MOVING TOWARD MOBILITY
Providing Protection to Civilians Through Static Presence and Mobile Peacekeeping in South Sudan
ORGANIZATIONAL MISSION AND VISION

Center for Civilians in Conflict (CIVIC) is an international organization dedicated to promoting the protection of civilians caught in conflict. CIVIC’s mission is to work with armed actors and civilians in conflict to develop and implement solutions to prevent, mitigate, and respond to civilian harm. Our vision is a world where parties to armed conflict recognize the dignity and rights of civilians, prevent civilian harm, protect civilians caught in conflict, and amend harm.

CIVIC was established in 2003 by Marla Ruzicka, a young American activist and humanitarian who advocated on behalf of civilian war victims and their families in Iraq and Afghanistan. Building on her extraordinary legacy, CIVIC now operates in conflict zones throughout the Middle East, Africa, Europe, and South Asia to advance a higher standard of protection for civilians.

At CIVIC, we believe that parties to armed conflict have a responsibility to prevent and address civilian harm. To accomplish this, we assess the causes of civilian harm in particular conflicts, craft practical solutions to address that harm, and advocate the adoption of new policies and practices that lead to the improved wellbeing of civilians caught in conflict. Recognizing the power of collaboration, we engage with civilians, governments, militaries, and international and regional institutions to identify and institutionalize strengthened protections for civilians in conflict.

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Lauren Sprink, Senior Researcher on Peacekeeping at CIVIC authored this report. Research for the report was primarily conducted by Sprink, with support from research consultant Chuol Dow Wich. It was reviewed by: Alison Giffen, Peacekeeping Director; Shannon Green, Senior Director of Programs; and Tazreen Hussein, Gender Advisor. In addition, several UNMISS officials, subject matter experts, and humanitarian actors provided valuable feedback on a draft of the report. Elena Abbott copyedited the report and Dena Verdesca designed it.

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We are also deeply grateful to the South Sudanese civilians and civil society leaders who spoke with CIVIC during our research. They have borne the brunt of the violence in South Sudan’s civil war and they are the stakeholders who stand to gain or lose the most from decisions around UNMISS’s capabilities and deployments.

We would also like to thank the Kingdom of the Netherlands’ Ministry of Foreign Affairs Department of Stabilization and Humanitarian Aid for supporting CIVIC’s Peacekeeping Program and for making this research and report possible.
## Glossary of Terms and Acronyms

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<tr>
<td>AOB</td>
<td>Austere Operating Bases</td>
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<td>CLAs</td>
<td>Community Liaison Assistants</td>
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<td>FIOCs</td>
<td>Field Integrated Operations Centers</td>
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<td>FSAs</td>
<td>Flight Safety Assurances</td>
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<td>HLP</td>
<td>Housing, Land, and Property</td>
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<td>MOUs</td>
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<td>POC</td>
<td>Protection of Civilians</td>
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<td>R-ARCSS</td>
<td>Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of Conflict in South Sudan</td>
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since taking over the helm of the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), the Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG), David Shearer, has voiced his intention to build UNMISS into a mission capable of responding to protection threats in a more proactive manner. Physical realities and policies make it costly and burdensome to temporarily deploy or relocate civilian staff deployed across a huge country. Adopting a more mobile and responsive approach to peacekeeping could therefore enhance UNMISS’s ability to achieve its mandated tasks. However, there are many obstacles to mobility in South Sudan, and UNMISS will need the support of the United Nations Secretariat and Member States to succeed.

This report is based on research conducted in South Sudan between April and December 2018. It identifies capabilities, policies, and practices that could strengthen the Mission’s ability to launch mobile operations and respond to dynamic and evolving protection threats. It discusses different types of mobility, including rapid response to threats, long-range patrols, and temporary deployments to more remote areas. It then evaluates the balance that UNMISS has tried to reach in the past and should aim to achieve in the future between using resources for more mobile operations and providing static security for the just under 200,000 civilians who continue to seek safety in Protection of Civilian (POC) sites on UN land. In addition, this report evaluates perspectives from peacekeepers, humanitarians, and civilians on the issue of whether and when civilians should relocate outside of the POC sites. Finally, it examines UNMISS’s attempt to expand the Mission’s footprint through the use of austere operating bases (AOBs) and proposes some lessons on how AOBs can become a more effective tool for protection of civilians.

UNMISS faces a number of barriers to mobility. Many of UNMISS’s policies and procedures—some of which are dictated by the Secretariat in New York and others that are set in Juba—can prohibit quick action by the Mission in response to threats. For example, human resources policies make it costly and burdensome to temporarily deploy or relocate civilian staff. Throughout the conflict, the South Sudanese government has blocked UNMISS’s freedom of movement in violation of the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) negotiated at the time of the Mission’s deployment. UNMISS’s policy of securing flight safety assurances (FSAs) from the South Sudanese government before air travel, while established to protect UNMISS staff and equipment in the face of hostile government blockages, can delay deployments. Even if UNMISS does secure FSAs, there may be no plane available for travel, or the POC’s air assets are stretched thin. In addition, troops are not always willing to deploy to high-risk areas or confront armed actors at checkpoints. Moreover, UNMISS community liaison assistants, who are national staff and can serve as a link between the Mission and local communities, are few in number compared to other missions and are not managed or deployed in a way that allows them to create community alert networks or decentralized early warning systems.

Despite these limitations, SRSG Shearer has pushed personnel to react quickly to threats and has experimented with the structure of high-level meetings within the Mission in order to find a formula that promotes quick reaction to shifting conflict dynamics. To succeed, he needs support from the Security Council and Member States to combat access denials by the South Sudanese government.

For several years, humanitarians have expressed concern that political pressure and resource constraints could fuel decisions to prematurely close POC sites. While physical protection is an important part of the mission’s wider efforts to protect civilians, it is not enough. Physical protection of the Northwest Protection of Civilians (POC) site in Unity region had been relatively calm up until mid-2016, and UNMISS did not have a base in the region. Without a presence there, UNMISS struggled to respond to the violence. Recognizing the ongoing need to address insecurity in Central Equatoria, UNMISS opened a base in Yei in January 2018, which, according to UNMISS officials, has begun contributing to improved security in the region.

After experiencing recurrent cycles of violence, many civilians want to see concrete evidence that peace is being implemented before they voluntarily leave the sites.
A revitalized peace agreement was signed by many of the warring factions in South Sudan in September 2018. The leader of opposition armed forces, Riek Machar, who has been in exile since civil war erupted, travelled to Addis Ababa in Ethiopia to meet with his foe, South Sudan’s President Salva Kiir, for a special signing ceremony. All signatories committed to ending hostilities in the conflict-affected country and creating joint governance and security structures. September 12, 2018

125 women reported experiencing sexual violence. These horrific incidents demonstrate the challenge that UNMISS faces in protecting civilians from diverse threats across an expansive geography with difficult terrain. The attacks likewise demonstrate the necessity for UNMISS to strike an appropriate balance between continuing to protect civilians inside POC sites and ensuring that patrols outside the POC sites are effective and responsive to shifting threat dynamics.

To UNMISS

• Work with the Secretariat to develop a plan for increasing the mobility of UNMISS’s civilian personnel, including by revising policies to facilitate relocation of civilian personnel to various field offices and by ensuring processes and equipment are in place to support their participation in long-duration patrols and short deployments to more remote areas;

• Work with the Secretariat to review the procedures of the UN Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS) for assessing and approving travel for UNMISS civilian staff and UN military observers, as well as their risk posture; to ensure UNDSS promotes an effective balance between protecting staff and allowing for proactive and mobile deployments;

• Consider whether civilian personnel and language assistants can be deployed more regularly to austere operating bases (AOBs) to ensure a comprehensive and effective approach to protection of civilians in these areas. Adjust regular flight schedules as needed to accommodate this rotation of civilian staff;

• Continue to assert the Mission’s right to freedom of movement. Continually assess the threat environment to determine which actors need to be informed of Mission movement and if or when the threat environment allows, revise the current policies that require securing government documentation before launching UNMISS air and ground movements;

• Ensure that plans to facilitate the return or relocation of displaced persons are based on comprehensive assessments of conflict and threats of violence against civilians;

• Continue working with humanitarian actors to ensure that relocations and returns of displaced persons are voluntary, informed, safe, and unlikely to exacerbate existing inter-communal tensions or support harmful ethnic redistribution;

• Initiate consultations between UNMISS’s military and civilian leadership to assess how resources currently being used by UNMISS to provide static protection to POC sites will contribute to protection in surrounding towns and in more remote locations where civilians are under significant threat if POC sites are gradually closed;

• Establish a system for monitoring the effectiveness of patrols and ensure that the planning and evaluation of patrols is based on comprehensive and continuous analysis of protection threats, including by fully implementing the effects-based patrolling plan and by improving data collection on the location and timing of patrols;

• To supplement pre-deployment training, consider in-Mission training for troops on methods of effective patrolling such as the importance of foot patrols and how to safely engage communities during patrolling. Such training should include an emphasis on how to engage women and how to safely engage potential victims of sexual violence;

• Review the current structure and function of community liaison assistants (CLAs) to determine whether adjustments to the CLA role will allow them to increase their contributions to early warning or create community alert networks. Consider adjusting UNMISS’s budget and staffing requests to increase the number of CLAs and language assistants, particularly the number of female CLAs and language assistants. If this is not possible, continue to stress the importance of deploying integrated patrols that involve relevant civilian staff, and

• Develop a regular system for reviewing the Mission’s footprint against short-, medium-, and long-term threat analysis to determine, in consultation with humanitarians, how it needs to be adjusted.


To UN Member States

• Continue to fund and contribute air assets to peacekeeping missions, as these are vital for Mission mobility and rapid response to threats;
• Prioritize funding to sustain (at a minimum) and ideally increase the number of UNMISS language assistants and CLAs;
• Support the Mission by engaging in a sustained dialogue with South Sudanese government officials on violations of the Mission’s right to freedom of movement;
• Provide adequate funding for personnel who coordinate the humanitarian community’s protection programming and facilitate communication and coordination between humanitarians and peacekeepers, such as civilian-military liaisons and cluster coordinators; and
• Provide funding to support conflict-sensitive humanitarian and development programming in areas of return so that the absence of services and livelihood opportunities do not serve as a deterrent to voluntary returns.

To the UN Secretariat

• Assist UNMISS in reviewing and adjusting administrative policies that prevent the rapid deployment of its civilian and military personnel;
• Ensure that the Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) and Statement of Unit Requirements (SURs) negotiated between troop-contributing countries (TCCs) and the Secretariat to outline the terms of their deployment allow for the flexible deployment of troops within South Sudan;
• Intensify efforts to identify TCCs with the capacity and willingness to deploy to UNMISS, adopt a mobile posture, and operate in austere conditions; and
• Explore the possibility of more regularly negotiating MOUs and SURs with TCCs that include deployment of language assistants alongside troops in order to promote more nimble, mobile, and effective deployments of UNMISS’s military component.

METHODOLOGY

Research for this report was primarily conducted by one Center for Civilians in Conflict (CIVIC) staff member and one research consultant. They conducted a total of 184 interviews in Juba, Bentiu, Bor, and Akobo during the months of April, November, and December of 2018. Of the 184 interviews, 18 were with UNMISS military officials, 40 were with UNMISS civilian officials, 5 were with UNPOL officers, 43 were with humanitarian or NGO actors, 64 were with South Sudanese civilians4, 3 were with civil society leaders, 9 were with other subject matter experts, and 1 was with a diplomat. CIVIC staff members also reviewed public and private UN policy documents that were made available to them during the course of their research, as well as literature produced by non-governmental organizations and institutes. While not cited in this report, our understanding of peacekeeping in the South Sudanese context was further informed by hundreds of interviews conducted by CIVIC across South Sudan throughout 2016 and 2017.

All interviews for this report were conducted using a semi-structured format. On average, interviews lasted approximately one hour, but they ranged from thirty minutes to two hours. Most interviews were carried out on an individual basis, but CIVIC occasionally spoke with multiple interviewees at one time based on the preferences of the participants. CIVIC took steps to ensure that the local community voices incorporated into our research and report reflect a balanced gender ratio and a variety of different perspectives, including those of people with different educational levels and backgrounds. Because of the focus of this paper, the majority of our research with civilians was conducted in POC sites and therefore reflects the ethnic makeup of the sites rather than the population as a whole. However, CIVIC also conducted interviews with civilians living outside of POC sites in Juba, Bor, and Akobo. For the security and privacy of the people interviewed, CIVIC has withheld names and identifying information throughout the document.

CIVIC took steps to ensure that the information represented in this report was fully accurate at the time of its writing and publication, including by triangulating information contained in the report. However, it should be noted that information in South Sudan, particularly around returns and relocations of displaced persons, can be politicized and perceived as having links to future shifts in protection and humanitarian assistance. To mitigate bias, CIVIC carefully explained the role of our organization and our research to civilians. We also took measures to verify information provided by checking it across different types of stakeholders and through observation.

4 Of the 64 civilians CIVIC interviewed, 30 were women and 34 were men.
BACKGROUND

South Sudan gained independence from Sudan on July 9, 2011, after several decades of armed struggle. Only two years later, the country erupted into civil war. South Sudan’s president, Salva Kiir, was a long-time rival of the country’s first vice president, Riek Machar. In December 2013, the power-sharing arrangement between Kiir and Machar collapsed. The ensuing crisis, although rooted in a political power struggle, quickly devolved into violence against civilians along ethnic lines. A political agreement was signed between Kiir and Machar in 2015, but the agreement failed to resolve underlying political tensions and was poorly implemented, leading to a new outbreak of violence in 2016.

Throughout 2016 and 2017, violence spread to nearly every corner of the country. New armed opposition groups emerged, and existing armed groups fractured. All armed groups continued to target civilians. A study published in September 2018 estimated that 383,000 civilians have died as a result of the civil war, including 190,000 from violent deaths. The level and brutality of sexual violence in the conflict has also been shocking. Attacks against civilians have led to wide-scale displacement both inside and outside of the country. As of December 2018, 1.87 million people were internally displaced and another 2.2 million were living as refugees and asylum seekers in neighboring countries.

The conflict has led to the collapse of the economy, which in turn has triggered a rise in criminality. In addition, cattle-raiding and inter-communal violence between herdsmen and farmers is often responsible for thousands of deaths each year.

Throughout the conflict, UNMISS has been a key protection and security actor. The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) authorized its deployment in July 2011. Then on May 27, 2014, the UNSC adopted Resolution 2155 in recognition of the deteriorating security situation and the outbreak of civil war the previous year. Resolution 2155 shifted the focus of UNMISS’s mandate away from partnership with state authorities and placed a larger emphasis on the Mission’s role protecting civilians, monitoring human rights, and enabling the delivery of humanitarian assistance.

When civil war first broke out in 2013, thousands of civilians fled to UNMISS bases for protection. Settlements of displaced civilians in and around UN bases became formal Protection of Civilians (POC) sites. With civilians inside the sites afraid to travel outside the compound walls to fulfill even their most basic needs, humanitarian actors began delivering services inside the sites to support the POC site populations. UNMISS continues to shelter just under 200,000 civilians in five POC sites around the country—in Juba, Bentiu, Malakal, Bor, and Wațu. Protection of the sites has posed a major challenge to the peacekeeping mission. Among other resources, the sites require dedicated perimeter protection by peacekeepers and constant patrolling by UN police officers to maintain order and security within the sites. Since their creation, parties to the conflict have directly attacked the Bor and Malakal POC sites. In addition, during the July 2016 outbreak of violence in Juba, fighting took place in the immediate vicinity of

5 London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, Estimates of Crisis-Attributable Mortality in South Sudan, December 2013–April 2018, September 2018.
7 Report of the Secretary General on South Sudan (covering the period from 17 February to 3 June 2018), UN ref. no. S/2018/609, June 14, 2018.
8 The UN Security Council authorized UNMISS on July 9, 2011, through UN Security Council Resolution 1996. Two UN peacekeeping operations preceded UNMISS: The UN Mission in Sudan was deployed in northern and southern Sudan in 2005 to support the implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement. UNMISS was replaced by UNMISS in 2011.
11 For additional information on the POC sites, see: Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), Protection of Civilians Sites: Lessons from South Sudan for Future Operations, May 31, 2017; Justice Africa, Justice Displaced: Field Notes on Criminality and Insecurity in South Sudan’s UN Protection of Civilians Sites, Spring 2016; International Organization for Migration (IOM), If We Leave We are Killed: Lessons Learned from South Sudan Protection of Civilian Sites 2005–2016, 2016.
For peacekeeping missions mandated to protect civilians, mobility and reach are key capabilities.

In reality, however, the government has significantly constrained UNMISS’s freedom of movement by blocking UNMISS travel by ground and air unless they have obtained prior authorization for movement from the government—a direct violation of the SOFA agreement.

In September 2018, most government and opposition actors in the country signed a Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of Conflict in South Sudan (R-ARCSS). The agreement has brought some hope for an end to the violence in South Sudan and of an opportunity for displaced civilians who have been living for years in the deplorable conditions of refugee and internally displaced camps and POC sites to relocate or return to their former homes. However, the R-ARCSS does not address many of the underlying issues that are driving conflict and displacement in South Sudan. Moreover, analysts have warned that the timelines for implementation are unrealistic, that signatories are not always met with willingness by the military, police, and civilian personnel. In one well-publicized case, it intervened in 2017 to assist in the evacuation of humanitarian workers in a peacekeeping mission, mobility can take a number of forms. Patrolling near POC sites and in towns by the Mission’s uniformed component—often referred to as Force—can deter violence, create a sense of security for civilians, and allow civilians freedom of movement to markets and schools. Long-duration patrols range, on average, from six to nine days. When fully integrated, they include both civilian and military personnel and allow the Mission to reach areas further from their bases to collect information, investigate reported violence against civilians, engage political actors, and carry-out programming. Where roads do not allow for long-duration patrolling, Mission personnel can, at times, travel by helicopter and fixed-wing flights to reach remote communities.

Mobility can involve both the ability to rapidly deploy in response to threats against civilians and the ability of the Mission to sustain for days or weeks the presence of military and civilian personnel in an area away from permanent bases so that the Mission can address growing threats or facilitate the delivery of humanitarian assistance. UNMISS’s ability to implement its protection of civilians mandate is dependent on its ability to carry out these mobile activities, for which it requires specific equipment, resources, policies, and procedures. It also requires personnel at all levels of the Mission to have the will and motivation to adopt a proactive and flexible approach. Since he assumed the position of SRSG in South Sudan in 2017, David Shearer has demonstrated a commitment to improving the Mission’s responsiveness to threats. He has repeatedly voiced his intention to transform UNMISS into a more nimble, proactive, and robust Mission and, during a number of incidents in 2017, UNMISS took quick action to protect the content under threat. For example, in April 2017, peacekeepers deployed to Abruc, a town in Upper Nile where tens of thousands of civilians were clustered after having been displaced by a government offensive in surrounding areas. The decision to deploy peacekeepers was made quickly and in consultation with humanitarian partners over a period of days. According to stakeholders who spoke with CIVIC, the deployment facilitated the delivery of humanitarian assistance in an insecure area where humanitarian partners had little existing infrastructure. The deployment required UNMISS troops to travel to an area and sustain themselves there for several weeks without the infrastructure of a base. UNMISS also deployed rapidly on several occasions in 2017 to assist in the evacuation of humanitarian personnel. In one well-publicized case, it intervened proactively to protect children at an orphanage threatened by crossfire from a battle between government and opposition forces in Torit.

The SRSG’s ambitions to transform UNMISS are not always met with willingness by the military component to deploy to higher risk and austere locations. UNMISS officials gave specific examples where some troops resisted participating in mobile or remote deployments. Moreover, while the SRSG has reportedly instructed troops to push back against violations of the Mission’s freedom of movement by armed actors at checkpoints, some troops have been much more willing to adopt a robust posture and challenge these restrictions. The military leadership of the Mission should continuously encourage a robust posture from troops.

In addition, some Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) and Statement of Unit Requirements (SURs) negotiated between troop-contributing countries and the UN Secretariat place specific geographic restrictions on where their troops will deploy. These restrictions undermine the Mission’s ability to deploy troops where and when they are needed. Reducing such geographic caveats in MOUs could increase the flexibility of Force. Transparency between the Secretariat and Mission leadership on the content of MOUs is also important, as this enables Mission leadership to make informed decisions on deployment of military personnel. UNMISS’s administrative policies and standard operating procedures (SOPs) can also hinder the
flexible deployment of personnel. For example, travel for UNMISS civilian officials, UN country team staff, and UN military observers (UNMOs) requires security assessments and approval from the UN Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS) for each trip. Overall, UNMISS officials and humanitarians were critical of the UNDSS process for making decisions regarding staff travel. They noted that UNDSS assumes a risk-averse posture, has inadequate capacity, and needs to improve its evaluation processes. As a result, UNMISS civilian officials are often unable to travel on roads and to locations where some humanitarians operate.23

Moreover, after one UNMISS helicopter was shot down by combatants in 2012 and a second was shot down in 2014, UNMISS adopted a policy on flight safety assurances (FSAs) that requires UNMISS to receive documentation from South Sudanese authorities before air travel can be undertaken with either UNMISS military or civilian aircraft. When UNMISS is unable to secure an FSA from the government in a timely manner, a special assessment must be conducted by Mission leadership before air travel can be undertaken. The process of securing an FSA or conducting a special assessment can delay or prevent a rapid response to threats. UNMISS has adopted a similar procedure for securing documentation from government authorities for ground movements. While intended to be a form of consultation with the government to reduce instances in which movements by UNMISS officials are blocked at checkpoints, the process in reality amounts to an aversive posture.24

UNMISS officials and humanitarians were critical of the UNDSS process for making decisions regarding mobilization equipment that promotes mobility, including adequate air assets and engineering teams. Air assets, in particular, are costly and are often an early casualty of budget cuts to peacekeeping missions. However, in a country like South Sudan with few paved roads and long rainy seasons that render dirt roads impassable, air assets are vital for a proactive and nimble protection of civilians posture.25 UNMISS officials noted that as the size of UNMISS has grown and the scale of threats has increased, adequate air assets have not been deployed to match the increase in personnel and allow for flexible deployment of those personnel. Adding troops without also adding air assets means, for example, that existing air assets will increasingly be diverted from supporting protection-related operations in country to rotate troops in and out of the country on leave cycles. An UNMISS civilian official in Juba told CIVIC that as country resources were stretched to the point of having to forego some missions he viewed as strategic to mandate implementation.26

Additionally, UNMISS personnel who spoke with CIVIC felt that adjustments to specific human resources policies could improve the Mission’s ability to flexibly deploy civilian personnel.27 “Human resources is a major issue for mobility,” said one UNMISS civilian official.28 For example, civilian officials’ contracts often allow them to work in one specific location. Travel outside of that location is costly because staff are paid a daily stipend during travel. To permanently relocate a civilian official from one office to another within South Sudan, UNMISS must pay relocation costs comparable to the costs of relocating a UN official from one country to another.29 UNMISS should consider, in consultation with Secretariat officials, whether some of these policies can be revised to improve the Mission’s ability to flexibly deploy and rotate civilian staff.

In interviews with CIVIC, UNMISS officials also stressed the importance of ensuring that the Mission has equipment that promotes mobility, including adequate air assets and engineering teams. Air assets, in particular, are costly and are often an early casualty of budget cuts to peacekeeping missions. However, in a country like South Sudan with few paved roads and long rainy seasons that render dirt roads impassable, air assets are vital for a proactive and nimble protection of civilians posture.25 UNMISS officials noted that as the size of UNMISS has grown and the scale of threats has increased, adequate air assets have not been deployed to match the increase in personnel and allow for flexible deployment of those personnel. Adding troops without also adding air assets means, for example, that existing air assets will increasingly be diverted from supporting protection-related operations in country to rotate troops in and out of the country on leave cycles. An UNMISS civilian official in Juba told CIVIC that air assets were stretched to the point of having to forego some missions he viewed as strategic to mandate implementation.26

Since he assumed the position of SRSG in South Sudan in 2017, David Shearer has demonstrated a commitment to improving the Mission’s responsiveness to threats.

21 CIVIC interview with UNMISS civilian official, #2, Juba, April 2018; CIVIC interview with humanitarian actor, #91, Juba, April 2018.
22 CIVIC interview with UNMISS civilian official, #20, Juba, April 2018; CIVIC interview with humanitarian actor, #100, Juba, November 2018.
23 CIVIC interview with UNMISS civilian official, #536, Bentiu, April 2018.
24 CIVIC interview with UNMISS civilian official, #97, Juba, November 2018.
25 CIVIC interview with UNMISS civilian official, #97, Juba, November 2018.
26 CIVIC interview with UNMISS civilian official, #536, Bentiu, April 2018.
27 CIVIC interview with UNMISS civilian official, #97, Juba, November 2018.
28 CIVIC interview with UNMISS civilian official, #89, Juba, May 2018.
29 CIVIC interview with UNMISS civilian official, #89, Juba, May 2018.

In Bor, an UNMISS official demonstrated this dilemma when he said, “Without air assets, we can’t access the field as much as we want. We are limited...we have to make hard choices between going to meet a governor or investigate an incident.”

Stakeholders also stressed to CIVIC the importance of community engagement and decentralized early warning systems for early and proactive response to threats. As a civil society leader noted, “Mobility will never succeed if they don’t have early warning.” His recommendation was for the Mission to “establish more warning signs of crisis emerge.” FIOCs also play a role that these meetings promote early response as emerging threats, and the SRSG has tried to ensure as decision-making forums for action in response to other high-level meetings held in Juba can also serve action through weekly or bi-weekly early warning networks, and make recommendations on Mission action through weekly or bi-weekly early warning meetings in Juba. Daily briefings for the SRSG and other high-level meetings held in Juba can also serve as decision-making forums for action in response to emerging threats, and the SRSG has tried to ensure that these meetings promote early response as warning signs of crisis emerge. FIOCs also play a role in coordinating response to reported threats at the field level by facilitating meetings where all Mission personnel can present requests for patrolling and use of air assets.

While FIOCs have improved situational awareness, many stakeholders asserted that additional language assistants and translation capacity in field locations would allow field-based military and civilian officials to better engage local populations, collect information, and understand emerging threats. Additional language assistants could be recruited as part of the civilian component of the Mission or the Secretariat could hire with troop-contributing countries and advocate for their deployment as part of military contingents.

There are other peacekeeping missions that rely heavily on civil affairs staff and community liaison assistants (CLAs) to develop field-based alert networks through community engagement. However, unlike these other missions, UNMISS does not have an extensive network of field-based CLAs deployed alongside uniformed personnel in remote locations. Moreover, UNMISS CLAs are managed by heads of field offices rather than the Civil Affairs Division, and they are also graded as general service staff rather than national professional officers. UNMISS personnel also stressed to CIVIC that the absence of female language assistants and CLAs makes it difficult for them to adequately engage women in South Sudan and understand their unique protection threats. Revising the management structure of CLAs and hiring additional CLAs with an emphasis on ensuring greater gender balance could allow UNMISS to improve its early warning capabilities.

Finally, UNMISS officials who spoke with CIVIC highlighted the importance of having staff in Juba who are capable of surging out to field locations. These officials gave the example of the Force Commander’s high-readiness reserve battalion, which has been deployed on short notice to reinforce the strength of troops in field locations during periods of increasing threat or need. UNMISS personnel also praised a field inspection, which facilitated access to key informants, and helped to identify potential threats.

Member States, the UN Security Council, and the Secretary-General should work with UNMISS to counteract the access constraints that undermine rapid response to threats.

In January 2019, UNMISS police officers provided an escort for students from a Juba PoC site to provide protection for them while leaving the site to take their secondary school certification examination.

January 15, 2019 | UNMISS Photo

In January 2019, UNMISS police officers provided an escort for students from a Juba PoC site to provide protection for them while leaving the site to take their secondary school certification examination.
restructuring of the Human Rights Division (HRD) in 2018 that led to the creation of a Rapid Investigation Team. The team can deploy from Juba to field locations to investigate serious human rights violations and support field-based HRD staff. This surge model may be particularly important for smaller civilian components of the UN, because UNMISS’s Rule of Law team are few in number, they might struggle to perform effectively if spread across field locations. To address this, they have adopted a surge-like model. They are currently based in Juba and deploy to field locations to conduct assessments and support mobile court proceedings.

UNMISS personnel told CIVIC that conversations have been underway regarding the creation of a civilian team or roster dedicated to rapid deployment in order to develop broader capacity for the quick deployment of the Mission’s civilian staff. Such a step could improve UNMISS’s ability to mount a nimble response to growing threats. Developing a rapidly deployable civilian team within UNMISS might require preparing special kits with UNMISS access where and when violence is being perpetrated against civilians. Speaking about access constraints, one UNMISS official said, “I am hopeful that this peace agreement will stop the SOFA violations and allow us to increase our reach, because I don’t see resistance from the Mission.” Member States, the UN Security Council, and the Secretary-General should work with UNMISS to counteract the access constraints that undermine rapid response to threats. If the peace process gains steam, UNMISS could face fewer access issues. However, given the limitations to UNMISS’s freedom of movement, decisions on UNMISS’s static presence and where it positions its bases will continue to be important.

UNMISS, Member States, and the Secretariat could improve the mobility of the Mission by adjusting some of the MOUs and policies that delay rapid response to threats by civilian and military personnel and by ensuring that UNMISS has appropriate equipment. However, UNMISS officials acknowledged to CIVIC that one additional and major factor preventing a timely response to threats is access restrictions imposed by parties to the conflict, including the government of South Sudan. While UNMISS maintains freedom of movement for regular patrolling and programmatic activities, armed actors often strategically block UNMISS access where and when violence is being perpetrated against civilians. Speaking about access constraints, one UNMISS official said, “I am hopeful that this peace agreement will stop the SOFA violations and allow us to increase our reach, because I don’t see resistance from the Mission.”

UNMISS’s Rule of Law processes, have contributed to high levels of sexual and gender-based violence in the sites. UNMISS also mandates a significant demand of its personnel and resources to protecting the POC sites, and Mission personnel have begun to argue that these resources would be more effective if shifted from static protection to mobile protection through patrolling and other activities. In the case of the Bor POC site, UNMISS has calculated that it spends $12 million per year to provide security for fewer than 2,000 civilians sheltered in the site. Security risk assessments conducted recently by the Mission have...
POC sites can be a harmful environment for civilians, particularly children, due to the lack of space, poor living conditions, and limited educational opportunities.

led them to conclude that potential immediate threats to civilians in Bor do not pose a significant danger and that, therefore, the amount of resources being used to support the POC site cannot be justified. Speaking about vulnerable civilians outside of the POC sites, one UNMISS civilian official said, "They are invisible to us because we are focused on the POC site population." UNMISS's calculation that resources should be shifted from static POC site protection to patrolling is partly founded on the belief that civilians continue to live in the POC sites primarily for easy access to the services provided by humanitarian actors rather than for security reasons. This belief is held by many Mission officials. As one UNMISS official said, "the threat that warranted the creation of POC sites, you can't say it is still there." These officials believe that if services currently being delivered inside the sites were shifted to areas outside, POC site residents would begin to leave in larger numbers. UNMISS officials also point out that elected leaders in the POC sites often benefit socially and economically from their leadership role and, alongside some traditional community leaders and former political figures, discourage communities from leaving the sites. Humanitarians also acknowledge that these complex political and social dynamics exist in the POC sites. While the immediate threat of violence against civilians in urban areas where many of the POC sites are located may have significantly decreased since the outbreak of conflict in 2013 and the resurgence of violence in 2016, CIVIC's research with civilians in POC sites in Bentiu, Bor, and Juba indicates that many of the civilians interviewed remain in the POC sites primarily because of security concerns.

Mobile deployments can be costly, while static protection can, in some cases, do more to protect civilians than short-term presence.

UNMISS conducted robust road patrols to Nhialdui in December 2018. The intensification of road patrols followed shocking incidents of rape and sexual assault, reported in the area in November. The patrol convoys comprised officials from the UNMISS Human Rights and Civil Affairs Divisions, and United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS). December 7, 2018 UN Photo / Isaac Bily

48 CIVIC interview with UNMISS civilian official #9, Juba, November 2018; CIVIC interview with UNMISS civilian official, #56, Juba, December 2018; E-mail correspondence with UNMISS civilian official, on file with CIVIC, February 2018.
49 CIVIC interview with UNMISS civilian official, #99, Juba, November 2018.
50 CIVIC interview with UNMISS civilian official, #73, Bor, May 2018; CIVIC interview with UNMISS civilian official, #99, Juba, November 2018; CIVIC interview with UNMISS civilian official, #103, Juba, November 2018; CIVIC interview with UNMISS civilian official, #155, Juba, December 2018; CIVIC interview with civil society leader, #153, Juba, December 2018; CIVIC interview with UNMISS civilian official, #149, Juba, December 2018; CIVIC interview with UNMISS civilian official, #155, Juba, December 2018.
51 CIVIC interview with UNMISS civilian official, #103, Juba, November 2018.
Why are Civilians Deciding to Stay in the POC Sites?

The composition of civilians in each POC site is different, as are their vulnerabilities and the surrounding conflict dynamics. CIVIC interviewed civilians in the Juba, Bor, and Bentiu POC sites in conversations with CIVIC POC site residents in Bor and Juba acknowledged that there has been a gradual improvement in the security situation since 2016, and particularly since the signing of the R-ARCSS.14 “We can breathe a little bit this time, [more] than we were,” said one man.15 As the security situation has improved, more civilians have begun venturing out of POC sites for short periods of time to go to markets, collect firewood, and attend school. However, this increase in civilian movement in and out of the POC sites has also coincided with a significant reduction in the food rations available to civilians in the sites. Many civilians therefore do not view short-term travel in and out of the POC sites as a choice, but as something that they do to provide their families with basic supplies.16

Many civilians who spoke with CIVIC felt they were still taking significant risks when traveling to and from the sites. When outside, they take precautions such as traveling in groups, moving during the day, and consulting with neighbors inside and outside the POC site to verify the safety of information on security before leaving. “Sometimes we just force ourselves to go outside, but we are not happy. We are scared,” said one woman in the Bentiu site.17 A mother living in one of Juba’s POC sites referred to the camp as a prison and explained, “I don’t go to the market and you have children, it is very difficult. You rather sacrifice yourself with what situation you may encounter instead of waiting until your kids die…I normally go to the market, but it’s not because I love to go outside. I have no choice.” Similarly, a man living in the Juba POC sites told CIVIC, “As I am a man, I can decide not to go. But for a mother watching her child cry, she will decide to go.”18 A woman who witnessed her husband’s execution before fleeing to a Juba POC site in 2013 broke into tears as she described to CIVIC how she constantly checks around and behind her when she leaves the site to go to the market because she is fearful.19

Given the diversity of individuals sheltered in the sites and the complex factors they take into account when making decisions about their future, there is no single reason civilians continue to remain in POC sites. However, the majority of the civilians who CIVIC interviewed continue to cite immediate and longer-term security concerns as their primary reason for living in the POC sites. These concerns include having their property stolen or destroyed, as well as having relatives abducted, sexually assaulted, or killed if they were to permanently leave the POC sites.20 A man living in the Bentiu POC site explained, “If one could walk on the roads without being attacked or if one could go establish his own home without being attacked, we wouldn’t stay here.” A second man living in the Bentiu site echoed these concerns, saying, “If the government was not killing us, there should be no reason for us to stay here. It is not new for soldiers to fight, but if soldiers could leave civilians alone, then civilians could be free.”21

Displaced Nation: The Dangerous Implications of Rushed Returns in South Sudan

Civilians in South Sudan have experienced multiple and unpredictable cycles of conflict. Periods of relative calm and the revitalized peace process have inspired hope among many people, but they remain skeptical that the calm will last and that the peace agreement will be implemented.22 “So the time people say there will be peace. They go to Arolo [Abi], to Jimmy years ago they were telling people there will be peace, we are now telling peace, they are back to Jimmy.72 A second man who has been living in the POC sites for many years observed, “It is not new for soldiers to fight, but if soldiers could leave civilians alone, then civilians could be free.”23

Given the perspectives and fears of civilians in the POC sites, UNMISS may struggle to maintain the trust of rival militias, disarmament, and reconciliation between rival political and ethnic groups.24 These expectations demonstrate the importance of the work UNMISS’s civilian sections are doing to promote implementation of national and local peace agreements and to resolve tensions between communities. Given the perspectives and fears of civilians in the POC sites, UNMISS may struggle to move away from static protection at the POC sites as quickly as Mission leadership would like.
Because of the standing history of violence, it is going to take a while for all South Sudanese to believe that what is in the works [on peace] is sustainable. It is going to take more evidence.

–South Sudanese civil society leader

61 CIVIC interview with civilian, #41 Bentiu POC site, April 2018
62 CIVIC interview with civilian, #41 Bentiu POC site, April 2018; CIVIC interview with civilian, #42 Bentiu POC site, April 2018; CIVIC interview with civilian, #43 Bentiu POC site, April 2018; CIVIC interview with civilian, #44 Bentiu POC site, April 2018; CIVIC interview with civilian, #51 Bentiu POC site, April 2018; CIVIC interview with civilian, #52 Bentiu POC site, April 2018; CIVIC interview with civilian, #53 Bentiu POC site, April 2018; CIVIC interview with civilian, #56, Juba POC site, April 2018; CIVIC interview with civilian, #57, Juba POC site, April 2018; CIVIC interview with national NGO official, #478, Ben May 2018; CIVIC interview with civilian, #91, Ben POC site, May 2018; CIVIC interview with civilian, #158, Juba POCI site, November 2018; CIVIC interview with civilian, #161, Juba POCI site, November 2018; CIVIC interview with civilian, #165, Juba POCI site, November 2018.
63 CIVIC interview with civilian, #42 Juba POC site, April 2018.
64 CIVIC interview with civil society leader, #139, Juba, December 2018.
65 CIVIC interview with civilian, #42 Bentiu POC site, April 2018; CIVIC interview with civilian, #43 Bentiu POC site, April 2018; CIVIC interview with civilian, #48 Bentiu POC site, April 2018; CIVIC interview with civilian, #53, Bentiu POC site, April 2018; CIVIC interview with civilian, #56, Juba POC site, April 2018; CIVIC interview with national NGO official, #478, Ben May 2018; CIVIC interview with civilian, #91, Ben POC site, May 2018; CIVIC interview with civilian, #158, Juba POCI site, November 2018; CIVIC interview with civilian, #161, Juba POCI site, November 2018; CIVIC interview with civilian, #165, Juba POCI site, November 2018.
66 CIVIC interview with civilian, #48 Bentiu POC site, April 2018; CIVIC interview with civilian, #49, Bentiu POC site, April 2018; CIVIC interview with civilian, #50, Bentiu POC site, April 2018; CIVIC interview with civilian, #51, Bentiu POC site, April 2018; CIVIC interview with civilian, #52, Juba POC site, April 2018; CIVIC interview with civilian, #53, Bentiu POC site, April 2018; CIVIC interview with civilian, #56, Juba POC site, November 2018; CIVIC interview with civilian, #57, Juba POC site, November 2018; CIVIC interview with civilian, #60, Juba POC site, November 2018; CIVIC interview with civilian, #61, Juba POC site, November 2018; CIVIC interview with civilian, #62, Juba POC site, November 2018; CIVIC interview with civilian, #63, Juba POC site, November 2018; CIVIC interview with civilian, #64, Juba POC site, November 2018; CIVIC interview with civilian, #65, Juba POC site, November 2018; CIVIC interview with civilian, #66, Juba POC site, November 2018; CIVIC interview with civilian, #67, Juba POC site, November 2018; CIVIC interview with civilian, #68, Juba POC site, November 2018; CIVIC interview with civilian, #69, Juba POC site, November 2018; CIVIC interview with civilian, #70, Juba POC site, November 2018; CIVIC interview with civilian, #71, Juba POC site, November 2018; CIVIC interview with civilian, #72, Juba POC site, November 2018; CIVIC interview with civilian, #73, Juba POC site, November 2018; CIVIC interview with civilian, #74, Juba

Humanitarian actors in South Sudan expressed a range of opinions on the POC sites and the relative importance of continued protection at the sites versus a more mobile approach to peacekeeping in South Sudan. In principle, humanitarians agreed that all protection actors should be working toward identifying and implementing more durable solutions for civilians in the sites. They also agreed that a component of encouraging returns would be building the level of services available outside of the sites. However, because delivering humanitarian assistance in the POC sites where civilians are concentrated is often less expensive than delivering assistance in remote areas of the country, it therefore appears more efficient to donors. UNMISS officials and humanitarian actors who spoke with CIVIC agreed that, as a first step, there is a need to sensitize donors to the shifts in funding required for an increase in service delivery outside of the sites.25 UNMISS officials also advocated for planning to support civilians returning from neighboring countries to South Sudan in order to prevent them from moving to the POC sites and expanding the POC site population.26

However, conflict analysts, humanitarian actors, and civil society leaders all expressed concerns that the conflict situation is extremely volatile in the wake of the R-ARCSS signing and that there is potential for localized or large-scale violence to resume over the coming months and years.27 We have a political deal that is not addressing the main issues in the country, and no one can predict how that is going to impact communities on the ground,” said one humanitarian actor.28 A second humanitarian added, “Problems aren’t going away just because they signed a paper in Khartoum, and a lot of it is actually triggering instability.”29 Humanitarians also noted that, while important in some contexts, patrols have real limitations on the protection they can provide to civilians. “POC sites give you less geographic coverage but more genuine protection,” one humanitarian actor told CIVIC. He added, “There is no clear indication of how effective patrolling is at improving protection on the ground.”30 According to a second humanitarian, perpetrators of violence “always know when these UNMISS people are going for patrols and they hide. Then, when [UNMISS] goes back, they come out.”31 Despite their concerns, humanitarians did recognize that an increase in patrols could be important if Force is used to facilitate work by civilian sections of the Mission, such as human rights investigations and political engagement.

In interviews with CIVIC, UNMISS officials acknowledged that patrols would be a more effective protection tool if they were more closely linked to analysis of protection threats and needs.32 Speaking about joint patrolling by military and civilian components of the Mission, one UNMISS civilian official said, “Joint integrated patrols are a waste of time if they are not conducted in order. There aren’t any reasonable for going there and if the

69 CIVIC interview with humanitarian actor, #7, Juba, April 2018; CIVIC interview with UNMISS civilian official, #28, Beno, April 2018; CIVIC interview with humanitarian actor, #17, Juba, April 2018; CIVIC interview with UNMISS Civilian official, #67, Juba, April 2018; CIVIC interview with humanitarian actor, #102, Juba, November 2018; CIVIC interview with UNMISS Civilian official, #103, Juba, November 2018.
70 E-mail correspondence with UNMISS civilian official, on file with CIVIC, February 2018; CIVIC interview with UNMISS civilian official, #94, Juba, December 2018.
71 CIVIC interview with humanitarian actor, #96, Juba, April 2018; CIVIC interview with humanitarian actor, #96, Juba, November 2018; CIVIC interview with humanitarian actor, #97, Juba, November 2018; CIVIC interview with humanitarian actor, #102, Juba, November 2018; CIVIC interview with humanitarian actor, #103, Juba, November 2018; CIVIC interview with humanitarian actor, #104, Juba, December 2018; CIVIC interview with humanitarian actor, #152, Juba, December 2018; CIVIC interview with civil society leader, #93, Juba, December 2018.
72 CIVIC interview with humanitarian actor, #105, Juba, November 2018.
73 CIVIC interview with humanitarian actor, #151, Juba, December 2018; CIVIC interview with humanitarian actor, #152, Juba, December 2018; CIVIC interview with humanitarian actor, #153, Juba, December 2018.
74 CIVIC interview with humanitarian actor, #154, Juba, December 2018.
75 CIVIC interview with humanitarian actor, #155, Juba, December 2018.
76 CIVIC interview with humanitarian actor, #156, Juba, December 2018.
77 CIVIC interview with humanitarian actor, #157, Juba, December 2018.
78 CIVIC interview with humanitarian actor, #158, Juba, December 2018.
79 CIVIC interview with humanitarian actor, #159, Juba, December 2018.
80 CIVIC interview with humanitarian actor, #160, Juba, December 2018.
81 CIVIC interview with humanitarian actor, #161, Juba, December 2018.
head of the patrol has no idea why they are going.” 79

To address this issue, UNMISS officials have developed a plan for “effects-based patrolling,” which seeks to build a link between specific reported threats and a patrol response. Improving data collection on the location and timing of patrols could allow UNMISS to better assess the effectiveness of its patrolling and adjust its patrols appropriately.80 According to UNMISS officials, buy-in from the military leadership of the Mission is needed to fully implement, and troops need instruction and guidance to understand its value.

Given the shifting conflict dynamics, several UNMISS officials also acknowledged that UNMISS needs to formulate a more concrete plan for how troops currently employed in state protection of the POC sites will contribute to improved protection for women, men, girls, and boys outside of the sites. Speaking about the challenge the Mission faced in trying to prevent and respond to conflict-related sexual violence as civilians leave the sites, an UNMISS military official told CIVIC, “We haven’t put a bit of thought into what those protection tasks look like in a dispersed population, and the effect on women and children could be problematic.” An UNMISS civilian official stressed the need for UNMISS to negotiate greater access from the government before or as a condition to relocating civilians outside the POC sites. “Otherwise,” he stated, “I don’t see how you will have confidence to not have the POC sites.”

While some humanitarian actors are wary of closer collaboration with UNMISS because they fear it compromises humanitarian principles, other humanitarian actors who spoke with CIVIC advocated for closer coordination between the two groups during planning in order to ensure that patrols address civilian protection threats. In Bentiu, humanitarian and UNMISS officials launched a Bentiu Response plan as one attempt to coordinate a surge in patrolling with increased delivery of humanitarian presence and assistance outside of the POC sites. Although ongoing cycles of conflict in Bentiu have continually undercut the full success of the approach, it is a model that might be effective in other contexts.81 Because UNMISS patrol planning primarily takes place at the sector and field office levels, stakeholders speaking with CIVIC agreed that consultation between humanitarians and Mission officials on the location and timing of patrols is most effective if the coordination takes place in field locations.82 Moreover, as more civilians volunteered to leave the POC sites—and if humanitarian services currently delivered inside the sites gradually shift outside—UNMISS and humanitarians should be mindful of how this will affect inter-communal tensions and protection threats to civilians. They should discuss whether any changes or additional coordination is warranted to ensure UNMISS responds effectively to these threats.

Beyond an improvement in the effectiveness of patrolling, both UNMISS and humanitarian actors agreed that housing, land, and property (HLP) issues will be one of the largest hurdles preventing safe returns. It will be a challenge because much of the land and property previously occupied by POC site residents is currently occupied by other communities. Moreover, there is some evidence that the government has tried to manipulate population movements, returns, and relocations for political benefit in what some have termed ethnic redistribution. Even where the government is not actively attempting to manipulate population movements, assisted population movements could unintentionally support ethnic redistribution.83 A number of UNMISS and humanitarian actors spoke with CIVIC that, in the short term, they would feel unsafe returning to live in urban areas controlled by soldiers who have actively targeted them with violence and where they would be living alongside rival ethnic groups. These civilians expressed greater willingness to be relocated to ethnically homogeneous areas where earlier generations of their families came from.84

Strong coordination between humanitarians and UNMISS actors will be needed in both the capital and field locations in order to plan for safe relocations of displaced persons and avoid contributing to ethnic redistribution. As one UNMISS official observed, “Moving out of the POC sites, the whole UN system has to work together. So, unless the UN system collectively has figured out a way to address the complexity, it will be a mess.”85 As an initial step, the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT)-UNMISS task force has developed principles of engagement and an operational guidance note on returns and relocations of displaced people in South Sudan.

Currently, a number of different forums exist in which humanitarians and peacekeepers are discussing population relocations and the future of the POC sites. However, there is a lack of clarity on where decisions should be made, and key organizations are sometimes sidelined from decision-making forums if and when they oppose relocations on protection grounds.86 In interviews with CIVIC, stakeholders also agreed that more data on civilian intentions and movements is needed to support possible solutions.87 Both UNMISS and humanitarian actors have recently increased their efforts to collect information on the intentions of displaced civilians and threats to civilians in different areas of the country.88 However, collecting information on returns and relocations is a sensitive issue, and stakeholders in South Sudan may need to coordinate and clarify what questions are relevant and how they should be framed to increase the quality of data that is collected. As demonstrated in the text box, “Why are Civilians Deciding to Stay in the POC Sites?”, the conflict environment around each POC site is different, as are the vulnerabilities of its inhabitants. Durable solutions for civilians in each site need to be conflict-sensitive and informed by data to ensure they are voluntary and safe.

While UNMISS officials often frame their options as a trade-off between providing protection at POC sites and more nimble and mobile protection outside of the sites, no amount of patrolling or improvement to patrolling is likely to encourage returns if civilians do not see concrete indications that the revitalized peace agreement is being implemented. Improved patrolling is one piece of security, but a key is the work of UNMISS’s Political Affairs and Civil Affairs sections, which supports national implementation of the R-ARCSS and local-level demobilization and social cohesion. However, while UNMISS can seek to influence and support these processes, it is ultimately the will of South Sudan’s politicians and leaders to implement the R-ARCSS that will have the greatest impact on the security environment and the prospects for safe returns and relocations.

83  CIVIC interview with humanitarian actor, #9, Juba, April 2018; CIVIC interview with UNMISS civilian official, #37, Juba, November 2018.
84  CIVIC interview with humanitarian actor, #96, Juba, November 2018; CIVIC interview with UNMISS civilian official, #103, Juba, November 2018; CIVIC interview with humanitarian actor, #157, Juba, December 2018.
85  CIVIC interview with humanitarian actor, #7, Juba, April 2018; CIVIC interview with humanitarian actor, #12, Juba, December 2018.
24
25

“Problems aren’t going away just because they signed a paper in Khartoum, and a lot of it is actually triggering instability.”

—Humanitarian actor
DETERMINING MISSION FOOTPRINT

“If you are opening a base, it cannot be military alone. It will not get you anywhere. …If we are able to be present in some of the areas with appropriate staffing, we can really make a difference.”

A nimble approach to peacekeeping requires that the Mission have a footprint of bases that can facilitate its reach and a timely response to protection threats. Having a base in a region of community can give the Mission a foothold from which it can more easily engage political and community stakeholders, develop situational awareness of threats, conduct patrols, deploy rapidly to stop violence against civilians, investigate human rights abuses, and contribute to the reduction of inter-communal tensions. However, establishing a full base requires a significant investment in infrastructure and is therefore expensive and time consuming. Mission officials estimate, for example, that a full operating base takes two to five years to build and costs millions of dollars.

For years, UNMISS has maintained a forward operating base in Leer. In 2018, SRSG Shearer attempted to expand the Mission’s reach by establishing similar bases across the country. Supplementing the Mission’s permanent bases, these austere operating bases (AOBs) vary in their size and the degree to which their infrastructure is developed. But, as their name indicates, they usually involve limited investment in permanent infrastructure and make use of basic facilities. The perimeters of some AOBs are marked by barbed wire rather than walls or berms, and peacekeepers deployed there often sleep in tents without regular or consistent access to running water and electricity. Because their facilities are basic, they can be established and closed more quickly than permanent bases, which allows UNMISS to deploy more flexibly and nimply to hotspots and adapt to shifting conflict dynamics.

Stakeholders who spoke with CIVIC expressed different views on whether increasing the number of AOBs is a good method of increasing the Mission’s reach and ability to protect civilians. Some UNMISS officials noted that AOBs give UNMISS greater situational awareness in remote areas of the country, an ability to better predict and plan for outbreaks of violence, and a closer proximity to violence, all of which facilitate Mission response. According to a survey of some humanitarian actors, the deployment of the UNMISS base to Leer in 2015 made the environment safer for humanitarians to also deploy and work there. UNMISS officials and some humanitarian actors spoke highly of the Mission’s decision to open an austere base and gradually expand their presence in Yei. Yei is in an area that has been heavily affected by violence and depopulated, but also contains some of the country’s best farmland at a time of widespread food insecurity.

Other UNMISS officials were concerned that AOBs would spread the Mission’s resources too thin to have any substantial impact. Once established, protecting and sustaining a base can consume one third to one half of the troops deployed to the base. In addition, because they are often in remote areas and have little infrastructure, everything has to be supplied to the outposts by plane and helicopter. Once opened, AOBs can also become difficult to close in an environment of increasing threats, and they are expensive to maintain over time. Some peacekeepers therefore argued to CIVIC that AOBs use too many resources, end up using the majority of their resources just to sustain their presence, only allow the Mission to...
increase their reach in a small radius around the base, and fall short of the type of nimble approach that could have a real impact. 98 For example, one UNMISS official exclaimed, “With a base, we just have a three-kilometer locus around there. What good is that? How strategic is that?” 99 Rather than AOBs, the official argued in favor of short-term mobile deployments like the 2017 deployment to Aburoc that was discussed in the Overcoming Barriers to Mobility section of this report. The Aburoc deployment required troops to travel to a remote area and sustain themselves there for several weeks without the infrastructure of an AOB.

Learning Lessons from the Austere Operating Base in Akobo

CIVIC spoke with UNMISS officials in Bor and Juba in April and November 2018 to gauge their expectations of how the Akobo AOB would contribute to the successful implementation of UNMISS’s mandate. Between November and December of 2018, CIVIC also undertook a research trip to Akobo to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the AOB and document lessons on how AOBs can best contribute to protection of civilians. UNMISS officials in Juba and Bor described a number of different goals and expectations for the Akobo AOB, including that the base would contribute to protection of civilians, facilitate the delivery of humanitarian assistance in the area, and improve UNMISS’s situational awareness. Because the base is one of the only UNMISS outposts in opposition-controlled territory, they also hoped it would allow for political engagement with opposition actors and therefore contribute to the Mission’s efforts to maintain neutrality.

Civilians interviewed in Akobo told CIVIC that they appreciate UNMISS’s presence in their community. However, most felt that UNMISS primarily contributes to protection by serving as a potential witness to violations of the ceasefire agreement, as well as to violations of humanitarian and human rights law that could occur if the government were to launch offensives in the region. 100 “It is good for UNMISS to be in Akobo to monitor the peace and give the executive report to the world,” said one local administrator. 101 Civilians also praised more concrete community projects carried out by the peacekeepers, including UNMISS’s installation of lights along major road routes, which civilians felt deterred criminal activity.102 However, civilians reported that they still rely primarily on ethnically based militias for their protection. They did not credit UNMISS’s patrols and presence in the town with contributing to security. Moreover, local authorities had no expectation or desire for UNMISS to increase patrolling or replace local militias.103

Most humanitarian actors interviewed by CIVIC in Akobo felt that the Mission’s presence there had a limited impact on their ability to deliver humanitarian assistance in the area. The majority of humanitarian organizations who spoke with CIVIC in Akobo were operating there before the construction of the AOB and have not adjusted their plans or activities because of the Mission’s presence.104 Moreover, humanitarians reported that one NGO requested assistance from UNMISS on two occasions when their compound in Akobo was being robbed, but did not receive any support.105 However, humanitarian actors in the town did express appreciation for the protection UNMISS soldiers provided at the airstrip as humanitarian planes land and depart.106

UNMISS’s top official, Special Representative of the Secretary-General David Shearer visited Akobo in January 2019. Akobo is the location of one of UNMISS’s austere operating bases, opened in 2018. Akobo has been the site of both spontaneous and planned returns and relocations for displaced civilians. January 24, 2019 UNMISS Photo

100 CIVIC interview with local administrator, #113, Akobo, December 2018; CIVIC interview with local administrator, #114, Akobo, December 2018.
101 CIVIC interview with humanitarian actor, #135, Akobo, December 2018; CIVIC interview with humanitarian actor, #136, Akobo, December 2018.
102 CIVIC interview with humanitarian actor, #134, Akobo, December 2018; CIVIC interview with humanitarian actor, #133, Akobo, December 2018.
103 CIVIC interview with humanitarian actor, #135, Akobo, December 2018; CIVIC interview with humanitarian actor, #136, Akobo, December 2018.
104 CIVIC interview with humanitarian actor, #120, Akobo, December 2018; CIVIC interview with humanitarian actor, #121, Akobo, December 2018.
105 CIVIC interview with humanitarian actor, #122, Akobo, December 2018; CIVIC interview with humanitarian actor, #123, Akobo, December 2018.
106 CIVIC interview with humanitarian actor, #124, Akobo, December 2018; CIVIC interview with humanitarian actor, #125, Akobo, December 2018.
The impact of UNMISS’s presence in Akobo has been limited by the size and structure of the deployment. When the Akobo AOB was first opened, the Indian Battalion based in Bor only deployed troops to the AOB for two to three days each week. Their presence on the ground was later expanded to five days per week and eventually to seven days per week. Overall, the base hosts only 30–40 troops at any one time, with no permanent presence of civilian Mission personnel. While troops now have a full-time presence in Akobo, the actual soldiers deployed to the base are rotated every week to alternate which troops spend time in the AOB’s more difficult living conditions. Because of this rotation, however, civilian actors noted that it is difficult to establish regular or sustained engagement, coordination, or planning with the peacekeepers.

Moreover, a major limitation for the troops deployed to the base is that they do not have any UNMISS language assistants or community liaison assistants to help them communicate and engage with community stakeholders.

Despite these drawbacks, the AOB has facilitated the temporary deployment of UNMISS civilian personnel and UN military observers to Akobo for short intervals to carry out activities. UNMISS officials reported that the base did improve their situational awareness, contribute to the Mission’s neutrality, and allow for the head of UNMISS’s regional field office—located in Bor—to undertake important political engagement with opposition actors.116 As one UNMISS civilian official summarized, “We need to project an impartial posture and understand what is going on on both sides of the divide. We do have better situational awareness.”

While appreciative of the Mission’s efforts to expand their presence,117 humanitarian actors voiced concerns to CIVIC that the establishment of AOBs creates expectations among civilians that the peacekeeping mission cannot meet. Such expectations could disrupt existing civilian self-protection and coping mechanisms.118 For example, when there is no UNMISS presence in an area, civilians often flee at the first sight of violence to more remote areas inside South Sudan or across international borders. When there is an UNMISS base nearby, civilians sometimes choose to flee to the base instead, assuming they will be protected by peacekeepers there. However, peacekeepers may not have the capacity to protect civilians from large-scale violence, particularly if they are posted in small numbers to an AOB. CIVIC found this to be a serious concern in Akobo, where many civilians voiced their intentions to flee to the AOB if the town were attacked.119 UNMISS officials have stated that they would be unable to protect or shelter civilians at the AOB in the event of a large crisis. Concerns about such a scenario are warranted, given that, at the start of the civil war in 2013, civilians in Akobo fled to the previous UNMISS base there, and several dozen civilians were killed when a militia overran the base.120 Such concerns do not mean that UNMISS should forego opening an AOB. However, it may be valuable for UNMISS and humanitarian actors to discuss and anticipate the potential negative impacts of an AOB so that they can take steps to mitigate them.

According to stakeholders, AOBs can be more effective if they include deployments of appropriate equipment and enough personnel to allow them to project out on short and long-duration patrols. Many stakeholders also stressed the need for AOBs to have a permanent or regular presence of UNMISS personnel who can engage communities, such as UN military observers, Civil Affairs personnel, language assistants, and community liaison assistants.121 The military will rarely get out of their APCs; their capacity if you put civilian [personnel] there, you will be able to reach the community,” said one UNMISS civilian official. “If we are able to be present in some of the areas with appropriate staffing, we can really make a difference.”122 A second peacekeeper agreed, saying, “These bases can be useful, but only if they are doing it in an effective way: communicating to communities, speaking with humanitarians, and showing a real presence.”

Finally, UNMISS officials recognized the importance of establishing strong systems for decision-making and planning around AOBs and the larger Mission footprint by linking planning on the Mission’s footprint with short-, medium-, and long-term analysis of threats; ensuring that military and civilian UNMISS officials are part of the planning process; determining what type of presence in the region would best match these threats; and balancing the type of deployment and staff to this analysis.123 An UNMISS military official summarized this process to CIVIC, stating, “The intention of Mission leadership needs to be clear on what we want from this [deployment] and for what length of time.”124

107 CIVIC interview with humanitarian actor, #2, Juba, November 2018; CIVIC interview with humanitarian actor, #31, Bentiu, December 2018; CIVIC interview with humanitarian actor, #122, Akobo, December 2018; CIVIC interview with humanitarian actor, #38, Akobo, December 2018.

108 CIVIC interview with UNMISS military official, #44, Juba, April 2018; CIVIC interview with UNMISS civilian official, #73, Bor, May 2018; CIVIC interview with UNMISS civilian official, #74, Bor, May 2018; CIVIC interview with UNMISS civilian official, #75, Bor, May 2018.

109 CIVIC interview with UNMISS civilian official, #73, Bor, May 2018.

110 CIVIC interview with humanitarian actor, #7, Juba, April 2018; CIVIC interview with humanitarian actor, #19, Juba, April 2018; CIVIC interview with humanitarian actor, #85, Juba, April 2018; CIVIC interview with humanitarian actor, #32, Bentiu, April 2018; CIVIC interview with humanitarian actor, #46, Bentiu, April 2018.

111 CIVIC interview with civilian, #112, Akobo, December 2018; CIVIC interview with local official, #113, Akobo, December 2018; CIVIC interview with civilian, #114, Akobo, December 2018; CIVIC interview with civilian, #115, Akobo, December 2018; CIVIC interview with humanitarian actor, #134, Akobo, December 2018; CIVIC interview with humanitarian actor, #135, Akobo, December 2018.

112 CIVIC interview with civilian, #112, Akobo, December 2018; CIVIC interview with local official, #113, Akobo, December 2018; CIVIC interview with civilian, #114, Akobo, December 2018; CIVIC interview with civilian, #115, Akobo, December 2018; CIVIC interview with humanitarian actor, #134, Akobo, December 2018; CIVIC interview with humanitarian actor, #135, Akobo, December 2018.

113 Under an earlier mandate that focused more on stabilization, UNMISS established a base in Akobo in 2013 with the goal of facilitating the extension of state authority. The base was closed in 2014 following an attack on the base by fierer soldiers and civilians in December 2013. The AOB established by UNMISS in 2017 is therefore not the first time UNMISS has had a presence in Akobo. For more information on the attack against the Akobo base in 2013, see: “UNMISS issues preliminary account of Akobo base attack,” December 20, 2013, https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan-republic/unmiss-issues-preliminary-account-akobo-base-attack; and Sudan Tribune, “Attack on UN Akobo base killed 30 civilians, says foreign minister,” December 21, 2013. http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article49276.

114 CIVIC interview with humanitarian actor, #10, Juba, April 2018; CIVIC interview with UNMISS civilian official, #28, Bentiu, April 2018; CIVIC interview with UNMISS civilian official, #29, Bentiu, April 2018; CIVIC interview with humanitarian actor, #46, Bentiu, April 2018; CIVIC interview with UNMISS civilian official, #54, Bentiu, April 2018; CIVIC interview with humanitarian actor, #76, Bor, May 2018; CIVIC interview with UNMISS military official, #76, Bor, May 2018; CIVIC interview with UNMISS civilian official, #94, conducted via Skype, June 2018.

115 CIVIC interview with UNMISS civilian official, #29, Bentiu, April 2018.

116 CIVIC interview with UNMISS civilian official, #49, conducted via Skype, June 2018.

117 CIVIC interview with UNMISS civilian official, #9, Juba, April 2018; CIVIC interview with UNMISS military official, #76, Bor, May 2018; CIVIC interview with UNMISS military official, #95, Juba, May 2018; CIVIC interview with UNMISS civilian official, #97, Juba, May 2018.

118 CIVIC interview with UNMISS military official, #85, Juba, May 2018.
Institutionalizing such a planning process will be a challenge for the Mission given how quickly conflict dynamics change in South Sudan. However, UNMISS’s SRSG has begun to create processes that allow for more strategic long-term planning and for more effective, timely analysis and decision-making. For example, the SRSG now summarizes the Mission’s strategic priorities, including plans for future base openings and closures, through a Guidance on UNMISS Operational Priorities document and an accompanying implementation matrix. He also created a meeting, the Operational Coordination Committee, that brings together a small group of high-level UNMISS and humanitarian officials intended to directly link early warning with decision-making and tasking.119

119 CIVIC, Data-Driven Protection, 16, 50.

Overall, CIVIC’s research demonstrates that AOBs can be one tool for a more nimble approach to peacekeeping, but ensuring that they are fully effective requires adjustments from how they are currently being utilized. Furthermore, AOBs are not a substitute for more mobile and rapid deployments, such as the one that took place to Aburoc in 2017. However, they are more flexible than permanent bases and could help the Mission extend the reach of its civilian and uniformed components in the interim as the Mission takes steps to revise policies and procedures and generate the capabilities needed for a more mobile approach. AOBs would be a more effective tool if UNMISS took steps to ensure the regular presence of civilian staff at AOB locations—in part, by addressing some of the mobility constraints discussed in the first section of this report.

Almost 3,500 internally displaced people (IDP) were relocated from one of the Protection of Civilians sites in Juba to an IDP camp within the community in a joint effort between UNMISS and humanitarian agencies. The combined effort to relocate the families to an existing site at Mangateen in the central city followed an UNMISS-negotiated end to sporadic fighting between various groups within the UN protection camp in August 2018. September 1, 2018 UNMISS Photo

A major limitation for the troops deployed to the base is that they do not have any UNMISS language assistants or community liaison assistants to help them communicate and engage with community stakeholders.
CONCLUSION

The signing of a revitalized peace agreement in September 2018 has given many South Sudanese civilians hope for a future that is different than the cycles of violence they have experienced in the past. “People in South Sudan are tired of war. They realize they are killing our future president, our future teachers,” one young South Sudanese man told CIVIC.120 But people are also deeply skeptical that the peace agreement will be implemented. Speaking about the signing of the R-ARCSS by South Sudanese politicians, a civil society leader said, “They have signed the paper, but they haven’t signed it in their hearts and they need to build trust.” His plea was that “UNMISS should keep watch on these civilians during the time of transition. It is just wait and see.”121

If implementation of the peace agreement gains speed, greater numbers of civilians may be willing to return from neighboring countries and POC sites to the areas where they or their families lived before the outbreak of civil war in 2013. Other displaced civilians may choose to or have no other choice than to relocate to new areas in South Sudan. The demand for humanitarian assistance will be huge, and UNMISS will need to adjust its protection activities to the changing conflict dynamics. Greater mobility on the part of UNMISS’s military and civilian components could contribute to improved protection in areas of return and relocation. However, many civilians may be unwilling to voluntarily leave the guaranteed safety of POC sites for the unpredictability of towns and villages controlled by government and opposition soldiers who have committed atrocities against them for years.

Static protection of POC sites requires significant UNMISS resources. Durable solutions for POC site residents should be the ultimate goal for humanitarians and peacekeepers. Although POC sites provide protection for only a limited number of people, they may offer more genuine protection than patrols and mobile deployments. Comprehensive, continuous, and gender-sensitive analyses of protection threats and civilian perspectives should dictate how quickly UNMISS can move away from static protection at the sites. In some locations, this may mean that UNMISS and humanitarians need to take a gradual approach to relocation and return. In other cases, data could support the need for humanitarians and donors to dedicate additional resources for returns and relocations. However, UNMISS should avoid focusing on politically driven deadlines that are divorced from the reality of threats on the ground and should ensure that benchmarks can be shifted if there are indications that population movements may be unsafe. UNMISS and humanitarians should strengthen coordination forums and consultation on the relocation of civilians and on responses to shifting threats.

While peacekeepers often frame mobility and static presence as tradeoffs, UNMISS can improve mobility while maintaining protection at the POC sites. SRSG Shearer proved this in 2017 and 2018 by launching mobile deployments to hotspot locations and by investing in a larger Mission footprint. In fact, UNMISS may need to improve patrolling and protection outside the POC sites before civilians are willing to relocate. Integrated interventions by UNMISS’s civilian sections can also contribute to building the conditions for returns and relocations by supporting the prevention and mediation of conflict at the local and national levels. A more nimble approach to peacekeeping needs to be a whole-of-Mission effort in which military and civilian components of the Mission all have the capabilities and will to extend their reach in coordination with each other.122

Ultimately, the safety and security of South Sudanese civilians lies in the hands of the main parties to the conflict. The peacekeeping mission will have limited leverage and ability to pressure these parties, and if implementation of the R-ARCSS does not move forward, the prospects for returns and relocations could stall. Nonetheless, Member States and the Secretariat in New York should support the efforts of UNMISS’s leadership to develop the tools for a more nimble and comprehensive approach to protection. These tools are vital within the current operating environment, and they could prove even more valuable for protection of civilians if the security situation in South Sudan improves and access constraints on the Mission are reduced.

120 CIVIC interview with civilian, #121, Akobo, December 2018.
121 CIVIC interview with civil society leader, #153, Juba, December 2018.
122 CIVIC interview with UNMISS civilian official, #140, Juba, December 2018; CIVIC interview with civil society leader, #143, Juba, December 2018; CIVIC interview with UNMISS civilian official, #149, Juba, December 2018.

A more nimble approach to peacekeeping needs to be a whole-of-Mission effort in which military and civilian components of the Mission all have the capabilities and will to extend their reach in coordination with each other.
ABOUT THE REPORT

Peacekeeping budgets, personnel, assets, and enablers rarely match the wide range of tasks that peacekeeping missions are mandated to perform and the number of diverse threats to civilians spread across the countries where they are deployed. Therefore, adopting a more mobile and flexible approach to peacekeeping can enable peacekeeping missions to achieve their mandated tasks. *Moving Toward Mobility: Providing Protection to Civilians Through Static Presence and Mobile Peacekeeping in South Sudan* examines the steps that the peacekeeping mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) has taken to improve mobility and implement more proactive responses to threats. The report discusses the challenges that UNMISS must overcome to achieve a more nimble posture and the balance that UNMISS should try to reach between increasing mobility and continuing to provide static protection at UN Protection of Civilians (POC) sites around the country. The report also reviews UNMISS’s attempt to expand the Mission’s footprint through the use of austere operating bases (AOBs) and proposes some lessons on how AOBs can become a more effective tool for protection of civilians. Finally, the report offers recommendations to UNMISS, the UN Secretariat, UN Member States, and the Government of South Sudan on adjustments to help the mission more effectively protect the millions of civilians under threat both within and outside the POC sites.

Decisions on whether and how to equip UNMISS for mobile operations, ensure that UNMISS strikes an appropriate balance between static and mobile protection, and enable UNMISS to achieve an expanded and more flexible footprint will directly affect the lives of South Sudanese men, women, boys, and girls. Such decisions are at the center of the degree to which UNMISS can prevent and respond to threats in a country where civil war has left hundreds of thousands of civilians dead and millions displaced.