government officials to support peace agreements, facilitate dialogues, and implement governance reforms. For example, the mission played a role in mediating the Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (ARCSS) in 2015. This agreement, which aimed to end the civil war and establish a transitional government, was supported by UNMISS through logistical assistance and diplomatic efforts.

On the other hand, the relationship between UNMISS and the South Sudanese government has often been strained. The government has sometimes accused UNMISS of bias and interference, particularly when the mission's actions or reports have highlighted human rights abuses or criticised the government's handling of the conflict. For instance, the government's criticism of UNMISS's reports on human rights violations and its alleged failure to protect civilians effectively has led to tensions and sometimes hampered the mission's operations.²⁶ The South Sudanese government's resistance to some of the mission's initiatives and reluctance to fully cooperate have complicated UNMISS's efforts to implement its mandate and support state-building.

Interactions with local communities have also been crucial to UNMISS's strategy. The mission has engaged with community leaders and local organisations to promote peace, facilitate dialogue, and address local grievances. These interactions

have been essential in building trust and fostering local-level reconciliation.²⁷ For example, UNMISS-supported community peace dialogues in areas like Jonglei and Unity State have reduced local conflicts and improved relations between ethnic groups. These grassroots efforts have helped to address some of the immediate sources of tension and violence, contributing to a more stable environment in certain regions.

However, the mission's ability to engage effectively with local communities has been limited by several factors. The pervasive insecurity and ongoing violence have made it challenging for UNMISS personnel to reach and interact with all affected areas. In some cases, local leaders and communities have been reluctant to engage with UNMISS due to mistrust or fear of reprisals from armed groups. For instance, in regions where armed factions control local governance and security, community leaders may hesitate to collaborate with international actors due to concerns about their safety or the potential for exacerbating local conflicts.²⁸

The interactions between UNMISS and international actors, including regional organisations and other donor countries, have also been significant. The mission has collaborated with the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and the African Union (AU) to mediate peace and coordinate responses to the crisis. These collaborations have united various stakeholders and aligned international support for peacebuilding efforts. For example, IGAD's involvement in the peace process and its support for UNMISS's mandate have been crucial in facilitating negotiations and implementing peace agreements.²⁹

Nonetheless, the multiplicity of international actors involved in South Sudan has sometimes led to competing interests and fragmented approaches. Different international actors often have varying priorities and strategies, creating challenges for coordination and coherence in peacekeeping efforts. For instance, regional powers such as Uganda and Sudan have had their interests in South Sudan, sometimes supporting different factions or influencing the conflict dynamics in ways that complicate UNMISS's efforts.³⁰ This complexity has required UNMISS to carefully navigate these relationships and seek to balance competing interests while maintaining its impartiality and effectiveness.

The interactions between UNMISS and local and international actors have played a pivotal role in shaping the mission's impact in South Sudan. While collaboration with local communities and government officials has been essential for implementing peacekeeping and state-building initiatives, challenges such as strained relations, security concerns, and competing international interests have posed significant obstacles. Addressing these challenges requires ongoing efforts to enhance cooperation, build trust, and ensure a coordinated approach among all stakeholders. The experiences of UNMISS in managing these interactions provide valuable insights for future peacekeeping missions and highlight the importance of effective engagement with local and international actors in achieving sustainable peace and stability.

Lessons Learned and Policy Recommendations

UNMISS's experiences offer critical insights into the complexities of peacekeeping and state-building in post-conflict environments. Analysing these experiences provides valuable lessons and informs policy recommendations for improving future peace operations. The mission's challenges and successes reveal critical areas for enhancement in the design and implementation of international peacekeeping mandates.³¹

One significant lesson from UNMISS is the importance of integrating a comprehensive approach to peacekeeping that combines immediate protection with long-term development strategies. While crucial for safeguarding displaced populations, the mission's focus on PoC sites demonstrated the limitations of relying solely on short-term protective measures without addressing the underlying causes of conflict. For instance, while PoC sites provided essential refuge during peak violence, their long-term sustainability was undermined by overcrowding and the inability to extend similar protection to remote areas. Future missions should prioritise a more holistic approach that includes robust strategies for conflict resolution, governance, and development alongside immediate protection efforts.³² This can help to address both the symptoms and root causes of conflict, leading to more sustainable peace.

Another critical lesson is the need for effective coordination and collaboration among international, regional, and local actors. The fragmented and sometimes conflicting interests of various stakeholders in South Sudan highlighted the challenges of achieving a unified approach to peacebuilding. For example, regional powers with vested interests, such as Uganda and Sudan, often complicated international efforts and influenced the conflict dynamics unpredictably. Effective coordination mechanisms and clear communication channels among global partners, regional organisations, and local actors are essential to ensure coherent and aligned strategies. Establishing frameworks for regular consultations and joint planning can help mitigate conflicting agendas and enhance the overall effectiveness of peace operations.³³

The experience of UNMISS underscores the importance of building solid partnerships with local communities and empowering them to play an active role in peacebuilding. Engaging with local leaders and community organisations proved valuable in addressing local grievances and promoting reconciliation. However, security concerns and local resistance sometimes limited the mission's efforts. Future peace operations should invest in building local capacities and fostering community ownership of peacebuilding initiatives. Providing training, resources, and support to local actors can enhance their ability to contribute to stability and reduce dependence on external interventions. Additionally, ensuring that peacebuilding efforts are inclusive and sensitive to local dynamics can help build trust and increase the likelihood of lasting peace.

Addressing the issue of corruption and governance is another critical lesson. UNMISS's attempts to support governance reforms were often undermined by

widespread corruption and lack of political will within the South Sudanese government. The persistent issues of corruption and mismanagement impeded progress and eroded public trust in governmental institutions. Future missions should prioritise efforts to combat corruption and promote transparency as a fundamental component of governance support. This can involve working closely with international anti-corruption bodies, supporting judicial and institutional reforms, and ensuring that aid and support are conditional on measurable progress in governance and anti-corruption efforts.

The mission's experiences also highlight the need for flexibility and adaptability in peacekeeping mandates. The evolving nature of the conflict in South Sudan required UNMISS to adjust its strategies and approaches continuously. The inability to predict and adapt to rapid changes in the conflict dynamics often limited the mission's effectiveness. Peacekeeping mandates should, therefore, include provisions for flexibility and adaptability, allowing missions to respond dynamically to changing circumstances and emerging threats. Regular assessments and adjustments to strategies based on real-time information and evolving needs can enhance the mission's ability to address complex and fluid situations.³⁴

Finally, UNMISS's experiences emphasise the importance of ensuring adequate resources and support for peacekeeping operations. The mission faced challenges due to resource constraints, including insufficient personnel and equipment to cover the vast and challenging terrain. Ensuring that peacekeeping missions are adequately resourced and supported is essential for their success. This includes financial resources, logistical support, training, and equipment. Adequate resourcing enables missions to operate effectively, maintain security, and provide the necessary support for peacebuilding and governance initiatives.³⁵

The lessons from UNMISS's experience in South Sudan provide valuable insights for future peacekeeping operations. Integrating comprehensive approaches, enhancing coordination, empowering local communities, addressing corruption, maintaining flexibility, and ensuring adequate resources are crucial for improving the effectiveness of international peace operations. By incorporating these lessons into future missions, the international community can better address the complex challenges of post-conflict environments and work towards achieving sustainable peace and stability.

Conclusion

UNMISS offers a complex case study of international peacekeeping and state-building in a deeply troubled context. The mission's efforts to stabilise South Sudan and support its transition from conflict to peace have been marked by notable achievements and significant challenges. As we reflect on UNMISS's experiences, several vital insights emerge that are crucial for understanding the effectiveness of peacekeeping missions and guiding future interventions in similar contexts.

UNMISS's primary success has been providing essential protection and humanitarian assistance to civilians displaced by conflict. Establishing PoC sites and providing humanitarian aid were crucial in safeguarding vulnerable population during intense violence. These efforts have highlighted the importance of immediate protection measures in mitigating the human suffering caused by conflict. However, the limitations of relying solely on such measures have become evident. The overcrowding and restricted reach of PoC sites underscore the need for a more integrated approach combining immediate protection with long-term conflict resolution and state-building strategies.

The mission's interactions with local and international actors reveal the complexities of peacekeeping in a multi-stakeholders environment. Collaboration with local communities and engagement with government officials have been vital in implementing peacekeeping mandates and supporting governance reforms. However, these interactions have also exposed the challenges of working in a context marked by political divisions, corruption, and competing interests. The strained relationship between UNMISS and the South Sudanese government and the conflicting agendas of international actors have often impeded the mission's effectiveness and complicated efforts to achieve a cohesive strategy for peace and stability.

One of the critical lessons from UNMISS's experience is the need for a comprehensive and flexible approach to peacekeeping. Various factors, including security risks, logistical constraints, and the lack of political will, have hindered the mission's attempts to balance immediate protection with governance support. Adapting to rapidly changing conflict dynamics and integrating short-term interventions with long-term development goals is essential for achieving lasting peace. This lesson highlights the importance of designing peacekeeping mandates that allow flexibility and adaptability in response to evolving situation.

Furthermore, addressing the root causes of conflict, such as corruption and poor governance, is fundamental to building sustainable peace. Widespread corruption and ineffective institutions often undermined UNMISS's support for governance reforms. The experience underscores the need for peacekeeping missions to prioritise anticorruption efforts and to work closely with international partners to support transparent and accountable governance structures. Effective governance is crucial for maintaining stability and ensuring that peacekeeping efforts have a lasting impact.

In conclusion, the UNMISS experience in South Sudan provides valuable insights into the complexities of peacekeeping and state-building in conflict-affected environments. While the mission has achieved significant successes in protecting civilians and supporting humanitarian efforts, it has also faced substantial challenges that have limited its effectiveness. Future peacekeeping operations can benefit from the lessons learned, including the need for a comprehensive approach that integrates protection with long-term development, effective coordination among stakeholders, and the necessity of addressing governance issues. By applying these insights, the

international community can improve its response to conflicts and work more effectively towards achieving sustainable peace and stability in similar contexts.

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