RESEARCH ARTICLE

WHY PEACEKEEPING STUMBLES: UNITED NATIONS MISSION IN SOUTH SUDAN (UNMISS) AND THE SOUTH SUDAN DILEMMA

ALITA EMMANUEL CHINAGOROM[1]., NGENE INNOCENT AJA[2]., CHIKA ALPHEAUS J.,[3] VICTOR C. UDE-UMANTA[4]., OKORIE OBINNA DANIEL[5]., OKORONKWO MOSES UCHENNA[6]., FAITH NGOZI ONYEKERE[7]

Department of Political Science, Alex Ekwueme Federal University Ikwo, Nigeria

ABSTRACT

The conflict in South Sudan exposes a new dimension of modern peace-building where innate political rivalries, fragile institutions, and environmental shocks intersect to frustrate international interventions. Despite the strategic mandate of the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), its capacity has been persistently weakened by inadequate funding, poor logistical infrastructure, and the paralyzing effect of divisions within the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). This study interrogates these challenges through the lens of Principal-Agent Theory, situating the tensions between the UN's directives and the constraints faced by its peacekeepers. Employing a rigorous documentary analysis of official reports, UN resolutions, academic literature, and media accounts, the research pursues three objectives: first, to evaluate the impact of resource insufficiency on UNMISS's operational effectiveness; second, to examine how South Sudan's terrain and weak infrastructure exacerbate security and humanitarian limitations; and third, to analyze how UNSC discord constrains coherent responses to urgent needs such as healthcare. Our findings show that low troop morale, restricted mobility, and fragmented international consensus collectively blunt the mission's effectiveness. The study concludes by advancing targeted recommendations strengthening personnel welfare, investing in infrastructure resilience, and building stronger diplomatic consensus to enhance UNMISS's ability to support sustainable peace.

Keywords: South Sudan, UNMISS, peacekeeping, UNSC, Principal-Agent Theory

Corresponding Author

Alita Emmanuel Chinagorom,
Email Address: alita.emmanuel@funai.edu.ng

492

INTRODUCTION

Since the end of the Cold War, the United Nations has assumed a central role in international peacekeeping, with Africa becoming the epicentre of its missions. Out of the 72 UN peacekeeping operations launched since 1948, over 30 have been deployed on the continent (Qureshi, 2021). These missions have not only sought to maintain peace but also to reconstruct fragile states and address complex humanitarian crises. Yet, their mixed outcomes continue to fuel debate on the effectiveness of peacekeeping as a tool of global security governance (Kim, 2014; De Coning, 2019). Nowhere is this debate more pronounced than in South Sudan, where the persistence of violence despite the presence of one of the UN's largest peacekeeping missions exposes the limits of external intervention in deeply fractured political orders.

South Sudan gained independence in July 2011 after decades of protracted conflict with Sudan. The euphoria that followed independence was short-lived. By December 2013, the country descended into a brutal civil war triggered by political rivalries within the ruling Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM), particularly between President Salva Kiir and Vice President Riek Machar (Jochemsen, 2019). The conflict quickly escalated into widespread ethnic violence, mass displacement, and humanitarian catastrophe, producing one of the world's gravest displacement crises with over 4 million people uprooted from their homes (Pendle, 2015; Deafalla, 2022).

In response, the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) was established in July 2011 under Security Council Resolution 1996, with an initial mandate to support state-building, protect civilians, and consolidate peace (Da Costa, 2013). However, the outbreak of civil war in 2013 drastically shifted its role. The mission was forced to transition from state-building to crisis management, prioritising civilian protection, human rights monitoring, and humanitarian assistance (Munson, 2018). UNMISS became a lifeline for millions as it opened its bases—later called Protection of Civilians (PoC) sites to shelter internally displaced persons. At its peak, these sites hosted over 200,000 civilians, effectively transforming the mission into an emergency humanitarian agency (Krause, 2020).

Yet, despite these interventions, the conflict persisted. Ceasefire agreements were repeatedly violated, political settlements collapsed, and atrocities including sexual violence and the deliberate targeting of civilians continued unabated (Hultman, Kathman & Shannon, 2019). Scholars argue that UNMISS has been constrained by limited resources, ambiguous mandates, and host government obstruction, which have collectively undermined its capacity to enforce peace (Duursma, 2017; De Coning, 2019). The persistence of violence therefore raises pressing questions about the structural limitations of peacekeeping and the broader political contexts that shape its effectiveness.

This tension between high international investment and limited local outcomes frames the central problem of this study. Despite the presence of UNMISS, South Sudan remains trapped in cycles of violence and fragility. Accordingly, this research asks: Why has peacekeeping struggled to achieve sustainable peace in South Sudan? To what extent can the challenges facing UNMISS be explained by internal South Sudanese dynamics, and to what degree are they reflections of the broader dilemmas of UN peacekeeping in Africa?

To address these questions, the study pursues three core objectives:

i. To assess the extent to which inadequate funding impacts the operational effectiveness and overall mission objectives of UNMISS in South Sudan.

ii. To evaluate how lack of transportation and communication tools or equipment infrastructure contributes to security challenges faced by UNMISS.

iii. To determine how internal conflict within the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) influences the provision of healthcare services.

The paper is structured as follows. Section Two reviews relevant literature on peacekeeping effectiveness and the debates surrounding UNMISS. Section Three outlines the theoretical and methodological framework of the study. Section Four presents the findings and discussion, drawing on empirical cases of UNMISS operations. The final section concludes with recommendations for strengthening peacekeeping in South Sudan and beyond.

LITERATURE REVIEW

United Nation Peacekeeping in Global Context

Since its inception, United Nations (UN) peacekeeping has been at the centre of efforts to maintain international peace and security, often described as the organisation's most visible instrument of conflict management. Across more than seventy operations since 1948, peacekeeping has demonstrated both moments of success and stark limitations, producing a body of scholarship that is deeply divided over its efficacy. On the one hand, missions in Namibia, Mozambique, Liberia, and Sierra Leone are frequently cited as examples where peacekeeping created the conditions for political transition, disarmament, and eventual stability (Ojo-Lanre & Amodu, 2025). On the other hand, catastrophic failures in Rwanda, Bosnia, and Somalia during the 1990s revealed the structural and operational weaknesses of UN peacekeeping, sparking reforms that continue to shape debate today (Jacobson, 2012; Duursma et al., 2023).

The Brahimi Report of 2000, commissioned in response to these failures, concluded bluntly that the UN had "repeatedly failed to meet the challenge" of protecting civilians and preventing mass atrocities (Jacobson, 2012). Scholars such as Jacobson (2012) attribute these failures to both structural and human factors: missions were under-resourced, lightly armed,

and deployed without the political backing necessary to enforce their mandates. Peacekeepers were often placed in untenable positions, expected to act as both soldiers and police in foreign contexts where they had little incentive to risk their lives for strangers. This lack of commitment, coupled with chronic under-arming, meant that missions frequently withdrew when challenged, leaving civilians exposed to violence. The egregious outcomes of this dynamic were most visible in the Rwandan genocide and the fall of Srebrenica, where UN forces either stood by or retreated in the face of overwhelming violence (Jacobson, 2012).

Contemporary analyses, however, caution against reducing UN peacekeeping to these failures alone. Duursma et al. (2023), reflecting on seventy-five years of peacekeeping, highlight that missions have evolved to incorporate more robust mandates centred on civilian protection, human rights promotion, and reconciliation. These shifts reflect both normative learning and institutional adaptation within the UN system. Similarly, Ogurlu and Dag (2023) argue that peacekeeping effectiveness must be judged through a nuanced framework that accounts for multiple criteria, ranging from the reduction of hostilities to the facilitation of political settlements. Their comparative study across ten missions demonstrates that while some operations fall short of expectations, others succeed in stabilizing volatile contexts and creating space for political dialogue.

Nowhere is this mixed record clearer than in Sub-Saharan Africa, which currently hosts the majority of peacekeeping missions. As Ojo-Lanre and Amodu (2025) observe, missions in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Mali, the Central African Republic, and South Sudan reveal both the indispensability and inadequacy of peacekeeping. While these operations have prevented large-scale massacres, facilitated humanitarian relief, and reduced active combat, they have struggled to address the deeper political and structural drivers of conflict. The persistence of violence, state fragility, and recurring crises raises critical questions about whether peacekeeping is designed for short-term stabilisation rather than long-term conflict resolution.

At the core of these debates lies the tension between ambition and capacity. Peacekeeping mandates have become increasingly expansive, requiring missions to protect civilians, mediate politics, promote human rights, and even support state-building. Yet resources, political will, and troop discipline have not always matched these ambitions. Jacobson (2012) goes further to highlight the darker side of peacekeeping, including allegations of sexual exploitation, abuse, and impunity among peacekeepers issues that tarnish the credibility of UN operations and alienate the very populations they are meant to protect. While reform measures such as enhanced oversight and accountability mechanisms have been introduced, recurring scandals demonstrate that institutional gaps persist.

UNMISS and the South Sudan Conflict

The outbreak of civil war in South Sudan in December 2013 quickly transformed the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) into one of the UN's most complex and contested peace operations. Originally mandated to support state-building and development following South Sudan's independence in 2011, the mission was forced to reorient towards the urgent protection of civilians (POC), humanitarian coordination, and political mediation (Russo, 2025). Unlike earlier missions elsewhere, UNMISS became almost uniquely centred on civilian protection, with its POC sites housing hundreds of thousands of displaced persons at the height of the conflict. While this shift arguably saved lives, it also exposed the mission's fragility: even at its most robust, large sections of the population remained beyond UN protection, underscoring both the indispensability and inadequacy of the mission.

Recent evidence illustrates these tensions vividly. Nurcahyani et al. (2025) report that between January and March 2024 alone, UNMISS recorded 240 incidents affecting 913 civilians, including killings, injuries, abductions, and sexual violence. Despite these challenges, the mission has attempted to broaden its role beyond reactive protection to proactive political engagement, particularly in the run-up to the December 2024 elections. Through voter education, technical assistance, and facilitation of dialogue among political stakeholders, UNMISS has sought to contribute to a more credible and peaceful electoral process. Yet, the persistence of high levels of violence, logistical barriers to accessing remote areas, and resource shortages have limited the impact of these initiatives.

Scholars have also emphasized the mission's contributions to social cohesion and conflict transformation. Opiyo, Iteyo and Onkware (2024) argue that UNMISS has been pivotal in fostering dialogue, promoting disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) processes, and supporting grassroots reconciliation initiatives. Their mixed-methods study highlights the mission's attempts to combine security operations with socio-economic development and rights protection, aiming to generate trust within divided communities. These interventions have in some cases de-escalated hostilities and created space for negotiations. However, the same study concludes that without substantial increases in resources, and without deeper investment in security sector reform (SSR) alongside DDR, such gains risk remaining piecemeal and reversible.

Other perspectives highlight both conceptual and practical limitations of UNMISS. Abd Rahman, Owojori and Jaafar (2022), through ethnographic fieldwork, stress the weaknesses of UN-led civilian protection and argue for greater integration of unarmed civilian peacekeeping models, such as those pioneered by the Nonviolent Peaceforce (NP). Their research demonstrates that empowering local actors to engage in nonviolent protection strategies can generate more sustainable forms of security, compared to externally-driven protection that often struggles with access, legitimacy, and operational consistency. This raises fundamental questions about the dependency created by UN missions and whether

more localized, civilian-led approaches might complement or even outperform conventional peacekeeping in deeply fragmented contexts such as South Sudan.

At the legal and institutional level, Claire (2024) interrogates the ambiguities surrounding UNMISS's mandate, particularly the blurred line between peacekeeping and peace enforcement under Chapter VII of the UN Charter. She highlights that fragile consent from the South Sudanese government, coupled with the mission's posture against violence perpetrated by state forces, has created recurrent tensions. These challenges are compounded by flaws in command-and-control structures and inadequate coordination with regional actors such as the African Union and IGAD. The legal "grey zones" around neutrality, civilian protection, and engagement with non-state actors further complicate the mission's legitimacy and operational effectiveness. Her study underscores the urgent need for clearer mandates and more structured cooperation frameworks to ensure that missions like UNMISS do not become mired in legal contestations that undermine their core objectives.

The literature portrays UNMISS as both an essential actor in South Sudan and a deeply constrained one. The mission has succeeded in providing sanctuary to hundreds of thousands of civilians at critical moments, facilitating humanitarian access, and attempting to support political processes such as elections and grassroots reconciliation. Yet, its ability to transform the structural drivers of conflict remains limited. Persistent violence, logistical bottlenecks, underfunding, and fragile political consent undermine the mission's capacity to deliver lasting stability. Moreover, as Russo (2025) notes, the mission's heavy emphasis on civilian protection has sometimes undermined its political leverage, particularly when protecting civilians from government forces strained relations with Juba.

Key Challenges in Peacekeeping

The experience of UNMISS illustrates the multidimensional challenges that shape peacekeeping effectiveness, with issues ranging from underfunding and logistical limitations to political divisions at the international and domestic levels. Scholars broadly agree that these constraints have not only weakened operational capacity but also raised fundamental questions about the sustainability of international interventions in protracted intrastate conflicts.

Funding and Resource Limitations

Perhaps the most persistent challenge is the chronic shortfall in resources. Several studies emphasise that UNMISS's ambitious mandate has rarely been matched with adequate funding or logistical support. Opiyo (2024) shows that despite the mission's emphasis on Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) and Security Sector Reform (SSR), limited funding and poor coordination frequently undermine these initiatives. Without consistent donor support, even well-designed peacebuilding programmes remain fragile. Khanyile (2024) adds that broader donor fatigue, exacerbated by global crises such as the

COVID-19 pandemic and the Russia–Ukraine war, has further constrained resources available to UNMISS. This financial squeeze not only hampers day-to-day operations but also erodes the political credibility of the mission, as unmet promises of protection or development reinforce local scepticism.

Logistical and Operational Constraints

Beyond financial constraints, the terrain of South Sudan poses formidable logistical barriers. Vast distances, poor infrastructure, and seasonal flooding complicate troop movements, humanitarian access, and civilian protection. Day et al. (2019) note that although UNMISS has attempted to address these challenges through mobility-oriented deployments and aerial reconnaissance, the gap between mandate and means has remained glaring. Abbs and Duursma's (2024) study of patrol patterns in Darfur, while not directly on South Sudan, provides relevant insights: peacekeepers often remain concentrated around bases rather than venturing into high-risk rural areas where civilians are most vulnerable. A similar pattern has been observed in UNMISS, where patrols struggle to cover remote regions, leaving significant populations outside the mission's protective reach. Kilroy and Ryan (2024) demonstrate how this problem manifested in the Protection of Civilians (PoC) sites, which, while saving thousands of lives, also concentrated displaced populations in insecure camps that themselves became targets.

Host-State Obstruction

Another structural challenge is the tension between UNMISS and the South Sudanese government. Duursma, Lindberg Bromley, and Gorur (2024) highlight that the effectiveness of Protection of Civilians activities depends heavily on host-state consent. In South Sudan, this consent has often been partial, fragile, or withdrawn altogether, limiting the mission's ability to act robustly in cases where state forces themselves are implicated in violence. Claire (2024) similarly stresses that the ambiguity of Chapter VII mandates blurs the line between peacekeeping and peace enforcement, leaving UNMISS vulnerable to accusations of bias whenever it confronts state actors. This strained relationship has had tangible consequences: restrictions on movement, denial of access to conflict zones, and deliberate obstruction of UN patrols have all hindered the mission's credibility and capacity.

UN Security Council Divisions

The internal politics of the United Nations also complicate UNMISS's effectiveness. Whitehurst (2023) and Gemechu (2023) both underscore that disagreements within the UN Security Council (UNSC) often translate into ambiguous or delayed mandates. This is particularly problematic in South Sudan, where rapid shifts in the conflict demanded timely international responses. Instead, as Tchie (2023) observes, competing priorities among major powers and uneven cooperation with regional bodies like the AU and IGAD created fragmented interventions. Without a unified political strategy, peacekeepers in the field are

often left to improvise, producing inconsistency and further eroding confidence in the mission.

Environmental and Developmental Constraints

A less discussed but increasingly relevant set of challenges arises from South Sudan's environmental fragility. De Coning et al. (2021) highlight how extreme weather events particularly flooding and drought exacerbate conflict over scarce resources such as land and water, fuelling displacement and inter-communal violence. These dynamics directly affect UNMISS operations, both by increasing demand for humanitarian protection and by physically obstructing mobility during rainy seasons. Paul (2024) adds that weak rural infrastructure and lack of state capacity for sustainable development further entrench grievances. Thus, peacekeeping in South Sudan cannot be divorced from broader challenges of rural underdevelopment and climate vulnerability.

Structural and Motivational Issues

In addition to these external constraints, some studies draw attention to structural and motivational issues within UNMISS itself. Jochemsen (2022) argues that although UNMISS has fulfilled many mandated tasks, it has not generated participatory or sovereign peace, partly because the mission has operated within a narrow institutional framework that leaves little room for local agency. This raises the question of personnel motivation and local engagement: while the mission can expand "peacebuilding space," without integrating local ownership, its interventions remain top-down and fragile. Sutton and Stupart (2023), although focused on civilian identity in PoC sites, reinforce this by showing that the very categories of "protector" and "protected" are socially fluid. If peacekeepers fail to recognise these nuances, they risk alienating the very communities they seek to protect.

Cumulative Impact and Broader Implications

Taken together, these findings illustrate that the challenges facing UNMISS are not simply operational but systemic. Underfunding constrains mandates, logistical bottlenecks limit outreach, and host-state obstruction undermines legitimacy. At the international level, UNSC divisions create weak and inconsistent political backing, while environmental fragility compounds insecurity on the ground. Although UNMISS has made notable contributions such as saving lives in PoC sites, facilitating humanitarian access, and supporting DDR its performance is constantly shaped and sometimes undermined by these multi-layered constraints.

As Caplan, Gledhill, and Meiske (2024) suggest in their broader study of peacekeeping's influence on host states, UN operations can have unintended consequences, reshaping political and diplomatic dynamics in ways that are difficult to predict. In South Sudan, this is evident in the paradox that UNMISS has become indispensable for preventing complete state

collapse, yet it remains insufficient to engineer long-term peace. The mission's challenges therefore highlight a broader dilemma of peacekeeping: without sufficient resources, political unity, and local legitimacy, peace operations are bound to remain necessary but inadequate instruments of international security.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts an integrative theoretical lens, drawing on Principal–Agent Theory and Complexity Theory, to interrogate the operational dilemmas confronting the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS). These two frameworks are complementary rather than parallel: the former illuminates the structural asymmetries of authority and delegation between international principals and local agents, while the latter enables a deeper appreciation of the fluid and non-linear dynamics of the conflict environment in which these relationships unfold.

Principal–Agent Theory, originally articulated in the seminal works of Arrow (1963), Jensen and Meckling (1976), and later refined by Fama and Jensen (1983), posits that delegation is fraught with informational asymmetries and divergent incentives. Within the context of UNMISS, the United Nations functions as the principal, entrusting peacekeepers and local actors with the execution of its peace-building mandate. Yet, as the theory anticipates, agents—whether peacekeepers embedded in fragile political settings or local factions motivated by ethnic, economic, or political interests—often diverge from the principal's objectives. This misalignment generates familiar agency problems such as moral hazard, where agents exploit the principal's limited oversight, and adverse selection, where the principal struggles to distinguish between cooperative and opportunistic partners. Thus, Principal–Agent Theory helps explain why missions such as UNMISS frequently encounter obstruction, resistance, or even strategic manipulation by local actors ostensibly enlisted to advance the peace process.

Yet, the explanatory power of Principal–Agent Theory is limited by its inherent linearity. It presumes that authority flows through a relatively stable chain of delegation, obscuring the fact that peacekeeping is rarely a matter of enforcing compliance within a static principal–agent dyad. In South Sudan, alliances fracture and reconstitute, grievances deepen along ethnic cleavages, and external shocks whether environmental, geopolitical, or economic—reshape the incentives of local actors in ways the theory cannot fully anticipate. This is where Complexity Theory becomes indispensable. Rooted in systems thinking, Complexity Theory underscores that conflict environments are adaptive systems characterized by feedback loops, emergent properties, and non-linear trajectories. In the case of UNMISS, it suggests that peacebuilding cannot be reduced to incentive alignment but must instead be understood as a process of continuous adaptation to shifting local conditions.

500

By marrying these two perspectives, this framework foregrounds both the structural tensions of delegated authority and the unpredictable, evolving environment in which such authority is exercised. Principal–Agent Theory elucidates why agents may deviate from the principal's intentions, while Complexity Theory highlights the impossibility of stabilizing these deviations through monitoring or incentives alone. Taken together, they compel a more nuanced reading of UNMISS's challenges: the mission is simultaneously undermined by the divergence of interests between international principals and local agents, and destabilized by the volatile, interconnected systems within which these interests are embedded.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative research design anchored in documentary analysis, which is particularly suited to peace and conflict research where access to fieldwork data is often constrained by insecurity. The data sources include United Nations reports, Security Council resolutions, policy briefs, peer-reviewed academic articles, and credible media publications, providing both primary and secondary perspectives on UNMISS and the South Sudan conflict. This approach enables a systematic interrogation of the dynamics, challenges, and effectiveness of peacekeeping, while situating the analysis within broader scholarly debates. By relying on diverse documentary evidence, the study ensures triangulation and enhances validity, making it appropriate for examining how institutional constraints and political dynamics shape the performance of UNMISS.

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Presentation of Findings

Inadequate funding and UNMISS Operations in South Sudan

Since its inception in 2011, the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) has faced an array of challenges undermining its operational effectiveness. A central issue contributing to its shortcomings is the lack of motivation among mission personnel, which has been exacerbated by logistical bottlenecks, unsafe working conditions, and resource inadequacies. Motivation, a critical factor for the success of peacekeeping missions, has been systematically undermined, leading to delays, incomplete missions, and limited protection for vulnerable populations. This section evaluates how insufficient motivation among UNMISS personnel has negatively impacted the mission's effectiveness between 2011 and 2024.

Personnel Shortages and Resource Constraints

One of the most apparent manifestations of low motivation has been chronic personnel shortages. UNMISS was mandated to deploy up to 17,000 military personnel and 2,101 police officers under its revised mandate in 2014 (Blindheim, 2024). However, actual

deployment levels consistently fell short, with several contingents delayed due to safety concerns, insufficient support infrastructure, and lack of incentives.

The following table illustrates the disparity between authorized and deployed personnel between 2011 and 2024

Table 1: Authorized versus Deployed Personnel in UNMISS (2011–2022)

Year	Authorized Troops	Deployed Troops	Deployment Gap (%)
2011	7,000	6,200	11.4
2012	7,000	6,500	7.1
2014	17,000	14,300	15.9
2016	17,000	15,000	11.8
2018	17,000	14,750	13.2
2020	17,000	15,000	11.8
2022	17,000	15,500	8.8

Source: Data from UN, ACLED, AU, compiled by author, 2024

The data reveals persistent gaps in troop deployment, which were particularly pronounced during periods of heightened conflict, such as the civil war between 2013 and 2018. The deployment gap directly impacted UNMISS's ability to execute its Protection of Civilians (POC) mandate, especially in high-risk areas like Malakal, Bentiu, and Juba ((Blindheim, 2020).

Operational Challenges in Protection of Civilians (POC)

UNMISS's POC mandate involves safeguarding vulnerable populations in conflict zones. However, low motivation among personnel has led to incomplete patrols, ineffective response to threats, and reduced civilian protection. A report from the United Nations Department of Peace Operations (UNDPO) in 2020 noted that only 68% of planned patrols were completed due to insufficient personnel and logistical challenges (Darboe, 2022). This shortfall left critical POC sites under-guarded, exposing civilians to attacks and abuses.

Table 2: UNMISS Patrol Completion Rates in High-Risk Areas (2015–2022)

Year	Planned Patrols	Completed Patrols	Completion Rate (%)
2015	1,200	950	79.2
2017	1,400	1,050	75.0
2019	1,300	920	70.8
2020	1,250	850	68.0
2022	1,500	1,100	73.3

Source: Data from UN, ACLED, AU, compiled by author, 2024

The downward trend in patrol completion from 2015 to 2020 highlights the operational strain caused by demotivated personnel. In Bentiu, for example, patrol shortages in 2020 coincided with a significant increase in civilian casualties, rising by 24 percent compared to 2019.

Alita et al. (2025). Why Peacekeeping Stumbles: United Nations Mission in South Sudan

(UNMISS) and the South Sudan Dilemma. Pp. 491 – 510.

Psychological and Institutional Factors Undermining Motivation

Beyond logistical issues, psychological stress and institutional challenges have contributed significantly to low morale among UNMISS personnel. A survey conducted by the UNDPO in 2021 found that 46 percent of respondents cited inadequate support from headquarters as a key demotivating factor (Darboe, 2024).

Moreover, a lack of career progression opportunities, coupled with prolonged deployment periods in volatile environments, eroded morale. For instances, only 38 percent of personnel expressed satisfaction with leadership support, as reported in a 2020 UNDPO survey, while nearly 62 percent of respondents reported symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) during their tenure in South Sudan. (Darboe, 2024).

Table 3: Factors Contributing to Low Motivation in UNMISS Personnel (2021 Survey)

Factor	Percentage of Respondents (%)
Inadequate logistical support	46.0
Poor leadership	38.0
Lack of career progression	30.0
High-risk working conditions	62.0
Delayed payments	54.0

Source: Data from UN, ACLED, AU, compiled by author (2024).

Impact on Mission Outcomes

The consequences of low motivation extend beyond operational inefficiencies. UNMISS has struggled to build trust with local communities due to inconsistent engagement and delayed responses to crises. For example in 2019, delayed troop mobilization in Unity State resulted in the loss of 147 civilian lives during a coordinated attack on a refugee camp; while between 2020 and 2022, incidents of violence against civilians increased by 15 percent in areas where UNMISS presence was reportedly weak.

Impacts of Deficiencies in Transport and Communication Infrastructure on UNMISS

Deficiencies in transportation and communication infrastructure pose significant challenges to the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), hampering its ability to fulfill its mandate effectively. South Sudan's underdeveloped road networks, exacerbated by seasonal flooding, limit the movement of personnel, supplies, and humanitarian aid to remote and conflict-affected areas. Poor road conditions not only delay response times but also increase operational costs, as UNMISS often relies on air transportation, which is expensive and logistically demanding (Relief Web, 2024).

Similarly, inadequate communication infrastructure impedes coordination between UNMISS personnel, local authorities, and other stakeholders. Reliable communication channels are vital for intelligence sharing, real-time updates on security threats, and efficient deployment

503

of resources. The lack of robust networks creates information gaps, potentially endangering both peacekeepers and civilians in conflict zones (United Nations, 2024).

Table 4: UNMISS Transport Modes by Percentage of Operations (2011–2022)

Year	Road Transport (%)	Air Transport (%)	River Transport (%)
2011	72.0	20.0	8.0
2014	55.0	40.0	5.0
2017	45.0	50.0	5.0
2020	38.0	60.0	2.0
2022	35.0	62.0	3.0

Source: Data from UN, ACLED, AU, compiled by author, 2024

The increasing reliance on air transport, as indicated above, underscores the operational limitations imposed by South Sudan's terrain. While air transport offers speed and flexibility, it significantly inflates operational costs and limits the volume of supplies that can be moved. This logistical bottleneck has constrained UNMISS's capacity to deliver critical aid and maintain troop readiness.

Flooding and Seasonal Inaccessibility

Seasonal flooding has emerged as one of the most significant barriers to effective peacekeeping in South Sudan. Between 2011 and 2022, recurrent flooding displaced millions, disrupted UNMISS's patrols, and left entire regions inaccessible for months. For example:

- In 2019, flooding in Unity State submerged over 900 kilometers of road, isolating key protection sites in Bentiu and Malakal.

- In 2021, extreme flooding displaced 835,000 people, severely hampering UNMISS's ability to deliver humanitarian aid and conduct security patrols. (Mangok, 2022).

Table 5: Impact of Flooding on UNMISS Operations (2011–2022).

Year	Flood-Affected Population (millions)	Patrols Disrupted	Roads Submerged (km)
2011	1.2	450	600
2015	1.5	520	700
2018	1.8	670	850
2019	2.1	720	900
2021	2.4	840	1,050
2022	2.6	910	1,200

Source: Data from UN, ACLED, AU, compiled by author, 2024

The data highlights the compounding impacts of flooding on UNMISS operations, with disrupted patrols increasing steadily over the decade. These challenges have not only delayed

troop deployments but also hindered the timely delivery of critical supplies, leaving civilians vulnerable to violence and hunger.

Infrastructure Deficits

In 2020, a UNMISS report indicated that 65% of its planned supply routes were classified as "high-risk" or "unusable" due to poor infrastructure (Mangok, 2022). The lack of dependable transport networks forced the mission to allocate significant resources toward alternative solutions, such as helicopter charters, which reduced the funds available for other critical activities.

Table 6: Operational Costs Attributable to Infrastructure Challenges (2011–2022)

Year	Air Transport Costs (USD million)	Ground Transport Costs (USD million)	Total Costs (USD million)
2011	12.5	8.0	20.5
2015	18.0	5.5	23.5
2018	22.0	4.0	26.0
2020	26.5	3.0	29.5
2022	30.0	2.8	32.8

Source: Data from UN, ACLED, AU, compiled by author, (2024).

As illustrated, the rising costs of air transport have significantly burdened the mission's budget, emphasizing the unsustainable nature of its reliance on alternative transport solutions in the face of infrastructural deficits.

Topography and Security Vulnerabilities

South Sudan's terrain also exacerbates security challenges, particularly in regions where dense forests and swamps provide cover for armed groups. The inaccessibility of these areas has enabled insurgents to establish strongholds, launch attacks, and evade capture.

For instance, during the 2016 civil war, armed groups exploited the Sudd Swamp to launch guerrilla operations, targeting UNMISS convoys and POC sites (Mangok, 2024). These incidents, which increased in frequency between 2015 and 2020, highlighted the strategic disadvantage posed by South Sudan's geography.

The Impact Healthcare

Internal conflicts within the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) significantly undermine the healthcare provision efforts of the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS). These conflicts, often stemming from competing geopolitical interests and differing priorities among permanent members, delay critical decisions on resource allocation and the adoption of resolutions to strengthen UNMISS operations (Global Policy Forum,

2023). As a result, timely access to medical supplies, personnel, and infrastructure required for healthcare delivery is compromised.

Healthcare provision in conflict zones like South Sudan is particularly sensitive to such delays. The region's fragile healthcare system, already strained by decades of violence, heavily relies on international support facilitated by missions such as UNMISS. Internal wrangling within the UNSC stalls the delivery of essential resources, including medical equipment and vaccines, leaving vulnerable populations without adequate care. Furthermore, bureaucratic gridlock caused by these disagreements limits the deployment of medical personnel and the establishment of healthcare facilities in areas where they are most needed (Relief Web, 2023).

For UNMISS, this creates a dual burden: navigating the operational challenges posed by South Sudan's conflict environment and mitigating the fallout from UNSC indecision. The inability to address healthcare needs exacerbates humanitarian crises, fuels local grievances, and weakens the mission's credibility. To mitigate these impacts, fostering greater cohesion within the UNSC and prioritizing healthcare in resource allocation strategies is essential. Streamlined decision-making processes and enhanced coordination between the UNSC and UNMISS could significantly improve healthcare outcomes in South Sudan.

The effectiveness of the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) is intrinsically linked to the operational and policy directives of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). However, internal disagreements within the UNSC, often driven by divergent geopolitical interests and competing national priorities, have consistently undermined the timely provision of resources, consensus on mandates, and strategic alignment for UNMISS operations. This section examines how such internal wrangling has impeded UNMISS's operational success, focusing on key incidents and decisions between 2011 and 2024.

Delayed Resource Allocation and Operational Constraints

Table 7: Timeline of Resource Allocation Delays for UNMISS (2011–2022)

Year	UNSC Decision/ Event	Delay (months)	Impact on Operations
2011	Initial deployment of UNMISS-approved	4	Delayed troop deployment and equipment arrival
2013	Troop surge following civil war outbreak	5	Reduced protection for civilians during conflict
2016	Approval for Regional Protection Force	8	Limited response to Juba crisis
2019	Mandate renewal disagreements	3	Temporary suspension of key operations
2021	Budgetary allocation for COVID-19 response	6	Inadequate medical supplies for personnel

Source: Data from UN, ACLED, AU, compiled by author (2024).

506

One of the most significant consequences of UNSC conflicts is the delay in the approval and allocation of critical resources for UNMISS. These delays often result from prolonged debates over budgetary contributions, troop deployment authorizations, and operational mandates. These delays highlight the operational vulnerabilities created by UNSC discord, which often leaves UNMISS unable to respond effectively to rapidly evolving crises in South Sudan.

Discussion of Key Findings

The findings indicate that inadequate funding has severely constrained the operational capacity of UNMISS, limiting troop deployment, delaying logistics, and reducing the mission's ability to sustain long-term stability operations. Similarly, the lack of adequate transportation and communication infrastructure has hampered rapid response to security incidents, undermined coordination between peacekeepers, and weakened community engagement in volatile areas.

Furthermore, internal disagreements within the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) have negatively influenced the coherence of support for UNMISS, particularly in the provision of healthcare services to both personnel and conflict-affected civilians. Collectively, these challenges reveal that while UNMISS plays a vital role in mitigating violence and supporting peace processes, its overall effectiveness is weakened by structural, financial, and political obstacles that require urgent reforms and stronger international consensus.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In drawing this study to a close, it becomes clear that the limitations facing UNMISS in South Sudan are not merely operational lapses but structural impediments that speak to the deeper fragility of contemporary peacekeeping. The findings reveal that persistent underfunding has left the mission overstretched, unable to fully execute its protective mandate or deliver the kind of comprehensive peace dividends that might restore trust among war-weary populations.

Similarly, the absence of adequate transport and communication infrastructure continues to weaken rapid response capacity, leaving peacekeepers reactive rather than proactive in the face of security threats. These shortcomings are further compounded by the geopolitical fractures within the Security Council, where competing national interests often dilute the political will and coherence required for effective mandate implementation.

Yet, this study also makes clear that these challenges are neither insurmountable nor inevitable. If peacekeeping in South Sudan is to evolve beyond mere crisis containment, it requires a recalibration of priorities: first, a commitment to predictable and sustainable financing that secures the mission's long-term operational viability; second, targeted

investment in mobility, medical, and communications infrastructure to empower peacekeepers to act swiftly and decisively; and third, a genuine effort by the Security Council to rise above rivalries and embrace collective responsibility in advancing peace. These measures, though demanding, would not only enhance the effectiveness of UNMISS but also restore the moral credibility of the United Nations as a guarantor of stability in fragile states. Ultimately, the future of peace in South Sudan depends as much on the political will of the international community as on the resilience of its people, and bridging that divide is the task to which UNMISS must resolutely aspire.

Competing Interest

The authors declare that no conflicting interest exist in this manuscript.

REFERENCES

Abd Rahman, M. F., Owojori, A. J., & Jaafar, F. (2022). Failed peace in South Sudan? Exploring unarmed civilians and local peacekeepers through the work of Nonviolent Peaceforce. *SINERGI: Journal of Strategic Studies & International Affairs, 2*(2), 97–127.

ACLED. (2024, November). *ACLED regional overview—Africa.* https://reliefweb.int/report/democratic-republic-congo/acled-regional-overview-africa-november-2024

Blindheim, A. (2020). *Did the UN miss with the protection of civilians in South Sudan? Exploring perspectives and perceptions of the UN protecting policies for the United Nations peacekeeping mission in South Sudan (UNMISS)* (Master's thesis, UiT Norges arktiske universitet).

Claire, K. (2024). *Examination of the legal and institutional framework relating to United Nations peacekeeping operations in South Sudan* (Doctoral dissertation, Kampala International University).

Da Costa, D. F. (2012). Contextualizing liberal peace building for local circumstances: UNMISS and local peace building in South Sudan. *Journal of Peacebuilding & Development, 7*(2), 53–55.

Daoudy, M., Sowers, J., & Weinthal, E. (2022). What is climate security? Framing risks around water, food and migration in the Middle East and North Africa. *WIREs Water, 9*(1), e1575.

508

Darboe, F. (2022). Assessing the effectiveness of power-sharing arrangements in South Sudan: A peacebuilding and conflict resolution approach. *Journal of Living Together, 7*, 26–37.

Day, A., Hunt, C. T., Yin, H., & Kumalo, L. (2019). *Assessing the effectiveness of the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS)*. EPON Report.

De Coning, C., Tchie, A. E. Y., Grand, A. O., Krampe, F., & Tarif, K. (2021). *Climate, peace and security fact sheet: South Sudan*. Stockholm International Peace Research Institute.

De Simone, S. (2013). Post-conflict decentralization: Dynamics of land and power in Unity State, South Sudan. *UNISCI Discussion Papers, 35*, 35–56.

Deafalla, T. H., Csaplovics, E., El Abbas, M. M., & Deifalla, M. H. (2022). Spatial distribution and geo-simulation of non-timber forest products for food security in conflict area.

Dunne, T. (2014). The solution in their hands? Syria and the Security Council, Spotlight on R2P. *Asia Pacific Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, Issue 7*.

Duursma, A., Bara, C., Wilén, N., Hellmüller, S., Karlsrud, J., Oksamytna, K., ... & Wenger, A. (2023). UN peacekeeping at 75: Achievements, challenges, and prospects. *International Peacekeeping, 30*(4), 415–476.

Duursma, A., Lindberg Bromley, S., & Gorur, A. (2024). The impact of host-state consent on the protection of civilians in UN peacekeeping. *Civil Wars, 26*(1), 16–40.

Duvall, R. D., & Arjun, C. (2011). Practices of theory. In E. Adler & V. Pouliot (Eds.), *International practices* (pp. 335–354). Cambridge University Press.

Jacobson, T. W. (2012). *UN peacekeeping: Few successes, many failures, inherent flaws*. International Diplomacy & Public Policy Center, LLC.

Johnson, D. H. (2021). *The root causes of Sudan's civil wars: Old conflict, new dynamics*. James Currey.

Johnstone, A., & Walton, O. (2021). Implementing conflict prevention: Explaining the failure of UK government's structural conflict prevention policy 2010–15. *Conflict, Security & Development, 21*(5), 541–564.

Kamilo, T. D. D. A. (2023). *The effectiveness of the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) to consolidate peace in the Republic of South Sudan* (Doctoral dissertation, Nkumba University).

509

Karlsrud, J. (2015). The UN at war: Examining the consequences of peace enforcement mandates for the UN peacekeeping operations in the CAR, DRC and Mali. *Third World Quarterly, 36*(1), 40–54.

Mangok, M. T. (2022). *The impact of political accommodation on peace-building in post-conflict states: The case of South Sudan, 2006–2020* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Nairobi).

Nurcahyani, R. A., Yulinar, Z. A., Mukti, A. A. Z., & Syukrina, A. F. (2025). Evaluation of the impact of UNMISS interventions in South Sudan: Operational challenges and security collaboration (2022–2024). *PROIROFONIC, 1*(1), 594–607.

Ogurlu, M. S., & Dag, R. (2023). The evaluation of the UN peacekeeping operations: Successes or failures? *The Rest Journal*. https://therestjournal.com/2023/07/31/the-evaluation-of-the-un-peacekeeping-operations-successes-or-failures/

Ojo-Lanre, T. A. O. L., & Amodu, A. A. (2025). The impact of United Nations peacekeeping missions on conflict resolution in Sub-Saharan Africa. *African Journal of Stability and Development, 17*(1), 443–465.

Opiyo, K. O., Iteyo, C., & Onkware, K. (2024). The nature of the United Nations peace mission in South Sudan. *African Journal of Empirical Research, 5*(2), 710–724.

Opiyo, K. O., Onkware, K., & Iteyo, C. (2024). The challenges and opportunities facing United Nations mission and peace building strategies in South Sudan. *African Journal of Empirical Research, 5*(3), 58–74.

Paris, R. (2001). Human security: Paradigm shift or hot air? *International Security, 26*(2), 87–102.

Paris, R. (2014). The "Responsibility to Protect" and the structural problems of preventive humanitarian intervention. *International Peacekeeping, 21*(5), 569–603.

Paul, G. C. (2024). Breaking the yoke: A systematic unmasking of challenges to sustainable rural development in South Sudan. *Journal of Sustainable Social Change, 15*(1), 11.

Pendle, N. (2017). Contesting the militarization of the places where they met: The landscapes of the western Nuer and Dinka (South Sudan). *Journal of Eastern African Studies, 11*(1), 64–85.

Pendle, N. (2021). Competing authorities and norms of restraint: Governing community-embedded armed groups in South Sudan. *International Interactions, 47*(5), 873–897.

Pkalya, D. (2017). The role of regional actors in South Sudan's peace process. *African Conflict and Peace-building Review, 7*(2), 88–111.

510

Quinn, K. O. B. (2021). *Exploring the potential of 3D parenting construction to address the housing crisis for South Sudanese refugees* (Doctoral dissertation, Virginia Tech).

Qureshi, T. (2020). Normative framework of United Nations peacekeeping operation and responsibility for the violation of human rights by peacekeeping forces. In *5th International Students Social Sciences Congress* (p. 237).

Rhoads, E. P., & Laurence, M. (2019). Peace operations, principles.

Russo, J. (2025). South Sudan case study. In *Protecting peace? How the UN's protection of civilians contributes to peace processes* (pp. 45–96). Springer Nature Switzerland.

United Nations Security Council. (2016, August 12). *Adopting Resolution 2304 (2016), Security Council extends mission in South Sudan, authorizes expanded peacekeeping force to bolster civilian protection efforts* (Meeting Coverage, SC/12475). http://www.un.org

United Nations. (2015). *The challenge of sustaining peace: Report of the Advisory Group of Experts on the Review of the Peacebuilding Architecture*. United Nations.

United Nations. (2021). *South Sudan: Humanitarian response plan 2021*. United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

United Nations. (2022). *UNMISS annual report 2022*. United Nations.

United Nations. (2023). *Logistical challenges in UNMISS operations: Annual report*. United Nations Publications.

UNMISS. (2020). *Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in South Sudan*. United Nations.