

Research Article

The United Nations' Role in Managing the Conflict in South Sudan, 2013-2022: A Focus on Protection of Civilians (PoC) and Humanitarian Assistance

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Abstract

In a very brief moment of calm in the wake of South Sudan's independence, the country plunged into an armed conflict despite various attempts at mediation and sanctions. Amid such despicable circumstances, the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) intervened to shape choices and interventions to manage the conflict. Some of such intervention domains included Protection of Civilians (PoC) and Humanitarian Assistance. To this effect, this research assessed conflict management by the United Nations in South Sudan with a focus on Protection of Civilians (PoC) and Humanitarian Assistance. The research used primary as well as secondary sources. For the primary sources, the study utilised the instrument of the interview to purposively sample 12 stakeholders who have in-depth knowledge of the subject matter from a population of 50. The secondary source relied on data from textbooks, scholarly, reviewed articles in journals, periodicals, magazines, etc., related to the subject matter. Findings from this study showed that the UN's effort in managing the conflict was very significant, as it protected civilians. This was done by providing space within its compounds to those fleeing brutal and widespread violence, among others. Findings also showed that UNMISS facilitated the delivery of humanitarian aid like food, shelter, healthcare, and education. The work recommends that more attention by UNMISS is needed to South Sudan's socio-economic development for all South Sudanese. There is a need for belligerent groups to prioritize building trust, cooperation, and confidence to firmly implement peace agreements in their attempt to bring long-lasting peace to the country.

Keywords

Assistance, Civilians, Conflict, Humanitarian, Protection

1. Introduction

More than 100 conflicts raged worldwide from the early 1990s to the end of 1999 [5, 6]. Intrastate and interstate conflicts were to be a thing of the past when the Cold War ended. Contrary to expectations, the crises and conflicts are not vanishing but are increasing and taking on new manifestations. In

Africa, for example, nearly half of the continent's countries and 20% of the population are afflicted by conflict, and conflicts are growing in Africa. As a result of this, Africa faces more conflict in the world compared to any other region of the world. An example of such a conflict is the South Sudan conflict.

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South Sudan has been engulfed in a complex and vicious conflict that has been marked by political turmoil, ethnic violence, human rights abuses, and a humanitarian crisis. South Sudan gained independence in 2011, and it should have been followed by a triumph of peace after a long period of Sudan's internal war. The newly established country quickly slid into war as political differences between President Salva Kiir and the former Vice President Riek Machar burst into violent clashes in December 2013 [27, 7]. The war rapidly acquired an ethnic coloration as the Dinka and the Nuer ethnic groups were pitted against one another, leading to massive atrocities and the forced evacuation of civilians [4].

The quest for power undermined efforts towards a sustainable peace agreement, reviving violence and instability. Ethnicity in the war in South Sudan has militarized, deepened divisions, and led to violence among different ethnic groups. The politicization of ethnic identity made historical grievances more intense and increased tensions, making reconciliation and cross-communal conversation an illusion [15]. The war had devastating humanitarian consequences, as millions of South Sudanese citizens were affected by food insecurity, displacement, and restricted access to essential services such as health and education. To these, human rights violations, such as indiscriminate killing, rape, and the mobilization of children into the army, were widespread, deepening the suffering of vulnerable groups and the chances of peace and reconciliation [14].

As the crisis worsened, the UN and other world bodies became involved in the management of the conflict. The UN established the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) [16, 25]. UNMISS mandate outlines the Mission's overall mandate to help the Government in building its capacity to govern effectively and democratically. UNMISS facilitates longer-term state-building and economic development, provides advisory and facilitation in the area of political transition and governance, and helps in the building of state authority, inclusive constitutional process, and elections [2, 17].

The crisis continued, and the UN Security Council redefined UNMISS's mandate in resolution 2155 to encompass the following four overarching areas: the protection of civilians, monitoring and reporting of human rights, the provision of the framework for the provision of humanitarian aid, and the facilitation of agreement to a cessation of hostilities [12].

The UN system took action to mobilize the international community's solidarity with the people of South Sudan. On the HC's request, on behalf of the HCT, based in consultation with the Principals of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), the Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC) triggered a system-wide three-month L3 IASC Emergency Response to the worsening conflict in South Sudan on 11 February 2014; it was subsequently extended by six additional months to November 2014 [23, 10]. In the wake of the foregoing, the paper aims to analyze the South Sudan conflict and the United Nations Mission.

There have been several studies in that area. Sundberg (2020) studied the United Nations (UN) Peacekeeping and Forced Displacement in South Sudan, Akim & Shalihah (2019) studied conflict in South Sudan, human security challenges, and conflict challenges in resolving, and Nyadera (2019) carried out work under the topic South Sudan Conflict from 2013 to 2018: Rethinking the Causes, Situation and Solutions. Of the stated studies, few cover 2013 to 2022 and the role of UNMISS in human protection and humanitarian intervention. This, therefore, is the study problem.

2. Methodology

2.1. Research Design

Exploratory approaches and survey research were used in this study. Reading secondary sources on the subject and speaking with key informants who were informed about it were necessary to obtain their viewpoints.

2.2. Population of the Study

The target populations were the South-South Sudanese Embassy and a few selected Nigerians, such as International Relations lecturers in the Department of Political Science and International Relations and the Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution (IPCR) in Abuja and its environs, who have in-depth knowledge and first-hand information about the conflict in Sudan. The sample from the population is presented below.

Table 1. Target Population.

S/N	Institution/organization	Frequency
1	South Sudan Embassy in Nigeria	15
1	Academicians (International Relations Lecturers of the University of Abuja)	25
3	Senior Member of Staff of the Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution (IPCR), Abuja, Nigeria	10
4	TOTAL	50

Source: Field Survey, 2023

2.3. Sample Size and Sampling Technique

The sample size was 20, which was determined by adopting a purposive sampling technique. The table below shows the sample distribution:

Table 2. Sample Distribution.

S/N	Institution/Organisation	Population	Sample
1	South Sudan Embassy in Nigeria	15	3
2	Academicians (International Relations Lecturers), University of Abuja	25	3
3	Senior Member of Staff of the Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution (IPCR), Abuja, Nigeria	10	6
4	TOTAL	50	12

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Table 2 shows that twelve (12) respondents were purposively selected for interview out of the total of 50 target population. Three (3) persons out of these were from the South Sudan Embassy. Six (6) out of 10 persons from the Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution, three (3) lecturers out of five (5) from the Department of Political Science and International Relations, University of Abuja, Nigeria.

2.4. Method of Data Collection

The methods used for collecting data included both primary and secondary sources. The primary data was obtained through the use of interviews. Key informants were identified based on how the UN managed the conflict, focusing on the Protection of Civilians and humanitarian assistance. The Secondary data involved gathering information from published and unpublished documents, including books, journals, the internet, the United Nations Development Program, seminal and Workshop Conference Papers, Newspapers, magazines, and non-governmental organizations such as the International Peace Research Institute and the International Committee of the Red Cross. etc., all related to the subject matter.

2.5. Method of Data Analysis

Content analysis was the method utilized to analyse the data for this study. A research method called content analysis uses textual material to evaluate and code to draw accurate and reproducible conclusions. This is a research method for a qualitative, methodical, and objective description of the communication's content. [3] states that a researcher can use content analysis to categorize any collection of qualitative materials gathered from records and study them into relevant groups to characterize them systematically. Examining a class of social artifacts, usually written materials such as newspapers, articles, books, magazines, speeches, legislation, letters,

and consultations, as well as parts or collections of them, is known as content analysis. In short, almost every type of communication can be used in the content analysis method. Cross-examination of evidence or facts from a variety of sources is required to prevent this burden, since content analysis is hindered by the difficulty of decoding human communication, which could result in incorrect conclusions in the analysis.

3. Establishment and Mandate of the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS)

The Security Council adopted resolution 1996 on 9 July 2011, creating UNMISS. UNMISS had been mandated to monitor, investigate, verify, and report on human rights situations, apprehended threats to civilians, and actual and potential violations of the law of international humanitarian and human rights. The mandate has since been renewed by Security Council Resolutions 2057 (2012) and 2109 (2013) [18, 20].

The Security Council in 2023 reaffirmed that the situation in South Sudan still constitutes a threat to international peace and security in the region in Resolution 2677 (2023). The mandate of UNMISS was extended to 15 March 2024 [24]. The Council also stressed that the Mission must continue to strive to implement its three-year strategic plan established in resolution 2567 (2021) of promoting inclusive, accountable governance, preventing the recrudescence of civil war, and securing durable peace through free, fair, and credible elections through the Revitalized Peace Agreement. According to [11, 21], UNMISS is thus mandated to do whatever is necessary to accomplish its mandate, which includes the following.

3.1. Protection of Civilians (PoC)

To prevent violence and offer a protective presence, peacekeepers are expected to actively monitor towns around the nation, with a special emphasis on places where displaced persons are returning following the peace agreement. Additionally, peacekeepers are in charge of ensuring the safety and security of residents in UNMISS Protection of Civilians locations, discouraging and preventing gender-based and sexual violence when feasible, and assisting in the prevention, mitigation, and resolution of intercommunal conflict. Working together with humanitarian organizations to facilitate the safe, voluntary, informed, and respectful return of displaced families from the POC sites to their homes is another crucial task.

3.2. Creating Conditions Conducive to the Delivery of Humanitarian Assistance

UNMISS forces are to make sure that millions of people in need in South Sudan receive humanitarian relief, including food, clean water, shelter, and medical care. In order for displaced individuals to return to their homes and communities and live in safety and dignity, it is also important to create a supportive and safe atmosphere.

3.3. Supporting the Implementation of the Revitalized Agreement and the Peace Process

The Mission is dedicated to supporting the establishment of enduring peace in South Sudan. It accomplishes this by collaborating with communities and individuals, as well as with political, religious, traditional, and community leaders, on a national and subnational level as an unbiased partner. By offering guidance and technical support, UNMISS employs its "good offices" to aid in the peace agreement's implementation. It also helps the Reconstituted Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission, which is in charge of monitoring the duties and mandate of the Transitional Government of National Unity and the peace agreement's implementation, as well as the Ceasefire and Transitional Security Monitoring and Verification Mechanism, which monitors and reports ceasefire violations [10].

3.4. Monitoring and Investigating Human Rights

The Mission probes and reports cases of abuses and violations of international humanitarian law and human rights, including those that might qualify as crimes against humanity or war crimes. Abuse of women and children, including all types of sexual and gender-based violence, is given special attention. Incitement to violence and hate speech incidents are also looked into. Other local, regional, and global organizations that do comparable work on human rights reporting and

monitoring receive technical assistance.

Similarly, UNMISS is tasked with the responsibility of probing, verifying, and reporting instances of hate speech and violent incitement. Collaborate with national, regional, and international organizations that keep an eye on, look into, prosecute, and provide reports on human rights and humanitarian law abuses. There is a military ceiling of 17,000 uniformed personnel and a police ceiling of 2,101 individuals, which includes 88 correctional officers [9].

4. UNMISS Troop Contributing Countries (TCC)

Table 3. UNMISS Troops Contributing Countries.

S/N	Countries	No. of Troops Contributed
1.	India	2267
2.	Nepal	1576
3.	Rwanda	1841
4.	Ethiopia	1265
5.	Kenya	735
6.	Mongolia	862
7.	Ghana	312
8.	China	512
9.	Bangladesh	279
10.	Cambodia	149
11.	Japan	272
12.	Korea	273
13.	Sri Lanka	673
Total 10485 Military Liaison Officers, 187 Staff Officers, 312		
GRAND TOTAL 10984		

Source: unimiss.unmissions.org, 2025.

A summary of the troops each participating nation provided to the UNMISS is provided in Table 3 above. As of February 2023, UNMISS had deployed 17,954 personnel in total, according to the table. 13,221 of them are soldiers, 200 are mission experts, 468 are police officers, 2,268 are civilians, 389 are staff officers, and 408 are UN volunteers.

5. Results

The UN Mission in South Sudan and Humanitarian Aid and Civilian Protection (PoC) With an emphasis on the Protection of Civilians (PoC) and Humanitarian Assistance, this section

of the study presents data collected on the ground regarding the role played by the UN in managing the conflict in South Sudan.

5.1. Protection of Civilians (PoC)

Dujarric (Oral Interview, 2023) stated that UNMISS set up a temporary base in conflict hotspots by a "strong and nimble" strategy to fulfill its mandate of Protecting Civilians. He added that although the GoS's refusal to allow the Mission access to many places hindered this work, integrated military and civilian teams were also established, which served to dissuade violence, de-escalate conflict, and promote reconciliation between parties.

Dujarric's argument is supported by [13], who asserted that conflict is controlled and violence against civilians is reduced wherever UN soldiers are present because they will do everything within their power to ensure the safety of the civilian populace. Thus, UNMISS fulfilled its mandate to protect civilians in South Sudan by providing physical protection, early warning signs, and early response, responding to attacks and violence, preventing and responding to gender-based violence, monitoring and reporting, and interacting with armed actors [8].

Commenting on the subject matter, Reni (Oral Interview, 2023) said that one of the initiatives taken by the UN to manage the South Sudan conflict, especially as it has to do with the protection of civilians, was the creation of the High-Level Revitalization Forum (HLRF). The HLRF is a diplomatic effort aimed at revitalizing the peace process in South Sudan. It brought together various stakeholders, including regional and international actors, to push for the full implementation of the R-ARCSS. Muhammed and Simon (Oral Interview, 2023) also shed light on this as their submissions highlight the UN's significant contribution to protecting civilians by establishing Protection of Civilian (PoC) sites, where thousands of internally displaced persons sought shelter and protection from violence. UNMISS, according to them, worked to ensure the safety and security of these sites. They also argued that the UN or UNMISS facilitated the delivery of humanitarian aid to conflict-affected populations. This assistance included food, shelter, healthcare, and education. These efforts aim to alleviate the suffering of those affected by the conflict.

According to Daniel (Oral Interview, 2023), the United Nations offered a peace master plan that called for all the warlords and factions to come together and resolve their disagreements to control the South Sudanese conflict. He asserted that UNMISS played a crucial role in overseeing and assisting with peace accords in South Sudan, including the 2015 Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan and the 2018 Revitalized Agreement for the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (R-ARCSS). In his argument, the UN also urged parties to uphold these accords and have discussions to end the conflict peacefully.

The aforementioned viewpoints from the interviews with the various key informants were consistent with the body of existing literature. In their work, evaluating [1], which was published by the *Norwegian Institute of International Affairs*, Oslo, Norway, they posited that UNMISS supported the peace process in South Sudan. Their remark is captured thus:

UNMISS provided immediate physical protection to more than 200,000 people, including large numbers of women and children. In the view of a wide range of experts and South Sudanese citizens, UNMISS's PoC sites not only saved tens of thousands of lives, but they also had the positive effect of isolating the polarised communities from one another at a time when even broader violence was likely. "Without UNMISS, there would have been a genocide here. Furthermore, the Mission's protection of humanitarian convoys and rehabilitation of supply roads have opened access to at least 100,000 vulnerable people who would otherwise have been beyond the reach of lifesaving aid [1].

5.2. Creating Conditions and Deliverance of Humanitarian Assistance

Muhammed and Simon (Oral Interview, 2023) noted that, in addition to the mandate of PoC, UNMISS also worked tirelessly to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid, including food, shelter, healthcare, and education. In line with this argument, documented reports from the UN showed that UNMISS facilitated and supported the supply of medical care, food assistance, and nutrition surveys.

A more thorough understanding of how UNMISS fulfilled this mission by establishing circumstances and providing humanitarian aid was possible because of publications like UNMISS News and UNMISS. According to [22], the UN, for instance, started a "Back to Learning Campaign" in October that greatly aided in advancing education in both local communities and UNMISS Protection of Civilians sites, where more than 180,000 internally displaced people sought refuge from violence and were placed under UN protection. The study found that school lunch service raised student enrolment from 40% to 93% for boys and from 30% to 86% for girls [22]. Additionally, the UN constructed two health facilities and 20 schools between 2011 and 2015 through its Quick Impact Projects.

The UN also supported medical care, food assistance, and nutrition surveys. Almost 96,000 children were admitted to outpatient therapeutic programs in 2015 to treat acute and severe malnutrition [22]. In 2015, about 261,000 children under the age of 15 received measles vaccines, over 973,000 children under the age of 15 received polio vaccinations, and over 300,000 durable insecticide-treated nets were distributed to prevent malaria. UNMISS also provided food assistance to inaccessible locations. Since January 2014, 6,000 aircraft rotations have airdropped 100,000 metric tons of food, making it the largest ongoing humanitarian air operation in the world. To end the malnutrition epidemic, more than 400,000 children

under the age of five were fed nutritious food in 2014 [22, 26].

UNIMISS also helped to improve food security and livelihoods by creating resilient livelihoods and combining short-term emergency response activities, like distributing livelihood kits, with longer-term development projects, like training agricultural extension workers and veterinarians and supplying solar-powered water pumps that provide access to clean drinking water. To inform early warning systems, the government and UN teams collaborated to carry out nutrition surveys, food security studies, and crop evaluations [22]. Moreover, South Sudan received \$39 million from the Response Fund through UNIMISS in 2020, which represents a significant amount of food insecurity [25].

Humanitarian agencies and nongovernmental organizations in the country increased the scope of a multi-sectoral response in each of the six nations (UNDP & WFP, 2023). In 2020, UNIMIS-affiliated aid organizations assisted over 6 million people nationwide. Similarly, the World Food Programme (WFP), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), and other partners treated about 600,000 children who suffered from severe or moderate acute malnutrition, with a recovery rate of 94% [22, 19].

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

The study examined how the United Nations managed the South Sudanese conflict through the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), a peace operation established on July 9, 2011, by Security Council Resolution 1996 and expanded by Security Council Resolutions 2057 (2012) and 2109 (2013).

The study demonstrates how UNIMISS was crucial to the handling of the South Sudanese crisis in terms of protecting civilians, particularly those living in IDP camps. In a similar vein, UNIMISS helped make it possible for thousands of South Sudanese to receive humanitarian aid, including food, water, and medical care.

Despite the achievements of UNIMISS, the mission had some challenges, which included:

1. *Political Divisions*: South Sudan experienced deep political divisions among its leaders, which hindered efforts to reach a political settlement. These divisions often lead to a lack of cooperation in implementing peace agreements and resolving the root causes of the conflict, which is also a big challenge.
2. *Lack of Trust*: A lack of trust between the various parties involved in the conflict has impeded peace efforts. Building trust and confidence among warring factions is crucial for the successful implementation of peace agreements.
3. *Ethnic and Tribal Dynamics*: The frequent ethnic and tribal conflicts in South Sudan have resulted in violence between numerous ethnic groups. Addressing these dynamics and promoting reconciliation is a challenging task.
4. *Funding Shortfalls*: Securing funding for humanitarian

and peacekeeping efforts in South Sudan has been a recurring challenge. Based on these, the following recommendations are suggested:

Diplomatic efforts should be strengthened. To this end, diplomatic engagement should be encouraged from regional and international actors to support the peace process in South Sudan.

The UNIMISS mandate should be enhanced. There should be a consideration to expanding UNIMISS's mandate to include stronger enforcement mechanisms and increased resources for peacebuilding activities.

It is necessary to encourage inclusivity. All parties involved in peace talks and decision-making procedures, including women and underrepresented groups, should be included.

Transitional justice should be supported, and there should be an implementation mechanism for accountability and reconciliation to address past grievances and build trust among communities.

Regional cooperation should be strengthened. This will foster cooperation between South Sudan and neighboring countries, thereby addressing cross-border security threats and promoting regional stability.

Abbreviations

HCF	Humanitarian Country Team
HLRF	High Level Revitalization Forum
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
IPCR	Institute of Peace and Conflict Resolution
PoC	Protection of Civilians
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNMISS	United Nations Mission in South Sudan
WFP	World Food Programme

Author Contributions

Agaba Halidu: Data curation, Methodology, Supervision

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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