Cognitive Peacekeeping Decision-Making in South Sudan 2013 to 2017

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Contents

Table of Figures, Maps, Pictures, and Text Boxes

List of Abbreviations

ARCSS	Agreement for the Resolution of Conflict in South Sudan
APC	Armoured Personnel Carrier
ASG	Assistant Secretary-General
AU	African Union
CMT	Crisis Management Team
CPA	Comprehensive Peace Agreement
CTSAMM	Ceasefire and Transitional Security Arrangement Monitoring Mechanism
D/SRSG (Political)	Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General (Political)
D/SRSG (RC/HC)	Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General (Resident Coordinator / Humanitarian Coordinator)
DMS	Director of Mission Support
EPON	Effectiveness of Peace Operations Network
FHQ	Force Headquarters
FPU	Formed Police Unit
HCT	Humanitarian Country Team
HIPPO	High-Level Panel on Peace Operations
HRW	Human Rights Watch
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IGAD	Inter-Governmental Authority on Development
IOT	Integrated Operational Team
JMAC	Joint Mission Analysis Centre
JMEC	Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission
MLO	Military Liaison Officer
MONUSCO	Mission de l'Organisation des Nations Unies pour la stabilisation en République démocratique du Congo (*United Nations Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo*)
MSF	Medecins Sans Frontiere
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation

OLS	Operation Lifeline Sudan
POC	Protection of Civilians
POC AA	Protection of Civilians Area Adjacent
SDF	Sudan Defence Force
SOFA	Status of Forces Agreement
SPLA	Sudan People's Liberation Army
SPLA/iO	Sudan People's Liberation Army / in Opposition
SRSG	Special Representative of the Secretary-General
SSDA/CF	South Sudan Defence Army / Cobra Faction
SSLA	South Sudan Liberation Army
SSNPS	South Sudan National Police Service
TCC	Troop Contributing Country
TGoNU	Transitional Government of National Unity
UAV	Unmanned Aerial Vehicle
UNAMA	United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan
UNCT	United Nations Country Team
UNDSS	UN Department of Safety and Security
UNISFA	United Nations Interim Security Force in Abyei
UNMIL	United Nations Mission in Liberia
UNMIS	United Nations Mission in Sudan
UNMISS	United Nations Mission in South Sudan
UNOCI	United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire
UNOIOS	UN Office of Internal Oversight Services
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
UPDF	Ugandan People's Defence Force
USG	Under Secretary-General

1. Introduction

Introduction

In July 2011, South Sudan became a country, and the United Nations inaugurated a new peacekeeping mission to support its newest member. The United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) was supported by a robust *Chapter VII* mandate, almost 8,000 soldiers and police, a large contingent of civilian experts[1] and an almost billion-dollar annual budget.[2] Its purpose was *'to help establish the conditions for development in the Republic of South Sudan'* (UN, 2011). In support of their mission, the UN also had considerable goodwill from their host. The South Sudanese had won their independence after one of the longest civil wars in modern history[3] through tenacious resilience but also substantial support from the international community, including the UN.

In 2011, the potential of a successful collaboration that would finally bring peace and prosperity to a people exhausted from relentless conflict would have seemed tantalizingly real. However, a devastating civil war erupted in 2013 that ultimately consumed the entire country, displacing 40% of its people[4] and leading to the deaths of hundreds of thousands (Checchi, Testa, Quach, Burns, 2018). Despite having a strong *'protection of civilians'* mandate, UNMISS constantly struggled to shape effective responses to known threats during the most dynamic phase of the conflict between 2013 and 2017. Their decisions at key moments were consistently suboptimal when compared with expected outcomes against its mandated objectives within its acknowledged capabilities.

My own relationship with UNMISS began when I joined their Joint Operations Centre (JOC) in March 2014. I initially worked as an analyst within Juba and then later in the State Operations

[1] 166 military observers, 6,834 military contingent personnel, 900 police, 957 international staff, 1,590 national staff, 506 UN volunteers and 500 additional temporary positions (UNGA, 2011)
[2] An initial budget of $738 million (UNGA, 2011) had risen to $936 million by January 2013 (UNGA, 2013)
[3] The second Sudanese civil war began in 1983 with a series of mutinies in the southern states and the founding of the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA). It concluded with the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in 2005 lasting almost 22 years. A broader interpretation of the war is that it was a continuation of the first Sudanese civil war that lasted between 1955 and 1972.
[4] According to the most recent online UNHCR data (accessed on March 1, 2020), approximately 1.8 million people have been internally displaced and 2.3 million have become refugees. The estimated population of South Sudan in 2013, according to statistics compiled by UN DESA World Population Prospects 2019, was 10.4 million.

Centre at their field mission in Jonglei. I stayed in South Sudan until mid-2017 during which time I also worked as a conflict analyst for the South Sudan NGO Forum and IOM. Between 2018 and 2019 I worked as the liaison between the UN Secretary-General's Executive Committee and the Operations and Crisis Centre managing information flow to the UN's primary policy making body. In these roles I got a first hand understanding as to how the UN system collects and processes information and how decisions are made at the field level. My interest in this pursuing this subject academically came because of my shock at what I felt was a lack of coherence between the information and analysis that was available to the UN and the decisions and policy that were ultimately produced. The underlying question to this research, is that if decision-making is not based on a rational assessment of the available evidence what other forces shape and define it?

The failures that occurred in South Sudan are not unusual for a peacekeeping mission. They represented another example of disappointing outcomes against high-minded intentions that have long been the hallmark of such operations (McGreal, 2015). Commentary on the accountability of the United Nations for such failures have been frustrated by a tendency towards obfuscation of its responsibility, rather than accountability, by the organisation when things go wrong (Howard, 2008). This in turn has created fatalistic interpretations of the potential of peacekeeping. Political realities, finite resources, and never-ending demands from a world in perpetual conflict are often portrayed as insurmountable challenges (The Economist, 2020). However, such fatalism is often rooted in incomplete understandings of peacekeeping action.

In this research I will seek a fuller understanding of operational peacekeeping decision-making through an organisational cognitive approach. This has the possibility to create understanding of the systemic context of decision-making as well as the hyper-specific elements of individual psychologies and interactions that underpin decision-making moments. Specifically, I will suggest that decision-makers interpret the world in a way that corresponds to a bounded rationality that incorporates organisational and individual needs to guide the relevance of the choice alternatives developed by decision-makers. Because that rationality limits the number of relevant factors that a decision-maker can contemplate, suboptimality will occur. In an organisation such as the UN where a bounded rationality can be dominated by factors that are extraneous to individual peacekeeping tasks, suboptimality increases.

As uncertainty in a context grows a decision-maker will increasingly rely on the certainties offered by a bounded rationality to create choice alternatives. Bias becomes more relevant to interpret the world as decision-makers try to match available information to beliefs and experiences that are embedded within the bounded rationality. Bias allows a decision-maker to focus on the extraneous elements of the bounded rationality rather than more practical elements of a particular peacekeeping task. This further increases the likelihood of suboptimality.

Behaviours can also emerge that undermine an organisation's inherent capacity to mitigate bias. Behaviours can marginalise challenging or divergent viewpoints and distort rational means to properly frame and anchor decisions. Therefore, a decision-maker will be less able to properly value information in a way that again makes suboptimal decision-making more likely.

Within the context of UNMISS this theoretical framework is particularly relevant. The extraneous elements of a bounded rationality within the UN made suboptimal decision-making likely. The uncertain environment within which UNMISS existed between 2013 and 2017 increased reliance on that bounded rationality. Bias existed to legitimise focus on those extraneous elements. Behaviours marginalised divergent viewpoints and distorted the framing and anchoring of information, undermining its resilience to the kind of bias that made suboptimal decision-making more likely.

In the next few chapters I will discuss more fully the theoretical basis of this research before I apply it to six key decision-events associated with the peacekeeping operation in South Sudan between 2013 and 2017. In the conclusion I will elaborate on how the application of a cognitive theoretical approach can improve on more traditional frameworks. In so doing there is the potential to move beyond the fatalistic implications of seeing action as the product of powerful impersonal forces and more as a product of mindsets that can be challenged through reforming systemic processes and empowering individual decision-makers. The research will suggest concrete reforms to organisational structures that create resilience to the kind of rationalities, bias and behaviours that are responsible for much of the suboptimal practice of UN peacekeeping.

2. Literature Review

Explanations of UN action within existing literature are almost as vast and complex as the organisation itself. In this chapter I have attempted to distil those explanations, that I believe to be most prominent, in a way that is sufficiently concise for the parameters of this project and yet can demonstrate the reasoning behind my theoretical approach and the way that it complements existing research.

Below I have summarised those main elements that constitute some of the most common means to understand peacekeeping action. I have encapsulated these within three broad understandings that include the role of (a) powerful interests, (b) a dysfunctional bureaucracy and (c) capability limitations. At the end of the chapter I have also included a short review of the existing literature available on the subject of this research, the UN's peacekeeping Mission in South Sudan, UNMISS.

Peacekeeping Action

a) The role of powerful interests

The role of powerful nation states in shaping UN peacekeeping action has been based on a rationalist institutionalist understanding of the role of states in the construction of international organisations. As Abbott and Snidel succinctly put it,

'States are the principal actors in world politics, and they use IO's [international organisations] *to create social orderings appropriate to their pursuit of shared goals'* (Abbott and Snidel, 1998).

Those interests do not create uniform or predictable action. Rather they reflect the anarchic organisation of international relations shaped by strategic interdependence (Milner, 1991). Legalistic and non-interventionist approaches, such as those often favoured by China and Russia (Abdenur, 2019), can exist even as other nations seek progress in changing peacekeeping norms that create the basis for interventions (Teimouri, 2015).

Another aspect of the anarchic nature of international relations and its impact on peacekeeping action are the contradictions between a state's espoused and operative interests. The desire to use international organisations as a means to signal values while

ignoring the resource implications of those commitments has created instances of *'organisational hypocrisy'* (Lipson, 2007), of which the commitment gaps explain in peacekeeping mandates are the most obvious example (Cunliffe, 2009).

An alternative way of understanding the role of powerful interests in shaping UN action is to understand the extent to which the UN has agency and uses it to shape action according to its own interests. Proponents of principal-agency theories understand the role of the agent as more than the rational implementer of its principal's interests (Eisenhardt, 1989; Pollack, 1997). The UN can exert its own interests in determining peacekeeping action by exploiting the information asymmetry between the principal (generally cast as the interests of the UNSC) and agent (generally cast as the UN Secretariat) (Thompson, 2006). The agent's control of *'expert'* information and proximity to the subject of the principal's decisions allow it to shape information that inform the decision alternatives for action through which the principal's interests are implemented (Eisenhardt, 1989). The approach has generated useful insights on how the contents of mandates and the resourcing of peacekeeping missions are made (Dijkstra, 2015) as well as the relationship between the UNSC and the Secretariat (Allen and Yuen, 2014).

Regardless of how the role of interests is understood, it is notable that the focus of these analyses invariably exists at the policy level to examine the relationships between states or the relationship between the UNSC and the UN Secretariat. The role of interests in shaping operational or tactical peacekeeping decision-making through individual UN functionaries remains less explored.

b) The role of dysfunctional bureaucracy

An alternative explanation of peacekeeping action has been provided by those focussed on the sociological context of a decision. Barnett and Finnemore are noted for this approach in their analysis of peacekeeping operations. According to their understanding, the UN bureaucracy create a context within which rigid organisational rules and structures regulate knowledge and activity. The corresponding dysfunctionality at an operational level creates suboptimal peacekeeping responses such as those seen in Rwanda in 1994.

'*The social stuff of which they* [International Organisation s] *are made – specifically, their rules and the nature of their authority – yields insight into the ways that they exercise power and*

how their good intentions can sometimes lead to unfortunate and tragic outcomes.' (Barnett and Finnemore, 2004, 44).

Others, such as Autesserre see the organisation as existing in a much wider landscape of international *'interveners'*, comprised of a multitude of International Organisations and diplomatic missions, which develop and share *'collective understandings'* (Autesserre, 2010). Autesserre also creates a richer understanding of the daily lives of the mass of individuals that work in emergency contexts through the practice, habits and narratives that constitute their reality. She demonstrates how this undermines the perceived value of locally embedded understandings of the context (Autesserre, 2014). The peacekeeping action that is rooted in these flawed understandings is therefore likely to be compromised.

While the likes of Barnett, Finnemore and Autesserre offer a different focus in their approach (sociological vs. anthropological) and unit of analysis (higher level bureaucrats vs. lower level interveners) there is a common appreciation of organisations as being societal units with corresponding culturally specific practices that inform action. That interpretation corresponds to a sociological-institutionalist approach to understanding organisational action within international relations (Meyer and Rowan, 1977). This approach shifts focus on the primary driver of action away from interests and towards the organisation itself. A broad interpretation of how action can be driven by the organisation is that a context creates *a 'logic of appropriateness'* which leads decision-makers to reflect organisational rules, structures and social practices in appropriate action (March and Olsen, 1998). Appropriateness can be contrasted with the *'logic of consequences'* in which individuals are capable of making more objective judgements and incorporating rational actor preferences.

A sociological-institutionalist approach creates significant understanding as to potential sources of dysfunction at an operational level. However, sociological-institutionalist can relegate individuals as relatively powerless amid larger sociological forces with implications as to how we understand individual agency and accountability.

c) The role of capability limitations

A final significant approach to accounting for peacekeeping action is in descriptions of action as defined by the technical capabilities available to a peacekeeping mission. Capability limitations are significant elements of the two approaches outlined above. Rationalist-

institutionalists highlight the role of interests in creating resource gaps that undermine capabilities in peacekeeping missions. Sociological institutionalists see inappropriate human resource mechanisms and training gaps as creating cadres unsuited to being responsive to local contexts.

Other scholars have focussed more on the technical nature of capability limitations that appear more atheoretical in their approach. These approaches can be a means to retain focus on technical components in peacekeeping missions such as the absorption of new technologies (Karlsrud, 2017) or assessing peacekeeper's tactical readiness to respond to different thematic challenges including their ability to carry out protection of civilian roles (Holt, Kelly and Taylor, 2009). Such approaches are also prevalent in UN analysis of peacekeeping (United Nations, 2015; United Nations, 2017). A capability approach is useful for isolating analysis in the search for technical problems. However, they provide the narrowest snapshot of a system, often focussed on the tactical level of peacekeeping practice, that make them less useful in considering a more complete understanding of peacekeeping action.

UNMISS

With the comparative newness of UNMISS, the amount of literature dedicated to trying to understand the Mission and its actions is limited. Detailed reporting has been done on UNMISS' responses to individual incidents that are also covered in this research. This is particularly relevant to the attack on its base in Malakal in 2016 (eg. CIVIC, 2016; MSF, 2016) and UNMISS' posture during violence in Juba in 2016 (CIVIC, 2016b). Closer attention has been also been placed on UNMISS in relation to specific thematic areas such as displacement (Sundberg, 2019) or protection issues (Briggs and Monaghan, 2017). However more comprehensive articles on UNMISS performance are fewer. The Effectiveness of Peace Operations Network (EPON) report is one of the few examples (Day, Hunt, He, and Kumalo 2019). That review is focussed on the technical aspects of the Mission's operations. There is little discussion of the realities of the context within which decision-making was developed or the individuals that influenced those decisions. Its perspective is derived from a capability limitation approach that is narrow in its outlook and with corresponding limitations as to the extent it can explain UNMISS' action.

A much richer perspective of UNMISS has been provided in the memoirs of diplomats who wrote on their experiences working in South Sudan (Johnson, 2018; Coghlan, 2017, Vertin, 2019; Shackelford, 2020). However, as has been noted in subsequent reviews, these perspectives can offer subjective viewpoints, occasionally with revisionist aims regarding their own actions (The Economist, 2016).

Another source of material is those recent publications on the conflict in South Sudan (Martell, 2018; Young 2019) which look at UNMISS as one of a broad range of factors that affected how the war manifested. However, it is notable that within this literature UNMISS occupies a marginal role which reflects their perception of the minor part that it played in the history of the conflict.

Conclusion

Above I have suggested that available approaches can feel fragmented in their tendency to focus on isolated components. Rationalist-institutionalist approaches are most useful when focussed on senior policy levels in which the interactions within the UNSC, as well as between the UNSC and UN Secretariat. Sociological institutionalists on the other hand have provided insights that help explain operational level action. A focus on capability limitations help explain tactical level action.

For brevity, this brief overview of the current literature does not fully analyse the overlap that exists between these approaches, even though they are significant and have been noted by others (Hall and Taylor, 1996). However, while acknowledging that these approaches have not been fully compartmentalised in existing literature, the over-all effect has been to create a sense that action is created according to different drivers at different levels. That belies the fact that the UN exists as an open interconnected system where external and internal stimulus are expected to have a system wide impact.

Another weakness of the existing approaches to analysing peacekeeping action is in accounting for the complexity that exists from hyper-specific aspects within a system. This includes the role of feedback from individual events, individual psychologies, or personal interactions. Elite decision-makers within the UN have been shown to shape policy (Karlsrud, 2013; Bode, 2017) but the impact of such individuality on an interconnected system remains relatively unexplored. It is likely that the relative invisibility of such processes and the

complexity that they imply may deter observers from generalisable inferences based on their presence in a subject being analysed. However, the matter that constitute an organisational decision-making process are primarily comprised of just such hyper-specific elements. To ignore them, in preference of more visible or generalisable impersonal forces such as interests or collective behaviours, is likely to ignore a highly significant factor in decision-making and the actions that that such decisions lead to.

In the next chapter I will focus on decision-making as a preferred lens through which to understand peacekeeping action. I will suggest the need to understand decision-making as a cognitive process. A cognitive approach has the benefit of allowing a systemic perspective which shows how interests and sociological structures impact all levels of action. It also accounts for hyper-specific elements of decision-making to create a more detailed and accurate explanation of peacekeeping decision-making.

3. Theoretical Framework

Introduction

The literature review suggests two gaps in the current understanding peacekeeping action. Firstly, different approaches have created a fragmented way of understanding peacekeeping action which do not represent a system perspective of the UN. Secondly, a more complex understanding of the UN system entails accounting for hyper-specific elements that are not easily visible and is often left out of analysis. To address these gaps, I propose a cognitive approach focussed on decision-making, whereby analysis is focussed on the mental action or process through which choice alternatives are developed. Decision-making reflects systemic thinking. Hyper-specific elements that include individual psychologies and interactions will also affect how that systemic thinking manifests in the actions of an individual decision-maker.

Cognition in International Relations

Following the cognitive revolution of the 1950s (Miller, 2003), some political scientists took an interdisciplinary approach in borrowing from behavioural, economic, organisational, and psychological sciences to explain action in international relations (Etzioni, 1969). Such approaches have been particularly valuable to understand how individual policymakers understand the world and how they act according to those understandings (Hermann and Hermann, 1989). These studies are often focussed on the *'micro-processes'* associated with cognition to understand the mind-sets of individual decision-makers in elite roles in international relations (Tetlock, 1998). Cognition has also been used to examine the role, and validity, of the work of international political experts (Tetlock, 2005).

Cognition has been less useful to international relations when examining individuals who do not have strong authoritative positions but rather create decisions mediated by organisational processes. This includes the heads of peacekeeping missions who are subject to organisational influences that affect their determination of choice alternatives. The exception is within sociological-institutionalist frameworks where cognition has been used more recently to incorporate analysis of lower level functionaries. For example, the *'logic of appropriateness'*, mentioned in the previous chapter, has more recently been interpreted as

the following of *'cognitive scripts'* that reinforce the legitimacy of institutions and shapes action within them (Saurugger, 2017). However, the effect of such an application only reiterates existing sociological-institutionalist ideas. It reinforces notions of collective behaviour rather than understanding the effect of specific stimuli created at an individual level.

Below I have attempted to reimagine how cognition might be more usefully applied within the field of International Relations in a way that would make it suitable for the purposes of this research. To do that I have looked at those concepts related specifically to organisational decision-making and suggested a model as to how they may be effectively applied to analyse peacekeeping decision-making.

Towards a cognitive approach

In his seminal book *Administrative Behaviour,* Herbert Simon sought to understand behaviour within organisations that was at odds with economic understandings of a rational agent (Simon, 1947/1997). For Simon, decision-making was not simply something that an organisation did but was at the heart of organisational purpose. What was central to that purpose was individual human decision-makers. For Simon, decisions were not the product of agency per se, but the way in which an individual responded to a specific organisational context. A key factor in how a decision-maker interprets that context is the computational limitation of the human mind. Unable to compute a potentially infinite number of choice alternatives, as demanded by rational choice, a decision-maker is compelled to limit the factors that they consider to those that are pertinent.

'One can leave out of account those aspects of reality – and that means most aspects – that appear irrelevant at a given time. Administrators (and everyone else, for that matter) take into account just a few of the factors of the situation regarded as the most relevant.' (Simon, 1947/1997; 119)

How a decision-maker might compile those relevant factors will depend on what is being demanded from the given task within the context of organisational priorities. More succinctly he suggests a cognitive understanding of organisational decision-making as,

'…shaped by a scissors whose two blades are the structure of the task and the computational capabilities of the actor.' (Simon, 1990)

Simon's understanding that individuals were not strictly rational and interpreted the world around them to suit organisational functions had significant implications for decision-theory that reverberate today. However, his characterization of human cognition feels mechanistic in its reduction to computational functions. It was in the decades that followed *Administrative Behaviour* that the cognitive revolution created a more intricate understanding of individuality within social and organisational settings. The movement away from behaviourist approaches to cognitive ones created new concepts within social psychology (Sewell, 1989). These included Asch's experiments, showing the need of individuals to make decisions that demonstrate group conformity (Asch, 1956) and Festinger's discovery of an individual's decision-making behaviour to reduce the mental discomfort caused by contradictory beliefs. (Festinger, 1957). According to these psychological understandings of cognition, individuals transcended their computational capabilities and adherence to objective task structures and instead existed as individual psychologically complex beings with individual needs (Miles, 1965).

In the 1970's, Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky added further to the cognitive model with their work on prospect theory. In their experiments, they identified how individuals consistently subjectively frame an outcome or transaction in ways other than that expected of a rational agent with the result that they systematically violate the axioms of expected utility theory, that correspond to most people's understanding of rational choice (Kahneman and Tversky, 1979). This was done because of bias in decision-making. While ostensibly an economic theory, the discoveries implied a psychological basis for decision-making behaviour. They demonstrated how individuals apply bias to compensate for missing or uncertain information, rather than trying to rationally incorporate that uncertainty into their calculation of choice alternatives. The suggestion developed further by Kahneman suggested that an individual's need for certainty to create personal cognitive ease takes priority over their commitment to more complex, and potentially discomfiting, rational decision-making (Kahneman, 2011).

The implications of the existence of psychologically needy individuals undermining rational decision-making because of bias have been wide reaching within the study of decision-making

in a commercial context. For example, the role of bias among auditors has been interpreted as a core reason for catastrophic business failures that had international ramifications in the early 2000s (Bazerman, 2006; Prentice, 2008). Those analyses are interesting not only for their application of a cognitive framework but the understanding that cognitively complex decision-makers, who were not elite, were responsible for operational decisions that had systemic implications. Similar applications of this kind of cognitive framework have been less forthcoming in the field of International Relations.

Bounded rationality, bias, behaviours, and suboptimal decision-making

Simon's initial work brought in an element of humanity to understanding organisational decision-making which is less evident in approaches to peacekeeping action outlined in the previous chapter. Moreover, subsequent psychologists, economists and cognitive scientists have created an ever more elaborate way of understanding decision-making and human behaviour within organisations that creates an intricate means to understand the role of hyper-specific elements in shaping how those organisations articulate decisions in a systemic way. It is possible to view peacekeeping decision-making through a cognitive organisational lens in a way that is likely to provide a richer means to understanding the suboptimality of its actions.

The framework that will be used in this research, to operationalise a cognitive approach, takes its inspiration from Simon's initial work. He coined the term *bounded rationality* to refer to the decision-making cognition by which a decision-maker filters reality according to their own limitations and task structure. I have adapted the concept to account for the psychological complexity with which an individual might view an organisational task. Particularly, I will focus on an individual decision-makers need to create cognitive ease to lessen contradictions within a bounded rationality and the role that its creation plays in creating bias in interpretations of reality.

Simon suggests that decisions arising from a bounded rationality, in and of itself, are likely to be suboptimal because of their tendency towards *satisficing* behaviours in which decision-makers in an organisational environment seek outcomes that just pass the threshold of acceptability rather than pursuing more risky *maximising* solutions (Simon, 1947/1997; 118). However, the relationship between the search for cognitive ease and the tendency towards

bias, detailed by the likes of Tversky and Kahneman, creates an additional component of suboptimality. Specifically, this entails the tendency to incorrectly value information to obtain a preferred solution, such as one that corresponds to an interpretation of the world that aligns with a bounded rationality. This use of bias creates an illusion of rationality that leads decision-makers to suboptimal calculations (Vecchio, 2006).

A final element to this framework is the *behaviours* that exist to strengthen the illusion of rationality offered by a bounded rationality. A traditionally conceived *'rational'* organisation, as originally conceived by Weber, has mechanisms that should mitigate against the role of bias in decision-making. These include the ability of an organisation to collect knowledge that is assimilated by expert departments. The role of experts, efficiently organised, allows an organisation to gather the most relevant information required for the optimal selection of choice alternatives. The division of labour between different departments decreases the possibility that a single bias viewpoint dominates decision-making (Udy, 1959). However, in reality, organisations create behaviours that favour conformity and cohesion more than the mitigation of bias. The consequence is an incentive to undermine those structures that are supposed to mitigate bias.

Note on use of terms bias and behaviour in research

It should be noted that the available literature around cognition does not normally distinguish between those elements that I describe as bias and those that I refer to as behaviours. In this research I have conceived the former as a purely cognitive process that represents a primary means to selectively use information to interpret the world in a way that directly relates to core aspects of the bounded rationality. Behaviour is a secondary component that has a more general detrimental impact on those mechanisms within organisational decision processes, that would have mitigated bias.

Text Box 1 - Note on use of terms bias and behaviour in research

Below I have provided a more thorough discussion of the three cognitive components of the theoretical framework as they specifically relate to peacekeeping. These have also been summarised in a chart towards the end of this chapter (fig. 1)

A peacekeeping bounded rationality

A bounded rationality exists wherever a decision-maker does. It is an interpreted world which allows a decision-maker to define appropriate actions according to the structure of the task. A bounded rationality is situational and needs to be considered in relation to an individual within a specific context. This will be done in the empirical chapters related to UNMISS. However, aspects of the bounded rationality will be more generalisable and relate to comparatively static elements of the organisational system within which a decision is being made.

To construct a loose model around generalisable elements of a *peacekeeping bounded rationality* I have tried to understand those elements that are likely to be prioritised by an individual decision-maker, with psychological needs, within a UN peacekeeping system. To do this I propose two questions aimed at eliciting what those needs might entail. Firstly, in respect to the priorities of the organisation, and the role that an individual has been employed to play they will ask, *'What is important to my organisation?'* Secondly, in fulfilment of their own professional needs, they will ask, *'What is important to me?'* With this overview in mind I have offered four potential answers in which I have attempted to capture the full range of needs that seem likely to be most urgent within the mind of an individual decision-maker. This builds on the kinds of interests and sociological behaviours that others have identified as driving peacekeeping action and referred to in the previous chapter. Each response can be simplified under four thematic components of a peacekeeping bounded rationality. These include (a) organisational myth, (b) UNSC and UN Secretariat interests, (c) system appropriateness and (d) individual values,

a) **<u>Organisational Myth</u>** **- *'I must protect the positive shared image of the organisation and myself within the organisation'***

A more fixed, and therefore more generalisable, component of an individual decision-maker's self-image relates to how the individual connects to a shared identity of the organisation within which they work. A bureaucracy creates a social system within which mechanisms are reconstructed as symbols, rites, and rituals. These constitute a type of culture that takes on an inflated importance in the mind of the employee (Trice and Beyer, 1984). Some individual's values may lead them to rebel against these rites and rituals. However, the individual need

for conformity suggests a much greater likelihood that they will adhere to the organisational culture (Asch, 1956). Current orthodoxy in organisational management suggests that strong *'organisational-fit'* should correspond to career advancement, suggesting that hiring and promotion practices also incentivise organisational conformity (Bowen, Ledford, and Nathan, 1991).

A UN cultural identity will also likely be even more prominent than a normal organisational culture, given the quasi-religious nature of its organisational myth. Within its founding document the opening line *'We the peoples of the United Nations,'* delineate the grandiose authority that underpins the organisation's legitimacy. One of the founding figures of the early organisation of the UN in general, and peacekeeping in particular, Dag Hammarskjold, looms large in the myth. His use of language leant a quasi-religious purpose to the organisation reflected in his personal writings, as well as his public conceptualisation of the UN's role.

'The principles of the Charter are, by far, greater than the Organisation in which they are embodied, and the aims which they are to safeguard are holier than the policies of any single nation or people.' (UNSC, 1956)

However, focus on an organisational myth can create worldviews that are simultaneously expansive (lifting decisions outside the scope of narrow interests) while also inward looking (satisfaction with a fixed self-image that precludes reform). Zaleznik sees within organisational myth the tendency for corporations to embrace their mythology in a way that creates inefficiency, as staff focus on its unchanging *'inner life.'* Far from motivating an organisation to show itself worthy of its myth, it breeds insularity and lessens responsiveness to a changing environment (Zaleznik, 1993). The core message of its myth fades into irrelevance as energies are directed towards the maintenance of symbols, rites and rituals and focus is on maintaining a generic positive representation of the organisation.

Of particular relevance in this research is the tendency for a focus on organisational myth to overemphasise the risks of actions that have the potential to undermine the organisation's reputation. As Zaleznik suggests, this lessens a decision-maker's appetite for uncertainty in a way that disincentivises the contemplation of a broader range of decision alternatives. An example of this may be seen in the response of the UN to the Haitian cholera crisis of the

2010s that killed approximately 10,000 people. Notwithstanding the evidence against it, it took 6 years of repeated denials and delayed action (Frerichs, 2016) before the UN publicly accepted its responsibility for introducing the disease to the local population (Katz, 2016). The accusations, while true, directly challenged the myth of the UN through its implication of incompetence and apparent indifference to the suffering of the local population. The organisational myth encouraged officials to be circumspect of information that might have prompted remedial action, lest that undermine the myth.

b) **UNSC and UN Secretariat Interests** - ***'I must satisfy those above me in the hierarchy'***

Notwithstanding, a diversification in types of organisational structure away from Weber's classic conception of hierarchy (Blau, 1968), the prevalence of hierarchy as a societal structure still means that people have become, *'…so accustomed to the idea of superiority and subordination,'* that even in less formal organisations the need to please those *'above'* is evident (Diefenbach and Sillince, 2011). That instinct is likely to be more pronounced in an organisation such as the UN in which hierarchical stratification is pronounced and embedded in its rites and rituals including an elaborate grading system of seniority (Chandran and von Einsiedel, 2016).

Deference to hierarchy from those decision-makers working at the field level of a peacekeeping mission, can constitute a deference to those interests that emanate from senior leadership within the UNSC and the UN Secretariat. The UNSC deploy a range of means to make their interests felt among senior staff of the UN. This includes informal arrangements and lobbying of governments over who leads UN Secretariat Departments, and Funds and Agencies (Cunliffe, 2009). Alternatively, the UNSC can more directly intervene when senior UN staff act in a way, they perceive to be contrary to their interests (see text box 2).

Eide, Choi and Annan

When Kai Eide opened negotiations with the Taliban while Senior Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) at UNAMA, he did so against the backdrop of *'considerable pressure from UN headquarters and the Security Council against engagement'* (Karlsrud, 2013). When Choi Young-Jin used military force to intervene in the conflict in Sierra Leone as SRSG of UNOCI he was publicly criticised by a member of the UNSC (Karlsrud, 2013). Eide and Jin subsequently left their roles following their decisions that diverged from organisational priorities. A constructive comparison may be that of Kofi Annan. Annan's significant role in the catastrophic decision failures that contributed to the UN's disastrous performance in Rwanda in 1994, did not impede his ascension to Secretary-General. Annan, as head of peacekeeping at the time, and with the agreement of Secretary-General Boutros Ghali, repeatedly denied General Dallaire permission to seize weapons in the run-up to the 1994 genocide. Notably his actions were more closely aligned to the interests of members of the UNSC who were reluctant to extend their involvement in the troubled country (Uvin, 2001).

Text Box 2 - Eide, Choi and Annan

Another means by which the UNSC communicate their interests to UN peacekeeping staff are the resources which they make available to respective missions. The so-*called 'commitment gap'* (the gap between the mandates and the resources available to achieve that mandate) has been a common feature of peacekeeping since their inception (UN, 2000). The level to which the UNSC authorises resources communicates the level of its commitment to an individual context (Lispon, 2007). A wary SRSG is likely to evaluate risk according to the political and material support evident in mission resourcing rather than the heady values of a mission's mandate.

Another aspect of interests that will impact the decision-making environment are those created within the UN Secretariat. These are not always aligned with the UNSC. Often, they relate to a preference in New York to avoid involvement that might over-extend the organisation in volatile and uncertain contexts. This is often related to the possibility that such decisions will threaten the organizational myth. It is also relevant to an individual's professional self-conception as they avoid the possibility of association with visible failures connected with large peacekeeping missions that are exposed to more significant and complex risks. In the creation of UNMISS for example, the UN Secretariat initially tried to avoid a Chapter VII mandate that necessitated a deeper operational commitment to South Sudan, arguing that Chapter VI was more appropriate to the context (Dijkstra, 2015). As the

principal, the UNSC ultimately overruled the UN Secretariat but these agent interests persisted and influenced how the Mission interpreted its mandate in the following years.

c) System Appropriateness - *'I must act correctly according to the system'*

The way in which the UN places a high priority in the observance of rules and structural expectations also skews decision-making by creating irrational value around rule following that detracts from focus from more practical elements of achieving a task. It was notable in this research that the UN generally did not punish instances of poor decision-making and even rewarded bad decision-makers. The common factor is that these decision-makers did not break any implicit or explicit rules. Such a narrow definition of job performance inevitably skews decision-making by creating appropriateness around process rather than task objectives. Similar examples of regard for systemic appropriateness have been observed in the UN's actions in Myanmar (see text box 3). This idea corresponds closely to Barnett and Finnemore's ideas as to how pathologies of dysfunction (Barnett and Finnemore, 2004) are created in bureaucratic environments as well as the *'logic of appropriateness'* referred to in the previous chapter (March and Olsen, 1998).

The UN in Myanmar

In 2017, UN Resident Coordinator for Myanmar, Renata Lok-Dessallien, was moved from her position following media accusations that she suppressed information about human rights abuses to maintain focus on cooperation with the Government on development issues (Holmes, 2017). The subsequent investigation by the UN confirmed *'instances of deliberately de-dramatising events in reports prepared by the Resident Coordinator'* that played a role in the UN's failures in the country during the genocide against the Rohingya community. However, the report is also at pains to suggest that the Resident Coordinator acted according to the rules suggesting that she, *'…framed her coordination of the country team in terms of the guidance received from New York'* (Rosenthal, 2019). Within the UN system, such adherence to the rules cannot be faulted even in the face of catastrophic failure. Lok-Dessallien subsequently secured a significant promotion to the resident coordinator role in India in 2019.

Text Box 3 - The UN in Myanmar

d) Individual Values - *'I must justify my professional self-image, by carrying out my duties according to my values within the resources available to me.'*

The desire to embody the best professional representation of oneself is perhaps obvious in its potential to create self-worth regarded as an *'emotional sine qua non'*. Failure to meet the

standards of that self-conception, represents a *'self-rejection'* that can be the cause of debilitating emotional pain and is generally avoided by *'successful'* professionals (McKay and Fanning, 2016).

The nature of what constitutes the self-image of a *'good'* professional is value laden. This research takes the cognitive-affective personality approach, in which behaviour and attitudes can be best predicted by understanding the interaction of an individual with a stable psychological system within a given situation (Mischel and Shoda, 1995). How an individual constitutes values within a bounded rationality therefore cannot be generalised and, in this research, will be addressed separately in respect to the three different decision-makers that the research concentrates on between 2013 and 2017 (see methodology).

Bias fills uncertainty

Within a concept of bounded rationality, the elements mentioned above allow the decision-maker to distil the chaotic nature of reality and its infinite choice alternatives to those manageable elements that are pertinent to those elements they perceive to be most important to the structure of the task. Decision-making within a peacemaker's bounded rationality mean that elements that are extraneous, when considering the practical elements of achieving a task, are likely to be given greater. An individual's values, interests, organizational myth, and system appropriateness take on an outweighed importance for a decision-maker to understand a context and define choice alternatives.

The means through which a decision-maker can internally justify acting according to such extraneous elements is through bias. Bias allows information about the world to be interpreted through subconscious processes that minimises cognitive contradictions in a way that is essential to the well-being of individual decision-makers (Zanna, 1994). These are the kind of contradictions that come from trying to incorporate extraneous considerations as elements of a task structure.

In ordinary times, it is likely that the tendency for suboptimal decision-making will increase in organisational decision-making where bounded rationalities push decision-makers to consider a significant number of extraneous factors, rather than focussing on those most practical to the task. However, the role of a bounded rationality is limited by the existence of a broadly stable *'reality'.* That stability exists in the acceptance of shared knowledge between

the UN and other entities capable of creating understandings of reality (Governmental, civil society, media etc.). That reality creates a limitation to which a UN decision-maker can bias interpretations of the world to justify the consideration of these extraneous elements of a bounded rationality.

However, shared stable understandings of reality are contingent upon the availability of information delivered in a sufficiently slow and predictable way that a network of disparate organisations can negotiate and agree upon shared meanings. In a dynamic situation, such as conflict, the stability of that reality degrades as entities struggle to find information and agree on meanings in a fast-changing environment. A conflict will undermine the availability and certainty of information as well as the capacity of diffuse networks to support a single, stable understanding. In that environment, an organisation such as the UN must be self-reliant in the absorption of information and creation of understandings. In that more isolated environment a bounded rationality, becomes more significant to the appraisal of information, and construction of reality.

In a situation of uncertainty, it is therefore likely that bias will increase as an uncertain decision-maker seeks to ground choice alternatives in known and extraneous elements within a peacekeeping bounded rationality. The tendency for individuals to resort to bias to respond to uncertainty is central to the experiments of Tversky and Kahneman (Tversky and Kahneman, 1979) and has been observed in organisational bias (Bazerman, 1985).

Bias grounds understandings in existing beliefs and experiences, that are connected to the values, myths, interests, and systems that can make-up a bounded rationality. Below I have suggested three types of bias that I will refer to in the empirical chapters of this research as they were the most prevalent based on observations of UNMISS.

a) **Confirmation bias** refers to, *'the seeking or interpreting of evidence in ways that are partial to existing beliefs'* (Nickerson, 1998) A significant amount of empirical evidence exists to suggest that individuals are susceptible to seeking out (Koriat and Lichtenstein, 1980), interpreting (Kuhn, 1989), and remembering (Lingle and Ostrom, 1981) information in such a way so as to better conform to an existing and deeply held hypothesis. Within my framework such hypotheses (or beliefs) are those that have been developed as *'correct'* according to at least one component of the bounded rationality.

b) **Availability bias** refers to the tendency of individuals to make judgements, *'by the ease with which relevant instances come to mind'* (Tversky and Kahneman, 1973). The availability of such instances in a person's mind will affect the ability of an individual to predict the likelihood of an events (Read, 1995). The vividness of instances, where they have had negative or positive connotations to the person experiencing them, also create associations that shape the way an individual perceives social reality and the values that they attach to it (Riddle, 2010). In this research, availability bias most commonly relates to those experience that are important to the way an individual interprets and comprise that person's values.

c) **Substitution bias** otherwise referred to as *attribute substitution* refers to the application of a stereotype (Kahneman and Frederick, 2002) or *'prototypical case'* that can be applied to replace missing or uncertain information (Sunstein, 2005). The bias can also account for positive and negative associations attached to individuals and organisations by decision-makers, even when those associations are not correlated (Rosenzweig, 2007). For example, a UN official may view a government official more positively simply because they are part of the same culture or system of international governance to which they assign positive connotations.

Behaviours enable bias

Suboptimal decisions are the result of consideration of extraneous elements in the structure of a task in a decision-makers development of choice alternatives. This is aggravated in an organisational setting where extraneous choice alternatives are a significant component of a bounded rationality because of their significance to the life of that organisation. This is aggravated further in a situation of uncertainty where stable understandings of reality breakdown. Bias increases as decision-makers seek to create certainty and reduce contradictory elements within their cognition. Bias will ground decision-alternatives in beliefs and experiences that relate to the bounded rationality.

However, well-developed organisations have inherent capacities to mitigate bias. These include the presence of diverse experts within specialised departments, the range of which will make the assimilation of information and its proper valuation more likely. The division of departments should inhibit the development of fixed *beliefs* and the need to rely on individual experiences. A bureaucratic organisation also creates an emotional detachment from a

decision, that should inhibit bias responses. Organisations should have a coherent and consistent risk profile that creates certainty around the acceptability of risk in its actions. To understand why bounded rationality and bias created sub-optimal decision-making in South Sudan, it is therefore necessary to understand why the inherent organisational resilience to bias failed.

Within the South Sudan peacekeeping mission, it was possible to identify certain behaviours that undermined a diversity of viewpoints and skewed the way in which a decision-maker frames a problem or anchors their decision. Frames relate to the different ways that the same information can be presented in the mind of a decision-maker to elicit differing responses. Anchors refer to those base values which can be arbitrarily chose by a decision-maker yet constitute a framework from which decisions are made. Framing and anchoring mistakes can include wrongly classifying groups when considering threats or else arbitrarily making a risk threshold needlessly high. These behaviours, when institutionalised, create systemic appropriateness around core interpretations. Competing or contradictory interpretations, even when developed by experts within the organisation, diminish in relevance. At the same time incorrect framing and anchoring of information is normalised in a way that legitimises the repetition of suboptimal actions. To attempt to capture the types of behaviours suggested above I have listed four of the most common that I observed during this research.

a) **Inside views** are the consequence of decision-makers arbitrarily restricting the boundaries of a decision process by limiting inputs from those outside of a small group, often comprised of those who follow the same bounded rationality. The tendency is for those within the inside view to overweight the uniqueness of their task in a way that undermines the potential value of external viewpoints. It legitimises the application of solutions that reflect the shared understandings from the small group (Kahneman, 2011).
b) **Groupthink** occurs when the desire for conformity and perceived harmony means that those within a group overweight the importance of consensus in decision-making over critical evaluation. The group is more likely to undervalue the opinions of those not in the group and artificially promotes optimism and certainty around decisions within it (Janis, 1972).

   Groupthink also tends to emulate senior mindsets by more junior staff because of expectancy of professional rewards (Vroom, 1964). This is particularly prevalent in the

'type A' organisations, as defined by Ouchi, where the importance of senior individualism undermines the value of internal consultations and horizontal information sharing (Ouchi, 1981). In a hierarchal and process-oriented culture such as the UN, more junior staff are left out of senior decision-making. Their involvement in the organisation is limited to arbitrary and irrelevant aspects of the organisation's life. As Deal and Kennedy observe in process-oriented cultures,

'They [the employees] *start developing artificial ties to elements of the world in the organisation; small events take on major importance – a certain telephone call, that snippet of paper, or the section head's latest memo.' (Deal and Kennedy, 2000)*

In an environment that does not value individual junior perspectives, emulation of senior mindsets becomes one of the few ways to demonstrate value within the organisation.

Barnett and Finnemore suggest that the way in which the UN system functioned in the lead up to Rwanda and Srebrenica, meant it struggled to assign appropriate significance to events outside of the official interpretation. Processes '*generated indifference*,' and it became, *'…tolerable, even desirable, to disregard mass violations of human rights*' (Barnett and Finnemore, 2004, 155). In their place, Barnett and Finnemore suggest that UNAMIR exhibited a type of groupthink favouring '*assimilated information*' based on systemic understandings, even as new information contradicted the decisions that stemmed from it (Barnett and Finnemore, 2004, 148).

c) **Risk aversion** refers to the tendency to reference incorrect risk frameworks in decision-making. This behaviour is increasingly irrational as decision-makers are willing to accept significant losses to avoid even small chances of encountering uncertainty (Kahneman and Tversky, 1984). Risk aversion becomes pronounced in uncertain environments with the acceptance of suboptimal outcomes to avoid uncertainty. When risk aversion becomes endemic to an organisation the level of acceptable risk will be lowered at systemic level even where it is irrational to do so.

d) The **sunk cost fallacy** refers to the irrational tendency to incorporate past investments into present decisions even when those investments are irrelevant (Parayre, 1995). The tendency undermines a decision-maker's ability to critically examine their past mistakes as they seek to justify past behaviour in future decisions (Arkes, 2000). In situations of

uncertainty such justification can escalate to maintain the correctness of decisions even in the face of information that suggest those decisions are suboptimal (Staw, 1997). A decision-maker that has a personal attachment to that investment can exacerbate this tendency as they seek to justify their role in the original decision (Kelly and Milkman, 2013).

Conclusions

Below I have drawn together the three cognitive elements of the theoretical framework in a single diagram (fig. 1). The central argument of this research is that UNMISS decision-makers were irrationally fixated on extraneous elements of a bounded rationality. Uncertainty increased this tendency and bias created legitimacy to the decisions that were grounded in these extraneous elements. However, as more practical considerations were made peripheral, suboptimality in decisions increased. Certain behaviours visible in decision-making within UNMISS suggest inherent organisational resilience to bias had been compromised particularly regarding the role of divergent viewpoints, risk frameworks and assessment of previous decisions. These behaviours skewed the ability of decision-makers to rationally frame and anchor decisions making reliance on a bounded rationality more likely.

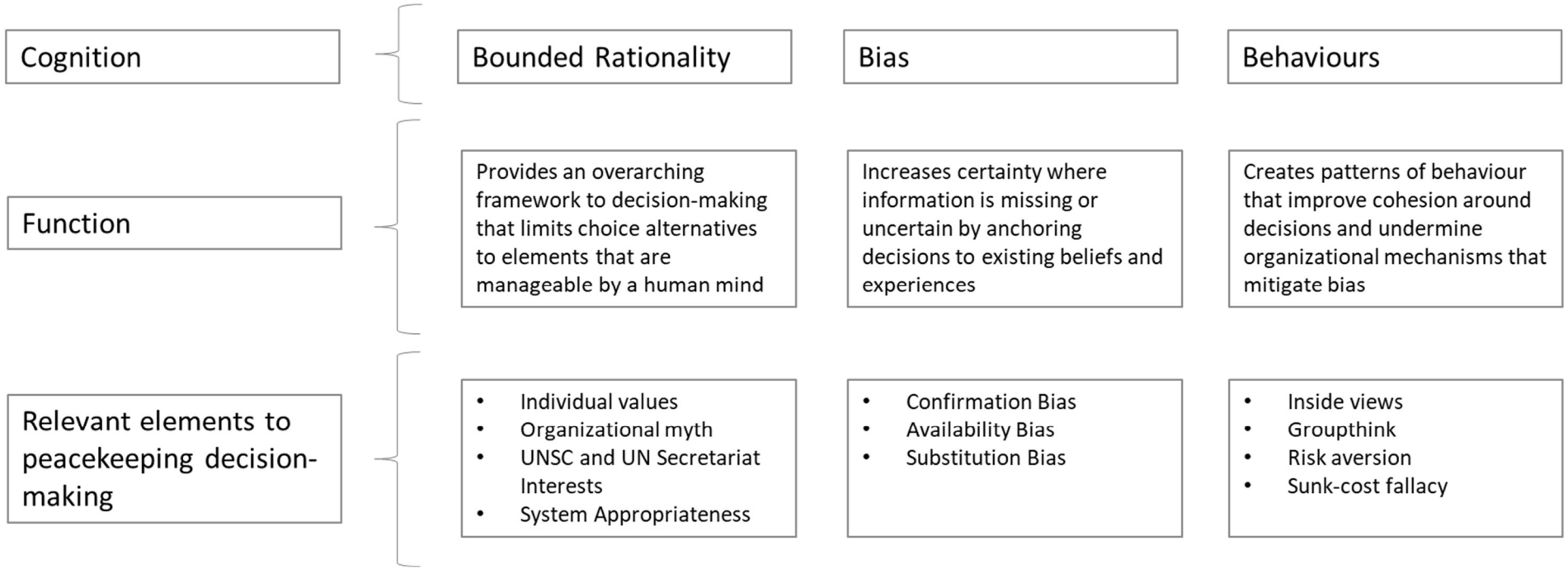


Figure 1 - Summary of cognitive terms used in theoretical framework

4. Methodology

Introduction

To focus observation when applying the theoretical framework, I intend to focus on the position of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) within UNMISS and the decisions that were made within the offices of the three individuals that occupied that role between 2013 and 2017. I will focus on how they, and the staff around them, behaved in relation to six key decision events over the same period. All the decisions relate to the Protection of Civilians (POC) component of UNMISS' mandate. By using a historiographical approach, I will build on existing literature through the analysis of a range of primary sources to construct a rich approximation of the context of decisions in relation to those events in six separate chapters. In the conclusions of each section I will more fully account for how the role of cognition in explaining decisions related to that context. Below I have provided expanded explanations related to my methodological choices.

UNMISS and South Sudan

In choosing a suitable subject to apply the theoretical framework I have chosen to focus on UNMISS and South Sudan. I spent three and a half years working in the country (March 2014 to August 2017) primarily as an information analyst. This included working for UNMISS. I was responsible for compiling reports on the security situation in the country for the State Operations Centre in Jonglei at the sector headquarters in Bor, as well as for the Joint Operations Centre based at the national headquarters in Juba. While there I was able to create a good base understanding of the context and UN decision-making processes. I additionally spent time working for the UN Secretariat in New York (March 2018 to March 2019) within the UN Operations and Crisis Centre (UNOCC) where I was also involved with analysis of and UNMISS operations albeit as part of a larger portfolio of responsibilities. Specifically, I was responsible for compiling the background briefs that were used in the Secretary-General's Executive committee in which I also sat in a secretarial capacity. There I was able to experience how the context was interpreted and how decisions were influenced from the perspective of the UN Secretariat.

The insights that I gained from this experience have directed the content of this research. This has allowed a more efficient engagement with the empirical components of the research. It has also informed how I chose the individuals that have been interviewed as part of this research.

In trying to find an appropriate position for myself in this research I have to account for my personal relationship with the subject. This includes acknowledging the embedded nature of that research and its implications. That relationship includes emotions of anger and frustration that I acknowledge feeling while observing, in sometimes graphic moments, many of the incidents described in this research. At each stage of this research, I have had to consider that the possibility that those emotions underpin an animus which represents the 'real' reasons for writing this. My approach has not been to be constantly reflexive in the writing the writing. My concern has been that an overly reflexive analysis (Alejandro, 2021), within a comparatively short word limit, would necessarily become a more methodologically focussed thesis in which my own relationship with UN decision-making would become more important than the decision-making itself. I acknowledge the inevitability with which my own emotions, particularly within an extreme context, will drive and inform this research (Hedstrom, 2019). However, I have also tried to adopt a constant self-reflection to account for the impact of these feelings on the research and ensure the integrity of my approach to the data. The results of that reflection are private.

Another consequence of the embedded nature of the research are my friendships with many of the people who I interviewed in the course of this research. Other researchers have noted the ethical and methodological complexities of such relationships within research (Brewis, 2014). These friendships have been useful in creating productive research. It has been especially useful in getting people to trust me and open up in a way they may not have otherwise. A complex issue has been deciding for myself how much I might exploit the advantage provided by my friendship. However, by acknowledging this in the interviews and explaining the full purpose of the research with the interviewees, in a way that ensures a high level of informed consent in obtained, these interviews were conducted in an ethical way. However, I have had to acknowledge the potential for an availability bias in the sampling, given that many of the interviewees could be considered friends. It stands to reason that my friends are also people with similar viewpoints to my own. As a consequence, I have

purposefully sought out individuals who I did not know personally and who, given their known reputations, could be expected to provide a contrary perspective to my own.

2013 to 2017

The chosen period corresponds with much of my own professional work in South Sudan, which allows the benefit of being able to use my existing knowledge to inform the content and direction of the research. However, the period also represents the most dynamic period of UNMISS peacekeeping when the conflict was at its most intense and when uncertainty around information would have been at its most extreme. The expectation, according to the theoretical framework outlined above, is that in this uncertainty evidence of suboptimal decision-making will be more abundant alongside evidence of bounded rationalities, bias and behaviours.

The SRSG

While I have written about the value of a systemic approach, it is not possible to review the whole system around UNMISS decision-making within the limits of this research. For this reason, I have chosen to focus on the role of the SRSG whose decision-making relates to policy, operations, and tactics of a peacekeeping mission. They influence the UNSC on policy, directly control operations in the field and set the environment for tactical decision-making in emergency situations. As such their decision-making process is likely to be reflective of systemic bounded rationality.

Between 2013 and 2017, there were three different SRSGs. I will also be able to suggest how the role of individual values changed the bounded rationality of their decision-making. These SRSGs were Hilde Johnson (July 2011 to June 2014), Ellen Løj (July 2014 to November 2016) and the current SRSG, David Shearer, who took up the post in December 2016. For reference I have provided a timeline of events, that will be studied in this research against the tenure of three different SRSGs (fig. 2)

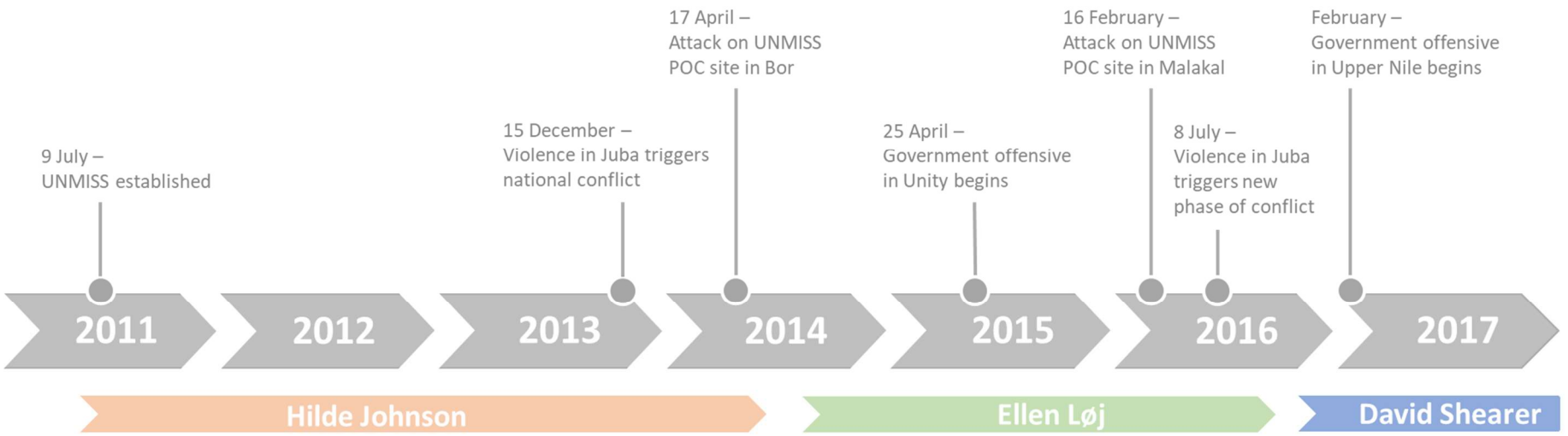


Figure 2 - Timeline of events and tenures of UNMISS SRSGs

Protection of Civilians

To make comparisons within the case study I have chosen to focus on a single theme that was the subject of regular decision-making and was a high priority throughout this period. From its inception in 2011, UNMMISS had a strong *'Protection of Civilians'* (POC) component (Dijkstra, 2015). In the years prior to 2014, this was outlined in sections: 3 (b) (iv), 3 (b) (v), and 3 (b) (vi) of (UNSC, 2011) and thereafter in section 4 (a) of (UNSC, 2014). When nationwide conflict started in 2013, the UNMISS POC role became its primary task. Those efforts became centred protection of civilians in a series of areas on UNMISS bases to which civilians had fled to escape fighting. Between 2014 and 2016 UNMISS opened five major POC sites. Although its role was not unprecedented in peacekeeping missions, the size and extended duration of these sites have provided novel challenges to a traditional peacekeeping posture (Lilly, 2014). Occupation of these sites reached a peak of 230,000 people in June 2017 (UNMISS, 2017e). During the period under study, UNMISS POC sites were attacked on four separate occasions.[5]

Six Decision Events

Between 2013 and 2017, I have identified six of the most significant events that relate to UNMISS' POC role in South Sudan between 2013 and 2017. These represent moments when decision-making by UNMISS around its mandated POC objectives would have been most pronounced. The six key events are; *Violence in Juba* (December 2013 / Chapter 6), Attack on the Bor UNMISS base and POC site (April 2014 / Chapter 7), *Government offensive in Unity state* (April 2015 / Chapter 8), *Attack at the Malakal UNMISS base and POC site* (February 2016 / Chapter 9), *Violence in Juba and the Equatorias* (July 2016 / Chapter 10), *Government offensive in Upper Nile state* (May 2017 / Chapter 11).

Structure

The research has been written on the assumption that the reader may not have specific knowledge of the country context or peacekeeping decision-making. I have included a background which provides a brief overview of the context leading up to 2013 as well as an overview of peacekeeping decision-making structures (Chapter 3).

[5] Akobo (December 2013), Bor (April 2014), Malakal (February 2016) and Juba (July 2016)

For simplicity, I intend to divide each empirical chapter, dealing with the six decision events into two sections. The first is a historiographical exploration of the context of the event, focussing on aspects that are pertinent to decision-making. These relate to practical elements that were relevant to the task and known to decision-makers. It will also describe those elements became relevant through the bounded rationality described above as well as the bias and behaviours that existed at within the organisation. In the conclusions I will more explicitly outline how the theoretical framework applies to the historiographical references.

The way in which I have applied the theoretical framework is based on the recognition that not all the aspects of the organisational bounded rationality, bias and behaviours exist to the same extent around every decision. In the conclusions of each chapter I will offer reasoning as to why one component was more prominent than another while maintaining the relevance of the model as a whole.

The conclusions of this research (Chapter 12) will draw together the implications of the empirical chapters and offer a justification for the wider application of a cognitive approach in assessing other peacekeeping missions. I will use the research to suggest areas of reform to the peacekeeping system that can mitigate bias in decision-making in such a way as to create more optimal peacekeeping solutions.

Evidence

A fundamental part of the approach of this methodology has been to provide a historiographical account of the decision context of South Sudan between 2013 and 2017. This has been to make visible as many of the known hyper-specific elements of the context as possible, including individual psychologies, interactions, and their associated behaviours. To achieve this, I have applied a critical analysis to literature, news articles, speeches, UN resolutions, records of action, UNMISS budgets, and records of UN meetings related to the context. Between April and July 2020, I also carried out eighteen semi-structured interviews with UN officials, diplomats and humanitarians who were either involved with or close observers of decision-making within the SRSG's office. Each lasted between 45 and 90 minutes and the quotations have come from transcribed records. The interviews were conducted anonymously and their inclusion in this research has been done carefully to preserve that anonymity.

As well as creating data which I can use to apply the theoretical framework, this approach to the evidence will create a more detailed account of UNMISS actions during the period under study than currently exists. It will also provide the means to provide an account of peacekeeping decision-making at the field level that is more detailed than currently exists. As such the empirical components of this research may have value in and of themselves for other researchers.

Challenges

The greatest challenge posed by this research is the difficulty of uncovering sufficient evidence of hyper-specific elements in a way that shows bias and behaviours that are consistent enough to suggest patterns that correlate to the kind of cognitive process described in the theoretical framework. It is likely that individuals sought rational justifications for their decisions and behaviours even where bias, according to a bounded rationality, provides a more logical explanation of their actions. However, the negative connotations of accepting the existence of personal bias creates a bias in and of itself (not to recognise it) when individuals are asked to account for past actions (Tavris and Aronson, 2016; 280).

To overcome this challenge, I have sought out as many perspectives and views as possible to generate as much data as is available to create as faithful an approximation of the decision context as possible. I have taken a critical approach to the available information. Primary sources have been treated as texts with narrative structures that reveal individual interpretations of the world. I have focussed on the extent to which those interpretations deviate from what might be the rational determination of an outsider, or somebody that would focus on those elements that are of practical relevance to optimal achievement of a task (rather than the extraneous elements of a UN bounded rationality). Where that deviation appears significant, I have suggested the extent to which the behaviours around it and the decision can be explained by the bounded rationality outlined in the theoretical framework.

5. Background

As suggested in the previous chapter, this research has been written with the likelihood that its reader does not have especial knowledge of the subject matter. This chapter will provide a brief overview of the country prior to the creation of UNMISS in 2011. It will give a sense of the political, security and physical context of the country including an introduction of some of the main individuals that were central to the conflict and will be frequently referred to. It will also cover how and why the Mission was formed as well as a description of the forums and roles that comprised its decision-making mechanisms.

The operating environment

For most of the 1980's the southern states of Sudan were engulfed in a vicious civil war, the brutality of which threatened a humanitarian disaster. Only the intercession of NGO and UN humanitarian agencies, organised under a consortium known as Operation Lifeline Sudan (OLS) averted a catastrophe (Maxwell, Santschi & Gordan, 2014). UN involvement under the OLS continued until the war finally came to a halt 22 years after it had begun, in 2005. The so-called Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) that concluded the conflict also heralded a new stage of involvement by the UN with the establishment of the United Nations Mission in Sudan (UNMIS). UNMIS supported the implementation of the CPA until a referendum, in which 98.3% of the population of Sudan's southern states voted in favour of independence. The new State of South Sudan was declared on 9 July 2011 (BBC, 2011a).

On 8 July 2011, UNMIS was rebadged and given a new mandate to support the establishment of the new country (UNSC, 2011). To the staff of the newly established UNMISS, particularly those that had been involved since the days of the OLS, there was a sense of euphoria and optimism as tens of thousands of people gathered in Juba to celebrate the first day of the new country (Martell, 2011). Not only had the country successfully emerged from one of Africa's longest and most destructive conflicts, but it appeared united in a common goal.

Nonetheless the challenges were daunting. Independence meant an inexperienced Government tackling some of the world's worst human development indicators on behalf of its 10 million people (UNDESA, 2019). This task was more complex given the decades of deliberate underinvestment by Khartoum, a continuation of the British colonial *'southern*

policy' (Martell, 2018; 40). Physical infrastructure that might be expected in a country of its size was largely non-existent. For example, only 14km of paved road existed in a country the size of France (WCRWC, 2007).

The natural obstacles were equally daunting. At the heart of the country stands *The Sudd*, a vast swamp whose Arabic name literally translates as *'barrier'* or *'obstruction'* and is fed by a colossal rainy season that lasts up to six months each year, turning many of the country's roads into impassable rivers. Up to 70% of the country can be inaccessible to road vehicles for up to half of the year (Dumo, 2018).

In addition to the development and transportation challenges, the political geography of South Sudan was fraught. It is comprised of a patchwork of competing communal groups. These groups frequently expressed their rivalries through large violent confrontations, particularly as a result of cattle raiding, that could claim the lives of hundreds in a single incident (Dixon, 2016). During the civil war, this competition was fanned by Khartoum through the material sponsorship of communal groups willing to show some level of allegiance to its authority. Khartoum's lack of investment in local governance also ensured that mechanisms, that might have otherwise created some local cohesion and resilience to conflict, largely did not exist.

The two largest and most powerful groups in South Sudan are the Dinka and Nuer, accounting for 36% and 16% of the population respectively (CIA, 2020). Around 60 other indigenous groups make up the rest of the population (UNDESA, 2019). During the civil war, communal competition had had devastating consequences. In 1991, a split in the main South Sudanese rebel group, the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), saw the creation of a new armed group around disaffected Nuer. They believed the goals of the SPLA had been undermined by the authoritative style of the SPLA's Dinka leader, John Garang. The subsequent violence led to an internecine conflict in which both sides perpetrated heinous acts against civilians on a communal basis. The most notorious of these was the massacre of at least 2,000 Dinka civilians at Bor by forces loyal to the Nuer commander, Riek Machar (Amnesty International, 2005).

Notwithstanding, these divisions, Garang advocated for reconciliation to reach a sustainable peace ahead of the CPA. He brought longstanding enemies together under a *'big tent policy'*

based on their re-joining the SPLA. Machar was eventually appointed Vice-President of the Autonomous Region of Southern Sudan, re-established under the CPA, in 2005.[6] Garang only held the role of President for 3 weeks before dying in a helicopter crash. The task of maintaining the complex and fragile alliances that he had built fell to one of his Generals, Salva Kiir, who also came from the Dinka community.

External threats to South Sudan

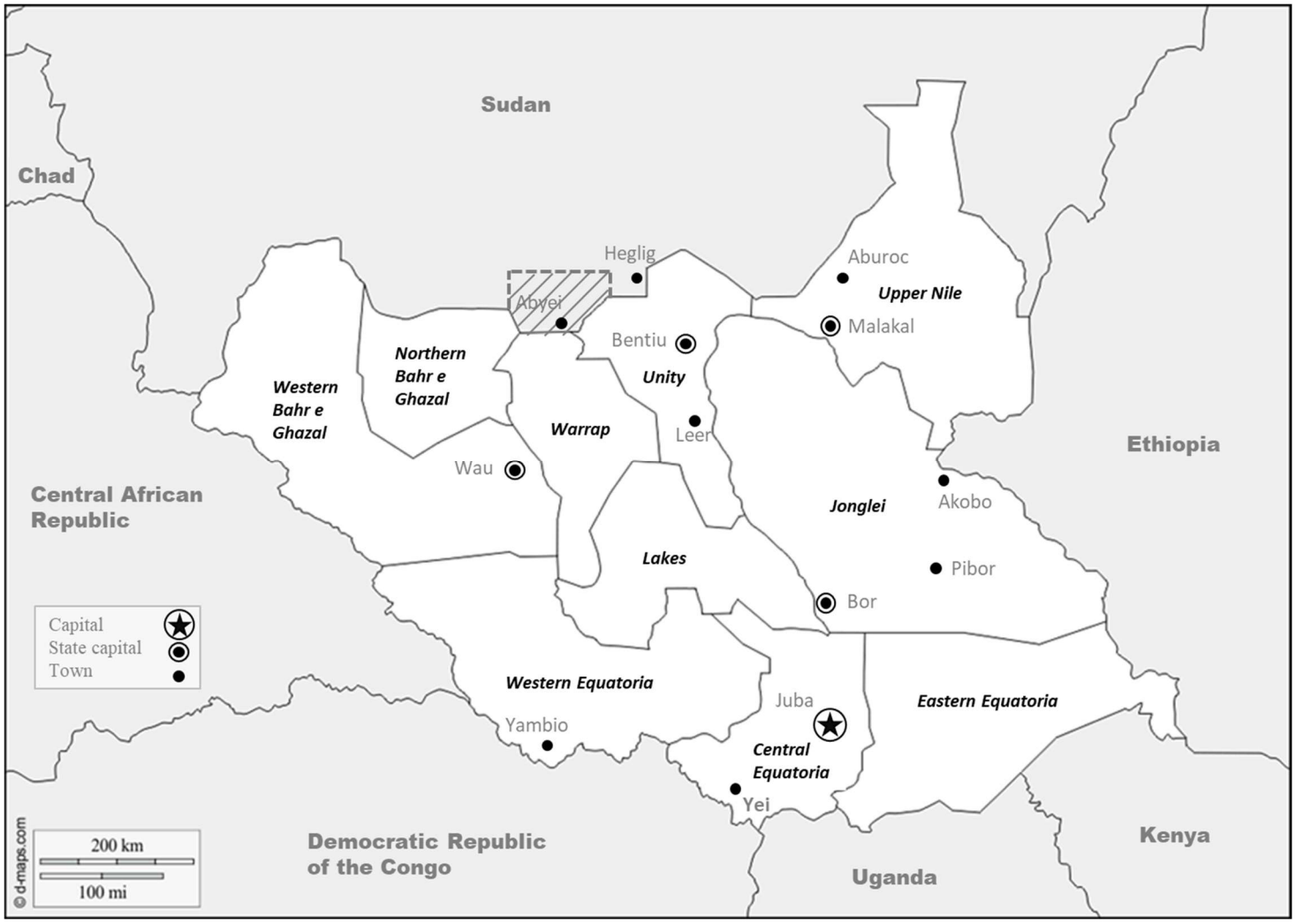
If the internal security environment looked fragile, the UN also had to contend with a constant threat of conflict from outside. Disputes over border demarcations between the southern states and Sudan, particularly around the oil rich region of Abyei (see map 1), existed from the outset of the CPA. Not only did Khartoum lay claim to the area but nomadic groups aligned with, and often sponsored by, Khartoum violently resisted claims by the south to the area (Brown, 2011). Between the signing of the CPA and independence, deadly clashes because of these tensions were frequent. In 2011, just three months before South Sudan achieved independence, Sudan militarily occupied the Abyei region threatening a return to all-out war (Zapata, 2013). This was only averted following a UN brokered ceasefire and a new peacekeeping mission, the United Nations Interim Security Force in Abyei (UNISFA), that was deployed in July (UNSC, 2011b). Tensions persisted however, with both Juba and Khartoum trading accusations that the other was supporting insurgencies in their respective countries (Holland, 2012).

Text Box 4 - External threats to South Sudan

Not only was the operating environment complex but also dangerous. The UN struggled in its role elsewhere in Sudan. The UN/AU mission in Darfur situated the United Nations-African Union Hybrid Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) between Khartoum backed militias and the Sudan Defence Force (SDF) on one side and militias with links to the SPLA on the other. In the years between the establishment of UNAMID in 2007 and the establishment of UNMISS in 2011, more than half of all global peacekeeping fatalities, arising out of malicious incidents, were in Sudan.[7]

[6] The Autonomous Region of Southern Sudan had existed between the end of the first Sudan civil war in 1972 to 1983, when the second Sudan civil war began.

[7] Includes military, police, and civilian peacekeepers fatalities by malicious acts in UNAMID (34) and UNMIS (4) out of a global total (74) between July 2007 and July 2011 and is based on data provided by UNDPO. Accessed on 10 Sep. 2019 at https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/peacekeeper-fatalities.



Map 1 - Map of South Sudan and areas mentioned in research

What type of mission?

Of all the members of the UNSC, the US had taken the strongest interest in helping define the parameters for the UN's new mission in South Sudan (Dijkstra, 2015). During the war in the southern states of Sudan, a campaign of popular support for US action against the Khartoum Government had galvanised a peculiar mix of A-list Hollywood celebrities and evangelical Christians (BBC, 2011b). For the US administration, support for *'oppressed Christian freedom fighters'* against *an 'oppressive Islamist Government'* was a welcome, seemingly unambiguous, distraction from the otherwise dismal story of US foreign affairs that was at the time defined by its unpopular misadventures in Afghanistan and Iraq. It also served as another means for the US to galvanise international attempts to isolate Khartoum's leader Omar Al-Bashir, whose regime the US had opposed since his military coup in 1989 and support of Iraq and Osama bin Laden in the 1990s.[8]

While the US administration under George W. Bush avoided calls for a military intervention, they used the moment to tighten the sanctions on Khartoum, hobbling the Government and forcing it to negotiate with the south (Hamilton, 2011). The US then channelled billions of dollars of aid into the region following the signing of the CPA. The importance of the US to South Sudan's independence project was perhaps most visibly apparent in Kiir's ever present black Stetson hat. The original had been a present from Bush in 2006 (Lynch, 2011).

For US lawmakers, there was an interest in showing success in a cause that they had invested in materially and politically. When asked to plan for a peacekeeping mission to support the establishment of the new state in 2011, UN planners showed a trepidation that was appropriate to the organisation's experience of the country up to that point. The UN proposed peacekeeping mission operating under a Chapter VI mandate with the South Sudan Government leading on all state-building and POC roles. UNMISS would be available to support POC in a *'worst case scenario'* (Dijkstra, 2015). It was the US that pushed for a more robust and proactive role than the UN planners had deemed realistic. This included placing the mission completely under a Chapter VII mandate and gave it a pro-active role in POC (Dijkstra, 2015).

[8] The US had suspended aid to Sudan in 1989 following Omar al-Bashir's military coup. In the 1990's Sudan had supported the Iraq regime and hosted Osama bin Laden prompting comprehensive US sanctions and a missile strike on installations in Khartoum in 1998.

UNMISS was authorized to perform three primary tasks (UNSC, 2011). These included; (a) support for peace consolidation; (b) support for the Government in exercising conflict prevention, mitigation, and resolution and protection of civilians and; (c) support capacity building within the Government to establish rule of law and strengthen its security and justice sectors. Within these broad goals the UNSC called on UNMISS to deliver against a range of specific activities which included support to the formulation of governance policies, promotion of participation in politics, setting up of conflict prevention including an early warning mechanism, monitoring of human rights, protecting civilians under imminent threat, creating the conditions for safe humanitarian delivery, supporting security sector reform, national disarmament demobilization and reintegration, building police capacity, developing a military justice system, facilitating a protective environment for children and demining activities (UNSC, 2011a).

To the dismay of the Secretariat, having been pushed into an expansive role to achieve a laundry list of diverse activities in a combustible environment, the UNSC only authorised the *'minimal size of force'* required to achieve it (Dijkstra, 2015). UNMISS was allocated 7,000 military personnel and 900 police. In comparison, when the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) was established it was allocated more than double the personnel for a country that was one fifth in size and only a third of the population of South Sudan's.[9]

Who did what?

To achieve its broad mandate UNMISS was organised as a '*multi-dimensional*' mission. The concept of multi-dimensional peacekeeping theoretically allowed it to achieve broad stabilization, peacebuilding and statebuilding objectives that were more complex than those assigned to conventional military missions (UN, 2003).

UNMISS would be led by a civilian SRSG, who held the rank equivalent to Under Secretary-General (USG) making them answerable directly to the Secretary-General. The SRSG plays a significant role in developing reports and shaping the Secretary-General's understanding of the context. While the Secretary-General is the official link between the Mission and the UNSC, where policy decisions regarding UNMISS are made, the SRSG would also regularly report directly and in person to the Council. An SRSG acts as a political intermediary in issues

[9] UNMIL was established in 2003 with 15,000 soldiers and 1,115 police (UNSC, 2003)

of relevance to the UN such as threats to international peace and security. They also inform the strategic relationship between the UN and the country by managing knowledge to develop organisational understandings that inform UN action in the field and inform policy developed in New York. While individual members of the UNSC have their own national means to collect information and create knowledge about South Sudan, the SRSG plays an important role in influencing their understandings through regular reporting to the Council. The SRSG also provides a primary role in developing operational responses by the Mission to implement strategy as well as respond to the day-to-day operational demands which are beyond the strategic purview of the UNSC. The SRSG also sets the context and operational environment within which tactical decisions by senior mission civilian staff and military commanders are made (UN, 2008).

The role of the SRSG has provided a useful unit of analysis for those interested in peacebuilding and specifically the role of the SRSG as mediator and political facilitator (Zahar, 2010; De Coning, 2016). Others have written about operational contexts in which SRSG's can be better understood as entrepreneurial in shaping norms (Karlsrud, 2013). In the context of this research I will be focussing on their decision-making role in which their values are part of the bounded rationality.

Other departments of the UN Secretariat had an ambiguous position in UNMISS decision-making. In 2011, the reform process that would see a consolidation of peacekeeping departments and delegation of responsibilities to the field level had not yet taken place (UN, 2018b). Responsibility for much of the organisation of UNMISS remained with several departments primarily operating out of New York. The Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) and the Department of Field Support (DFS), would have had much greater control of the administration of budgets, staff, and assets than they currently do. The heads of those departments were equal in seniority to the SRSG and had a significant stake in the strategic and operational decisions of the Mission. Their physical proximity to the Secretary-General and UNSC in New York would also have meant that they had a potentially powerful voice when advocating for certain policy approaches within the mission. DPKO would have had additional decision-making leverage through their chairmanship of the New York based Integrated Operational Team (IOT) that acted as a conduit for working level interactions

between UNMISS and the UNSC penholder. Tensions could exist when the IOT sought to lead on policy recommendations that UNMISS felt was their preserve (Interviewee 8, 2020).

At the field level, the UNMISS SRSG had notional control over all aspects of its operations inside the country (UN, 2008a) and an extensive team to fulfil the Mission's mandated objectives. Beneath the SRSG sat two Deputy Special Representatives of the Secretary-General (D/SRSG). These exist at an Assistant Secretary-General (ASG) level and are also directly appointed by the Secretary-General. The D/SRSG (Political) led offices that comprised approximately 500 civilians serving as political and civil affairs officers, human rights officers as well as the staff supporting rule of law and security institutions (UNGA, 2011). The D/SRSG (Political) was well integrated within the mission and reported directly to the SRSG.

The D/SRSG, Humanitarian Coordinator and Resident Coordinator (D/SRSG (HC/RC)) is referred to as *'triple-hatted'* because of their combined roles. The S/SRSG (HC/RC) led departments within UNMISS of approximately 260 people including disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration teams as well as peacebuilding, women's protection, and HIV/Aids programmes (UNGA, 2011). However, the more influential role of the D/SRSG (HC/RC) is as Resident Coordinator that gives them leadership of the UN Country Team (UNCT) that comprises the heads of UN Agencies operating in the country. They also chair the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) in their capacity as Humanitarian Coordinator that is a broader decision-making forum that includes NGO and humanitarian cluster leads. The D/SRSG (RC/HC) played a role more independent from the Mission than the D/SRSG (Political) that included being able to engage in public advocacy on humanitarian issues separate from UNMISS. They could also coordinate policy responses within the humanitarian community. Their RC/HC role was separately administered through the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP),[10] and its humanitarian function was notionally protected from control by the Mission by the humanitarian principle of distinction.

A significant senior staff that directly reports to the SRSG, but more junior to the D/SRSGs, is the Force Commander, who held a D-2 position, the most senior of the professional grades of the UN. Although remaining an active member of their parent armed forces, the Force Commander is directly employed by the UN. The Force Commander is responsible for orders

[10] Though this has since changed following the 2018 reforms (UN, 2018a)

tasking the military component of the Mission, which is made up of a patchwork of Troop Contributing Countries (TCCs). Unlike the Force Commander, TCC soldiers are not directly employed by the UN. However, they are obliged to act under the authority of the UN within the broad remit of the Policy on Authority, Command and Control (UN, 2008b). However, TCC's retain considerable autonomy. Caveat positions on the use of TCCs are agreed with the UN Secretariat prior to deployment, sometimes without the full knowledge of the SRSG or Force Commander (UN, 2015; 70). Although the military chain of command is notionally vested in the peacekeeping mission, reports of TCCs only acting under their respective national chains of command in critical situations have been reported (see chapter 5). The consequence was that tactical military postures in UNMISS had to be negotiated between the SRSG, Force Commander, and respective TCCs.

Additional senior UMISS staff

Another vital component of the mission was the role of the Chief of Staff. They were also a D-2 grade and reported directly to the SRSG. Under their responsibility were approximately 140 staff members, largely working in planning, and coordination functions. This included the Joint Mission Analysis Centre (JMAC) which provided critical synthesis of information available to the mission to drive decision-making. The Police Commissioner was responsible for approximately 900 UN police officers that in 2011 (UNGA, 2011), were largely supporting security sector reform activities. The only other D-2 staff was the Director of Mission Support (DMS). While not immediately involved in political decision-making, their role in managing all aspects of the mission's vast transport, logistics, procurement and human resources demands meant that approximately 1,700 civilian personnel, the majority of UNMISS staff, were within the DMS' reporting structure (UNGA, 2011). In articulating the capability constraints on the Mission in decision-making, the DMS represented a powerful voice.

Text Box 5 - Additional senior UMISS staff

Decision-making forums

At the highest level, responsibility for decision-making takes place within the UNSC. These decisions relate to the policy direction of a mission that are predominantly articulated through resolutions that relate to the regularly reviewed mandate, the authorization of forces and the mechanisms related to sanctions on the country. The UNSC may also use these sessions to decide on statements that seek to clarify its position on a situation and apply

public pressure on Governments that have been deemed to be a threat to international peace and security.

As suggested above, the Secretary-General reports to the UNSC on the Mission and the SRSG is regularly invited to provide additional briefings. Other senior members of the UN that have pertinent perspectives such as the UN Secretary-General's Special Adviser for the Prevention of Genocide and the USG responsible for peacekeeping will also brief the Council.

Non-UN decision-making forums

Less formal diplomatic groups existed in relation to South Sudan. These are groups in which different member states have privileged access to the South Sudanese Government and coordinate diplomatic decisions among themselves ahead of deliberations within the UN. These include the Troika (US, UK, and Norway), that represent those western countries involved with supporting the original CPA deliberations. A larger group referred to as the Troika-Plus additionally include the EU and UN in their discussions (Coghlan, 2017; p. 40). Regional countries connected through regional organisations such as the African Union (AU) and the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) also play an influential role. IGAD was the convening organisation that supported the negotiations that led to the CPA. Since then it has become the de facto organisation for supporting mediation of political processes in the country.

Text Box 6 - Non-UN decision-making forums

At the field-level, the SRSG made decisions with their senior staff through two key forums. At the inception of UNMISS, the Mission Leadership Team (MLT) was supposed to be the primary forum for UNMISS senior leadership to meet, share relevant information, and allow the SRSG to make informed and collaborative decisions. However, the membership of the MLT was reported to have become unwieldy with an increasing number of participants advocating for their inclusion (Interviewee 10, 2020). By the time the conflict started in 2013, decision-making functions had largely moved to the more streamline Principal's Management Team (PMT). In that meeting sat the two D/SRSG's, Force Commander, Police Commissioner, Chief of Staff and DMS. The only non-senior staff mentioned as frequently attending the PMT was the Chief of JMAC.

The Tactical Footprint

In 2011, UNMISS was able to take advantage of a pre-existing footprint built under UNMIS. Its civilian and military personnel were established in offices in each of the ten states in the

country. Additionally, it had begun to populate 35 proposed county support bases. This created operational opportunities but also considerable logistics challenges. Notwithstanding, that UNMISS was capable of operating and maintaining more than 3,000 UN owned vehicles, the tough demands of the climate and terrain created shortfalls. By 2013, as many as a quarter of UN vehicles were reported to have met the *'write off criteria'* (UNGA, 2013). The leadership also complained about a lack of all-terrain vehicles and riverine capacities creating a constant mobility crisis within the Mission (Johnson, 2018; 122).

A more serious problem related to the paucity of air assets available to the mission. Despite its large number of staff operating in a country the size of France, in which many roads were impassable for up to six months of the year, the air assets available to the mission were limited. In 2011, it was only able to operate 23 rotary-wing and 9 fixed wing air-assets (UNGA, 2011). During the rainy season, these provided the only realistic means to move people and equipment between dozens of bases, conduct patrolling in vulnerable areas, as well as any reconnaissance activities beyond the immediate vicinities of its bases.

UNMISS also struggled to maintain the military hardware that was needed for a robust peacekeeping posture. An interviewee suggested that national supply chains had proven inadequate to meet the tactical readiness of TCCs including shortfalls in critical areas such as ammunition (Interviewee 12, 2020). Another significant deficiency was the availability of tactical air assets. While there were provisions for 7 'military-type air assets' (UNGA, 2011), throughout the period covered by this research no tactical air assets capable of supporting military operations were deployed. Attempts by UNMISS to deploy Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) and attack helicopters were consistently blocked by the South Sudan Government (Tito, 2015). This severely limited the scope of potential patrolling in risky environments and reconnaissance activities.

It is also evident that UNMISS was poorly administered in the years leading up to 2013, meaning that it is likely that what assets it had available were often deployed inefficiently. The UN Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) found in 2013 that in four key administrative areas UNMISS were either categorized as unsatisfactory or only partially

satisfactory.[11] This included a particularly damning assessment of its air transportation management (UN, 2013).

Conclusion

By 2011, the UN had accumulated significant experience of the operating environment of South Sudan. The multi-dimensional nature of UNMISS gave it considerable flexible capabilities. However, the limited resources, demanding operating environment and huge scattered mandate meant that, even in favourable conditions, achieving consistently optimal results against a long list of tasks was difficult. In a challenging political and security environment, and with known inefficiencies in the administration of the Mission, the possibility of optimal outcomes against all or even most of the mandated priorities and activities looked small.

However, responsive decision-making should have given precedence to those components of the Mission that related to the stabilization of the country and represented the raison d'être of UNMISS. In this its POC role would have been especially significant. However, at an early stage UNMISS struggled to assimilate information that would have provided it early-warning of destabilizing POC threats. Even when threats were known it was unable to efficiently deploy its resources in a way that was efficient and effective. In the next chapter I will explore why this was by looking at the decisions that were made in lead up to the outbreak of violence in December 2013, that marked the beginning of the national civil conflict.

[11] This included air transportation management (unsatisfactory) AUDIT REPORT 2013/064, medical services (unsatisfactory) AUDIT REPORT 2013/113, local procurement (partially satisfactory) AUDIT REPORT 2013/126, receiving and inspection activities (partially satisfactory) AUDIT REPORT 2013/109, Procurement, administration and management of rations contracts (Partially satisfactory) AUDIT REPORT 2013/56

6. Violence in Juba - December 2013

In this chapter I will discuss the events leading up to the outbreak of violence that marked the start of South Sudan's national conflict. This includes a discussion of a context that showed highly visible and consistent signs of stress that implied clear threats to the stability of the country and should have led to a peacekeeping response. I will describe the actual UNMISS posture and the way that the SRSG, Hilde Johnson, appeared to frame the context. I will also describe the divergent interpretations of the context that developed because of the uncertainty of 2013 and the tendency of UNMISS decision-makers to determine the validity of those interpretations through isolated decision-making forums and frameworks. In the conclusion I will apply the theoretical framework and show how decision-making relied heavily on a bounded rationality that was significantly informed by Johnson's own values. This encouraged availability and substitution biases to process information in a way that ultimately undermined the Mission's ability to create an optimal response to emerging threats.

Background

By 2013, just two years after it officially became independent, South Sudan looked fragile. Tensions over the northern border had been high, including an abortive invasion of parts of Sudan by the SPLA (Rosen, 2012), which now existed as the official defence force of South Sudan. Internal threats to stability inside the country were equally evident. Intercommunal rivalry had led to serious violence that claimed thousands of lives (Gettleman, 2012). The Government also faced insurgencies because of local grievances by organised armed groups in Jonglei and Unity states (Small Arms Survey, 2013).

Attempts by the state to exercise its new authority could be clumsy. Disarmament campaigns to diffuse communal tensions in Jonglei brought the Government into direct conflict with the very communities that it was supposed to protect. Extensive reporting suggested systematic human rights abuses by the SPLA during these campaigns (HRW, 2012). During an unrelated peaceful protest in another part of the country in 2012, civilians were also killed by Government security forces (HRW, 2013). In its actions between 2011 and 2013, the Government did little to rebuff the perception that it was filled with ex-soldiers who struggled to see the world outside of a military lens (Pinaud, 2014).

When heavy-handed security methods proved ineffective, the Government turned to a tactic that Khartoum had often deployed in its attempts to undermine opposition to its rule in the south. The Government provided material incentives to buy off its opponents. For example, when the Government reached an agreement with the South Sudan Liberation Army (SSLA) to end their insurgency in Unity in 2013, they agreed to no less than eight of their leaders being made generals in the SPLA and another 3,700 soldiers being integrated into the military (Craze and Tubiana, 2016).

That regular need to absorb more and more soldiers into the military created pressures on a bloated defence force and critically undermined expensive security sector reform efforts sponsored by the US and UK Governments. By 2013, the SPLA had 745 generals, more than the combined forces of the entire US military. The total size of its army was more than 200,000 personnel, making it larger than the army of neighbouring Ethiopia, which has ten times the population (IISS, 2013). South Sudan's defence budget was also larger than that of Ethiopia's and Kenya's combined (IIIS, 2013). The failure to reform the SPLA ensured that society remained highly militarized and rivalry between military commanders over limited resources created discontent in the ranks. The leader of the South Sudan Defence Army / Cobra Faction (SSDA/CF), David Yau Yau, launched his 2011 insurgency partially as a consequence of having been disappointed by the military appointment he had been granted following his participation in a previous rebellion (Small Arms Survey, 2011).

Exacerbating internal security tensions was political competition over large but finite resources that became available with independence. When the new border was created in 2011, the vast majority of Sudan's oil wealth was left in the south, making it the third largest sub-Saharan oil producer.[12] However, that wealth was largely controlled by the state, creating a concentration of power and wealth in state institutions. This created frenzied competition to access political positions. Disappointment among candidates participating in the 2010 local elections, for example, triggered as many as seven insurgencies in the following months (Small Arms Survey, 2011).

[12] *Only Nigeria and Angola have larger oil supplies according to the* BP Statistical Review of World Energy 2019 68th edition

For those that successfully found access to state resources, the rewards for the unscrupulous could be huge. Corruption proliferated on a massive scale. In 2012, Kiir accused his own staff of theft of $4 billion of public money (Smith, 2012). Prosecution of corruption was insignificant and the corrupt rich, alongside those who had made legitimate fortunes from the opportunities of peace, were part of an increasingly visible elite class in Juba. Hastily erected skyscrapers and an ever-growing number of expensive Land Cruisers on the poorly paved streets contrasted sharply with the dire poverty that existed in the rest of the country.

Among those left out of the immediate financial dividends of independence, anger was festering. The rapid growth in the wealth of the elites was not matched by improvements in the country's development indicators that remained among the worst in the world. According to a survey of public opinion conducted by the International Republican Institute in 2013, most of the population believed the country was moving in the wrong direction (IRI, 2013). This was an opinion that was shared by many international observers. By 2013, the country was considered by the Failed States Index[13] as being in the top 5 most failed states in the world. The Global Risk Consultancy company Maplecroft classified risk in the country as *'extreme'* (Brown, 2013).

2013 Political Crisis

Fundamental problems with the country's governance, security infrastructure and economic inequality were the backdrop to a growing political crisis that was playing out in the capital city, Juba. In January 2013, Kiir, fired more than 100 senior military staff amid rumours that he was concerned about a potential coup (BBC, 2013a). On 23 July, he then sacked his entire cabinet including his Vice-President, and political rival, Riek Machar. This followed persistent rumours that Machar was attempting to concentrate power for himself and intended to challenge Kiir for the Presidency in 2015 (Tisdall, 2013). The move by Kiir was deeply concerning given that Machar had been appointed to his position by John Garang as an attempt to create national unity in the country. The situation prompted concerns that the political crisis could divide the country along ethnic lines between the Nuer and Dinka communities, from which Machar and Kiir hailed respectively, just as had happened in 1991 (BBC, 2013c).

[13] Later known as the Fragile State Index

On 6 December 2013, Machar, and a group of senior politicians from the ruling party held a press conference accusing Kiir of *'misguided leadership'* (Sudan Tribune, 2013). They signalled their intent to use a meeting of senior officials of the party on 14 December to effectively end Kiir's candidacy in the 2015 elections. On 15 December, there was confusion over an alleged order by Kiir that Nuer soldiers, based in the capital, should be disarmed to prevent a potential coup (AU, 2014; 27). By 16 December, a group of Dinka militia, supported by the SPLA were involved in the targeting and killing of Nuer soldiers and civilians (AU, 2014; 119). The violence created chaos in Juba with thousands of civilians fleeing the city or forcing their way into the two UNMISS bases in the capital for protection.[14] On 18 December, an SPLA General based in Jonglei, Peter Gadet, led a Nuer contingent in mutiny against the Government. He took the strategically important town of Bor, less than 150 kilometres from Juba. Within a week, Nuer officers across the country had rebelled under the banner of Machar, who had narrowly escaped the capital. Within weeks the country had divided, largely along communal lines with fierce battles being fought in Unity, Upper Nile and Jonglei states. By February 2014, tens of thousands had been reported to have been killed (ICG, 2014) and almost three quarters of a million people were reported to have been displaced (USAID, 2014).

A Culture of Non-confrontation

In the two and a half years before Juba imploded, UNMISS had struggled to come to grips with the considerable challenges of effectively using an undermanned, under-resourced, and under-motivated peacekeeping force tactically to achieve mandated goals. Early attempts to deploy UNMISS proactively to stop intercommunal violence in Jonglei in 2011 had achieved mixed results. Stingingly, despite UNMISS' efforts, a media narrative emerged that accused UNMISS of *'standing idly by'* during large-scale abuses of civilians (Johnson, 2018; 113). In 2012, UNMISS was again accused of inaction as SPLA attacks on civilians occurred in the wake of a disarmament campaign that UNMISS had supported (Amnesty International, 2012; 17). The SRSG, Hilde Johnson, complained that capability constraints represented the primary reason for UNMISS' failures. She protested to the UNSC that the resources available to her

[14] These were based at the airport at Tomping in the north east of the city and the main base at UN House approximately 5 kms away on the other side of the city

were insufficient to respond to a serious critical incident (Johnson, 2018; 136). She also claimed that TCCs disregarded her orders around critical POC incidents (Johnson, 2018; 139).

While accepting that UNMISS was under-resourced and TCCs unreliable, Johnson struggled to manage those capacities that were available to her. UNMISS had more than 7,000 soldiers at its disposal that if efficiently deployed, permitted significant operational options. Furthermore, criticism of the Mission between 2011 and 2013 did not come from UNMISS' lack of capabilities but their failure to apply those capabilities even when it had the opportunity and obligation to do so. No-where was this more evident than in the Mission's unwillingness to use force when faced with abuses perpetrated by Government security services. A culture of non-confrontation emerged with one study of UNMISS POC strategy in 2012 finding that,

'*Several interviewees stressed that no UNMISS peacekeeper ever has – or ever would – shoot an SPLA soldier to protect a civilian being abused by that soldier.*' (Fenton and Loughna, 2012)

If Johnson felt as though any of the soldiers in her Mission were not committed to their duties, she had the authority and obligation to send them home. However, there is no evidence that she ever did. Moreover, the tendency of peacekeepers to avoid confrontation corresponded with her own ambivalence about the use of force.

Johnson has additionally suggested that UNMISS' mandate was insufficient to allow it to, *'intervene in a situation of active combat between two belligerent forces*' (Johnson, 2019; 139). However, the claim that UNMISS' mandate was insufficient to intervene is an unnecessarily narrow reading of the broad powers of the Mission's Chapter VII mandate and its obligation to *'use all necessary means'* to protect civilians (UNSC, 2011).

Johnson also seemed unwilling to use her public position as the Secretary-General's representative to criticise Government actions in a way that could have inhibited further transgressions of its POC responsibilities. The absence of public criticism was even more notable when the Government's misbehaviour extended to violent harassment of peacekeepers. In December 2012, the SPLA shot down a clearly marked UNMISS helicopter in an act that, only long after she had left her role as UNMISS SRSG, Johnson would publicly refer to as a *'war crime'* (Johnson, 2018; 123). The Government maintained that the incident had been an accident and never investigated or held anybody to account. The incident also

signalled an escalation in harassment of UNMISS by Government forces. In the six months prior to the outbreak of violence in December, there were another 67 violations by the Government of the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) signed with the UN. This included incidents of harassment, threats, physical assault, arrest, and detention of UN Staff. In one incident a female member of UN staff was *'severely beaten'* by members of the Presidential Guard following an alleged traffic violation (UNSC, 2013).

Several interviewees highlighted the difficult role that Johnson, and all SRSG's occupy, in trying to maintain consent of a host Government in a fraught context such as South Sudan (Interviewee 8, 2020; Interviewee 4, 2020; Interviewee 16, 2020). They suggested that avoiding confrontation served as a strategy to maintain that consent. However, the costs of that strategy were considerable. Habitual non-confrontation by UNMISS encouraged the perception among belligerents that an intervention, militarily or politically, by UNMISS was unlikely.

It is possible to see in the policy of non-confrontation a risk aversion in which an irrational willingness to accept losses became preferable to the uncertainty of a riskier policy of confrontation. This continued even as the risks of non-confrontation approached catastrophic levels making continued inaction irrational. To account for UNMISS' inability to pre-empt known threats, either through tactical deployments or political interventions, as more than simply the consequence of capability constraints or the need to maintain consent in the country.

The Wrong Place at the Wrong Time

Other events in 2013 likely skewed the way that Johnson framed the crisis. In spring 2013, the Government launched a security operation against insurgents in the same part of Jonglei that UNMISS had deployed forces in 2011. The SPLA were accused of abuses against civilians on a large scale and deliberately allowing communal violence in the state to proliferate (HRW, 2013). UNMSS was slower to react than it had been during the 2011 intercommunal clashes. In addition, the perceived failure of Johnson to speak out created accusations that she was *'in the pocket'* of the Government (Johnson, 2018; 132). Johnson's account of her arrival in New York at the end of June to brief the UNSC bristles with the indignity of the public nature of these accusations.

'When I arrived in New York at the end of the month, I was told that MSF [Médecins Sans Frontières] *representatives had been making the rounds saying that more than 100,000 Murle* [one of the communities in Jonglei] *had 'disappeared'…Members of the Security Council were told the UNMISS leadership could not be trusted – we were 'too close' to the government.'* (Johnson, 2018; 133).

Under pressure from the UNSC, Johnson flooded Jonglei with peacekeepers. Understood as a practical task to protect civilians, the usefulness of the operation ended almost as soon as it had begun. Kiir officially withdrew the SPLA from operations at the start of October leading to the violence subsiding (Johnson, 2018; 142). However, following a large reconfiguration of UNMISS, as demanded by the UNSC, the peacekeepers stayed leaving critical hotspots like Juba chronically undermanned. As one UN official described the tactical layout,

'You had lots of pinpoint presence on the ground, which meant the mission was fixed and it had small presences all over the place. There those of us who were saying, "Look, you're fixed. You need to remain flexible," but I think it's fair to say she [Johnson] *was under massive amounts of pressure just to get people out there* [Jonglei]*' (Interviewee 8, 2020).*

In December 2013, as the yearlong political crisis was reaching a crescendo, UNMISS' tactical footprint in Juba consisted of a mere 120 soldiers capable of operating outside of its bases (Johnson, 2018; 186). Under pressure from interests in New York, in which the organizational myth of the UN had been brought into question, through public pressure by advocacy groups, Johnson took up a posture that would have considerably narrowed her tactical options.

Framing the Problem

In attempting to account for how Johnson understood the context, consideration also needs to be given to the experience that she brought to the Mission. Before becoming SRSG, she had been in largely political roles within her government and later the boards of various development bodies and as the Deputy Executive Director of UNICEF. She had never served in an operational capacity in an emergency context, let alone in one with the security issues of South Sudan.

If Johnson lacked experience in the operational aspects of the Mission, she would have been was more confident when the problem was framed as a political. As noted by an interviewee,

Johnson was regarded as a *'political animal'* (Interviewee 8, 2020) who had a particularly strong relationship with the politics of South Sudan. She had been a part of the 2005 CPA negotiations as a Minister of International Development for Norway. That relationship was characterised by her country's warm relations with the SPLA that had existed since the civil war. For its support, Norway had earned a place in the international *'Troika'* (with the US and UK). The Norwegian Government carefully protected that privileged access. Johnson, despite no longer working for her Government, was perceived as having a stake in that policy (Coghlan, 2017; 42).

Johnson's relationship with the country was also personal. Just before she accepted the role of SRSG, she published a book about her experiences during the CPA negotiations. When the agreement was signed, Johnson went to John Garang's house with a bottle of Champagne to congratulate him, the situation being sufficiently familiar that the pair spent the evening telling stories and jokes (Johnson, 2011; 200). After attending Garang's funeral a few months later, she called on his successor Salva Kiir, meeting with him alone in his house to reassure him of her support (Johnson, 2011; 201).

On being appointed as SRSG, Johnson appears to have assessed the value of her relationships, and her political abilities to operationalise them, highly. In early 2013 UNMISS received reports of a mobilization of a militia, that would later be identified as the Mathiang Anyoor (see text box 7) in a training camp owned by Kiir, just outside of Juba (Johnson, 2018; 243). On being informed about the militia, Johnson confronted Kiir at one of their regular meetings. However, on being told that the men were an *'essential'* addition to his already considerable bodyguard, Johnson was sufficiently mollified not to take the matter further (Johnson, 2018; 243).

The Mathiang Anyoor

Kiir's militia was initially raised in response to a border crisis in 2012 before being moved to Juba. It was entirely made up of Dinka from the Bahr-e-Ghazal region from which Kiir comes. Most were reported to only be able to speak Dinka and not the language local to the part of the country in which the capital city is based, or the Arabic and English languages that serve as a lingua franca. At the time, the militia were referred to as Dot Bany (rescue the leader) or Gel Bany (protect the leader). After 2013, the militia would be more commonly known as the Mathiang Anyoor (named after a poisonous brown caterpillar) and was the primary force responsible for the atrocities committed in Juba in December 2013 (Martell, 2018; 19). In early 2013, UNMISS estimated their number to be between 2,000 and 3,000 (Johnson, 2018). However, in a subsequent enquiry conducted in 2014 by the African Union estimates of the actual force in Luri ranged between 7,500 and 15,000 (AU, 2014).

Text Box 7 - The Mathiang Anyoor

In September, Kiir began making public speeches reminding largely Dinka audiences of the Nuer violence against their community in the 1990s and called on them to be ready to defend themselves. In one speech he declaimed, '*The "Tiger" has now taken out its claws and is ready to crush their faces. Blood will flow*' (Johnson, 2018; 170). The *'Tiger'* was a reference to Kiir's nom de guerre from the civil war. Again, Johnson confronted him, this time over the inflammatory potential of such language. However, she again accepted that he had heeded her admonishment (Johnson, 2018; 170).

So confident was Johnson in the effectiveness of her political approach that she did not raise either the issue of the militia or inflammatory speech with the UNSC. Instead, in the UNMISS report delivered to the UNSC in November, directly before the outbreak of violence, she expressed *'cautious optimism'* (UN, 2013b), commending the President for the *'smooth transition'* in government following his decision to fire his cabinet and oust the Vice-President.

The political relationships that were at the core of Johnson's approach raised consternation among others in the country. As already suggested, some humanitarian organisations believed her to be partial. Even among other diplomats she was seen as too attached to the creation myth that surrounded the Government (Shackleford, 2020; 83). Within the context of this research that partiality may be explained because of the values that comprised her own professional self-conception. The sense that she was a politician, and her value was based in the relationships and experiences that comprised that image, created an extreme

influence on the way that she would process information. Johnson was reported to have once said about the politicians in Juba, *'They never lie to me. They know that I know them too well*' (The Economist, 2016). As the journalist and author Peter Martell more perceptively noted, *'She thought leaders on all sides were her long-time friends, and so trusted what they would tell her. They lied.*' (Martell, 2018; 223)

Two Perspectives

In addition to the known aspects of the escalating tensions mentioned above, UNMISS had written code cables to New York in October about serious rifts within the SPLA along Nuer and Dinka lines that gave rise to the possibility of a serious schism in the national army (Interviewee 17, 2020). The escalation of the political crisis in 2013 presented vivid dangers that were recognised within and outside of the Mission. As one UNMISS officials described the situation at the time,

'*Everyone knows something is up. The red lights are flashing everywhere...you had the vast majority of national staff, to use the generic term, saying something is going badly wrong, all indicators point to violence*.' (Interviewee 8, 2020)

However, notwithstanding the available evidence, the same official also pointed out that,

'*Then you had a lot of the long-term international watchers including the diplomatic community saying, "No, they've just got independence. They will pull it back from the brink.*"' (Interviewee 8, 2020).

Other interviewees suggested that the view that the country would '*pull it back'* was pervasive among international observers, particularly those that had come to be relied on as *'experts'*, either because of their connections to the country or else because of their authoritative positions in the diplomatic or UN community.

'There was a cast of characters that have been around with those groups from the CPA days. Obviously, the narrative in the CPA days was that they [the SPLA] *were the goodies. So, people had invested a lot morally and emotionally in a group of people and found it very hard to accept they've been let down by them.'* (Interviewee 9, 2020)

There was a therefore a divergence of opinions on what was happening in the country. The first, which was strongly supported by national analysts working for UNMISS, suggested there

had been a steady accumulation of destabilizing events in the country which, by December 2011 pointed to conflict. The President was mobilising soldiers, outside of the official structures of the Government military, and was using language that identified a specific target for possible violence. At the same time, UNMISS had information about divisions along communal lines within the SPLA. The clear epicentre of the crisis was Juba where the political actors were based and where military assets were being moved months before violence broke out.

The second opinion was that the political crisis and reports that suggested instability in the security of the country were only superficially serious. The characters with whom senior experts and diplomats had close relations could be trusted to avert a catastrophic collapse in the country.

Interviewees suggested that Johnson was an *'intelligent'* and *'conscientious'* leader (Interviewee 5, 2020). She showed a strong capacity to engage with the issues in a way that was *'compassionate'* and was, at least initially, able to accept challenges to her own decision-making (Interviewee 16, 2020). However, the same interviewees also referred to a *'paradox in her personality'* that overshadowed her decision-making as the crisis approached (Interviewee 16, 2020).

As Johnson weighed UNMISS' posture in 2013 she was faced with two seemingly contradictory interpretations of the world around her. A rational analysis would likely stress that the evidence for the correctness of the first interpretation was significant. Not only was there an underlying national fragility, of which national politics was a key component, but specific events in 2013 pointed towards the likelihood of a violent national conflict that would start in Juba. The second more optimistic interpretation lacked a similarly strong evidentiary basis and yet, in failing to urgently reinforce Juba with peacekeepers, make a public intervention in the deteriorating political situation, or escalate clear warning signs to the UNSC, Johnson appears to have relied on it as a basis of her decision-making. She favoured an irrational understanding of reality to delineate her choice alternatives.

The view from the inside

The context of the UN in 2012 and 2013 was one in which there would have been little focus on South Sudan. In 2012, the UN was launching a highly contentious mission in Syria. A

damning report about UN inaction in the conflict in Sri Lanka was released in 2012 (BBC, 2012). The extent of UN impotence in the DRC was creating uncomfortable headlines (Hatcher, 2012) and the scandal of its cover-up in the spread of cholera in Haiti was also reaching a crescendo (Gladstone, 2013). When the UNSC and UN secretariat were roused to pay greater attention to South Sudan it was only after a sustained public pressure campaign in New York, because of the Jonglei situation. Even then however, the extent of the concern amounted to ordering Johnson to reconfigure UNMISS to address the problem. No additional resources were forthcoming. The general disinterest of the UN Secretariat about the Mission is evident in Johnson's disdainful view of her New York colleague's lack of support. Her conservative requests for greater diversity in mobility assets, for example, was reported to have fallen on *'deaf ears'* (Johnson, 2018; 122).

That high-level disinterest was exacerbated within the country among an international community that were focussed on narrow considerations within their respective fields rather than the broader context. As one international worker described,

'The trouble is, and I was a classic example of someone who didn't think it would happen because I didn't see what I didn't want to see. I was on a nice long-term program working five weeks on, three weeks off, with most people getting paid quite well. I didn't want to think that that was all going to stop…I think the UN staff is like that as well because they like to think things are just going to go on and on because basically, it's a bread and butter job for most of them.' (Interviewee 2, 2020)

The former Canadian Ambassador observed that the diplomatic corps watched much of the unfolding crisis in 2013 with only *'detached disinterest.'* Their priority in late 2013 was instead on the more mundane negotiations of a new aid compact (Coghlan, 2017; 108).

The lack of interest in the political upheaval in the country from either New York or within the international community in the country encouraged an isolation of views about UNMISS' role within a small circle around Johnson. Those familiar with her decision-making suggested that even among senior staff she was '*good at keeping her cards close to her chest*' (Interviewee 8, 2020) and was inclined to rely on her *'own cognizance'* when evaluating the worth of new opinions (Interviewee 4, 2020). Others suggested that with her own knowledge of the country

she relied heavily on her own interpretations and only accepted inputs from a *'limited trusted circle'* (Interviewee 10, 2020).

She could also clash with other UN officials whose contrary perspectives appeared to undermine her own. She was reported as conflicting with two consecutive D/SRSG (RC/HC)'s (Interviewee 16, 2020). She was also reported to have had a contentious relationship with a member of her staff within the Civil Affairs Department who was reported to have persistently and openly questioned Johnson's lack of scepticism regarding Government intentions (Interviewee 10, 2020). When the Government complained that the same official was acting impartially in early 2014, Johnson was reported to have supported the official's removal from the Mission on safety and security grounds (Shackleford, 2020; 204). Others familiar with the incident felt Johnson had been too eager to approve the official's removal (Interviewee 9, 2020).

Conclusions

When viewed as the result of a consideration of those practical elements of UNMISS' mandated task, Johnson's decision-making appears irrational. Her actions showed a tendency to make peripheral emerging risks in a way that inhibited prudent pre-emption and preparation for a foreseeable disaster. However, when seen as the product of a bounded rationality, as described in the theoretical framework, it is easier to explain.

Appropriate action was persistently framed within experiences that related to her own values. It affirmed a positive self-image of her relationships and skills as a politician as well as the policy of the Norwegian Government in which she may have had a professional stake. Her experience as a politician, and lack of operational experience in an emergency setting, also created an incentive to frame the problems in the country as being inherently political. This undermined her ability to recognize tactical opportunities that existed, albeit within the limited resources that she possessed in UNMISS.

Other aspects of the peacekeeping bounded rationality existed as less prominent but nonetheless incentivised types of action. It is likely that the known general reluctance of the UNSC to endorse proactive peacekeeping interventions, either political or tactical, inhibited

actions.[15] The UNSC and UN Secretariat interests also meant that they pushed for UNMISS interventions only when faced with public criticism that undermined reputational aspects of the organisational myth, such as in Jonglei in 2013. However, the deployment of UNMISS in Jonglei served little purpose after October. The operation was planned around the preservation of the organization's operational myth rather than the practical requirements of UNMISS' protection tasks in the country. The deployment would only have reinforced in Johnson's mind the ineffectiveness of military assets at her disposal. As the situation in Jonglei wound down, she appeared unenthusiastic about reconfiguring UNMISS yet again to meet new threats that were emerging at the end of the year.

In South Sudan in December 2013, outside analysis and UNMISS' own analysts suggested red lights were, *'flashing everywhere.'* Internal discontent in the military and the widely reported political crisis suggested conflict. The mobilization of communally partial militias around Juba and the hate speech being used the President provided clear warnings as to where and how that conflict might materialize. However, a more positive assessment of the situation existed that better suited a bounded rationality in which a political framing and avoidance of confrontation were preferred, even though it related poorly to the available evidence. Johnson was able to give coherence and plausibility to the more optimistic interpretation that better aligned with the bounded rationality through bias.

Bias allowed UNMISS to form more certain understandings around selectively chosen information that supported the preferred bounded rationality, in which the situation could be framed as a political one in which the various actors were likely to *'pull it back from the brink'*. This interpretation underpinned a continued policy of non-confrontation, a failure to adjust UNMISS' posture to bolster peacekeeping presence in Juba and a failure to raise concerns with the UNSC of clear and imminent dangers. Below I have suggested how those bias may have manifested in Johnson's decision-making.

Johnson's treatment of the context shows a *confirmation bias* to the extent that she favoured information that supported her belief that her political relationships, and her ability to operationalise them, were a sufficient response to provocations, particularly by President Kiir.

[15] For example the actions of Kai Eide or Choi Young-Jin (see chapter 3)

Kiir's, and other senior politicians promises, were overvalued as an evidentiary basis of action (or inaction).

An *availability bias* predisposed her to a political framing that was better suited to her most available experiences. Having never worked in an operational role in an emergency context before, her ability to contemplate the reality of the kind of breakdown in violence that took place in 2013, in a sufficiently vivid way as to justify the corresponding escalation of a peacekeeping response, was weak. Johnson appears to have prematurely disregarded the potential of her military capabilities, effectively avoiding any peacekeeping contingency planning to respond to the growing crisis in the country.

A *substitution bias* can be seen in her tendency to stick with understandings of South Sudanese officials that she had developed during the CPA. These had taken on a stereotypical quality that led her to mistakenly characterise the actions of the likes of Kiir as those belonging to a flawed, but trusted friend. This created a tendency to take the information that was she offered on face value rather than more rational circumspection.

What ultimately made her acceptance of a more optimistic interpretation so compelling was behaviour that encouraged Johnson to make decisions within a limited circle. Broad disinterest in the political trajectory of the country from outside and within the country meant that she was allowed considerable latitude in creating an interpretation of the context that suited her own values. That the more optimistic interpretation of the trajectory of the conflict was also prevalent among the diplomatic circles, within which she existed, would have helped promote bias towards its acceptance as part of her decision-making. This evidence of an *inside view* suggests a behaviour that would have made bias more likely in decision-making.

Another behaviour that would have reinforced a bias that favoured the more optimistic interpretation was *risk aversion*. An inherent preference to risk adverse strategies offered a means to avoid the contemplation of difficult choice alternatives, such as military confrontation, that represented uncertainty that would have been cognitively discomfiting. Only a few months after its helicopter was shot down in December 2012, UNMISS suffered one of its worst attacks when one of its convoys was attacked by a rebel group, killing 12 people (Green, 2013). After such heavy losses it would have been increasingly likely that Johnson anchored her risk assessment artificially low, to avoid further losses. Information that

implied an increasing risk would have been avoided because it implied the adoption of a new framework in which the Mission would be expected to accept risks that it had thus far been avoiding.

The extent to which Johnson had been wrong in accepting the optimistic interpretation on which to base her decision-making was clear in her lack of contingency planning, including the failure to deploy a strong peacekeeping force in the capital in December 2013. Her satisfaction with her political efforts were misplaced and she also failed to escalate clear warning signs to the UNSC of the real possibility of a violent national schism. Decision-making by Johnson in 2013 appeared to be the product of bias that created certainty around an interpretation that suited her own values as well as the limited interests of the UNSC. The isolated nature of her decision-making further limited her exposure to more challenging viewpoints that could have influenced her understanding of the context. Risk aversion also suited a rosier understanding of the situation that aligned more closely with her bounded rational interpretation.

The eruption of the conflict in December 2013 meant that within a few weeks, international attention became more focussed on the country. The bounded rationality become considerably more complex as interests of the UNSC, and UN Secretariat began to exert themselves more comprehensively. The appearance of a UN peacekeeping mission caught unawares again, was another blow to an organisational myth that had already been battered by poor performance and scandals in the previous two years. Johnson now faced having to account for these new considerations as she contemplated the decisions in and around the most violent attack on UNMISS, which occurred in April 2014 and is the subject of the next chapter.

7. Attack on Bor UNMISS Base and POC site - April 2014

In this chapter I will describe the events leading up to the attack of an armed group, including uniformed members of the Government security services, on the POC site on the UNMISS base in Bor, Jonglei State. I will discuss how the myth of the POC sites and UN Secretariat's dissatisfaction with its role in those sites influenced SRSG Johnson's understanding of the context and informed her strategy. I will also discuss the aftermath in which the incident quickly disappeared from the organisation's institutional memory. In the conclusions, I will use the theoretical framework to suggest that Johnson's own values and the UN Secretariat's interests created a concentration on extraneous elements in relation to the task. Bias meant that information that provided clear warnings was not absorbed into decision-making. This undermined UNMISS' capacity to ensure a strong posture that might have discouraged the attacks. The behaviour of UNMISS in the aftermath discouraged understandings about the incident that could have led to more optimal responses to similar events that took place in the following years.

Background

Following the violence in Juba in December 2013, conflict spread to other parts of the country as Nuer contingents of SPLA mutinied to join Machar's hastily improvised opposition, the Sudan People's Liberation Army in Opposition (SPLA/iO). The towns of Bentiu, Malakal and Bor were significant flashpoints, positioned on or close to dividing lines between traditionally Nuer and Dinka territories (HRW, 2014). Retributive actions by Nuer soldiers against Dinka civilians soon followed. In an incident at a small remote UNMISS base in Akobo on 19 December, two UNMISS soldiers were killed when they were vastly outnumbered by a mob of Nuer men attacking and killing 19 Dinka civilians sheltering there (UNSC, 2014).

In Bor, less than 150 kilometres north of Juba (see map. 1), Peter Gadet led mutinying soldiers to take the town on 18 December. When the SPLA retook it within a week, an estimated 20,000 men comprising an informal Jonglei Nuer militia, known as the '*White Army*', joined Gadet (BBC, 2013d). In a harrowing echo of the massacre in 1991, the resultant battle led to widespread attacks on Dinka civilians and pushed thousands across the Nile to a displacement site near the town of Minkammen (Dixon, 2014). On 18 January 2014, Gadet's forces were

pushed out a second time following a joint operation by Government forces and the Ugandan People's Defence Force (UPDF), who had intervened on the Government's behalf (Radio Tamazuj, 2014). This time, the Nuer parts of the town were destroyed, and thousands of Nuer civilians were chased into the nearby UNMISS base (UNMISS, 2014). As in other parts of the country, this temporary response to an immediate threat of violence led to the creation of a POC site that continued to exist as this research was being conducted.

During the fighting, tensions around the UNMISS base at Bor were high. At the airfield next to the UN base four US soldiers were wounded as they attempted to evacuate international workers from the town in December (BBC, 2013e). The base itself was struck at least three times by indirect fire (UNSC, 2014). On 19 January, the Minister of Information, Michael Makuei, arrived the day after the SPLA retook the town a second time. The UN State Coordinator acquiesced to a visit by Makuei to the POC site the following day. However, when Makuei arrived with a heavily armed SPLA bodyguard, an altercation ensued as the State Coordinator denied him entry. The minister responded by threatening to withdraw flight safety assurances from UNMISS (effectively cutting off peacekeepers from Juba) and personal threats were made to the UNMISS official by members of Makuei's entourage (UNSC, 2014; 9). Johnson deemed the threat on the life of the State Coordinator to be sufficiently serious that within 48 hours, he had been evacuated from the country.

The Government used the incident to publicly berate UNMISS. Kiir denounced their presence in the country as partial and the Government orchestrated anti-UN demonstrations in the capital (Johnson, 2018; 210). UNMISS patrols were threatened by SPLA officers that they would be shot if they tried to enter Bor (Interviewee 17, 2020).

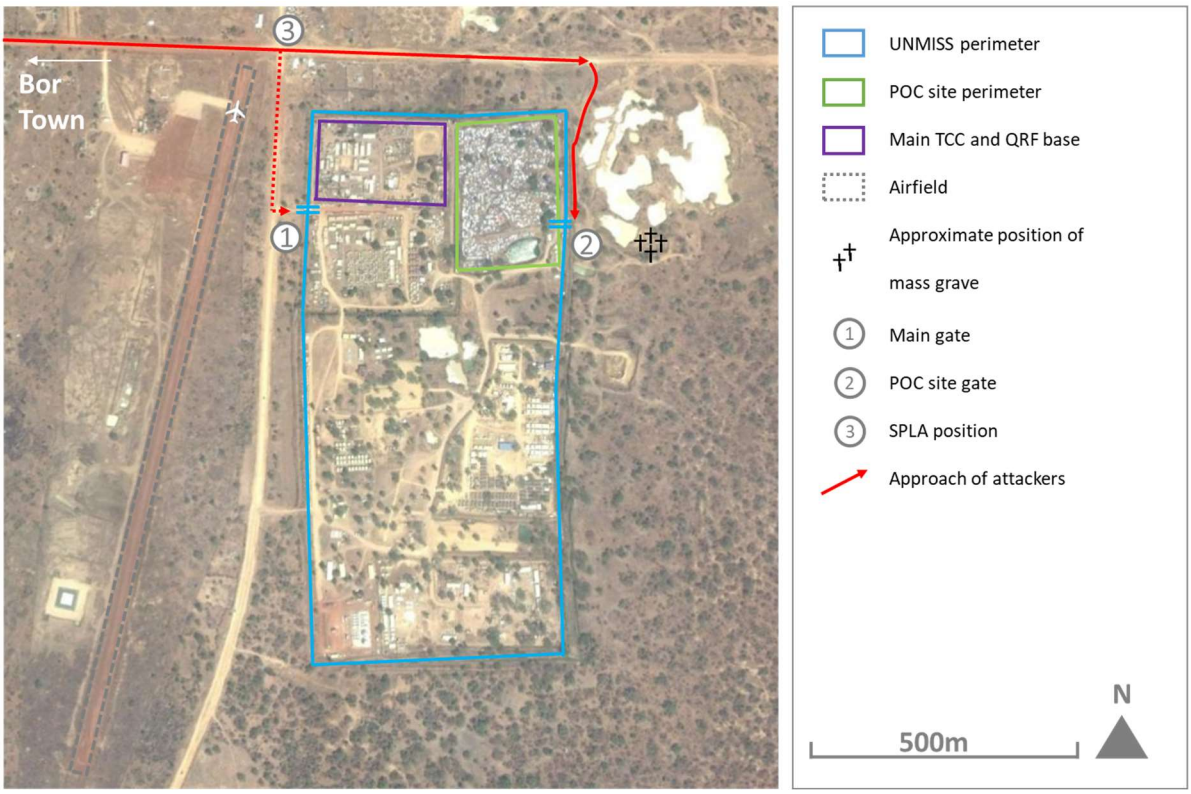
Over the next month, the SPLA were reported to have attempted to enter the UN POC site at Bor at least four times (UNSC, 2014; 9). Incidents of harassment by Government forces were reported against anyone leaving the POC site including incidents of abduction, rape, maiming and killing, including occurring in front of UN peacekeepers. UNMISS received reports that non-Nuers had been warned by uniformed armed men to, *'leave the POC site before the Government attacked it'* (UNMISS, 2015a; 18).

By April, the opening phase of the conflict had calmed somewhat in Bor. The continued presence of the UPDF and a better organised SPLA had pushed the SPLA/iO threat far from

the town. The number of civilians sheltering at the UN POC site had shrunk to about 5,000, mostly Nuer civilians (UNMISS, 2015). Protecting the UNMISS base were at least a battalion of infantry soldiers, equipped with small arms, light weapons, and armoured vehicles. A section of military police and a company of military engineers were also stationed there (UNGA, 2013). In total, at least 500 UN soldiers would have been present on the base in April 2014.

On 15 April Machar's forces, operating about 400 kilometres north, took the town of Bentiu. The aftermath was bloody with at least 200 civilians reported murdered by the SPLA/iO (UNMISS, 2015). The civilians in Bor POC site, greeted the news of an SPLA/iO victory with loud celebrations angering some of the now homogenous Dinka community that lived nearby in Bor town (UNMISS, 2015a; 18). On 17 April, a group of between 100 and 300 men travelled through Bor carrying signs protesting the presence of the IDPs in the UNMISS base (UNMISS, 2015a; 11). UNMISS were warned at 0930 about the protesters and a UN Military Liaison Observer (MLO) team from the base drove out to reconnaissance the group (Interviewee 12, 2020). Intelligence, received by other parts of the mission, suggested that the group were armed, and uniformed personnel were involved. However, the information was not communicated to staff guarding the site (Interviewee 11, 2020). As the protest approached, UNMISS requested the State Governor to intervene but no action appears to have been taken (Interviewee 11, 2020). As they arrived in the vicinity of the UNMISS base most of the group bypassed the main gate moving straight to the other side of the base where the POC site was situated (See map 2). As they walked past the main gate two men on a motorbike drove up to it, handing a letter to the security officer on duty. When asked who they were, they responded, '*Fuck you! You will see!*' (UNMISS, 2015; 20).

Despite an opportunity to respond at an early stage, '*APCs* [Armoured Personnel Carriers] *were not deployed preventatively as the crowd approached*' (Interviewee 11, 2020). In making their way to the rear of the base, the protesters walked past a contingent of SPLA stationed on the road (UNMISS, 2015a; 19). They were not stopped or impeded despite ongoing UNMISS requests for Government assistance. For approximately 1 km the group walked past the northern and eastern perimeters of the base, allowing time for additional assessment of the threat by UNMISS (see map 2).



Map 2 - Satellite imagery of Bor UNMISS Base and POC site taken on 28 February 2014 (imagery accessed on Google Earth on 16 February 2020)

At 10.55 a group of 20 to 30 men climbed the berm perimeter. The small dirt berm had been recently eroded by rains meaning that it had become easily scalable (UNMISS, 2015a; 20). Once inside, the men opened the main gates to other attackers. Eyewitnesses recalled that the UNMISS soldiers stationed there provided no effective defence of the perimeter. Many of the soldiers retreated from their fortified positions to armoured vehicles parked nearby while others ran from the perimeter altogether, retreating to the main base (Interviewee 11, 2020: Interviewee 12, 2020).

On entering, the attackers began shooting indiscriminately at civilians. The attack was unhurried. The perpetrators had time to loot the site, ransack shelters, and abduct women and children (UNMISS, 20152; 23). The attackers interrogated some of the few Dinka IDPs that were resident at the site through intermarriages. Another report described two attackers arguing over who should have a woman as their *'wife'* (UNMISS, 2015a; 21). While the majority of those killed by the attackers were shot, machetes were also used indicating that

the incursion was lightly armed. The UNMISS mobile team that had been following the protest since the town,

'…repeatedly requested a force response to stop the attack, warning, "if we don't respond immediately, there will be many dead on our hands"'. (Interviewee 11, 2020)

UNMISS officials suggested that despite *'incessant'* requests to return fire from more junior officers, the TCC battalion commander delayed action.

'He was on the phone to his national headquarters, and ultimately relinquished when the fight had dissipated and ordered the perimeter guards to open fire.' (Interviewee 12, 2020)

An armed response from UNMISS soldiers inside the APCs already positioned at the perimeter came thirty minutes after the belligerents had fired their first shots (UNMISS, 2020; 21). Reinforcements from the rest of the battalion were slow to mobilise and reach the perimeter. A Quick Reaction Force (QRF) was unable to unlock the main gate that had been closed as the protest approached (Interviewee 11, 2020). Once outside, they were impeded by the same SPLA contingent on the road that had allowed the protest to proceed to the POC site without hindrance (UNMISS, 2020; 22). A second QRF struggled to travel the short distance within the base as it was impeded by fleeing civilians (Interviewee 12, 2020).

By the time the incident was over, at least 53 people were reported to have been killed, including 11 children. Three of those were believed to have been perpetrators, though from subsequent reporting it is unclear how they were killed (UNMISS, 2015a; 22).[16] A further 98 civilians were treated, largely for gunshot wounds. Eleven women and children were reported to have been kidnapped. During the attack, men in the South Sudan National Police Service (SSNPS) uniforms were credibly and consistently reported as having been involved, including one of the dead attackers (UNMISS, 2015a; 24).

The UNMISS Human Rights report on the incident concluded that*, 'There are reasonable grounds to believe that the attack was planned in advance'* (UNMISS, 2015a; 24). The report does not mention who it believes planned the attack, but the involvement of Government security forces, the failure of the SPLA to intervene and the role of the SPLA in impeding

[16] *According to UNMISS' reporting, peacekeepers only fired outside of the perimeter yet only one body thought to belong to a perpetrator was found outside of the perimeter*

UNMISS trying to respond strongly suggests Government complicity. While it officially condemned the violence, the Government Minister Michael Makuei also blamed UNMISS for encouraging the initial *'provocation'*. In his backhanded condemnation he used the incident to threaten other IDPs sheltering on UNMISS bases,

'Anybody who celebrates successful operations being conducted by the rebels against the government is a rebel, and we cannot continue to accommodate rebels inside UNMISS compounds.' (Doki, 2014)

'Posture, Posture, Posture'

The most glaring failures in Bor in 2014 were tactical and indicative of pervasive structural issues related to the use of TCCs in high-risk scenarios in peacekeeping missions. These include the lack of training of TCCs to carry out POC duties including understanding their obligations to engage with lethal force to protect of civilians. It also related to the hesitancy of TCCs to act outside of their national chain of command. However, notwithstanding the tactical failings, a much broader operational failure created the conditions for UNMISS' suboptimal response.

By UNMISS own reporting, *'Rumours of an impending attack on the POC site* [at Bor] *had been gaining momentum several weeks before the attack took place'* (UNMISS, 2015; 18). Yet there is little evidence that the leadership based in Juba were alive to the potential risks. A peacekeeper lamented that throughout their time serving in Bor there was a lack of direction from the centre, *'There was no downwards flow of information at all'* (Interviewee 12, 2020).

When asked by an UNMISS official in the immediate aftermath of the attack on Bor what he thought had gone wrong, the D/SRSG (RC/HC) Toby Lanzer was reported to have replied, *'posture, posture, posture'* (Interviewee 4, 2020). While he may have been referencing the failure of the TCC's at Bor to establish a force presence in their area of operations, his statement could have equally applied to the strategic leadership of UNMISS in the months preceding the incident.

UNMISS' political position in Bor looked weak following the incident with the Minister of Information in January. While Johnson saw the evacuation of the State Coordinator as a pragmatic precaution, others saw his removal as a de facto expulsion, and a sop to a

Government intent on marginalising the Mission's ability to play a meaningful role in the country (Shackelford, 2020; 204). The State Coordinator's removal was the third such expulsion of UNMISS staff over the past year and was the latest in a pattern of intimidation described in the previous chapter.[17] The extent to which Johnson had come to disregard the utility of escalating protests against the Government can be seen in her withering response to the expulsion. She recalled that *'There was no point in protesting the accusations, for this would just escalate the tension*' (Johnson, 2018; 211). Focus on non-confrontation and risk aversion therefore continued to be prevalent in UNMISS decision-making in 2014.

The POC sites myth

If Johnson struggled to find a robust position against the Government outside of the POC sites, it might be assumed that within their perimeter she had a strong interest in careful vigilance and robust defence, given her role in their establishment. Bor was one of six POC sites that existed in April 2014, and at the time cumulatively held about 70,000 people. The opening of the UN bases to protect civilians became associated with a myth that reflected the UN's own organisational myth and Johnson's perception of herself. As she suggested in 2014, only a month after the attack on Bor,

'I would not be able to face the mirror if I were not to say, "Open the gates." It was a very strong commitment on my part. Keeping the gates closed was not an option. I did not want that to happen under my watch.' (Di Giovanni, 2014)

As suggested in the previous chapter, 2012 and 2013 had been replete with examples that were held up as UN failures of its mythologised purpose in respect to the protection of civilians. In Johnson's actions, it had appeared that she had provided much-needed evidence that UN peacekeeping remained connected to that mythology. However, Johnson's relationship to those events is more focussed on the value of the myth than the act of protection. Johnson embellished her, and the UN's role in establishing the sites. Her DSRSG (RC/HC) remembered their formation differently.

'We never "opened the gates," it was an attitude that if there are people under threat, under stress, jumping over the fence, which was what the vast majority were doing, we will welcome

[17] The others being a human rights officer in December 2012 and a civil affairs officer in January 2014.

them and we will protect them. So, opening the gates was an attitude that we would assume our responsibilities to protect civilians.' (Arensen, 2016; 21)

The perimeters around the two UNMISS bases in Juba in December 2013 were large and porous and manned by soldiers that were not inclined to use force. By the time that Johnson had given the order to *'open the gates'* the gates were already reported to have been open and civilians were already moving inside the perimeter (Arensen, 2016; 21). Johnson's instruction only served to give an official blessing to something that was already taking place.

More broadly the UN did not welcome its new role protecting civilians as enthusiastically as Johnson suggests. As the situation worsened and more people sought protection the UN Secretariat, through statements by the Secretary-General, suggested a simmering resentment and panic about their role. In the Secretary-General's report in March 2014, he references the *'huge strain'* of the POC sites on UNMISS and the anxiety associated with *'uncharted territory'* that the POC sites represented (UNSC, 2014). Staff at the time recall that there was already a pressure in 2014 to maintain the temporary nature of the sites. The use of the terminology of 'POC sites' was supposed to avoid connotations of an IDP site with more long-term responsibilities (Lily, 2014).

UNMISS concerns about its new role were not unfounded. Societal problems and anti-social behaviour that existed outside of UNMISS were transported inside, and potentially intensified within the trapped and traumatised communities. Rule of law functions fell to UNMISS which was dramatically underprepared. The Mission had no adequate guidelines as to how to process lawbreakers within the POC site, where handing them over to the national authorities could not be safely done (Briggs and Monaghan, 2017; 79). Makeshift jails in the sites were hastily constructed out of metal shipping containers that became suffocatingly hot in the extreme South Sudanese heat. UNMISS Formed Police Units (FPUs) had to be deployed using riot gear and tear gas against the same civilians that the Mission was supposed to protect (Radio Tamazuj, 2014b). Officials from the UN Secretariat in New York were reported to be constantly fretting about the reputational damage that could be done were it found to be violating basic human rights (Interviewee 5, 2020).

The role of UNMISS at the POC sites also represented a contradiction at the core of its own mandate. Up until the events of December 2013, UNMISS had interpreted its role in the

context of a peacebuilding role in support of the Government. At the POC sites it now found itself protecting civilians from the same Government that they had been supporting (Stamnes, 2015).

Aside from the rule of law dilemmas, the protected civilians lived in appalling conditions often within metres of air-conditioned UN offices and residences. The hastily constructed sites had become their own humanitarian crises, with poor infrastructure creating serious health and safety concerns. With the onset of the rainy season, flooding became so serious in the POC site at Bentiu that children were drowning in the huge pools that formed inside the base (CIVIC, 2015; 38). Poorly constructed latrines were collapsing in other sites creating outbreaks of preventable diseases (MSF, 2014). In April, MSF launched blistering attacks against perceived UN failings with its Secretary-General urging,

'…the UN leadership to remember that protection means more than just corralling people in a guarded compound.' (MSF, 2014)

If publicly UNMISS continued to bask in the glow of its actions *'opening the gates,'* internally its attitude to the POC sites increasingly framed them as a problem that outweighed their symbolic importance. This shift in thinking was evident, particularly among the UN Secretariat in New York. Focus was not on the threats to the POC sites but rather those from inside. An internal guidance note sent by DPKO to UNMISS the week before Bor was attacked was entitled *'Note of Guidance to UNMISS on the Security of the IDP population in POC sites.'* It was entirely directed on how to counter threats posed by the IDPs themselves, regarding crime and other anti-social behaviour. There was no mention in the document of external threats or perimeter security (Interviewee 17, 2020).

Politics as protection

If the UN Secretariat was irrationally focussed on what was happening within the POC sites, the focus of the UNSC was not even in the country. For the first few months of 2014, international diplomats had been working in the stations to which they had been almost entirely evacuated. They were not idle, but their efforts were focussed on the peace talks in Addis Ababa and the prospect of reaching a quick political resolution through a hastily convened IGAD mediated process. A cessation of hostilities agreement was reached in January and major donors invested millions of dollars to its mediation and monitoring

mechanisms.[18] Its collapse within days of its signing only intensified diplomatic efforts. The US played a leading role under the leadership of the US Envoy to Sudan and South Sudan, Donald Booth (Young, 2019; 140). Yet Booth saw the problem as a geostrategic one framed by its regional dynamics. A State department official working as part of the South Sudan Embassy noted that in early 2014, *'Addis was where the special envoy's office was focused. What was happening elsewhere was of minimal concern.'* (Shackelford, 2020; 215)

Unsurprisingly, Johnson's preferred focus was also at the political level. While she had been given no role in Addis, she framed her function in the country as a meso-political one and argued that her primary means to attend to the protection of civilians was through political interventions. In January 2014, Johnson wrote to the head of DPKO. In the document she outlined a realignment of her vision for UNMISS' POC role. Her *'Tier 1'* activity was *'protection through political process'* with maintenance of physical security at POC sites and the establishment of protective environments relegated to *'Tier 2'* and *'Tier 3'* respectively (Interviewee 17, 2020).

An argument can be made that a tiered organisation of strategy does not necessarily denote a hierarchy of concerns. However, the use of '*tiers'* in organizational terminology generally indicates an order of priorities. It is distinct from the language of '*pillars',* for example, which denotes equal standing of priorities. The attachment of a numerical value to that tier further underlines its relative place to other elements of the strategy. The idea that the UN Secretariat, that spends much of its time with the work of creating and drafting policy with international ramifications would have been unaware of the nuances surrounding its use of language is unlikely.

The ordering of Johnson's strategy was peculiar. If the experiences of 2013 had shown anything it was that UNMISS had little political leverage to protect civilians. Following the humiliating expulsion of its staff in early 2014, that leverage had degraded even further. Given the amount of activity from other much more influential parts of the international community that aside from the US included the diplomats of most of South Sudan's powerful east African

[18] In 2014, the EU contributed 2 million dollars to IGAD mediation in South Sudan, the largest contribution to a single country through the African Peace Facility (EU, 2015). The UK and Norway provided 1 million dollars (USD) to support IGAD monitoring and verification. Later in the year, the UK provided an additional 1 million dollars in 2014 to IGAD (Dfid, 2016). The US provided 5 million dollars to support monitoring and verification mechanisms (USDS, 2015).

neighbours, the likelihood that Johnson could add value seemed unlikely. On the other hand, the spontaneous creation of the POC sites showed a concrete means for the Mission to make a demonstrable impact on objectives set out in its mandate. A rational determination of how UNMISS should structure its activities would likely have prioritised its activity around physical security at these sites.

The UN Secretariat, however, was eager to avoid the perception of the organisation as primarily functioning to protect the POC sites. Johnson's thinking also aligned with peacekeeping policy at the time. In the report of the High-Level Panel on Peace Operations (HIPPO) the following year, on which Johnson was invited to sit, the 'primacy of politics' in peacekeeping was stated (UN, 2015c) and then later repeated and affirmed in the 'Declaration of Shared Commitments on UN Peacekeeping' that became the Secretary-General's 'Action for Peacekeeping' (A4P) policy (UN, 2018d). In March 2014, it was not therefore surprising that the Secretary-General officially communicated the POC strategy to the UNSC much as Johnson had outlined it with political interventions rather than physical protection, its primary concern (UNSC, 2014).

The Aftermath

While much of this chapter has focussed on the event preceding and during the attack on Bor, the most fateful decisions may have ultimately taken place in its aftermath. At approximately 1500 hrs on 17 April, several hours after the attack had ended, a number of UNMISS officials re-entered the site to begin to document the crime scene.[19] At about the same time, the UNMISS state coordinator instructed a 'clean-up' to begin, stressing the importance of moving civilians that had fled to the more secure sections of the base, reserved for UN staff. This had been instructed to take place by nightfall. UN officials described a scramble to collect evidence as bodies were hurriedly moved. The next morning, the same investigating UN officials were given only two hours to collect evidence from additional examinations of the bodies before they were taken to be buried (Interviewee 11, 2020). A mass grave was dug approximately 100 metres outside of the base. 46 bodies were buried and marked by four wooden crosses (UNMISS, 2015a; 5). When an investigation team from a regional governmental organisation arrived only a few months later and asked UNMISS to view the

[19] A downpour of rain is reported to have stalled earlier attempts to begin the work (Interviewee 11, 2020)

grave, the foliage had been allowed to grow so thick around it that the crosses were sufficiently obscured making it impossible for officials to identify the location (Interviewee 11, 2020).

The sense that the memory of the tragedy, and even evidence that it had taken place at all, was allowed to disappear in the organisational mind was more than simply a product of the chaos of the aftermath. The kind of public high-level Board of Inquiry, that would have been normal for such a serious loss of life on UN premises, was never conducted according to those interviewed (Interviewee 11, 2020; Interviewee 8, 2020; Interviewee 15, 2020).[20] Internal reporting by the UN Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS) and the military Force Headquarters (FHQ) did take place. However, the thoroughness of those investigations was questioned. Key civilian UNMISS staff who were present at the site at the outbreak of violence expressed surprise that they were never interviewed as part of these investigations (Interviewee 11, 2020). Another UN official, one of the few allowed to access that reporting, was scathing.

'It was whitewashed, it was unbelievable…I don't know what the underlying motivation is. I mean, the UN has a hard time criticising itself but [exasperated exhalation of air]*. I was shocked when I read that thing, because it was so not true, so fabricated.'* (Interviewee 15, 2020)

A public report on the incident was released nine months later. However, carried out under the auspices of UNMISS' Human Rights Department (HRD), the focus was on the actions of the attackers than the responses of UNMISS (UNMISS, 2015). A UN Official struggled to account for the lack of impact that the incident at Bor seemed to make on Mission strategy.

'It doesn't have the historical resonance, I guess. Frankly, because it was, I don't know how significant, like in terms of a strategic event, maybe it just wasn't that important. I don't know. It's tragic. Maybe it fell of the radar, right?' (Interviewee 10, 2020)

The incident at Bor could have served as an opportunity to honestly reflect on the Mission's shortcomings and re-orient UNMISS' strategy with greater focus on physical security of

[20] Between 2012 and 2016 the UN conducted four Boards of Inquiry in South Sudan. These related to two incidents of its helicopters being shot down (2012 and 2014), an attack on its POC site at Malakal in 2016 and the failure of the mission to respond during violence in Juba in 2016.

civilians to avoid being targeted again. Instead, Johnson appears to have viewed the incident as anomalous and only obliquely significant in its impact on the broader political situation. In her memoir, the incident is dealt with in a single page. She largely ignores UNMISS' failures. Instead, she highlights how the President had, *'told me how angry he, personally, was'* on UNMISS' behalf. She also described how the incident affected the political process because it represented a *'game changer for international engagement'* (Johnson, 2018; 219). The ever-present lens of personal relationships and political strategy were again prominent in her analysis.

What Johnson tellingly did not dwell on were the Mission's tactical failures. Specifically, she did not mention UNMISS' inability to translate warnings into action, a lack of care around physical security infrastructure and the poor state of readiness of UN soldiers. With no worthwhile reflection on the incident at Bor, and no lessons drawn, those faults were left unaddressed. The Mission subsequently failed to repulse two more attacks on POC sites that it guarded in separate incidents in 2016, each resulting in a significant loss of civilian life. When media pressure forced the UN to conduct investigations into those incidents, they found almost the same set of failings as had occurred at Bor.

Conclusions

It is difficult to see the role of an SRSG in following the failures of individual soldiers at a regional base far from Johnson's own office in Juba. However, as suggested in the theoretical framework, a systems perspective means that even decisions made at a low level are part of a broader decision-making environment in which the SRSG plays a pivotal role. It was the SRSG who set the framework within which UNMISS continued to avoid confrontation. The SRSG also chose to make physical security a second tier POC priority. A lack of robust or proactive response at the tactical level was reflective of broader operational mindsets. These decisions to frame the context in this way again appear to be related to Johnson's individual values and self-perception as a politician as well as her aversion to framing the problem in military or tactical terms. This created a focus on those extraneous elements of a bounded rationality described in the previous chapter.

The escalation of violence also brought the interests of the UNSC and the UN Secretariat to the fore. The UNSC encouraged focus on a quick political solution rather than a robust defence

of the civilians under UNMISS' care. The UN Secretariat were more fearful of the implications of prolonged involvement with the POC sites, and all the complexities that that entailed, than focussing on how best the Mission could provide for their physical security. The implications of the reputational damage of the POC sites on the organisational myth created another incentive to avoid their becoming a focus for UNMISS activity. A focus on extraneous concerns that were part of the bounded rationality created low expectations around accomplishing more practical tasks, such as improving physical infrastructure and encouraging TCCs to use force against attackers.

The situation in South Sudan in 2014 continued to be considerably uncertain. The disruption of the conflict meant many of the UNMISS staff were evacuated. Bases in some parts of the country were closed and access was severely constrained in the face of a high tempo of violence. Capacity was turned towards emergency roles, particularly coming to grips with the influx of tens of thousands of civilians seeking protection. External networks of information gathering were significantly degraded with diplomatic, humanitarian and media organisations facing even greater disruption to their information gathering and analysis capacities than UNMISS. The effect of this uncertainty would have meant ever greater reliance within the Mission on the bounded rationality. Bias would have helped shape how the Mission processed information to bolster the certainty of assumption made according to that rationality.

The failure of the Mission to absorb repeated warnings about the possibility of an attack on Bor and escalate those to an appropriate level suggests a *confirmation bias*. Evidence of a physical threat against the POC site, necessitating UNMISS to adopt greater focus on physical security, would have been discomfiting when considered under the bounded rationality described above. Information regarding political developments is likely to have been overvalued under the belief that politics served as the primary means to deliver on the Mission's POC tasks. The effect would have been to make information regarding threats against sites, that necessitated greater focus on physical security as a priority, peripheral.

The poor ability of the organisation to absorb, process and react to information regarding specific and credible threats against Bor POC site at all levels also suggests the possibility of a *groupthink* that emulated the bias of the UNMISS leadership. Specifically, this included the tendency to portray the greater threats associated with the POC sites as being internal rather than external. Under this groupthink it becomes more likely that proactive responses and

reasonable contingency planning in Bor could not take place because the Mission at all levels had become blind to the evidentiary logic of such action.

The aftermath of the incident and the lack of significance attached to the Mission's failings gives credence to the accusation that lower significance was attached to the physical security of POC sites. The avoidance of an independent inquiry and corresponding accountability will have encouraged the perception that the groupthink emulation of senior leader's bias, created within a bounded rationality, was appropriate.

Johnson's reluctance to create confrontation that might *'escalate'* tensions with the Government, without contemplation of whether such escalation might be warranted or desirable, suggests that she also continued to have a *risk averse* attitude to the situation. Johnson's risk aversion allowed her to maintain the validity of a political approach by avoiding further damage to her relationships with political actors which was important to her individual values. However, the suboptimal consequence was that her risk aversion had become risk seeking as her policy of non-confrontation looked irrational as it emboldened Government belligerence. It also skewed the desirability of acknowledging threats that would have compelled a confrontational response.

Another behaviour that affirmed the bounded rationality while contributing to suboptimal responses was the possibility that a *sunk cost fallacy* had crept into the way that decision-makers framed their past decisions. By 2014, UNMISS had spent almost $3 billion. In return 25 peacekeepers had been lost[21] and the country had been allowed to slip into a devastating civil war. The ambiguous success of *'opening the gates'* represented a minor consolation to the UN's organisational myth. A rational accounting of UNMISS' performance would have been that its strategy and investments up to that point represented a colossal waste, necessitating a rethink of its strategy. The attack on Bor would have served as culmination of that failure which would have been personally distressing to Johnson as she was transitioning out of the Mission. However, when Johnson left the Mission in July her leaving speech was implausibly upbeat (see next chapter). The avoidance of any public embarrassment around Bor also meant that the UN avoided any outward admission of failure. The failure to

[21] Of which 13 were the result of malicious incidents according to UNDPO peacekeeping fatalities data accessed on 28 August 2020 at https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/data

acknowledge failure is indicative of a *sunk-cost fallacy* in which its failed investments were not rationally set aside but instead given value to determine future strategies.

Within the UNSC and UN Secretariat there was some unhappiness with Johnson's performance (Interviewee 5, 2020). However, the implications that her decision-making represented a complete failure was officially ignored. Despite her poor record Johnson was rewarded for her tenure by being given a highly influential role on the prestigious High-Level Panel on Peace Operations (HIPPO) when she left South Sudan. Johnson's dedication to system appropriateness also made her worthy of promotion regardless of the quality of her decision-making. That incentivised the legitimacy of mindsets and strategies that belonged to an organisational bounded rationality. These would have a significant effect on Johnson's successor who saw a requirement for continuity in UNMISS approach rather than an urgent need to rethink it.

8. Government Offensive in Unity State - April 2015

In this chapter I will discuss Johnson's departure and Ellen Margrethe Løj's arrival as the new SRSG, and the expectations which accompanied the change in leadership. I will suggest that Løj's previous experience gave her a specific set of values that influenced her decision-making and her leadership style. This led to an even greater commitment to systemic interpretations of the context and an even more isolated perspective than had existed under Johnson. I will also discuss the role of the UNSC and their attitude to the conflict that appeared partial in favouring the Government. This existed as the Government launched massive operations in the country with huge implications for civilians in Unity state. I will suggest that UNMISS' response was deficient in ways that cannot be accounted for by capability gaps alone. In the conclusions I will suggest that SRSG Løj's framing of the context within a diplomatic and peacebuilding framework as well the interests of the UN Secretariat and UNSC constituted a bounded rationality that disincentivised timely or confrontational decisions-making.

Background

In Johnson's farewell statement in July 2014, she went to great lengths to emphasise the extraordinary and unprecedented nature of the events of the previous eight months. She repeated the refrain *'never before'* three times to describe the *'explosion of violence, the hurricane'*. But she left with the assertion that the worst might be over.

'And it is only when you have weathered the storm, and you are in somewhat calmer waters, that a captain can dock and hand over to someone else. That is the case with me now.' (UNMISS, 2014f)

However, if there were *'calmer waters'* to be found in July 2014, they would have only seemed so compared to the extremities of violence that had recently taken place. The country remained territorially divided (see approximate areas of control in annex) with both sides entrenched in well defended positions, indicating the possibility of a prolonged conflict. Attempts to reach a political resolution achieved little. A cessation of hostilities agreement between the parties in January was breached within days and a peace agreement in May similarly collapsed less than two weeks after Johnson left the country (Al Jazeera America, 2014). The numbers of civilians seeking protection from UNMISS continued to rise, reaching

100,000 in July (UNMISS, 2014d). UNMISS' capacity to carry out operations beyond the immediate vicinity of its main bases remained limited. Having closed most of its smaller bases, following the attack on Akobo its tactical footprint had shrunk, limiting its access in the country. On those occasions that UNMISS ventured out on patrol from those bases that they retained they regularly faced obstacles and harassment.

The implications of the lack of freedom of movement were nowhere more evident than in Unity State. The town of Leer in southern Unity (see map 3) was the birthplace of Riek Machar and became a predictable focus for SPLA operations in the early stages of the conflict (Radio Tamazuj, 2014c). Violence in the area had created widespread displacement and significant humanitarian needs. Southern Unity became the most food insecure area in the whole country with all parts considered either in crisis or in emergency phases under the integrated phase classification (FEWS NET, 2014). Yet, despite these needs, the restrictions on peacekeeping movement meant that no UNMISS patrols took place in southern Unity between December 2013 and May 2015 (UNSC, 2015) and humanitarian services in the area were provided without peacekeeper support.

A new captain

There was a gap of two months between the departure of Johnson and the arrival of her successor, Ellen Margrethe Løj.[22] The gap was unfortunate. During that period, not only did the peace agreement collapse but an UNMISS helicopter was shot down by the SPLA/iO, killing four of its staff (UNMISS, 2014e). While it seems unlikely that the presence of an SRSG would have altered the outcome in either instance, the lack of UNMISS leadership during these critical incidents would have further undermined the stature of the Mission in the country. The reasons for the gap are unclear. One interviewee suggested that the UNSC had privately lost faith in Johnson and were impatient to see her leave. In the hurried search for a replacement they sought a different direction.

'I think Løj as a person was brought in as a direct response to Hilde, much more hardnosed and true to UN concepts. They brought in a bureaucrat who had experience in New York and the Council and in UNMIL…. [Johnson] *was a political animal, viewed herself as a political*

[22] Johnson stepped down as SRSG on 7 July and Løj was not announced as her replacement until 23 July (UN, 2014a). She arrived in Juba on 2 September (UN, 2014b).

animal, and a lot of it was done in her head personally and depends on personal relationships. Løj was much more, 'sit back, use the structures.'' (Interviewee 8, 2020)

If Johnson was a politician in her attempts to situate UNMISS policy around her own political interpretations, Løj was the consummate diplomat. Her career up to that point suggested that she strongly believed in the power of international peace and security architecture. She had represented Denmark on the UNSC between 2001 and 2007 and was closely identified with her support to the reform process around peacebuilding mechanisms (Interviewee 7, 2020). During that time, she helped establish, and was co-chair, of the first informal consultations of the Peacebuilding Commission (UN, 2005) and stated a strong belief in the role of peacebuilding within peacekeeping strategies.

'I think I cannot underline strongly enough the importance of peacekeeping and peacebuilding going hand in hand. They are two sides of the same coin. If we don't urgently work on building the peace while we keep the peace, then we will not achieve our ultimate goal, namely sustainable peace and prosperity.' (Boutellis and Wyeth, 2012)

Between 2008 and 2012, Løj was able to see how peacebuilding could be effectively incorporated into a peacekeeping Mission when she was appointed as SRSG of UNMIL. In Liberia she enjoyed a strong relationship with President Sirleaf Johnson. Increasing stability in the post-conflict country would have provided Løj with positive affirmation for a collaborative approach focussed on peacebuilding outcomes while UNMIL also represented a rare *'win'* for UN peacekeeping (Blair, 2019) and would have created a halo around Løj's performance and her strategies. Between 2012 and 2014 she additionally served as a member of the Board for the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, again focussed on diplomatic and peacebuilding work (HD, 2012).

Løj the diplomat

As Løj arrived, the UNSC authorised a new UNMISS mandate. The laundry list of statebuilding activities that had weighed down the Mission since 2011, had disappeared. In its place were four priorities of which POC was the mission's primary role. Under pressure to address the ambiguity that Johnson had felt undermined her capacity to intervene against the Government between 2011 and 2014, the UNSC strengthened the language around the protection of civilians. UNMISS was now clearly mandated to protect civilians *'irrespective of*

the source of such violence' (UNSC, 2014). UNMISS' other three priorities included the monitoring and investigating human rights, creating the conditions for delivery of humanitarian assistance, and supporting the implementation of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement (UNSC, 2014).[23]

In her first public press conference as SRSG in October, Løj publicly acknowledged the shift in mandate focus. However, she also pre-empted complaints from the Government about the perceived loss of statebuilding support from UNMISS by separating herself and the mission, somewhat disingenuously, from the political machinations of New York.

'Let me say that the mandate for the Mission is solely in the hands of the members of the Security Council, it is the 15 members of the Security Council who decide what the mandate of the Mission is. We will not be consulted on the mandate.' (UNMISS, 2014)

In her brief comments on the political process taking place in Addis Ababa, which the Government had regularly complained about in its frequent admonishment of the international community, Løj was similarly keen to distance herself in a way that again should have ingratiated herself with the Government.

'Let me say that I hope very much, and I support the Security Council's call for a peace agreement, the negotiations as you know are taking place under the mediation efforts by the regional organisation IGAD, so we are not involved in that.' (UNMISS, 2014)

Similarly, Løj downplayed the more emphatic tone of the POC components and dedicated much of her first few months taking actions and making statements that time and again appeared aimed at reassuring the Government and attempting to normalise UNMISS' position in the country. In November, she sent a draft Memorandum of Understanding to the Government on the transition of criminals within the POC sites to national authorities (UNSC, 2014b). She also helped legitimise Government claims that the POC sites harboured opposition supporters and SPLA defectors. In November she stated in a press release that,

[23] While the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement had effectively collapsed the international community continued to sponsor its mechanisms including its monitoring teams.

'I have no doubt that in the Protection of Civilian sites there are many people who support the opposition, or that there are many who are former soldiers, who defected from the army. That's a fact.' (UNMISS, 2014b)

In the same press release she lectured civilians in the POC sites to do better at respecting their civilian nature (UNMISS, 2014b) and in the following month organised a series of well publicised weapons searches and weapons destruction ceremonies within the sites.[24] The actions shocked humanitarians who fretted that the new SRSG risked legitimising inflammatory language by the Government that had previously been used to justify attacks on POC sites including Bor (Briggs and Monaghan, 2017; 73).

Notwithstanding the end of its statebuilding mandate, UNMISS continued to provide symbolic material support to the Government. This included capacity building of security services around protections issues (UNMISS, 2015) as well as the building of security infrastructure, such as the construction of at least three guard posts in Juba (UNSC, 2014b).

However, if Løj hoped that her diplomatic strategy would create the kind of access that she had enjoyed with Liberia's Government, she should have been sorely disappointed. Her first meeting with Kiir was reported to be frosty by UN Officials (Interviewee 13, 2020) and her subsequent meetings were sporadic, often weeks apart (Interviewee 7, 2020). Despite the setbacks she persisted as one UN official commented,

'She definitely wasn't an optimist, but somehow there was this ego thing that like tomorrow they're going to wake up and realize that we're doing a lot of good stuff and this meeting will go better. I don't know it's just this weird expectation.' (Interviewee 13, 2020)

Løj appears to have had less time for forging similar links with the opposition. She did not make similar attempts to connect with the SPLA/iO and in an early, and much publicised decision, denied a request by IGAD to support a transportation of SPLA/iO as part of the ongoing political process (UNMISS, 2014c). Løj also did not re-establish any bases, even of a temporary nature, inside territory held by the SPLA/iO during her tenure.

[24] In a coordinated campaign UNMISS conducted public weapons destructions at; Juba POC site (9 December 2014), Malakal POC site (12 December 2014), Bentiu POC site (19 December), Wau POC site (23 December), Bor POC site (29 December) based on various press releases by UNMISS between 10 December and 30 December 2014 accessed on 4 March 2020 on https://unmiss.unmissions.org/

Løj's Inside View

In 2015 UNMISS was collecting and processing information about the context in a way that was siloed and hierarchal and would be familiar to anyone with experience of the often-dysfunctional structures that exist in peacekeeping missions. Relationships between departments could be fractious and information was hoarded by individuals who used it to show usefulness to senior leadership. (Interviewee 1, 2020). Those sections responsible for synthesising cross-mission information, such as the JMAC, had to rely on personal relationships and goodwill to access information held by other departments (Interviewee 1, 2020). Other UN officials complained that JMAC products were circulated only to those few individuals that sat on the PMT, due to their sensitive nature, creating *'information blindness'* in the rest of the Mission (Interviewee 7, 2020).

Løj's management style appeared to exacerbate these organisational issues. During her time in Liberia, Løj favoured a hierarchal structure. As a UN official working in UNMIL at the time noted,

'With Doss [Løj's predecessor in UNMIL] *we all were gathering around him as a team and consider*[ing] *the aspects together and collaboratively. Løj wants to see things with her own eyes and wants to make up her own mind. Her staff here* [in UNMIL] *is more the support who should pave the way for her.'* (Winckler, 2015)

To more junior staff working for Løj in UNMISS, she could be '*invisible'* beyond her private office, rarely engaging with them (Interviewee 1, 2020). At an early stage of her tenure, she hobbled decision mechanisms that had otherwise provided a relatively empowering means for junior staff to provide inputs to decision-making. She instructed the team responsible for producing early warning analysis to remove early response recommendations from its reporting rendering the product inconsequential to decision-makers (Interviewee 15, 2020).

While some of the interviewees stressed that Løj was a *'voracious reader'* of reports and willing to *'listen to all sides of an argument'* (Interviewee 7, 2020) she also had a reputation for trying to aggressively shape discourse. This was particularly evident in her relationship with humanitarians that worked alongside the Mission. One characterised the relationship as,

'…combative and it tended to be a little bit-- What's the word I want? Almost like a rubber band reaction, where it was just like we would push back on something and then you just get this complete shutdown. There wasn't a lot of room for like, "All right, let's negotiate. Let's find a middle ground." It was like, "Oh, you don't like that. Okay, you're now kicked out of the POCs [POC sites]*." You'd just be like, "What?" It's just a massive overreaction.'* (Interviewee 6, 2020)

A UN official interviewed defended the SRSG's reputation on her interactions with humanitarians but conceded,

'If they [humanitarians] *came at her with stuff which wasn't sympathetic to UNMISS' point of view, she used to steamroll them. I saw one poor guy from MSF, she let him speak for five seconds, and just ran through him.'* (Interviewee 4, 2020)

This also extended to her attempts to shape public discourse to negate criticism of herself or the Mission. Journalists and researchers complained that under her their access to the POC sites became more restricted. Their entry could be denied, time limits were set, and chaperones required (Radio Tamazuj, 2016q). Even research questions could be vetted by the Chief of Staff before they were put to UNMISS officials in a perceived attempt to limit UNMISS' interactions with the press to set *'talking points'* (Briggs and Monaghan, 2017; 43). Løj was much less inclined to interact with the press than either her predecessor or successor. When she made an uncharacteristic foray into the media, writing an op-ed in a British newspaper, it was to defend UNMISS record against public criticism rather than achieve mandated objectives (Løj, 2015).

Where Løj did discuss policy more openly was within the most senior levels of the mission. Within the PMT were a number of staff with whom Løj had previously worked in Liberia. The DMS, Chief of Staff, D/SRSG (Political) and Special Advisor had all been part of her senior leadership team in UNMIL. A UN Official suggested that the cluster of senior officials who had previously worked together is not unusual in the UN system.

'It's very common with these missions. When she came to UNMISS, she brought her people from Liberia with her whose entire careers were pegged to her success. That's how you get that group thing at the top. I think she was just so far outside of her scope that she didn't really know what to do without it.' (Interviewee 14, 2020).

It is additionally possible that within her senior team, Løj not only sought to imitate the personnel structure of UNMIL but also its '*successful*' peacebuilding focus. When Moustapha Soumaré was hired as the D/SRSG (Political) in late 2014, he lacked experience in political roles. At UNMIL, and during the entirety of his career up to that point, he had been in recovery, governance, and development roles (UN, 2014c). While his skillset did not suit the position of a D/SRSG (Political) in an active conflict, it made sense if those that hired him believed a transition was imminent. He later explained that when he was hired to UNMISS he had been led to believe, although he does not say by whom, that transition to a post-conflict stage was likely and the prospect of peacebuilding activities taking place was real. At a press conference in July 2015, he showed his frustration at the persistence of the conflict.

'When I accepted this post, it was towards the end of 2014. At that time, there was prospect that a peace agreement was going to be signed, and that we will actually have a Mission dealing with important issues, as highlighted in a peace agreement.' (UNMISS, 2015)

Peace, but first war

In 2015, the peace process was still dominated by the US. While there is no question that the US had expressed frustration at both parties to the conflict, their political interests were partial. Their ally, the Ugandan President Museveni had unambiguously come down on the side of the Government, sending the UPDF to South Sudan to help the SPLA push the SPLA/iO away from capital. The US was wary of Riek Machar, whose only material support came from its longstanding foe, Omar al-Bashir (UNMISS, 2015b). At an early stage, the US openly explained its partiality. In May 2014, Kerry clarified the US position as,

'…we do not put any kind of equivalency into the relationship between the sitting president, constitutionally and duly elected by the people of the country, and a rebel force that is engaged in use of arms in order to seek political power or to provide a transition.' (Rubin, 2014)

In 2014, the US blocked efforts by France and the UK to get the UNSC to agree to an arms embargo in South Sudan (Lynch, 2015). This allowed the Government to make huge purchases of arms that included small arms and light weapons, hundreds of armoured vehicles, the country's first attack helicopters and even an air-to-ground attack jet (Conflict Armament Research, 2018). In contrast the SPLA/iO found their already meagre weapons supply slowly

cut off as the US used its sanctions regime to dissuade Khartoum from further involvement in the south (Conflict Armament Research, 2018). While US frustration with Kiir's government was palpable (VoA, 2015), their actions suggested official tolerance for some escalation of military action by the Government, likely to force the opposition to reach a quick agreement.

Even though the UK and France are likely to have had misgivings over the decision to allow the Government to continue purchasing arms, the importance of the US vis-à-vis their lack of interest in the country of South Sudan meant that they did not vigorously protest. The maintenance of a pre-existing EU arms embargo on the country may have sufficed as a satisfactory symbolic moral position.[25] China maintained a stronger alignment with the South Sudan Government, as a consequence of its economic involvement in the country particularly in oil (Bodettit, 2019). In the initial stages of the conflict, China had invited military personnel from the Government to the country and allowed large arms shipments from its state-owned defence company, Norinco (Conflict Armament Research, 2018). China's peculiarly narrow interests found expression in UNMISS' mandate. The section that dealt with UNMISS responsibility to protect building crucial to the protection of civilians included *'hospitals'*, *'places of worship'* and, incongruously, *'oil installations.'*[26]

No escape in Unity

By early 2015, the Government's build-up of armaments meant that by spring, a large-scale government offensive looked imminent. In March, the International Crisis Group wrote,

'The SPLA has been gaining ground since May 2014 thanks to major arms purchases, improved tactics and the influence and presence of the Ugandan army. Many in the SPLA increasingly see little reason for concessions to the SPLA/iO…The government feels an urgency to push for victory, as a looming financial crisis threatens its fragile coalition, much of which is built upon patronage networks running short of cash.' (ICG, 2015)

In that same month UNMISS sent a code cable to New York, having identified large deployments of freshly supplied Government security services in forward positions in Unity

[25] The EU arms embargo was instituted on Sudan in 1994 in response to the civil war. In 2011, it was amended to include the newly created South Sudan according to the SIPRI database of arms embargoes https://www.sipri.org/databases/embargoes/eu_arms_embargoes/south_sudan accessed on 9 Jul. 2020.
[26] The inclusion of oil installations as a priority role in the protection of civilians have been a part of all UNMISS mandates since November 2014

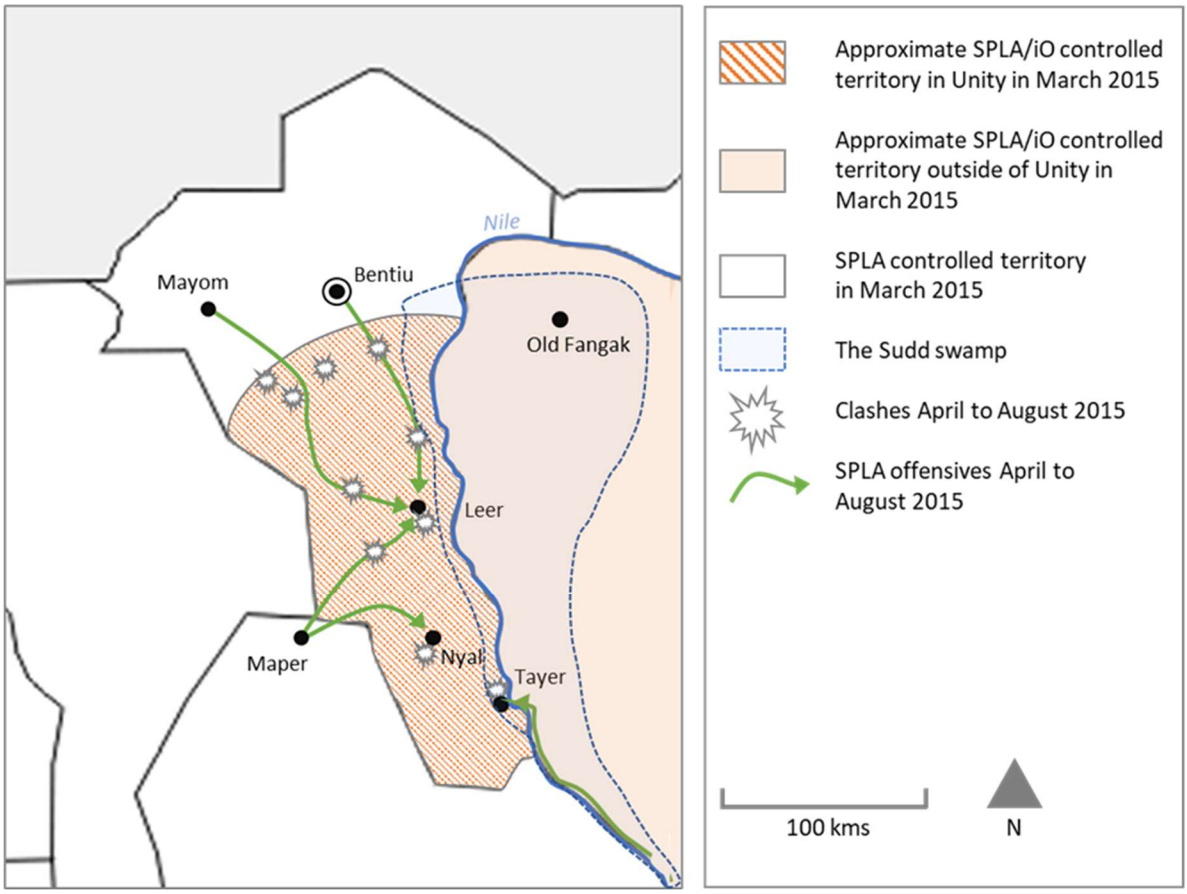
State. They assessed the likelihood of coordinated military campaigning as *'probable'* (Interviewee 17, 2020).

The potential impact on civilians of any escalation of conflict was significant. In 2014 Kiir had handed over command of the SPLA to Paul Malong. Malong had a fearsome reputation as the architect of the Mathiang Anyoor militia, that had been heavily implicated in perpetrating the massacres in Juba in 2013 (AU, 2015; 22). As SPLA Chief, Malong had already overseen the partial integration of the Mathiang Anyoor into the regular SPLA (Boswell, 2019).

When Government operations began in Upper Nile state in March, the SPLA/iO showed themselves incapable of withstanding the now better armed and supplied SPLA. It was only the surprise defection of a key SPLA ally from the Shilluk community, that prevented a total collapse of the opposition in Upper Nile state.[27] Attacks on civilians in Upper Nile were significant (UNMISS, 2015d). However, opposition territories were either connected to stronghold SPLA/iO areas or else bordered other countries to which civilians might escape as refugees, such as Sudan and Ethiopia. A concentration of fighting in the vicinity of Malakal, also meant that civilians could more easily seek protection at the nearby UNMISS POC site.

When the offensive reached Unity the following month, the avenues of escape were much fewer. As the Government launched an offensive from all sides in April 2015 (see map 3), civilians were left with three hazardous routes of escape. They could either travel north through 100 kilometres of Government controlled territory in which informal militias had been armed and given licence by Government security forces to rob, murder and rape civilians fleeing the fighting (UNMISS, 2016; 19). Alternatively, if they could find access to a boat, and pay the cost of travel, they could travel north along the Nile, to reach an opposition stronghold in Old Fangak and then potentially travel through Jonglei to safety in Ethiopia (Noy, 2018). Finally, they could hide in the swamp, and the many islands, near the fighting that offered a natural protective barrier. However, on the islands they were exposed to harsh living conditions without access to humanitarian services (Al Jazeera, 2015). Drowning while either escaping along the Nile or hiding in the swamps represented another significant danger.

[27] A dispute between Johnson Olony's Shilluk Aguelek militia and a neighbouring Dinka Padang militia led to the desertion of Olony and his forces when the Government appeared to side with his long-time rivals (Dumo, 2015)



Map 3 - Unity conflict April to August 2015 (based on map in Craze and Tubiana, 2016; 82)

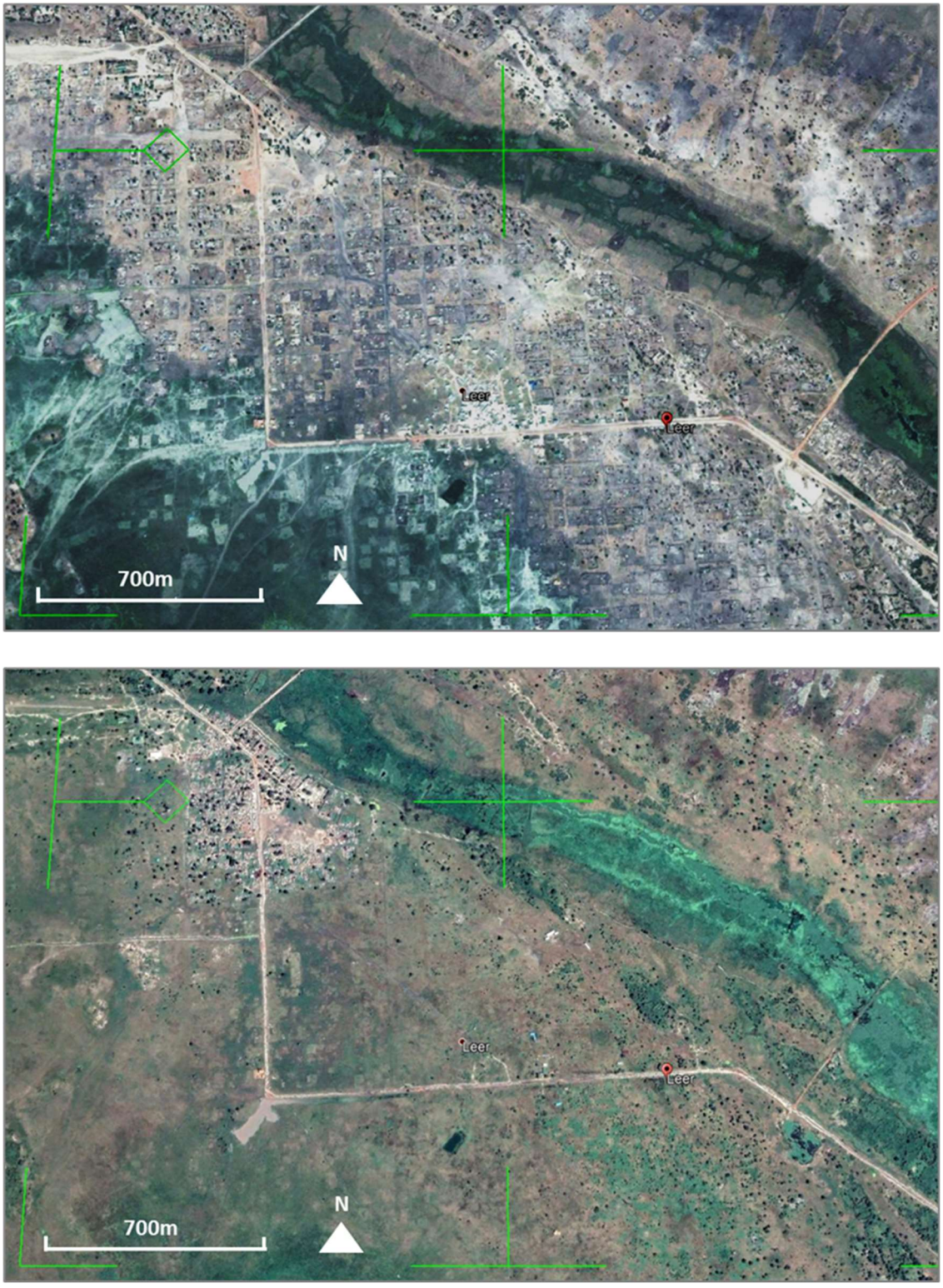
On 25 April, the SPLA moved from Mayom and Bentiu in the north, with armed militia groups in their wake. From the west, they attacked from their base in Maper in Lakes state. In the south, SPLA boats shelled the port of Taiyer (Small Arms Survey, 2015). Thousands of homes were reported to have been destroyed in coordinated attacks on civilian centres (UN, 2015). The displaced brought a litany of horror stories about the initial offensive and the attacks they sustained as they travelled to the POC site. UNICEF reported in mid-May that according eyewitnesses they had interviewed,

'Whole villages were burned to the ground by armed groups, while large numbers of girls and women were taken outside to be raped and killed – including children as young as seven.' (Radio Tamazuj, 2015)

According to UNMISS' own public reporting,

'This recent upsurge has not only been marked by allegations of rampant killing, rape, abduction, looting, arson and displacement, but by a new brutality and intensity, including such horrific acts as the burning alive of people inside their homes.' (UNMISS, 2015c)

A conservative estimate of the number directly killed was 7,165, the vast majority of which were civilians. An additional 829 were believed to have drowned while trying to escape in the swamps. 4,155 children were separated from their families and 890 people were reported to have been abducted (Office RC/HC South Sudan, 2016). Without a secure base from which to operate, all humanitarian services had to be evacuated from southern Unity by 11 May, leaving 300,000 people without access to life saving aid and likely resulting in a significantly higher mortality. At least 100,000 heads of cattle were plundered, representing the community wealth of the entire southern Unity (Small Arms Survey, 2015). Satellite imagery of Leer shows the almost complete destruction of the town (see map 4).



Map 4 - Satellite imagery of Leer in December 2014 (Top) and November 2019 (Bottom) (imagery accessed on Google Earth on 16 February 2020)

A Peacekeeping Response?

UNMISS had been aware since March that an offensive was likely. When it occurred, it could access almost real time information about threats against civilians from the huge numbers fleeing the violence to their base. Between April and August, the number of people seeking protection from UNMISS in Bentiu rose from 50,000 to more than 120,000 (UNMISS, 2015b). However, UNMISS' response was sluggish. On 15 May, UNMISS sent a letter to the SPLA and civilian authorities requesting that they allow unhindered civilian movement for those fleeing the conflict and allow humanitarians to access the contested areas (UNMISS, 2015b). The Government initially denied that they were hindering civilians, provoking strongly worded statements by IGAD (France 24, 2015), the UNSC (UNSC, 2015c) and the Secretary-General (UN, 2015b). Under pressure, the Government issued a decree instructing the armed forces to lift restrictions on movement and allow humanitarian access. There is no evidence that the decree was ever enforced but, in a meagre concession, UNMISS was granted limited access to parts of southern Unity (UNMISS, 2015b).

Between 23 and 28 May, the Mission conducted a patrol to Leer as part of *'Operation Unity'*. Subsequently, a response plan was developed in which it would establish a static presence through a Temporary Operating Base (TOB) in Leer. However, implementation of so-called *'Operation Unity II'* was persistently delayed. After near constant fighting between April and August, the Government wound down its campaign in southern Unity, with the SPLA in control of Leer. That month Kiir added his name to a peace agreement heralding an official pause in SPLA campaigns. However, it would still not be until November, more than six months after the fighting began, that UNMISS finally deployed the Leer TOB. In explaining the delay, UN Officials I interviewed offered technical issues as a possible reason.

'It seems that the main delay with setting up the Leer base were the problems with road accessibility to the area, combined with the prolonged lack of serviceability for the appropriate air asset, the Mi-26, for transferring materials required for setting up the base.' (Interviewee 18, 2020)

The 100 kilometres of road between the UNMISS base in Bentiu and the town of Leer represented a difficult challenge during the summer of 2015. Ongoing conflict and Government harassment provided the main barriers to effective movement. In the period

between the start of the conflict and the deployment of the TOB, UNMISS reported 59 restrictions on its movement, almost entirely by the Government, although it is unclear how many of these took place in Unity (UNMISS, 2015). While there is no public record of what transpired during these restrictions, anecdotal evidence suggests UNMISS military could be easily deterred. One UN Official described meetings about military patrols in Unity at this time.

'I remember being in meetings where they basically talk about an entire patrol of armed peacekeepers, like half a battalion. A couple of hundred guys with armoured vehicles and automatic weapons basically being turned around by barefoot SPLA teenager on the side of the road.' (Interviewee 14, 2020)

In a report to the UNSC in November, the Secretary-General refers to the issue of *'troop reluctance'* as a key factor undermining the ability of the UNMISS to carry patrolling (UNSC, 2015d).

It would be easy to suggest that the six months it took for UNMISS to provide a protection response in southern Unity was purely a capability issue, aggravated by an unwilling soldiery. UNMISS had insufficient troop numbers and assets in 2013 to deal with the full range of task it had been mandated to perform. But by mid-2015, its mandate had been dramatically pared down and an additional 5,000 peacekeepers had been added to its forces (an uplift of more than 60% from its pre-war capacity).[28] Also, when UNMISS ultimately deployed to Leer in November it was without any fundamental change in its resources.

While there may have been *'troop reluctance'* there is no evidence that Løj or the UN Secretariat took any steps at this time to sanction officers or TCCs for not carrying out their responsibilities during this time. When UNMISS was called on to action a similar operation in a similar context and with similar resources in 2017, the preparation time required was only a few days (see chapter 9). Another explanation for the delays in responding is that UNMISS leadership had other reasons to be unenthusiastic about an operation in southern Unity in a way that effected the timeliness of its decision-making.

[28] Based on 7,684 TCCs, FPUs and individual police available in December 2013 and 12,523 TCCs, FPUs and individual police available in June 2015 based on UNDPO peacekeeping data accessed on 28 August 2020 at https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/troop-and-police-contributors

'Why are we investing?'

Given the dramatic increase in civilians seeking protection at Bentiu at this time, the establishment of a base at Leer risked the possibility of a new round of civilians, particularly those hiding in the swamps, moving to the site to seek protection. By 2015, interviewees suggested Løj was under pressure to avoid any further expansion of the POC sites.

'She was under lots of pressure not to make them [the POC sites] *permanent structures, and minimise them for a whole host of reasons and a lot of political pressure from just about every angle…She took very much the political position supported by the Council, supported by New York* [the UN Secretariat] *of, "Let's try and minimise these protection sites. Let's try and make them temporary in nature."'* (Interviewee 8, 2020)

Evidence that Løj was conscientious in trying to minimise UNMISS' role at the POC sites can be found in the combative relationship she had with humanitarians as she brought in rules on the extent of services that could be offered within the sites, and the durability of the materials that could be used in building shelters (Briggs and Monaghan, 2017; 26). As the largest POC site, Bentiu became a focus for her ire. When a donor contributed to a humanitarian push to improve the dire conditions of the camp in early 2015, one UN official noted her displeasure,

'The Dutch had put in a lot of resources to expand Bentiu and did a lot in terms of urban planning. She [Løj] *really didn't like that. Now maybe someone practically speaking might say, "Well, you got these people you don't know how long they're going to be around, let's at least have a decent facility for them," but her thing was, "Why are we investing?" Not "we" but even this Dutch donor at the time, I think it was the Dutch, investing all of this into making what, in the end, she didn't want to be an incentive for people to come."* (Interviewee 7, 2020)

In May 2015, as the numbers of people in Bentiu surged because of the horrific violence being perpetrated in the southern parts of the state, she warned the UNSC that the POC sites were at risk of becoming,

'…magnets that attract people looking to avail themselves of the services available in the camps, rather than those needing physical protection.' (UNSC, 2015c)

At the start of August, UNMISS wariness to the opening of new POC sites was such that following fighting in Yambio, in the south-west of the country, UNMISS refused to allow

fleeing civilians inside the gates of its base (Radio Tamazuj, 2015b). It does not seem coincidental that the Leer TOB was ultimately only established once the number of people seeking protection at Bentiu started to fall, indicating a general lowering in the need for UNMISS to provide physical protection in the state.

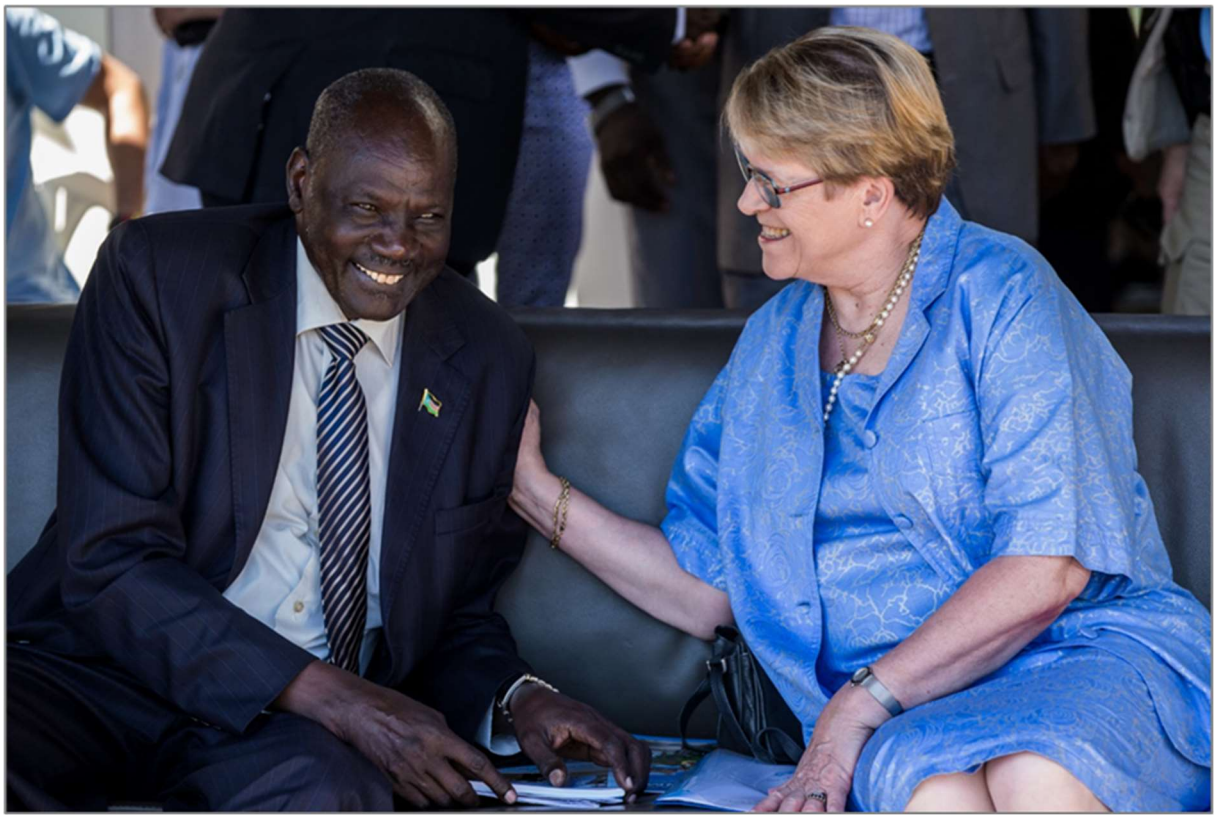
Complete and utter failure

UNMISS failed to be proactive to timely warnings of threats against civilians and then provided a response that was so delayed that it did nothing to mitigate the damage to the civilian community in southern Unity between April and August 2015. The assessment of humanitarians that there had been a, *'…complete and utter protection failure on UNMISS' part in southern Unity'* (Jones, 2015) seems accurate.

Publicly, Løj appeared to prioritise the relationship which she was attempting to cultivate with the Government over condemnation of its perpetration of violence in the country. While she admitted to being *'deeply troubled'* by the reports from Unity in May and called for *'unimpeded access'* she took care to never directly blame the Government (Sudan Tribune, 2015). Humanitarians were left with the impression that Løj had no interest in using her representational role to achieve protection aims. As one noted,

'She was never a voice on protection. It never struck me that she was speaking up or pushing back. It just felt like she was completely absent. I think it is telling that at no point during my time with the protection cluster did we feel that we could go to her for support on protection issues.' (Interviewee 6, 2020)

Extraordinarily, at the height of the atrocities in late May Løj chose to share a platform at an official UNMISS ceremony with Michael Makuei, who was closely associated with the attack on civilians at Bor and had come to be viewed as the Government's most prominent apologist. The promotional material released by UNMISS from the event appears focussed on prioritising an image of harmony between UNMISS and the Government even when violence in Unity was at its peak (see pic. 1).



Picture 1 - Government of South Sudan Minister for Information Michael Makuei and SRSG Ellen Løj taken at UN Peacekeeping Day Event at UN House on 29 May 2015. (Retrieved from UNMISS Media flickr account on 31 August 2020)

UNMISS' most ardent criticism of the violence was done obliquely through the ostensibly independent work of the Mission's Human Rights Department, rather than the office of the SRSG (UNMISS, 2015c). The D/SRSG (RC/HC) also used his independent capacity to be more vocal about the atrocities being committed, leading the Government to expel him in June (UN, 2015). The next month his deputy was seriously assaulted by Government security services in her own home, forcing her to leave the country (Patinkin, 2017). Press releases by UNMISS at the time made no reference to either the expulsion or the assault.[29]

Conclusions

When Løj arrived in South Sudan, the UN Secretariat interest in the country was based on its preoccupation with the POC sites and the corresponding threat to the organisational myth. Løj's own values aligned with that of the UN Secretariat. This can partially be explained by her

[29] Based on archived press releases between June and July available at https://unmiss.unmissions.org/press-releases

reputation as a *'hardnosed'* advocate of the UN system. However, it also relates to those individual values in which she overvalued a normalised relationship with the Government and the speedy transition to a peacebuilding phase of the conflict. That priority created an extraneous element within a bounded rationality which influenced choice alternatives. Under such a reading of the conflict, the POC sites must have seemed like an obstacle rather than a core responsibility of the Mission. The influence of these interests, values and myths would have provided a powerful disincentive to Løj to accept the creation of a new base where it was possible, if not likely, that her efforts to stop an expansion of the Mission's POC site responsibilities would be reversed.

Another extraneous element within a bounded rationality was the tacit acceptance of members of the UNSC to allow some escalation of the conflict by the Government. As suggested above, Løj's experiences suggested that she strongly believed in international peace and security mechanisms including the right of the UNSC to dictate strategy. The attitude of the UNSC, which created a permissive environment for Government security operations to take place, also reflected Løj's own stated belief in the legitimacy of a sovereign Government to be responsible for its own security policies. In her decisions she therefore continued to engage the Government, spurn the opposition, and refrain from activities that might undermine the Government's security operations. While Løj's decisions in 2015 showed deference to UNSC interests, and incorporated her own values, they were also highly systemically appropriate, even as they were practically suboptimal in providing protection for civilians.

To create cognitive ease around her choices Løj appears to have shown bias. It is likely that an *availability bias* existed in which diplomatic strategies around peacebuilding, particularly those that reflected her own success in Liberia, were accessible experiences. Løj did not have commensurate operational experience in emergency contexts, and it seems likely that she sought to see in South Sudan the same harmonious relationship between the Government and the peacekeeping mission that she had had at UNMIL. Her willingness to try again and again to ingratiate herself with the Government suggests that she was incorrectly seeing indicators of success in her strategy when there were none. Her faith in the UNSC, given her own available experience of being a part of the UNSC, and her tendency to align her own

professionalism with those diplomats that she viewed as peers, meant that she put too much value on the relevance of UNSC diplomacy to positively contribute to peace in the country.

There was also a significant presence of a *substitution bias* in Løj 's decisions. In her pursuit of a strong working relationship with Kiir, Løj appears to have been attempting to recreate the relationship that she had enjoyed with Liberia's President. The fact that she continued to pursue the strategy despite a lack of interest from Kiir's office, strongly suggests that she was working according to a stereotype of an inherently reasonable Government official that wished to play a responsible role as a part of the international diplomatic system which she represented.

A *confirmation bias* is likely to have led to a tendency to overvalue information of the legitimacy of Government action making Løj circumspect when called on to apportion blame for attacks on civilians. In contrast she appeared to have undervalued disconfirming evidence, such as widespread attacks on civilians that should have prompted a more vocal response. This would have weakened urgency in a peacekeeping action, or the need to publicly confront the Government about its role in the atrocities.

Cohesion was given to the correctness of Løj's decision-making because of certain behaviours. Even more so than Johnson, Løj showed a propensity to concentrate decision-making discussions among a narrow group of individuals. Løj's *inside view* was based on her preference for hierarchical decision-making over flat structures, lack of tolerance for narratives that diverged from her own perspective, and propensity to have staff with whom she was familiar within her inner circle of decision-making. Their concentration of decision-making among a small group of individuals similarly aligned in their values, would have made it less likely that challenging perspectives would have a sufficient platform to create more varied choice alternatives, including those that related more closely to practical elements of achieving the POC task.

Risk aversion would also have been prominent. The persistent failure to instil a willingness to confront the SPLA within peacekeeping forces meant that by mid-2015 the consequences of such actions were still unknown. That uncertainty meant that the tendency to avoid uncertainty persisted. The deployment of Op Unity II represented the first time that UNMISS had launched a significant protection operation outside of its own base since the start of the

conflict. Risk aversion would have meant that reasons for delaying or avoiding the action would have been given undue prominence in finally deciding to give the Mission the go-ahead. Procrastination borne out of risk aversion would have provided a justification of inaction that aligned closely with the preferred bias to support the bounded rationality.

A final behaviour worth mentioning relates to the op-ed that Løj wrote to answer criticism of the Mission's role in 2015 (Løj, 2015). She selectively uses information, ignores evidence, and frames the situation in Unity in a way that is disingenuously favourable to the decisions that she made in 2015. That article is further evidence of bias. However, it is also an indication of the willingness of Løj to incorrectly appraise mistakes and failures, which is reminiscent of the tendency towards unreasonably positive assessments of past investments that correspond to a *sunk-cost fallacy*. In 2016, this tendency would become increasingly pronounced and become a hallmark of Løj's leadership. In a series of disastrous events, Løj's decisions became increasingly desperate attempts at justification of previous decisions. However, with each *'doubling down'* UNMISS drifted further from practical considerations of carrying out POC tasks, as they sought to show the correctness of their bounded rationality. The first instance was Løj's failure to account for the mistakes in Unity in a way that had a direct bearing on an attack on one of its largest POC sites in Malakal, Upper Nile State.

9. Attack on Malakal UNMISS Base and POC site - February 2016

In this chapter I will discuss Løj 's developing attitude to physical security at POC sites that led to a series of decisions that downgraded the commitment of UNMISS to them, despite a sustained requirement. This was particularly true in Malakal where tensions were rising in the second half of 2015 and the start of 2016 to create a high likelihood of violence in and around the site. When an attack on UNMISS took place in February, UNMISS staff was unprepared and made a series of poor tactical decisions. In the conclusion I will suggest that these mistakes existed within a context in which UNMISS decision-makers, operating under a specific bounded rationality, made emerging threats to POC sites a peripheral concern. Apathy among more junior UNMISS officials reflected senior understandings of the context. Specific threats around Malakal were ignored and the tactical emphasis during the incident was on securing UN assets rather than POC duties. Attitudes among UNMISS staff became suggests the presence of groupthink that affected their decision-making.

'Rescaling'

Following the signing of the peace agreement, the Secretary-General made recommendations on the future of UNMISS' strategy in November 2015. He recommended that UNMISS' first priority be *'political support to the Transitional Government of National Unity* (TGoNU)*'* (UNSC, 2015d). Its second priority should be support of security mechanisms in the country, including the Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission (JMEC) and the transitional joint security services. Protection of civilians was mentioned as a third priority with its focus being the projection of military force beyond the POC sites rather than on its existing role in physical security. As part of this realignment, the Secretary-General offered a plan to reduce UNMISS involvement in physical security at the POC sites by rescaling its military commitment to the number of staff allocated to perimeter security (UNSC, 2015d).

This change of focus away from POC sites is surprising given that, as was shown in the Unity crisis, UNMISS had little ability to project force outside of its own bases. The signing of the peace agreement had made little difference to that ability as insecurity and troop reluctance persisted. Because of the Government's offensives during 2015, the need for UNMISS' POC sites increased exponentially with the number of people requiring protection doubling to

reach 200,000 by the end of the year (see fig. 3). The requirement for UNMISS security at the sites had increased.

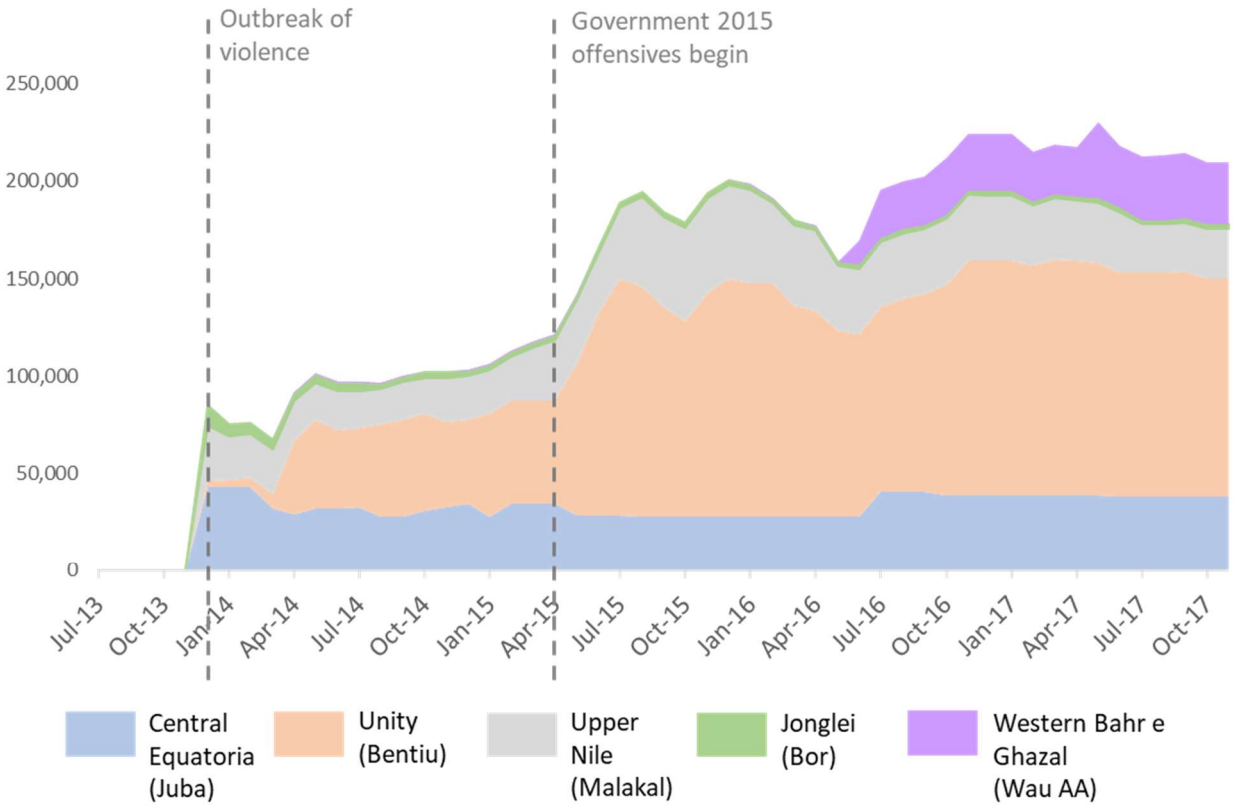


Figure 3 - Numbers of people seeking protection at UNMISS POC sites by state (Location of main site) (based on UNMISS POC site updates available https://unmiss.unmissions.org accessed on 30 April 2020)

The UNSC appears to have been sceptical of the aspirational plans of the Secretary-General. In its renewal of UNMISS' mandate in December an additional task was added to include political and capacity support to the implementation of the peace process. However, its existing tasks remained largely unchanged and POC remained the Mission's primary role. The type and extent of POC activities that UNMISS were carrying out therefore should have remained unchanged. However, in what may have been a display of an agent exerting their own interests over that of a principle, UNMISS, supported by the UN Secretariat, was incrementally shifting strategy, policy, and resources away from the POC sites.

In 2014/15 UNMISS troops dedicated only about 11% of its total available military duty capacity to the perimeter security of POC sites.[30] In planning for 2015/16, the number of soldiers available for POC site protection fell in absolute terms, despite an uplift in soldiers and the doubling in size of the size of the sites. Less than 9% of available troop duty capacity was dedicated to POC site perimeter protection.[31] These numbers are remarkable given that UNMISS regularly complained that the POC sites were an unnecessary burden and prevented them from projecting force elsewhere. UNMISS staff routinely and incorrectly claimed to humanitarians that almost half of their soldiers were tied to the protection of POC sites (Briggs and Monaghan, 2017; 59). Not only do these numbers suggest that that was never the case but without effective patrolling taking place in the country it seems likely that peacekeepers were significantly underutilized. Nonetheless, the excuse of a lack of manpower was used by UNMISS as the official reasoning for the Mission's reluctance to negotiate for additional land to expand overcrowded sites (Briggs and Monaghan, 2017; 38).

In May 2015, when Bentiu POC site expanded, UNMISS refused to pay for, or use its engineering contingent on site, to erect new perimeter security around it. UNMISS argued that it did not have a responsibility to carry out the work. Temporary watchtowers that were erected around the expansion were reported to have been left unmanned even as incursions by armed men took place at the site. In an argument with humanitarians that lasted until 2016, the humanitarian agency IOM eventually agreed to pay for and carry out the work necessary to complete the perimeter security at the peacekeeping base (Radio Tamazuj, 2015f).

UNMISS policy also shifted in a way that appeared to show that it was trying to distance itself from its role at the sites. When violence broke out in in Wau in Western Bahr e Ghazal state in July 2016 (see map 1), as many as 20,000 people fled to the UNMISS base in the town (Foltyn, 2016). As they had done in Yambio the previous summer, UNMISS kept its gates shut. Too scared to return to their homes the civilians camped next to UNMISS compelling the Mission to set up a perimeter around them and create a de facto POC site that still existed at

[30] Based on 142,170 troop days reported to have been carried out to provide static protection of the POC sites (UNGA, 2015), out of a total number of 1,282,912 available troop duty days as part of 2014/15 planning (UNGA, 2014)

[31] Based on 105,408 troop days planned to provide static protection of the POC sites, out of a total number of 1,202,528 available troop duty days (UNGA, 2015)

the time of this research. While the site looked much like any other POC site, UNMISS insisted that it be referred to by the title *'Protection of Civilian Area Adjacent to UNMISS'* (Wau POC AA). While notionally still under UNMISS' protection, by siting the civilians outside of its base, UNMISS created ambiguity around its obligations that reflected its increasing reluctance to be tied to its static protection role. The change in nomenclature is notable given that the term 'POC site' was supposed already meant to convey impermanence, by differentiating it from an ordinary IDP site (Lily, 2014). With the naming of Wau POC AA, UNMISS sought to restate and amplify their desire not to be drawn into a long-term commitment to their role at the sites.

These changes in UNMISS' posture and policy are confusing when considered against UNMISS mandated role as being primarily concentrated on POC. However, it makes sense when considered as a response to a bounded rationality in which UN Secretariat interests and Løj's own values, as detailed in previous chapters, created a logic in limiting UNMISS' role in physical protection at the sites. Humanitarians also suggested that negative perceptions increasingly became a part of the fabric of understanding at all levels of the Mission (Briggs and Monaghan, 2017; 26). This can be seen in planning that took place at the tactical level in 2015 and 2016. Contingencies around POC were framed in terms of their problematised occupants rather than as populations seeking UN protection. In a tabletop exercise to rehearse against threats to Malakal POC site in September 2015, two scenarios were discussed. In both, the only threat to civilians was that posed by the civilians themselves.[32] While these were realistic scenarios, an independent UN investigation found that contingency planning by UNMISS at this time was consistently targeted in a way that did not give appropriate credence to the full range of extant threats (UN, 2016). At Malakal, humanitarians also reported that the Mission had, *'become lax in repairing fences,'* despite having a military engineering capability responsible for such repairs (CIVIC, 2016). Those decisions that were more tactical in nature, increasingly emulated senior decision-makers suggesting a groupthink that defined the environment for such decisions in 2016.

Fault lines in Malakal

[32] The first involved a violent protest by IDPs and the second, the possibility of intercommunal fighting within the site (CIVIC, 2016).

External threats to the POC sites remained pronounced in 2016. While there was a downturn in violence in the last third of 2015, the reduction could be better explained by a tapering off of the Government's offensives, and a shift of Government focus to a destabilising financial crisis (Byaruhanga, 2015), than political commitment to the new peace agreement. The signing of the deal had been marked by bad faith and little optimism. President Kiir had initially refused to sign at the official ceremony in Addis Ababa. He only signed a week later at a fraught and confused ceremony in Juba, at which hardliners like Michael Makuei stormed out in disgust (Vertin, 2019; 408). Paul Malong had also expressed his opposition and Kiir was forced to attach an addendum of reservations to the agreement (Radio Tamazuj, 2015c). Ceasefire breaches took place within days of the signing.

Many of those initial breaches took place close to Malakal where tensions had been simmering since the Government was denied a key strategic victory against the SPLA/iO in 2015. The Government's bitter failure came following a defection by a militia comprised of members of the Shilluk community. They had abandoned the Government cause following the murder of one of their senior commanders by a militia from the neighbouring Dinka Padang with whom they had a longstanding territorial rivalry. The Government were perceived to be partial to the latter (Craze, 2019; 44).

Following the defection, that competition manifested in a battle for control of Malakal in May 2015 between the Shilluk and the SPLA. The SPLA pushed the Shilluk militia back but only to within a few kilometres of the town (Craze, 2019; 54). After the signing of the peace agreement skirmishing around positions close to Malakal continued and were the subject of heated early discussions under the Transitional Security Arrangements in September (IGAD, 2015).

The Government stoked tensions further when it unilaterally redrew the boundaries of national states in a way that limited Shilluk influence in Upper Nile. Most significantly the contested Malakal was placed in a state that was overwhelmingly Dinka Padang (Radio Tamazuj, 2015b). In December, a Dinka Padang SPLA Commander was appointed as Governor of the new Eastern Nile State to which Malakal now belonged. Almost immediately the opposition accused him of militarising the area, recruiting, and mobilising Dinka Padang militia groups and then manoeuvring those forces close to Malakal to instigate fighting with nearby SPLA/iO positions (South Sudan News Agency, 2015). UNMISS also started receiving

reports of Dinka civilians being transported by the Government to parts of Eastern Nile State, in a move that was described a *'land grab'* (CIVIC, 2016; 12). On 1 February, the Eastern Nile State purged the administration's new civil service of Shilluk and Nuer, depriving many of the people that still lived in Malakal, albeit within the confines of the POC site, the livelihoods that connected them to the area (CIVIC, 2016; 11). By February, the only substantial links among non-Dinka to Malakal was within the UNMISS POC site.

The Powder Keg

While sparks were flying outside of their base in Malakal, UNMISS would have been conscious of the volatile situation inside the site. Whereas other POC sites had seen some reductions since the end of the Government's 2015 military campaigns, the continued tensions in Upper Nile meant that in Malakal POC site, the numbers remained close to its 48,000 peak, more than double what it had been at the start of 2015.[33] As a consequence, the site became dangerously overcrowded with only approximately 10 square metres available per person, about a third of the internationally accepted standard of 30 (Radio Tamazuj, 2015e). When a fire broke out in January 2016, as many as 1000 shelters were destroyed increasing pressure on the residents (Radio Tamazuj, 2016).

Malakal POC site was also unique in the heterogenous mix of communities that made-up its population. As well as the Nuer and Shilluk, it housed the only significant population of Dinka inhabitants under UNMISS protection. Although the communities lived separately, the tight conditions inevitably led to continuous conflicts that had to diffused by UNMISS, sometimes by force, including the deployment of riot police and tear gas (Radio Tamazuj, 2015f).

Following an increase in clashes between the SPLA and SPLA/iO close to Malakal in the first week of February, the SPLA began blocking access to the POC site. UNMISS also reported increased SPLA movements in the vicinity of the site (Interviewee 17, 2020). MSF staff reported increasing tensions along with a growing number of weapons confiscations at the site gates (MSF, 2016; 16). Humanitarians were sufficiently concerned about this new escalation that they requested UNMISS on 8 February to produce a risk mitigation plan for the POC site. In a normal decision context such prudent action would likely have been

[33] In February 2015, there were 21,368 people seeking protection at Malakal POC site (UNMISS, 2015e). This peaked at 48,840 in August (UNMISS, 2015f). By December, the recorded number remained at 47,791 (UNMISS, 2015g).

approved. However, as suggested above, the bounded rationality created a groupthink that reflected senior reluctance to play a robust role in the POC sites. This made peripheral concerns about external threats to the POC sites within the Mission. UNMISS declined the request (CIVIC, 2016; 24).

The Breach

On 16 February, two men, believed to belong to a Dinka Padang militia, attempted to enter the POC site. Following a search by UN security guards they were found to be smuggling rifle magazines into the camp. As UN police questioned them, SPLA waiting just outside intervened. They assaulted UN staff, allowing the men to escape. On hearing about the incident, Nuer and Shilluk camp leaders expressed concern to the UN about weapons within the Dinka section. However, no follow-up actions appear to have been taken. Tensions were reported to be high on the site during the rest of the day and UNMISS deployed security guards and FPU to intervene in an altercation between Shilluk and Dinka youths in which sticks, and stones were used as weapons (UN, 2016).

On the morning of 17 February, UNMISS security reported a breach in the perimeter fence which was being controlled and kept open by Dinka POC site residents. A group of SPLA soldiers were also reported to be congregated by it. Additional deployments of UNMISS military were made along the perimeter, but they did not secure the breach and the hole was not repaired (UN, 2016). As suggested earlier such remedial repair actions had become less urgent tasks to the peacekeepers on site.

An altercation in the evening between Dinka and Shilluk youths triggered more violence. Gunshots were heard at 2230. UNMISS withdrew the FPU from the POC site to reinforce the main base. An emergency Crisis Management Team (CMT) meeting was convened at 0000 with the eventual decision that APCs be deployed at flashpoints. However, fighting persisted and escalated. At 0230 grenades were thrown inside the Nuer section of the site (MSF, 2016; 17). The soldiers inside the APCs showed an unwillingness to move in areas that were affected by fighting, including refusing to accompany an UNMISS fire truck, responding to a fire (UN, 2016).

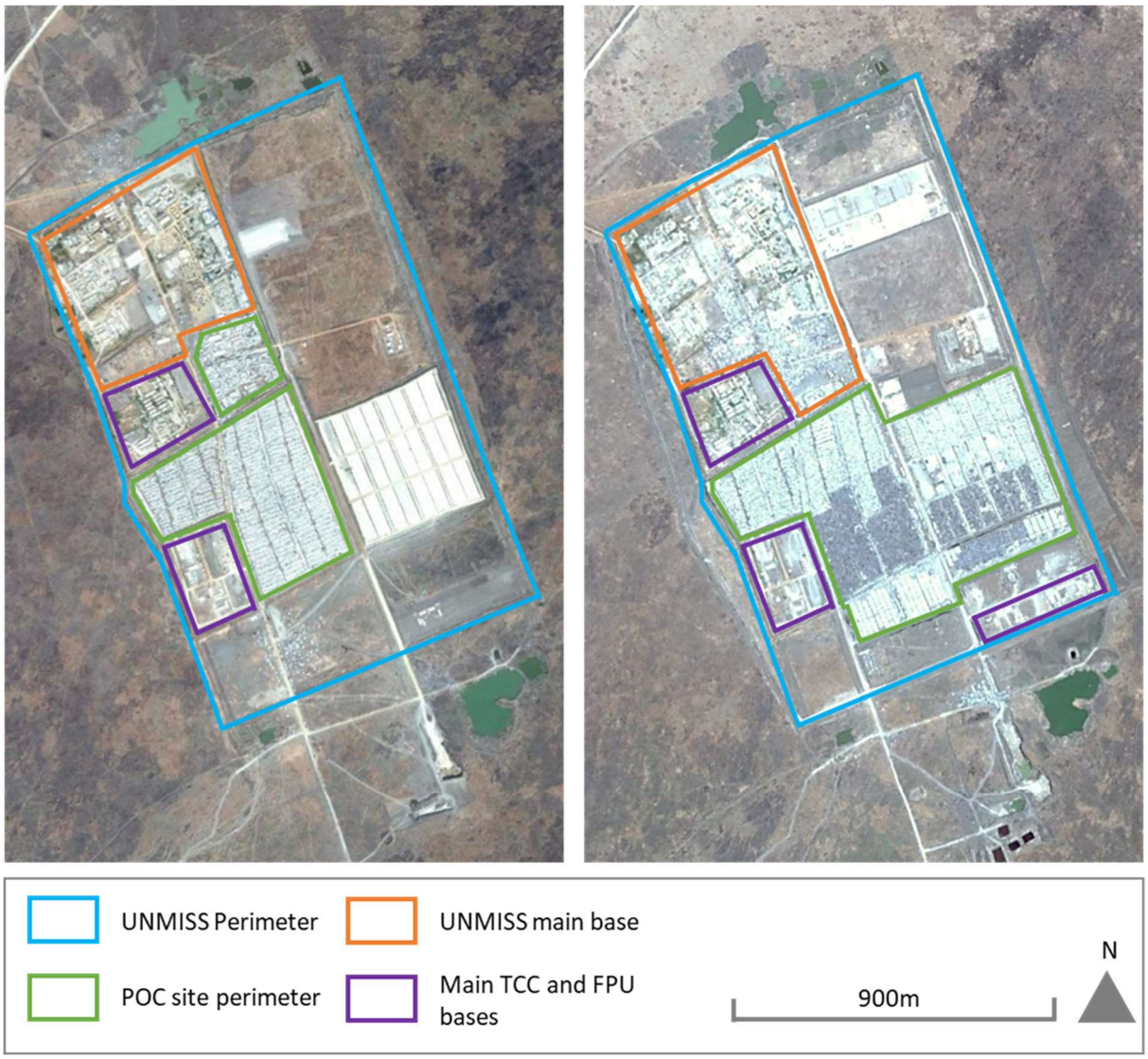
During the early hours of 18 February, UNMISS reported that Dinka civilians were leaving the site through the breach in the perimeter fence. The CMT reconvened at 0800 and decided to

continue *'robust patrols'*. There is no evidence that the team sought to secure and/or repair the breach or establish that their soldiers understood their responsibility to engage with lethal force against imminent threats to civilians.

At 0930, UNMISS held a meeting with the State Governor and SPLA Sector Commander. UNMISS were criticised by Government officials for their failure to protect Dinka civilians in the previous day's violence. At 1000, UNMISS reported SPLA soldiers entering the breach. UNMISS sentries posted less than ten metres away abandoned their positions. Soon after, fighting inside the POC site resumed with an even greater intensity. SPLA were witnessed to have been involved in the fighting while also carrying jerry cans of petrol and fashioning Molotov cocktails. They subsequently burned down large sections of the site. In total 3,700 family's shelters were destroyed as well as multiple humanitarian facilities (CIVIC, 2016).

During the morning, an MSF clinic was dealing with *'mass casualties'* on the main base (MSF, 2017; 17). In front of a gate leading from the POC site to the main base a large crowd of several thousand had gathered attempting to escape the fie and killings. UNMISS were reported to have kept the gate closed and deployed a tank to reinforce it, preventing IDPs from escaping the violence inside the POC site. The action was in line with what appeared to have been UNMISS decision policy in refusing civilians entrance to main sites, as it did in Yambio the previous year. Humanitarians were reported to have repeatedly asked UNMISS to open the gate (MSF, 2017; 17) and IDPs were reported to have been, *'pounding on the gate, begging to be let through'* (CIVIC, 2016; 33). The Mission only relented when the fighting got closer and desperate IDPs began to climb the fence at about 1200.

At 1341 hrs, when a few SPLA soldiers tried to enter the UNMISS main base, peacekeepers were ordered to fire on the intruders. According to the subsequent Board of Inquiry, officers refused to carry out the order without written authorization. The UN Sector Commander sent an email to all UN military confirming the rules of engagement and ordering the soldiers to use all necessary means to respond. That was then re-confirmed by D/SRSG (Political) Soumaré, who was the Officer-in-Charge, in the absence of SRSG Løj. UNMISS finally returned fire at 1545, almost 18 hours after the first shots were fired. In the end it took only 45 minutes for UNMISS to re-establish control and force the intruders out of the site (UN, 2016). Approximately 30 civilians were reported to have been killed (UN, 2016) and a large section of the site was destroyed (see map 4).



Map 5 - Satellite imagery of Malakal UNMISS Base and POC site taken on 3 February 2015 (left) and 20 February 2016 (Left). Areas burned down in violence in February 2016 visible in right image (imagery accessed on Google Earth on 16 February 2020)

The Investigation

As had been the case in Bor, UNMISS had had more than enough soldiers to defend the perimeter. With more than 2 infantry battalions and additional companies of infantry and other military units there would have been more than 1,000 soldiers capable of withstanding the lightly armed incursion that took place (UNGA, 2016). The subsequent Board of Inquiry criticised UNMISS' posture and tactics, describing many of the same failures that had taken place at Bor less than two years previously. The Board pointed out the lax attitude to perimeter security, both patrolling and physical, and misconceived priorities in its tabletop

exercises. They berated command decisions, particularly regarding the delayed use of force. They also accused UNMISS of being aware of the threat and not reacting.

'In relation to security/intelligence information, the Board found that the Mission has a relatively comprehensive early warning system in place. However, the translation of that information into appropriate and/or timely actions remains elusive.' (UN, 2016)

What is absent from the report is the decision context which framed those military missteps. However, inaction by UNMISS in Malakal was appropriate in a national decision context in which focus on perimeter security had dramatically diminished at an organisational level along with concern regarding external threats to POC sites.

Conclusions

As suggested in previous chapters, UN secretariat interests and Løj's own values had played a significant role in creating a bounded rationality that saw the POC sites as problematic. In 2015 and 2016 there were concerted efforts to withdraw commitment from those sites and make them a peripheral responsibility. Those decisions and posture were emulated through increasingly negative perceptions of the POC sites by more junior officials. This became evident in reports of negative and obstructive attitudes by some UNMISS staff to humanitarians operating in the sites, refusal to take seriously threats in contingency planning and the undermining of attempts to improve perimeter security through delaying construction or repairs of perimeter infrastructure. The parallel of these tactical decisions with senior decision-making, even as the rising protection needs made them irrational, are a strong indication of *groupthink*.

At Malakal, UNMISS staff appear to be emulating the same *confirmation bias* that existed at higher levels of the organisation. Information that threats against Malakal were rising in general and a specific threat was emerging in February 2016 were abundant. Yet a confirmation bias existed in which such information contradicted the organisational belief that threats against the POC site were not significant. Thus, UNMISS officials in Malakal could feel as though they were making a rational decision in declining humanitarians request that they make contingency plans. Even as the attack was underway, they appeared to discount the possibility that this was anything more than another flare up at the volatile base even as eyewitnesses provided significant evidence that the base was under attack.

In contrast to what took place at Bor, the violence in Malakal was highly visible. An international journalist had been on site when the attack happened and reported at an early stage of UNMISS' failures, despite attempts by UNMISS to curtail their reporting (Radio Tamazuj, 2016q). Even though the fatalities at Malakal were ultimately fewer than had occurred at Bor, the Secretary-General was forced to convene a Board of Inquiry. However, it would be another six months before the Board released its highly critical report. Within that time, as was seen in Wau, the Mission continued to lower its commitment to its role at the POC sites. Most damaging however, was that what had emerged in Malakal was evidence that the bounded rationality, that had been at the core of suboptimal decision-making since at least 2013, increasingly looked to be the predominant lens through which a significant proportion of UNMISS staff viewed the context. This helped create an organisational inertia that proved tragically inept when, in 2016, UNMISS faced its greatest challenge when the peace agreement inevitably collapsed.

10. Violence in Juba and the Equatorias - July 2016

In this chapter I will discuss how the bounded rationality became focussed around an overly optimistic interpretation of the 2015 peace agreement. Optimism did not have a strong evidentiary basis. Løj's decision-making did not include easily actionable contingency planning and ignored threats that suggested a catastrophic breakdown in violence was likely. When that did take place in Juba in July 2016, UNMISS leadership had become so fixed on a single understanding of the context, encouraged by UNSC and UN Secretariat interests, that it was unable to properly evaluate the implications of new information that suggested an increase in the national conflict would follow. In the conclusions I will suggest that a fixation on the peace agreement and legitimacy of the Government as part of the bounded rationality created bias that skewed Løj's ability to react. It also encouraged a sunk-cost fallacy that made it difficult for her to change the suboptimal strategies that she had been implementing since she arrived in 2014.

The Insubstantial Peace

By August 2015, international diplomats had been negotiating off and on in Addis Ababa for almost 20 months. In that time significant bills were being accumulated at the expensive hotels that were chosen as the venues for negotiations, as well as generous per diems for the representatives. The bill for the first year alone was reported to be $20 million (USD) (Martell, 2018; 235). In that time little progress was made. International diplomats grumbled that their investment, both political and material, had generated little. They pointed with frustration to the narrow interests of regional powers and the intransigence and ineptitude of the negotiators (Vertin, 2019; 376). The frustration among the US negotiators was such that they considered moving the peace talks to US soil. Only the desire of President Obama to maintain regional ownership of the problem, in which the US had little intrinsic interest, kept the talks in Africa (Vertin, 2019; 387). The dilution and compromises to reach any kind of agreement were significant. Ultimately the international community managed to get an agreement in August 2015 which one senior diplomat underwhelmingly described as a *'draft deal'* for a *'Plan B'* scenario. Particularly problematic was the fact that the Agreement for the Resolution of Conflict in South Sudan (ARCSS) lacked *'oversight mechanisms'* and was *'ambiguous on matters of security and de-mobilization'* (Vertin, 2019; 399).

As described in the previous chapter, even this watered-down agreement was only half-heartedly endorsed by Kiir who publicly expressed grave reservations. On attempting its implementation in late 2015 vital committees became bogged down in wrangling over their composition. (Panchol, 2015). Kiir's decree on the reorganisation of the state system, referred to in the previous chapter, created deadlock over other substantive negotiations that still had to take place (UNSCb, 2016). Even when IGAD declared Kiir's decree a violation of the peace agreement, the Government refused to relent, creating a standoff (Zeitvogel and Wudu, 2015).

Where agreements were reached the outcomes could be dismal. Under the Transitional Security Arrangement (TSA) agreed in October the terms allowed for more than 9,000-armed security personnel to be stationed in Juba during the transitional period. About a third would be staffed by the opposition (UNMISS, 2015). Even though excess SPLA personnel were supposed to be removed from the city, there was no systematic mechanism to monitor the arrangement. Scepticism of the workability of the TSA abounded. A document from a forum of NGO's noted in October 2015,

'It is unclear how this number of armed men can be successfully monitored let alone contained, should hostilities break out again. Already Juba, under the auspices of a peace agreement, may be looking less secure than it had been during war.' (SSNGO Forum, 2015)

As armed SPLA/iO began arriving in Juba, supported by UNMISS, regional diplomats started to express concern suggesting that the SPLA and SPLA/iO,

'…are competing on the military front, trying to outdo each other by amassing troops and armaments around the capital.' (Radio Tamazuj, 2016d)

What mechanisms did exist to create discipline in the implementation of the peace agreement were treated with contempt. The Government were reported to not be complying with even minimal levels of monitoring of its forces in the capital (Radio Tamazuj, 2016d). It was also accused of regularly harassing peace monitors including illegally detaining them and obstructing access (Radio Tamazuj, 2016e. Akile, 2016). The most brazen attack by the Government on the peace monitors came in April 2016, when Government security services interrupted a meeting of international diplomats in Juba. At the meeting they attempted to arrest the British diplomat working as Deputy Head of JMEC, accusing him of *'misrepresenting'*

the Government. A human chain of international diplomats around the hapless official offered only temporary protection as he was expelled from the country soon after (Radio Tamazuj, 2016f).

A war by any other name

As suggested in the previous chapter there was an overall fall in the conflict following the signing of the peace agreement in August 2015. However, this was the result of the end of large military campaigning in areas that had traditionally represented the frontlines of the conflict since 2013. By 2016 smaller outbreaks of violence were occurring in areas that had hitherto been regarded as supportive of the Government. In Upper Nile, this broadening of the conflict was most clearly seen in the violence from the rift with the Shilluk. Increasing incidents of violence were also taking place in the west and south of the country. These often related to local political disputes, land conflicts with nomadic cattle herders, and trouble caused by ill-disciplined locally stationed SPLA. The common denominator in these disputes was that the Government was perceived to be partial when Dinka were viewed as instigators of violence.

The SPLA, freed from military offensive roles in other parts of the country, helped escalate the local nature of these conflicts when they intervened to protect Dinka community interests. These operations were carried out under the guidance of SPLA Chief Paul Malong, who had been the architect of the brutal Unity campaign. He issued *'shoot to kill'* orders against civilians resisting his directives (UN, 2016) and transferred SPLA Generals that had been implicated in the abuses in Unity, to newly restive areas. This included Lieutenant-General Gabriel Jok Riek, who had been sanctioned by the UN for his role in the Unity violence (Radio Tamazuj, 2018) and yet was appointed SPLA Division Commander in Western Bahr e Ghazal. In June, it was his forces that perpetrated mass violence against the civilian community in Wau, killing hundreds and leading to the creation of UNMISS Wau POC AA (Foltyn, 2016). The town of Mundri in Western Equatoria similarly saw large scale destruction and displacement of civilians following SPLA operations in February (Radio Tamazuj, 2016b). In Central Equatoria, Malong deployed the fearsome Mathiang Anyoor, that had been partially integrated to the SPLA, to rein in perceived dissent within the local population (Boswell, 2019; 10). As well as intensified SPLA operations in areas such as Wonduruba and

Katigiri in 2015 and 2016, a series of grisly murders were blamed on attempts by the Government to intimidate local communities (Radio Tamazuj, 2016c).

The Ceasefire and Transitional Security Arrangements Monitoring Mechanism (CTSAMM), responsible for monitoring the peace agreement, declared that the violence in these areas constituted a widespread disregard for the terms of the ceasefire. In 2016 it reported that the scope and area of the conflict was spreading (Finnan, 2016). The Government furiously contested CTSAMM's interpretation. It stressed the law enforcement nature of its operations in the country against *'criminals'* that were not covered by the ARCSS (Radio Tamazuj, 2016r).

Looking for green shoots

While UNMISS acknowledged the problems that existed in the political process they remained non-committal on its broader implications. In both Secretary-General's reports in the first half of 2016, they highlighted *'positive developments'* (UNSC, 2016b) and *'noticeable progress'* in the implementation of the ARCSS (UNSC, 2016). UNMISS avoided committing to an interpretation of the security situation that might imply the war continued. Referring to the spread of violence to other parts of the country, the Secretary-General noted in June that the situation was merely *'tense'* with the presence of unnamed *'armed groups'* primarily to blame (UNSC, 2016). Any inference that violence in the south and west might have a bearing on the peace process was studiously avoided. This was despite the UN's own Panel of Experts linking many of the key anti-Government groups in these areas to the command structure of the SPLA/iO (UN, 2016). The use of language was careful, obfuscating the dire situation in the country. If the context was *'worrying'* and the peace process was *'extremely fragile'*, there was no suggestion that it was not viable and wanted only for more *'concerted and sustained efforts'* (UNSC, 2016c). Within the Mission the focus on more hopeful elements of the context created pressure on those who viewed the situation differently. As one interviewee remarked about the time,

'Everybody was pushing this line of peace, peace, peace, peacebuilding. It was lonely to be that voice of dissent saying that everybody else you're listening to is wrong because they're just relaying the messaging that is coming from effectively government counterparts who were towing the SPLA line.' (Interviewee 14, 2020)

UNMISS was not alone in its publicly favourable assessments. Despite a sanctions regime being in place, no individuals were sanctioned because of breaches of the ceasefire The Canadian Ambassador admitted that by 2016 resistance to the Government's narrative had dwindled to the point that, '*so many of us* [diplomats] *had given up criticising the state'* (Coghlan, 2017; 233).

It is possible that the international community had been chastened by an aggressive Government policy that included harassment and vocal denunciation of any perceived criticism. At the same time, it was spending millions on lobbying firms in Washington DC to challenge negative narratives (Quinn, 2016). However, as likely, is that the substantive fulfilment of the peace agreement was simply less important than establishing success around more visible superficial markers of progress, that were important to the symbolic significance that the country occupied in the interests of the international community, particularly the US. Most notably this could be seen in the pressure to facilitate the return to the capital of Riek Machar. Machar's protestations that a return to Juba was *'suicidal'* was met with condemnation by the US who accused him of prolonging the conflict (Young, 2019; 152). The Government's willingness to receive Machar had been equally underwhelming and it was only another intervention by the US pushing JMEC to table a *'take it or leave it'* proposal to the conflict parties, did Machar unenthusiastically return.

From the perspective of the diplomatic community, Machar's return created *'a palpable mood of optimism'* (Coghlan, 2017; 241). UNMISS proclaimed to the Security Council in June that his arrival and the technical start of a 30-month transitional achievement as the primary success of the previous six months (UNSC, 2016). The problematic context of his return and its potentially destabilising effects went unmentioned. In the months that followed, the international community maintained its non-interventionist posture even as the lack of material progress and ensuing arguments that took place saw a steady and predictable deterioration in stability in the country.

Considerable Risk

Reports from interviewees suggested that UNMISS was aware of the emergence of a dangerous phase of the conflict. However, in characteristic style, it struggled to articulate knowledge of those threats into action. An interviewee suggested that she had seen

documents from the UNMISS JMAC that *'clearly set out'* likely scenarios of the large-scale violence, that ultimately took place in Juba in July (Interviewee 7, 2020). Another interviewee, trying to explain UNMISS' inaction suggested,

'It was like all of the elements are in place for this to combust and go completely sideways but they had been in place for weeks and weeks without combustion. I feel like a sense of latency certainly developed, and I think the leadership of UNMISS was just buying the line from Machar and from Kiir. They're like, "Yes, we're very serious about this blah, blah, blah, blah."' (Interviewee 14, 2020)

Notwithstanding a public willingness to accept the Government's interpretation of the context, Løj wrote to officials in New York on 1 July assessing the risk of the peace process collapsing as *'considerable'* (Interviewee 17, 2020). Yet, prudent contingency planning or proactive postures to mitigate emerging risks remained astonishingly absent. One interviewee described the inertia in 2016.

'It goes even beyond mission leadership. It's a cultural thing, about going to do something pre-emptively, when you can't actually prove ultimately that it was the right thing to do in the financial and political implications in doing so. The information, I think two boards of inquiry in '16 proved it. There should have been a couple more. The mission failed to effect a response to mitigate early warning.' (Interviewee 8, 2020)

July

On 16 June, Government security services shot at Machar's convoy inside the city of Juba (Radio Tamazuj, 2016i). The following week at least forty people were killed in the violence perpetrated by the SPLA in Wau. Michael Makuei blamed *'anti-peace elements'* for the violence (AFP, 2016) and soon after announced that the President had cancelled the country's Independence Day Celebrations that would have taken place on 9 July (Al Jazeera, 2016). The Government cited a lack of funds but rising tensions around the country and particularly in the capital were becoming increasingly evident. The cancellation meant that the Government does not have to divert soldiers to preparations for the large military parade that was supposed to take place. On 2 July, a senior SPLA/iO officer was shot and killed by Government security services (Radio Tamazuj, 2016j). On 7 July, 5 security services were killed during a shootout between SPLA and SPLA/iO at a checkpoint in the town (Radio Tamazuj, 2016k). In

two more separate incidents that day the head of UNESCO was shot (Radio Tamazuj, 2016l) and security services shot multiple times at close range into US Embassy vehicles carrying the US Charge d'Affaires (The Guardian, 2016). On 8 July, the SPLA and SPLA/iO clashed outside the Presidential Palace, while Kiir and Machar met inside. Neither leader seemed able to control their respective forces while they both sheltered in the same room (Radio Tamazuj, 2016m). Once the skirmish died down, Machar hurriedly returned to his base close to UNMISS HQ. Sporadic fighting followed him including the use of small arms fire, mortars and rocket propelled grenades (Radio Tamazuj, 2016n).

In stark contrast to the woefully undermanned UNMISS that had been in Juba in 2013, the Mission now had four infantry battalions and multiple auxiliary companies (More than 1,500 soldiers) based in Juba, equipped with light weapons and armoured vehicles (UNGA, 2016). Yet as the fighting from the Presidential Palace appeared to spread to other parts of the city, UNMISS' tactical deployment remained essentially unchanged from December 2013. Its peacekeepers were largely confined to base.

The extent to which UNMISS was unprepared on that day meant that all three of its civilian leaders (Løj and her two D/SRSG's) were attending meetings elsewhere in the city. Much of the UN's efforts on 8 July were spent trying to get those leaders back to base through various Government roadblocks, a process that took more than 24 hours to complete (CIVIC, 2016b).

The next day there was a lull, likely as both sides weighed up the implications of their actions. Despite this respite, UNMISS did not manage to deploy outside of its bases to carry out patrols or protect humanitarian bases and assets. Nor did it seem better prepared for when violence resumed on 10 July. During that day, the SPLA launched a massive offensive against Machar's base. The extent to which it was coordinated suggested that significant planning had gone into the operation. The SPLA deployed tanks, attack helicopters and its only jet plane were deployed. Once the main thrust of that assault ended, the SPLA turned their forces on the rest of the city to destroy any pockets of resistance. This led to large-scale looting and attacks on civilians (CIVIC, 2016b) as well as wholesale looting of humanitarian compounds. WFP's main warehouse in the country was systematically looted by the SPLA who removed 4,500 tonnes of food (enough to feed 40,000 people for 6 months) and 50 vehicles. In total, almost $29 million of food and equipment was taken from the humanitarian community in Juba by Government forces (UNSC, 2016d; 15). The SPLA also attacked a compound housing

humanitarian staff know as 'Terrain.' The report found that successive UNMISS military contingents refused to deploy to the compound, less than a kilometre from its main base, despite persistent requests for help (UNSC, 2016e). One journalist was murdered and three humanitarians gangraped at Terrain once the SPLA had forced their way into the panic room. The last survivors were only extracted when an NGO deployed private security guards to the compound the following day.

While UNMISS failed to deploy outside, their ability to adequately defend the perimeter of their own base again proved insufficient. The subsequent UN investigation found that the arrangements for physical security around the perimeter of its headquarters had been inadequate with security posts unable to withstand even small arms fire. Peacekeepers again abandoned their positions and the resultant incursions inside the POC sites killed as many twenty civilians (UNSC, 2016e). Two peacekeepers were also fatally wounded when an RPG was fired at an APC inside the compound. The peacekeepers could have survived their injuries had the base been equipped with an adequate medical facility. However, despite the base being the country's largest, and responsible for protection of one of the biggest POC sites, poor planning meant that there was no medical facility with blood transfusion or surgical capacities to attend to the dying peacekeepers (Wells, 2016).

After the fighting dissipated from 13 July, assessments were made on the human cost. Approximately 36,000 civilians were displaced from their homes (Al Jazeera, 2016). While many of those fled to the 2 UN bases in the city, others concentrated at humanitarian compounds, which were unprotected during the violence. In the first month after the fighting, the UN documented 217 incidents of sexual violence (UNOHCHR, 2016). Some of those incidents were reported to have occurred within sight of UN peacekeepers manning the perimeter of UN House, but they did not intervene (Gale, 2016). Initial reporting suggested at least 300 people were killed (AFP, 2016) of which 73 were confirmed to have been civilians (UNHROC, 2016). However, no reliable assessment exists for either the extent of sexual violence or fatalities and the respective number in both instances is likely to considerably exceed reporting.

'This is what we're dealing with now'

It is unclear at which stage of the fighting Machar snuck out of the capital, but it must have been sufficiently early that he slipped through the SPLA's security cordon without detection. Once they realised he had gone the Government pursued him south through the countryside over almost 40 days, while SPLA/iO forces in Central and Western Equatoria fought a fierce rear-guard battle (Radio Tamazuj, 2016o). A chronically ill Machar may yet have died in the jungle had it not been for a rescue mission launched by another peacekeeping Mission. As soon as he crossed the DRC border, the UN peacekeeping Mission MONUSCO mobilised by helicopter to pick him up and provide urgent medical attention (United Nations, 2016b). The actions of MONUSCO contrasted with UNMISS that had not offered Machar similar protection when he had been a few hundred metres from their base in Juba.[34]

In attempting to justify its actions in attacking and then pursuing Machar, the Government opted for an audacious strategy. As it had done in 2013, it argued that its actions were defensive and blamed the SPLA/iO for instigating the initial conflict, despite the latter being vastly outnumbered and outgunned (Karimi, 2016). In Juba, the Government rounded up the SPLA/iO politicians that had been left behind. Through what appears to have been a mixture of incentives and intimidation they persuaded a group, led by Machar's Deputy Taban Deng, to declare themselves the *'official'* opposition (Sudan Tribune, 2016). The Government announced that the July violence did not affect the implementation of the 2015 peace agreement and Deng would henceforth speak on behalf of all opposition to the Government (Radio Tamazuj, 2016s).

Deng's elevation was almost universally rejected by SPLA/iO units in the field. They remained loyal to Machar, leaving the frontlines of the conflict unchanged (UNSC, 2016d). Even though his flight from Juba had taken a physical toll on Machar, and left him separated from his field commanders, his forces appeared resilient and cohesive (Small Arms Survey, 2016). JMEC rejected the Government's narrative and asked Deng to step aside to allow Machar to return

[34] The UN cast the intervention as being humanitarian in nature and a response to a request made by the DRC authorities (United Nations, 2016b). However, the DRC Government initially denied that it had made any such request (Finnan, 2016b). Interviewees suggested that MONUSCO's actions may have been the result of personal connections between the SPLA/iO and MONUSCO leaders and took place without the authorization of New York.

(Sudan Tribune, 2016b). However, UNMISS was more hesitant. As one of the interviewees reported, the organisation was conflicted as to how it should respond.

'I think privately, certainly within my department, we thought the whole Taban Deng thing was a joke of such outrageous proportions that it was just almost impossible to take seriously. The whole thing was just so outrageous…However, the impression that I got was that the understanding in the senior levels of UNMISS was that "this is what we're dealing with now".' (Interviewee 14, 2020)

By August, Løj had begun to normalise UNMISS' relationship with the new Transitional Government of National Unity, with Deng as Vice-President and the official opposition representative.[35] On 23 August, John Kerry announced that the US would effectively accept a change in the leadership of the SPLA/iO (Danis, 2016). Within the next week, IGAD and other key international partners followed the US lead and made similar statements.

The Fighting Spreads

Following the US' decision to support the South Sudan Government, it used its diplomatic energies to marginalise the influence of Machar. Under pressure from the US, Sudan and Ethiopia closed their doors to Machar (Young 2019; 174). A trip to South Africa by Machar for medical treatment ended in effective house arrest in what appears to have been a ploy, in which the US were complicit, to keep Machar as far from Juba as possible (Radio Tamazuj, 2016p). Kenya began arresting SPLA/iO activists based in Nairobi that advocated for Machar's return to the peace process (Al Jazeera, 2016b).

The implications of the international community's support of the Government's position was also to legitimise its characterisation of the security picture in the country. Those that remained outside of the agreement, which included almost all of the SPLA/iO as well as the considerable number of other groups that had joined them in 2016, became legitimate targets again. This expanded the frontlines that had existed before the peace agreement was signed in 2015 (see approximate areas of control in annex). The diplomatic choices which UNMISS supported set a chain of events that that would lead to an escalation of the conflict beyond

[35] Following the inauguration of the newly assembled Transitional National Legislative Assembly on 18 August, UNMISS met with its leadership. On 23 August, UNMISS met with the Minister of Justice to discuss their support to transitional justice. On 25 August, Løj discussed with the TGoNU how it and UNMISS might *'harmonize its understanding of the mandated tasks under resolution'* (Interviewee 17, 2020).

anything that had occurred up to that point. The first target of SPLA operations were the restive parts of the Equatorias where newly affiliated SPLA/iO militias had been pivotal in facilitating Machar's escape from the country.

Characteristically, the operations in the Equatorias involved widespread attacks on civilians that devastated the south. Human rights groups documented systematic and large-scale human right abuses (Pedneault, 2016). A mass exodus of civilians from the country took place on a scale hitherto unseen and reminiscent of the worst violence of the war against Khartoum. In the six months after the violence in Juba approximately 600,000 people fled, most making their way to refugee sites in Uganda (see fig. 4). The violence against civilians became so severe that by November the Secretary-General's Special Adviser for the Prevention of Genocide, Adama Dieng, openly talked about the possibility of the situation devolving into a genocide (UNMISS, 2016). At the end of November a visit by the UN Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan accused the Government of ethnic cleansing and added that the whole country was on the verge of catastrophe with the Equatorias as the new epicentre of the conflict (UNoHCHR, 2016b).

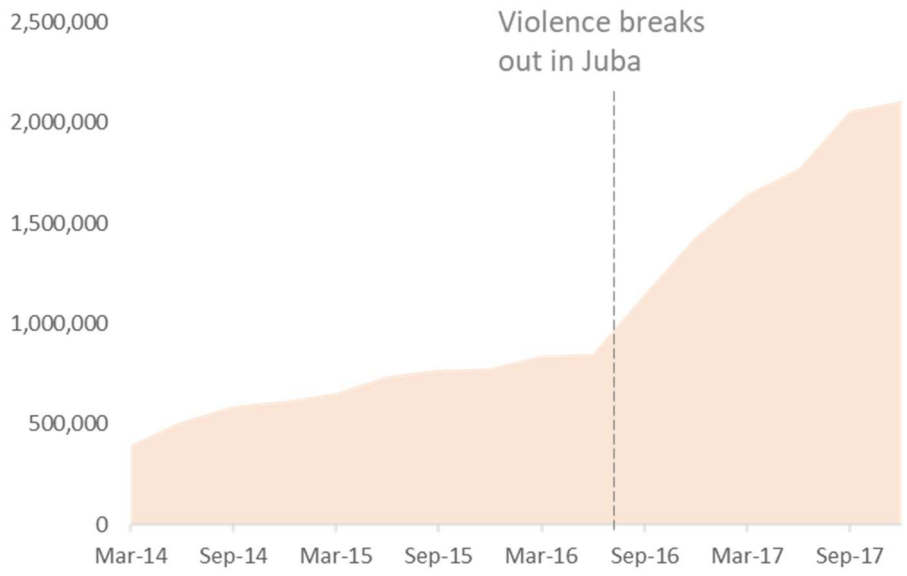


Figure 4 - South Sudanese registered as refugees in other countries (based on UNHCR data available at https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/southsudan accessed on 15 May 2020)

The ability of many Equatorians to flee into neighbouring Kenya and Uganda lessened the requirement on UNMISS to provide protection. However, pockets of civilians remained caught in the violence. Approximately, 100,000 were reported as trapped inside the town of Yei while fighting raged around it (Nuri, 2016). UNMISS response was characteristically lacklustre. Seven patrols to the area were delayed or denied by the Government (UNSC, 2016f). It appears to have been successful at conducting two others (UNSC, 2016g). However, according to the Secretary-General's report in November, at the peak of the violence, no peacekeeping interventions to protect civilians in Yei were planned (UNSC, 2016f). According to subsequent assessments of the violence the conflict that directly followed the breakdown of the peace agreement in 2016 represented the deadliest period of the entire war (Checchi, Testa, Quach, Burns, 2018).

Løj Retires

The two independent Boards of Inquiry that the UN convened in 2016 offered a devastating portrayal of the Mission's failures. For the disastrous response in July, the UNMISS Force Commander was the only senior official to be fired (Quinn, 2016). The lingering sense that his removal was an act of scapegoating by the UN seems well-founded.[36] The report on which his firing had been based had been highly critical of UNMISS' civilian leadership and management decisions, particularly their responsibility for the entrenched *'culture of reporting and acting'* that had created an *'inward looking'* and *'risk averse'* mission (UNSC, 2016e). The Force Commander, for all his failings during the incident, had only been in the Mission for six weeks prior to 8 July. The timing of Løj's announcement to retire, a week before the report was published, suggests that she may have been allowed to exit the role without the organisation having to defend her failures.[37] The late appointment of her successor further suggests a hastened transition.[38]

Løj's response to the violence in 2016 was muted. Even in her final briefing to the UNSC in November, she appeared unalarmed by the devastating situation in the Equatorias that other UN colleagues had highlighted. What others had described as a precursor to genocide, Løj

[36] The Kenyan Government saw the firing of a senior Kenyan General as unfair and withdrew their troops from the Mission accusing the UN of scapegoating its officer (Biryabarema, 2016)
[37] Løj announced her departure on 24 October 2016. Lt.-Gen. Johnson Mogoa Kimani Ondieki was fired on 2 November.
[38] David Shearer was appointed her replacement on 13 December 2016.

portrayed as a *'volatile'* situation that had led to *'sporadic fighting'* (UNSC, 2016g). This characterisation was a source frustration to others observing the conflict in its potential to undermine consistent messaging as to the extent of the crisis. One donor complained that Løj's prosaic descriptions had made it difficult for them to persuade their home Government of the extremity of the situation. As they attempted to, *'…tell head-office that there is a war, the SRSG is saying there is no war.'* (Briggs and Monaghan, 2017; 89).

Conclusions

By 2016 UNMISS had roughly ten times the number of soldiers available in Juba than it had in December 2013. They also had a much greater depth of experience of the conflict including facing a breakdown of violence in Juba and attacks on its bases. Accounts suggest that according to their own analysis UNMISS' leadership was aware of the likelihood of conflict in 2016 and how it might take place. Despite this advantageous position, the leadership did not make any improvement on UNMISS suboptimal actions in 2013. If anything, the gap between its performance and expectations had worsened.

The extent of this failure can best be accounted for by an increasingly irrational tendency to tie interpretations of the world to elements of a bounded rationality that were extraneous to the practical considerations required for more optimal decision-making. A frustrated international community had become so desperate for totemic signs of success in the peace agreement that they were unwilling to consider the continuing viability of the agreement or use its influence to inject greater discipline in the process, such as the use of sanctions. This was most evident in the interests of the US who continued to guide UNSC attitudes to the conflict. An uncritical focus on the peace agreement also would have made sense in the context of the organisational myth of the UN. The kind of political settlement an internationally endorsed peace agreement represented is central to what the UN understands as its raison d'être, that to have presented reasons as to why the peace agreement was failing, and acted accordingly, would likely have been cognitively difficult. This would have been particularly discomfiting for the values of Løj who embodied the professional values of a diplomat with a high regard for the role of the UNSC and the UN in defining systemically appropriate structures to bring about improvements in international peace and security.

These considerations outlined above created a belief in the importance of upholding the peace agreement, seemingly at any cost. That in turn created *a confirmation bias* in which information regarding the success and worth of the peace agreement appeared to be persistently over-valued. Evidence suggests UNMISS were aware of the risks that were present in the lead up to July 2016 yet set them aside. Vital improvements were not made in perimeter security, emergency infrastructure such as medical facilities were not constructed, contingency planning for protection of humanitarian staff and POC sites were not carried out.

An *availability bias* would have created coherence around Løj's attempts to maintain the pretence of a successful working relationship with the Government, even as the peace agreement failed. The strategy was rooted in her available experiences as a diplomat and as SRSG of UNMIL. At no point did Løj show an ability to deviate from that strategy and sought a normalisation of UNMISS' relationship with the Government at an early stage following the events of July.

As suggested above the attitudes of more junior officers increasingly galvanised around an emulation of this irrational optimism in the peace agreement. The description of '*lonely'* divergent voices in the Mission illustrated the way in which disconfirming evidence of the bounded rationality became marginalised through *groupthink*.

The events of July 2016 provided an abundance of evidence that the bounded rationality within which decisions had been formed was fundamentally wrong. However, a *sunk cost fallacy* developed because of the Mission's repeated investments in bad decisions. The beliefs that those investments had been at least somewhat correct became even more coherent within a *groupthink* that tied many UNMISS staff and the UNSC to those decisions. The sunk cost galvanised around a belief that created legitimacy around the framing of the Government's *'outrageous'* insertion of a puppet opposition into the peace agreement. The consequence was a complete failure to pre-empt and mitigate a massive escalation in the conflict either through political or peacekeeping actions. The unfettered violence pushed the country closer to genocide than at any point of the conflict.

Throughout her tenure Løj was responsive to the interests of the UNSC and the UN Secretariat. She showed concern for the organisational myth and acted in a way that was consistently systemically appropriate, putting faith in the international peace and security

architecture. Yet, at the same time, by most other measures of success, her decision-making was dismal and her time in office a failure. As with her predecessor, she was never called to account for those failures. Instead, her systemically appropriate decision-making meant that she was allowed to retire without the recriminations that her top military officer faced. She was subsequently re-employed by the UN within a year of her departure to lead a strategic review of MINUSMA (UNSC, 2018). The decision was particularly perplexing given MINUSMA's reputation as the UN's *'most dangerous mission'* (Sieff, 2017) where the kinetic nature of the conflict and the highly tactical challenges matched none of the skills that Løj had demonstrated at any stage of her UN career, particularly in South Sudan.

Once again, the UN had set a standard for decision-making that did not encourage a successor to behave in a way that incentivised the consideration of practical elements of fulfilling UNMISS' mandate. That in the first few months of 2017 UNMISS did perform somewhat better only came with extraordinary changes in the bounded rationality of decision-making that moved focus away from those extraneous elements that had persistently been the source of sub-optimal decisions in previous years.

11. Government Offensive in Upper Nile State – April 2017

In this chapter I will discuss the dramatic changes in UNSC and UN Secretariat interests that occurred at the end of 2016 as well as the arrival of a new SRSG, and a new set of individual values. These changes created a hugely different bounded rationality. Under SRSG Shearer a more robust peacekeeping strategy emerged. When faced with a similar set of circumstances as to those that existed in Unity in 2015, UNMISS was much more proactive with a corresponding increase in the optimality of its response. In the conclusions I will suggest that a dramatically different bounded rationality meant that bias diminished, and Shearer was permitted to better consider those elements of the context that were more germane to the Mission's mandated POC task, providing the basis of an optimal solution. However, I will also suggest that the circumstances of April 2017 were fleeting, and the system reverted to a '*normal'* bounded rationality that meant that corresponding bias and enabling behaviours will also have returned.

'None of us can say that we did not see it coming'

While Løj showed consistency in her approach to the very end, the environment within which she was making decisions was shifting in a way that would have made her strategy look increasingly nonsensical. Senior UN figures, that operated largely outside of the UN Secretariat such as the Special Advisor for the Prevention of Genocide, offered a hugely different understanding of the context. The US administration, which continued to lead the international diplomatic effort also made an astonishing volte face. In November, at the same meeting Løj had given her final anodyne assessment of the conflict, US Ambassador Samantha Power railed against the UN's inaction and the South Sudan leadership.

'We are reminded of all of the warnings that the United Nations missed or saw but chose to ignore in places like Srebrenica and Rwanda in the 1990s. Given the accumulation of warnings, we have lost the right individually and collectively to act surprised in the face of even greater atrocities in South Sudan. None of us can say that we did not see it coming…Let us not treat the leaders of South Sudan as though they are responsible and credible interlocutors but engage them as the cynical actors whom they unfortunately have shown themselves to be, too often putting their short-sighted personal interests above the welfare of millions of their

own people who are suffering. Let us stop asking for permission to carry out a mandate authorized by the Security Council in the interest of peace and security and, instead, start demanding it to unite around that message and mandate. Let us stop acting as if the principle of sovereignty, as critical as it is to the functioning of the international order, gives the South Sudanese Government or any Government license to commit mass atrocities against its own people or fuel a humanitarian crisis that has left millions of lives hanging in the balance.' (UNSC, 2016g)

Beyond the rhetoric Power announced a proposal for an arms embargo on South Sudan, a move that the country had previously opposed. She also called for an *'inclusive'* peace process, with the face-saving ambiguous inference that Machar should be allowed to return.

New perspectives

With Løj's retirement, confidence in the Mission had reached an all-time low. Power's diatribe came in the weeks that followed the release of the second Board of Inquiry in 2016. In the two Boards that had been convened that year, UN action had been lambasted for its failure to pre-empt foreseeable threats. With the expansion of the conflict in the second half of 2016 and the continued growth in the numbers of individuals seeking protection the country the situation had reached a new low. Power's comparison of the country to previous UN failures in Rwanda and Srebrenica would have chilled the UN Secretariat and anyone who believed in the organisational myth of the UN.

Along with Løj's '*retirement*', several other changes in personnel brought significant changes to the context of decision-making. Ban-Ki Moon's tenure as Secretary-General came to an end at the end of 2016 and the USG of the UN's Department of Peacekeeping also departed in early 2017. The changes wrought because of a new US administration in January 2017 would also have a significant impact.

The choice of David Shearer to replace Løj as SRSG was a notable shift. He had never held a position in New York, as his two predecessors had done. Instead he had considerably more

experience in humanitarian operational roles in the field including in emergency and conflict environments that resembled the context of South Sudan.[39]

The collapse in faith in the Mission and a wholesale change in leadership created an impetus for an overdue change in strategic direction. The 2016 Boards of Inquiry offered operational fixes that a demoralised UNMISS staff became eager to implement as it tried to separate itself from its previous missteps. Military staff, particularly, became more proactive than they had been for some time and *'much more willing to go and try'* (Interviewee 8, 2020). The Board of Inquiry recommendations that Shearer implemented included more robust means to physically protect civilians at POC sites, including the construction of better perimeter defences and weapons free buffer zones around the sites. It also led to the creation of more frequent and robust patrolling strategies. Critically, this included instructions that soldiers should assert their right to patrol and stand their ground for 48 hours when confronted with an access denial. More training was devoted to ensuring soldiers understood the rules of engagement and more regular scenario training involving directives on use of force were conducted (UNSC, 2017).

Shearer's leadership style also seems to have been the antithesis of Løj's. He eschewed her preference for hierarchy, preferring a flat structure of decision-making. Interviewees differentiated Løj's *'old school'* hierarchical style with Shearer's more *'democratic'* approach (Interviewee 14, 2020). One interviewee commented on his arrival that,

'We were certainly happy to see someone who came in and spoke the language of proactivity and seemed interested in wanting to know what was going on, and who seemed quite dynamic and keen to engage across the mission.' (Interviewee 1, 2020)

In addition to those consultations, Shearer reorganised components of the senior decision-making team. He elevated the Chief JMAC to the role of Special Advisor, in a way that would have disrupted the small inner circle that had hitherto dominated decision-making. As well as being more engaged across a broader range of the Mission, interviewees suggested that Shearer was better at engaging externally. One interviewee noted,

[39] According to a CV accessed online on 5 August at https://img.scoop.co.nz/media/pdfs/0905/David_Shearer_CV.pdf. Shearer spent more than thirteen years in operational roles in emergency contexts that included Iraq, Lebanon, Rwanda, Somalia, and Sri Lanka.

'I think it's the manner of those discussions [about protection of civilians]. *Shearer continued those discussions but changed the narrative. I think, given his background he was much more able to communicate with humanitarians and then was able to discuss each* [POC] *site as an individual entity.'* (Interviewee 8, 2020)

Another key difference with Løj, was Shearer's significant experience in senior politics, having previously led the Government Opposition in New Zealand. Much more than Løj he showed confidence in using his public position for political ends. However, in contrast to Johnson, he also seemed more adept at using his political talents from a position of constructive opposition. In his first months he openly and directly criticised the South Sudan Government for blocking humanitarian assistance (Wudu and Bior, 2017). In March 2017, He wrote an editorial for Newsweek with the provocative title, *'Why South Sudan's leaders are to blame for the country's famine'* (Shearer, 2017). When UNMISS displayed robust postures against Government security services he pushed his press office to promote the willingness of peacekeepers making forceful interventions.[40] The bounded rational belief that had made anything but polite collaboration the only means to influence the political inclinations of the Government appeared to have been abandoned. The threat to the organizational myth and the persistent failure of the UNMISS strategy had meant that UNSC and Secretariat interests no longer prioritised a harmonious relationship between the Government and UNMISS. Shearer's own values made a different decision-making approach possible.

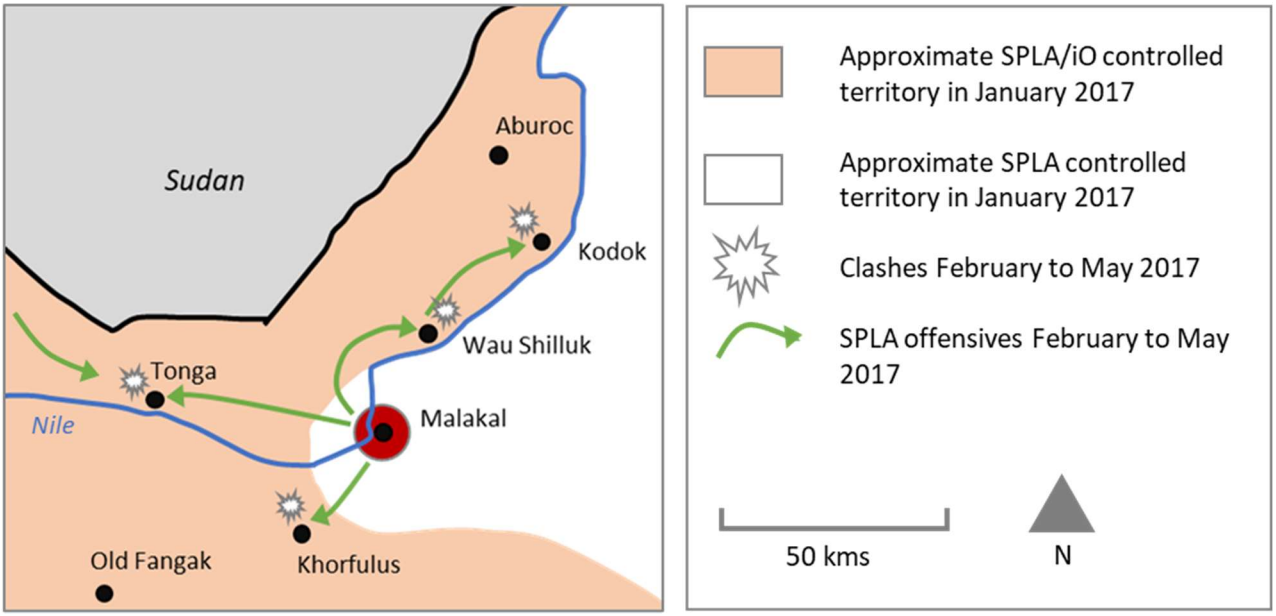
Cometh the hour?

The first real test of the new SRSG came at the start of 2017. Following a stalemate in the Equatoria offensive, the Government turned its attention back to those parts of the country it had fought over in 2014 and 2015. Fighting in Upper Nile began in late January, with an attack on the town of Wau Shilluk (UNSC, 2017b). Civilians from the Shilluk community escaped as the SPLA advanced. As many as 20,000 fled north along the River Nile to the town of Kodok (See map 6). On 26 April, the SPLA pushed further into Shilluk territory, attacking Kodok and pushing up to 30,000 civilians further inland to the town of Aburoc. Beyond Aburoc, the nearest safe haven was sufficiently far that it would be impossible for any

[40] Two examples of this include an intervention by Chinese peacekeepers in Yei to rescue UN staff (UNMISS, 2017). and an intervention in Bentiu by Mongolian peacekeepers to rescue 50 civilians (UNMISS, 2017b).

vulnerable groups to escape by foot. Coordinated attacks on the SPLA/iO along the entire west bank saw their defensive capabilities crumble. Areas like Aburoc represented the few pockets that the SPLA/iO were able to cling to on the west bank of The Nile. The potential for a decisive victory for the Government meant that further advances to Aburoc were likely. With Government forces regrouping in Kodok only 30 kilometres away, any advance would take place with little warning. Given the brutality of previous SPLA offensives, the threat against civilians was extremely high. Significant violence against civilians had already been reported as having taken place in Wau Shilluk and Kodok at earlier stages of the offensive (Amnesty, 2017). On 27 April, OCHA published a flash update calling on parties to the conflict to adhere to international humanitarian law (OCHA, 2017). Having already been evacuated from Kodok, humanitarians were concerned about their ability to stay in the insecure Aburoc and provide the vital services required. A protection cluster report from the time starkly noted.

'Without transport to a safer location, food and water, the population, especially the most vulnerable persons, are at serious risk of being abused, raped and killed.' (Protection Cluster, 2017)



Map 6 - Upper Nile conflict February to May 2017 (based on UN reporting in UNSC, 2017b)

The warnings resembled those that had been produced ahead of other Government offensives in Unity and the Equatorias and in those instances had led to no pre-emptive action. However, on this occasion, UNMISS' response was substantially different. Following the attack on Wau Shilluk, Shearer expressed public and specific concern about the displaced population because of the Government's operations (UNMISS, 2017c). However, evidence that the Government had become inured to the possibility of an UNMISS intervention was shown by the subsequent SPLA advance to take Kodok. However, on this occasion, UNMISS responded with a military operation. On 7 May, Shearer announced that he had deployed peacekeeping troops to Aburoc to secure the area for humanitarian delivery essentially putting peacekeepers in the way of a likely SPLA advance (UNMISS, 2017d). What had taken UNMISS six months to achieve in Unity in 2015, took a matter of days in Upper Nile. It was the first UNMISS base to be located in SPLA/iO territory since the start of the conflict. The operation lasted six weeks, allowing humanitarian services enough time to provide life-saving services and support the transport of the most vulnerable out of the hostile area. During the operation Shearer provided public visibility of the situation there by visiting the site along with journalists. Of the impact of the operation he commented from Aburoc,

'It's something that we hadn't done before. It's something that our peacekeepers aren't known for, getting in helicopters, flying in at very short notice, establishing a base on the ground in a potentially hostile environment and then getting on with the job of bringing others in to do the humanitarian work. It worked really well here and it set a precedent and a bit of a model for the rest of our peacekeeping troops to look at…The bottom line here is that there are hundreds of people alive here today who would not have been alive if we hadn't done this.' (United Nations, 2017)

The UNMISS intervention in Aburoc represented a watershed moment in the conflict. In the months that followed, enthusiasm within the Government for continuing the conflict appeared to dwindle. On 9 May, two days after peacekeepers were deployed to Aburoc, Paul Malong was fired as Chief of Staff of the SPLA in a shock decision by the President (Radio Tamazuj, 2017). A few months later he was arrested and forced into exile in a move that showed the waning influence of hardliners within the Government. The route back to the peace process was a slow one. It would be another year before Machar formally re-joined it and he only returned to Juba in October 2018. Violence continued throughout the country

but the huge offensives that had led to mass atrocities and huge displacements between 2013 and 2017 stopped. Having had its bases attacked four times between 2013 and 2016 there were no similar attacks between then and the time of this research. Over that same period only one peacekeeper would die because of a malicious incident.

The extent to which this positive change of trajectory can be attributed to the sudden emergence of a more robust peacekeeping mission needs significant qualification. This turning-point had been some time in the making. Paul Malong had failed to deliver a decisive victory against the SPLA/iO since taking control of the SPLA in 2014. His high-stakes gamble to attack Machar in Juba in 2016 had, by 2017, shown itself to be been an unmitigated failure leading to a prolonging of the conflict and another economic collapse. The SPLA/iO could claim control over a greater amount of territory than they had at any point since the outbreak of violence in 2013 (see approximate areas of control in annex). The strident reaction of the international community following the violence in the Equatorias was another indicator that the hardline strategies that the Government of South Sudan had pursued up to that point were no longer tenable. Kiir already appears to have been attempting to rein in the excesses of Malong as early as December 2016, when he deployed National Security officers to areas around Yei in what appears to have been an attempt to contain the worst excesses of the SPLA (Arensen, 2016).

However, Shearer was unlikely to have been fully aware of the favourable conditions within which he was operating. The likelihood is that without his intervention the SPLA would have advanced on to Aburoc is strong and may have emboldened the hardliners. At the very least it is highly likely that the Mission saved many lives as Shearer suggested. The timing of Malong's departure, immediately following the Aburoc operation, is sufficiently close to suggest that the abrupt halting of the Upper Nile offensive played a role in his departure. The operation therefore came closer to achieving the expectations that might be reasonably applied to a peacekeeping Mission than anything UNMISS had done to this point. It was as thus close to optimal as any UNMISS POC operation since 2013.

Conclusions

The operation in Aburoc took place without any fundamental changes to the Mission's mandate. Following the collapse of the peace agreement the UNSC had authorized an

additional 4,000 soldiers. However, Government obstruction and UN inefficiency meant that by April 2017, few had entered the country. In April 2017, there were approximately the same number of peacekeeping soldiers available to the Mission as there had been in June 2015, during the Unity offensives.[41]

What had changed by 2017, was the bounded rationality within which peacekeeping decisions were made. The UNSC had become considerably less indulgent towards the Government of South Sudan. The UN Secretariat's focus shifted to the preservation of its organisational myth, which was more threatened by the spectre of inaction than the ongoing burden of the POC sites. Shearer also brought with him a new set of values that were more at ease with operating in a conflict environment, more robust peacekeeping postures, and constructive confrontation vis-à-vis the Government.

The extraneous elements of the bounded rationality lessened in importance as the beliefs, interests, and values that it embodied became aligned around the need to find better solutions that could create credibility in UN action. This included the contemplation of more confrontational decision alternatives. In that framework, the role of bias dissipated as the way the SRSG absorbed information became focussed around attaining more optimal actions rather interpreting the world to satisfy extraneous considerations.

At the same time behaviours, that had been associated with the maintenance of high levels of bias, also diminished. Shearer was less inclined to *inside views*, seeking broader participation from within and outside the organisation and utilising flatter organisational structures. The departure from the organisation of individuals personally attached to failed investments diminished the influence of *sunk-cost fallacies*. *Groupthink* weakened as the leadership abandoned its attachment to discredited interpretations and staff embraced focus on task optimality. *Risk aversion* also subsided in the grim aftermath of 2016. The consequences of repeating those failures through safe inaction appeared, for the first time, more cognitively unsettling than the uncertainty of contemplating riskier actions.

[41] In June 2015, there were 11,350 UNMISS peacekeeping soldiers in country compared to 11,512 in April 2017. The number of soldiers had fallen from over 12,000 in June 2016 following the decision by Kenya to withdraw their contribution following the firing of Lieutenant General Johnson Mogoa Kimani Ondieki. Based on information from UNDPO data accessed on 25 August, 2020 https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/troop-and-police-contributors

However, a bounded rationality that allowed UNMISS to focus on task relevance in creating decision-alternatives for action would not last. It is notable that, notwithstanding the US' change of political tack, they were unsuccessful in achieving an arms embargo in December 2016. While no country voted against the resolution, eight abstained, depriving it of the required number.[42] Even if international opinion had broadly turned against the Government of South Sudan toward the end of 2016, the implications of a consensus on a more robust peacekeeping strategy was limited. The attitude of the UN Secretariat to the operation in Aburoc appeared ambivalent. There was a lack of official celebration when it took place and its mention in the subsequent Secretary-General report to the UNSC in June distilled the event to a single sentence describing UNMISS activities creating conditions conducive to the delivery of humanitarian delivery. The tone belied the unprecedented nature of the operation (UNSC, 2017c).

Shearer had sought the operation to be a model of a '*more nimble, mobile, and proactive'* type of peacekeeping in the country (CIVIC, 2019). Yet, while he appears to have had some success improving the tactical robustness of the Mission, the deployment of operations like that carried out at Aburoc were not forthcoming. The Secretary-General made no mention of a new strategy or tactical posture for the Mission. Instead, his reporting on UNMISS to the UNSC looked similar to those of his predecessor. Description of UNMISS' implementation of activities to protect civilians remained pinned to the three-tier approach initially developed by Johnson. Dialogue and political engagement remained the primary tool for UNMISS to protect civilians (UNSC, 2017c).

In my research I have been unable to determine where this lack of enthusiasm for the Aburoc Mission came from. It is possible that its implications were overlooked, given the difficulty of proving the efficacy of a preventive action. However, it is also likely that, viewed from a more *'normal'* bounded rationality, the operation looked like the kind that the UNSC might prefer to be consulted on, lest it be interpreted as an intervention against a sovereign Government.

[42] The reasons for the abstentions were complex (China, Russia, Angola, Egypt, Senegal, Malaysia, Venezuela and Japan abstained). They were a product of broad principles in matters of sovereignty as well as regional interests. Ambassador Power bitterly complained that even the US ally Japan abstained, potentially to avoid the risk of retaliatory attacks on its own peacekeepers in the country (Gady, 2016). The fact that the US had introduced the measure a only a month before the end of the Obama administration, meant that Power had little leverage to corral support and instead created an opportunity for its international rivals to orchestrate a foreign affairs embarrassment.

At the same time, Kiir's apparent contrition, in marginalising hardliners, appeared to have been sufficient to lure back international support to the stalled peace agreement. The resumption of traditional diplomatic roles between official bodies meant interest in the value of robust tactical peacekeeping postures in the field would have diminished. UNSC and UN Secretariat interests shifted back to the peace agreement.

The poorly constructed ARCSS was dusted off and an increased number of signatories asked to recommit to the re-jigged version. Unreassuringly, the sponsors attached a single word to distinguish the *Revitalized Agreement for the Resolution of Conflict in South Sudan* (R-ARCCS) from its failed predecessor. UNMISS again found itself in a supporting role to a flawed political process.

The obsession with shrinking the POC sites reasserted itself and Shearer was described as again *'under pressure'* to prioritise that (Interviewee 8, 2020). It was also suggested that Shearer himself, lost some of the *'energy'* that he had arrived with and that familiarity with the context and the reassertion of a more traditional bounded rationality instilled greater levels of *risk aversion* in the way that he increasingly viewed his actions (Interviewee 17, 2020).

In early 2017, a moment existed that allowed for more optimal action based on an accurate assessment of a broad range of information within a bounded rationality that allowed focus on the practical elements of a POC task. It does not appear that that moment lasted. As the memory of the success of the Aburoc operation faded a bounded rationality, that looked quite like the old, re-emerged in prominence.

12. Conclusion

In the introduction of this research I suggested that available analytical methods within International Relations to examine peacekeeping action did not provide a comprehensive method of analysis. There was a tendency to see different forces driving action at different levels of the UN system in a way that was fragmented and belied the systemic nature of UN action. Additionally, the methods of analysis struggled to account for hyper-specific factors that behavioural and cognitive scientists in other contexts consider significant in accounting for decision-making.

I have offered an alternative cognitive approach that is focussed on decision-making to understand action. Specifically, I suggest that the accepted decision-making process of distilling reality to *'relevant'* facts is the primary means through which individuals develop choice alternatives. I have further suggested that relevance is subjective and liable to relate to those elements that are important to an individual and their relationship with an organisation. In the UN, and specifically from the perspective of an SRSG, this is unlikely to be focussed on practical elements of a mandated task. Instead, individual values, UNSC and UN Secretariat interests, organizational myth and systemic appropriateness are the means through which an SRSG is most likely to understand what elements of reality are most *'relevant'* to a given task.

In situations of uncertainty bounded rationality becomes increasingly relevant as stable shared understandings of reality breakdown. The UN becomes reliant on its own understandings to create knowledge. To align knowledge with the bounded rationality, bias is used to create preferences around information that confirms beliefs and experiences that relate to elements assimilated within that bounded framework.

The inherent capacity with organisations to mitigate bias can become undermined by behaviours that distort framing and anchoring of decision-contexts by decision-makers.

In applying this theoretical framework to South Sudan, I have described the contexts of six decision-events that took place between 2013 and 2017 with a focus on the role of the three different SRSGs that served as the heads of the Mission during that period. In Hilde Johnson, her individual values were allowed to play an outweighed role in defining the bounded

rationality in 2013, thanks to a general disinterest in the country among the rest of the international community. Her bias towards framing the context in political terms and her tendency to view her political relationships in irrationally favourable terms undermined her ability to pre-empt and plan for the outbreak of conflict that year. In 2014, UNSC interests were focused on political processes while the UN Secretariat sought to limit the UN's exposure at POC sites. Along with Johnson's preference for political processes, less attention was given to physical security of civilians under UNMISS' protection contributing to failures that resulted in the massacre at its site in Bor.

Following Johnson's departure, the UNSC focus on political process developed to include a more partial attitude to the Government and acceptance of its escalation of violence in the country. At the same time UN Secretariat antipathy to the POC sites deepened. When Johnson's successor arrived, these aspects of the bounded rationality aligned with Ellen Løj's own values. Her self-conceptualisation as a diplomat that strongly believed in international governance structures and peacebuilding underpinned her attempts to ingratiate herself with the Government. This created a tendency to view Government security actions as more legitimate than the evidence practically suggested and the tendency to understand POC sites as obstacles to peace rather than core to the Mission's POC objectives. The consequence was that during the violence in Unity in 2015, UNMISS struggled to understand the reality in a way that would have prompted much more urgent action that could have mitigated the loss of life that occurred.

In Malakal in 2016, the actions at a tactical level demonstrate how emulation of a bounded rationality, in which POC sites had become peripheral to UNMISS' organizational understanding of its core objectives, had become entrenched in a type of groupthink. A working level emulation of the bounded rationality also entailed reflecting the suboptimality that came with an irrational focus on extraneous elements rather than those that were most pertinent to the task. Later in 2016, the attachment to past decisions created ever more extreme bias to justify the bounded rationality that were based on commitment to consistency with previous decisions. This sunk cost fallacy underpinned UNMISS' squandering of much more favourable capabilities than it had had in 2013, to allow an even more suboptimal set of decisions to occur during the violence of July 2016. It stuck with its

discredited strategy even as disconfirming information became abundant as South Sudan reached the depths of its civil war in November.

The extent of the disaster of 2016 was sufficiently visible that a shared understanding of the conflict emerged in which a strategy that had been developed through the bounded rationality looked dramatically irrational. Those elements of interests, beliefs and values within the bounded rationality were no longer served by adherence to the existing strategy as the disastrous turn of events undermined UNSC and UN interests and imperilled the organizational myth. UNSC and UN Secretariat interests adapted to this new shared understanding and brought greater consideration of those elements that were more practical to the task. Specifically, this entailed addressing the unfettered ability of the Government to define the security situation in the country and seek out opportunities in the political and tactical space for the UN to demonstrate robustness in its peacekeeping response. The values that David Shearer brought also seemed more suited to eschewing organizational behaviours that warped the framing and anchoring of decisions and showed a willingness to absorb information and develop choice alternatives that were based on elements were more practical to achieving optimal results. In this his attempts to find potentially robust and credible strategies around a POC strategy was aligned with a bounded rationality that placed a new priority on such approaches. The outcome, in the form of the Aburoc Mission was the most optimal POC operation conducted under UNMISS during the period under research.

However, the aftermath of the Aburoc Mission and the failure to build momentum around strategies that were most focussed on the practical elements of peacekeeping POC tasks suggests the tendency for an organisation, with inherently conservative mindsets, to revert to that bounded rationality which relates to a predictable inner life than is reactive to practical concerns in an otherwise unpredictable world. In trying to predict the most likely action of an International Organisation in a given situation it is therefore likely that the static elements of its mindset, that comprise the greater part of its *'normal'* bounded rationality, will provide a better signifier of action than a consideration of the practical elements of the task.

Towards a better peacekeeping

The implications of accepting the value of a cognitive approach have significant implications for policymakers. It offers an alternative to envisaging change in practice as the product of

shifts in policy norms (Bode and Karlsrud, 2018). Furthermore, it offers a different way of seeing the role of individuals in effecting policy change beyond agency (Da Costa and Karlsrud, 2013). Instead, it recasts individuals as cognitively complex whose decision-making can be determined by existing interests, values, and beliefs as well as their relationship to their organisation.

The conclusion that the application of bias in decision-making within a UN peacekeeping mission, because of bounded rationality, may be systemic and systematic will be an uncomfortable one. The international system that comprises international peace and security architecture has proven itself to be stubbornly resistant to reform especially where those reforms imply changes that might affect core interests, belief, and values. However, there have been some positive moves. The development of information analysis capacity within peacekeeping Missions reached a significant juncture in 2006 with the development of the JMAC concept (UN, 2006). Further effort should involve information analysis in decision-making. This could include ensuring that the Chief JMAC is appointed at a D1 level, thereby making them equivalent to other senior staff in decision-making forums.

The more recent UN Secretariat reforms of 2018 have also been a positive development which created more autonomy for peacekeeping missions that allow SRSGs to act with greater independence from UN Secretariat departments in New York, that hitherto controlled budgets and personnel more comprehensively. This includes greater control of personnel and budgets. More devolved control is a positive step. In UNMISS, the tendency for UN Secretariat Departments to become fixated on policy issues that had little relation to lived experiences in the field were an unhelpful contribution to the bounded rationality and undermined optimal decision-making. In South Sudan this was particularly evident in the pressure that the UN Secretariat created around the issue of the POC sites.

A less positive move has been the absorption of administration of the RC/HC system from UNDP to the UN Secretariat. The DSRSG (HC/RC) on occasions provided a vocal counterpoint to SRSG decisions. They were willing to be a dissenting voice in the UN system, such as their criticism of the Government by the D/SRSG (HC/RC) during the violence in Unity. Now that the role is administered directly by the UN Secretariat that will be less likely as the organisation seeks coherence in its public positions.

Further work needs to be done on creating a better equipped cadre of SRSGs. The logic that experienced politicians and diplomats are also equipped to manage military and statebuilding missions in complex environments is fundamentally flawed. Practical experience of operational roles in emergency or conflict environments should be a minimum standard for any SRSG being contemplated for an appointment to lead a peacekeeping mission.

Greater effort should be put in considering the kind of team that exists around an SRSG to disrupt inside views and create diversity in the way teams develop choice alternatives. The common practice within the UN of senior officials moving staff that they are familiar with into their new mission should be stopped. At the same time, more flexibility in hiring is required to ensure an SRSG is empowered to hire staff suited to the context.

SRSGs should also be encouraged to manage a peacekeeping mission through a flatter organisational structures that encourages discussion and diverse views that challenge senior thinking. They should also dismantle, as much as possible, information silos that concentrate the tools to make informed decisions within the senior hierarchy. An SRSG should engage more fully with external viewpoints even when they may be challenging.

The UN should routinely investigate suboptimal decision-making against mandated tasks. The remit of these investigations should relate to a system perspective, rather than the narrow technical remit that investigations such as the reports into Bor or even the Boards of Inquiry in 2016 allowed. Individuals that conduct the investigations should be from a more wide-ranging background than are currently appointed by the UN and not restricted to those that are sympathetic to a UN perspective.

The UN can seek ways to assimilate more challenging and diverse viewpoints into its decision-making processes. As was seen in Løj's defence of UNMISS, the organisation can be sensitive and defensive when criticised, thereby missing opportunities to improve from valid concerns about its performance. The UN Secretariat in New York also continues to be isolated from NGOs and activists who play a marginal role in the work there. The tendency to prioritise irrelevant processes over lived experience creates obsessions around totemic policies and practices that have no relevance to a given task and result in suboptimal decision-making. The isolated and inward-looking culture in missions and in New York should be challenged to allow a more diverse range of voices to participate in discussions around particular contexts.

It may also be pertinent to suggest that the behaviour of member states could also be better. A broader, more representative, and more democratic UNSC would likely lessen the tendency for the flawed political strategy of a single nation to create focus around interest that are extraneous to the UN's charter, as took place in South Sudan with US policy. Member states should also see peacekeeping as an instrument to be used in the impartial administration of the UN Charter, rather than supporting national interests that are irrelevant to optimal solutions around mandated objectives.

There are good reasons as to why member states should relinquish their interests in this way to give peacekeeping missions greater freedom to make decisions more independently. As was shown in South Sudan, the fixation on interests became self-defeating. The UN Secretariat's attempts to protect its image only led to ever greater failures that tarnished its image. The UNSC prioritisation of a diplomatic peace process rather than a successful peacekeeping mission ultimately incentivised the continuation of conflict that led to ever increasing requirements to invest politically and materially in the conflict.

The SRSG's Dilemma

If systemic reform is not possible, which is sadly likely, attempts by individual SRSGs to collect, analyse, and act on information in a way that eschews bias and focuses on practical elements of a task is likely to be problematic. A non-biased process may lead to the creation of information that compels action that may contradict other elements of the bounded rationality. If an SRSG act outside of the bounded rationality, they risk censure from the UN Secretariat and UNSC and even the loss of their jobs. However, if they fail to act, it may become public knowledge that they took no action, despite the availability of information that clearly laid out the consequences of that inaction. They could face public condemnation and reputational risk to the organisation. An incentive therefore exists to continue to obscure available information and analysis in a way that allows bias to persist and suboptimal actions to continue.

An alternative way to view the role of the SRSG is that they are capable of agency within a bounded rationality to the extent that their values constitute a significant component of that rationality. Those values may be aligned with the bounded rationality, as was the case with the SRSG's examined in this research. However, an SRSG may also use their position

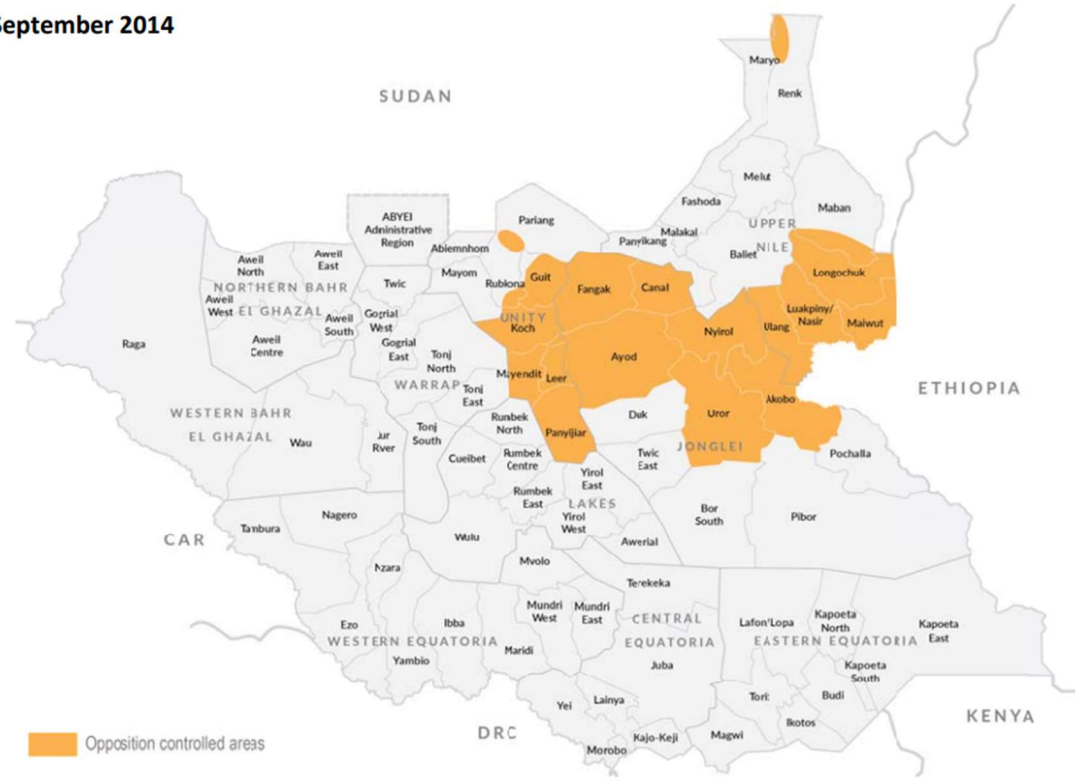
entrepreneurially to encourage behaviour that avoids bias and challenges existing beliefs and interests in a way that influences other parts of the bounded rationality to allow for greater consideration of practical elements of tasks.

However, the exertion of agency by an SRSG in the ways described above will undoubtedly be challenging and presents the likelihood of psychological discomfort that comes with a failure to conform to the expectations of an organisation. It likely also entails formal and informal negative professional feedback that is likely to affect future promotion.

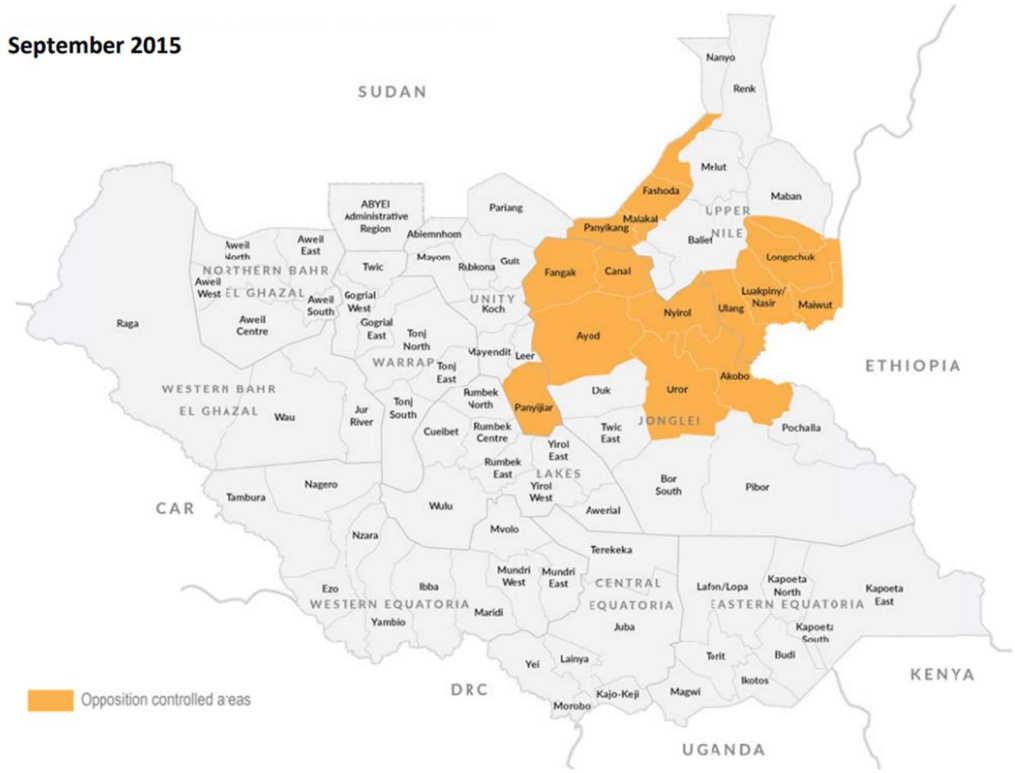
A final reflection is a more challenging one. Where an SRSGs determines an optimal course of action that that is discouraged when viewed through the lens of a bounded rationality, what obligation do they have to retain organisational thinking? To an employee that has based their professional lives on acting according to systemic appropriateness and have been persistently rewarded for the correctness of their actions by ever greater promotion and rewards, it is a difficult proposition. However, a moral imperative to act to save the lives of civilians, regardless of its professional implications exists in a frontline role. At some point, an SRSG should be willing to disregard any organisational considerations, including those of a bounded rationality, to act in the way that they personally understand as the most optimal means to protect. Such decision-making may mean that individual never works for the UN again. It may even be such that the difficulty in proving the value of a preventive action means that posterity may not even credit their decision. It is an extremely poor professional choice. However, it is a profound moral one.

Annex – Approximate areas of control

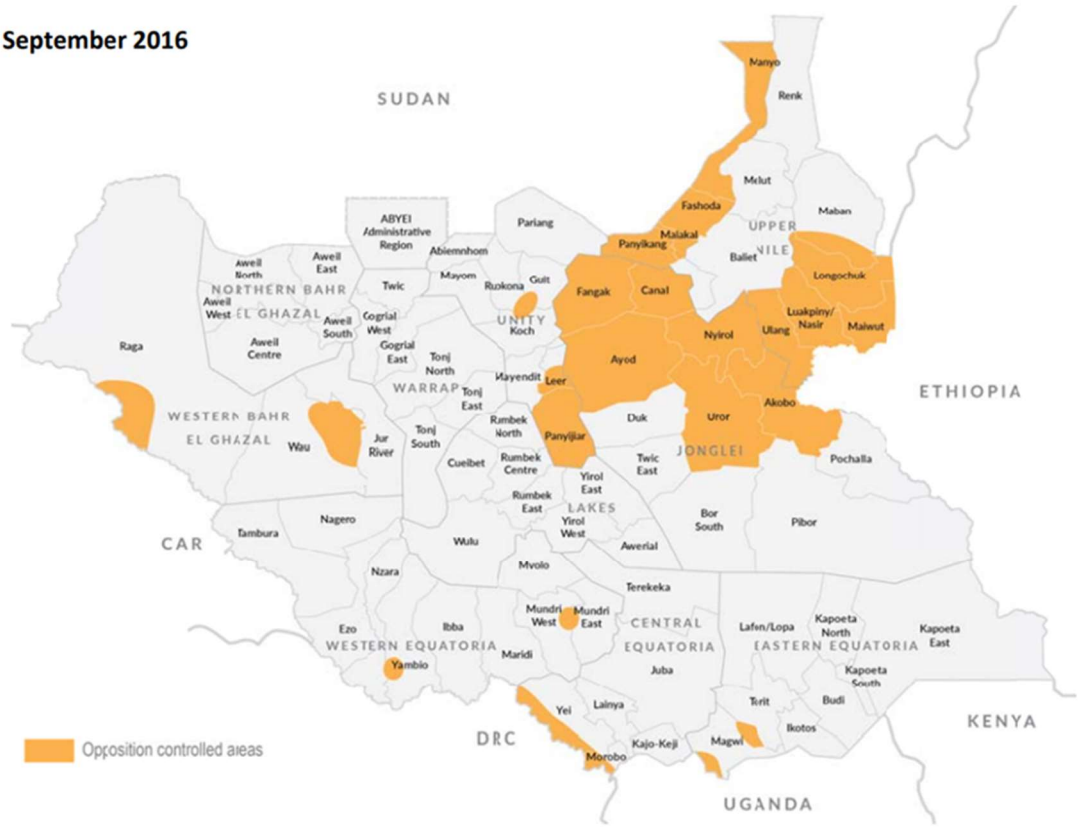
September 2014



September 2015



Annex – Approximate areas of control



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