Prioritization and Sequencing by Peacekeepers: LEADING FROM THE FIELD

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2018, the United Nations produced a Declaration of Shared Commitments on U.N. Peacekeeping, which has now been endorsed by 154 U.N. member states. The declaration included a commitment by member states to pursue prioritized and sequenced mandates for peacekeeping missions. For his part, the U.N. Secretary-General committed to proposing parameters for the prioritization and sequencing of mandates. This report contributes to a project by the U.N. Department of Peace Operations to develop those parameters.

The goal of prioritizing and sequencing mandates is to ensure that peacekeeping missions’ mandates are tailored, achievable, and effective. Prioritization and sequencing aim to ensure that peacekeeping missions are focusing their efforts strategically on the activities that will help them to achieve their most important objectives at any given time, rather than spreading their efforts thinly across many disjointed activities. In this way, prioritization and sequencing are intended to maximize peacekeeping missions’ overall impact.

A companion report by Security Council Report, Prioritisation and Sequencing of Council Mandates: Walking the Walk?, explored how prioritization and sequencing can be advanced through better mandates. Our report, however, asks how prioritization and sequencing can be advanced in the field by peacekeeping missions themselves. The two reports are complementary and should be read in conjunction. Drawing on analysis of five peacekeeping missions (UNAMID in Darfur, MONUSCO in the Democratic Republic of Congo, UNMISS in South Sudan, MINUSMA in Mali, and MINUSCA in the Central African Republic), we offer the following findings.

Concepts and Mandates

Despite two decades of advocacy for prioritization and sequencing, there has been limited progress toward operationalizing these ideas. This is in part because reform efforts have focused almost exclusively on how prioritization and sequencing can be achieved through mandates. Prioritization and sequencing should be understood as a field-driven process rather than a mandate-driven process. The Security Council should start producing mandates that enable prioritization and sequencing in the field, instead of treating mandates themselves as the forum for prioritization and sequencing. The Security Council can do this by crafting mandates that are tailored to the context and focused on stating strategic objectives instead of listing tasks. This would allow missions greater flexibility to determine how to prioritize and sequence their own activities to achieve the strategic objectives.

Efforts to implement prioritization and sequencing are also hindered by faulty conceptual models or assumptions. The Council and the Secretariat should reject linear models of conflict transformation, which assume a specific succession of tasks should be carried out along a set conflict-to-peace continuum. Rather, the focus should be on prioritizing and sequencing tasks flexibly according to needs on the ground. Similarly, the Council has embraced a comprehensive concept of peacekeeping, expecting missions to address both immediate drivers of violence as well as root causes of conflict despite short time frames and limited national capacities. The Council and the Secretariat should ask themselves tough questions about whether it is realistic for peacekeeping missions to address root causes, and ensure that missions are adequately resourced to address those root causes if so. Finally, the Council and the Secretariat should embrace a more nuanced and political role for rule-of-law components, instead of seeing these capacities as technical and focused largely on institution-building.
Mission Leadership
In order to enable more field-driven prioritization and sequencing, **senior leadership in the field should offer a clear vision of each mission’s political strategy**, and translate that vision into what it means for each component’s activities. Mission leaders should be more consistently engaged in decision-making for setting, planning for, executing, and evaluating priorities, and in communicating these decisions to the rest of the mission. These expectations should guide the selection of new senior mission leaders, and should be communicated to mission leaders through induction training, information requests, personnel evaluations, and guidance. The Security Council should reinforce these expectations by requesting information on how missions are prioritizing and sequencing their activities.

Mission Processes
Missions have developed new approaches and good practices to improve their processes for prioritization and sequencing. These include innovative processes to collaboratively define and plan for shared priorities, to evaluate and revise priorities, and to sequence the activities of different mission components together with the U.N. agencies, funds, and programs that collectively make up the U.N. country team (UNCT). **The Secretariat should capture and share these good practices, so that they can be more consistently applied by field missions.** The Secretariat should also produce research and guidance on how to address challenges that missions face in prioritization and sequencing in partnership with the UNCT, where there are particular ongoing gaps.

Mission Capacities
One of the biggest impediments to effective prioritization and sequencing in peacekeeping missions is inadequate planning capacities. **Member states should strengthen missions’ planning capacities.** This could take many forms, including adding more planners to existing mission planning units; adding dedicated planners in the mission headquarters and/or in field offices with strategic importance; integrating military, police, and civilian planners; integrating planners from missions and UNCTs; and co-locating mission and UNCT planners. **The Secretariat and member states should also strengthen missions’ analytical capacities by developing analytical frameworks for prioritization and giving missions access to analysts with different expertise, such as regional experts and political economists.**

Budget and Personnel Arrangements
Many mission personnel are concerned that member states will criticize them or reduce their budgets if they do not report that they have implemented every task listed in the mandate. But this rigidity is incompatible with the flexibility needed for prioritization and sequencing: if everything is a priority, then, effectively, nothing is a priority. **Member states and the Secretariat should proactively encourage missions to reallocate posts and funding flexibly** to enable prioritization and sequencing as conditions on the ground change. Some new flexible arrangements may be possible since the Secretary-General’s 2019 Delegation of Authority to the field, but field missions require greater clarity about what new budgeting or personnel arrangements are available. Flexible arrangements are critical to ensure that missions can reallocate resources to focus on different activities in response to changing priorities.
INTRODUCTION

Prioritization and sequencing lie at the heart of discussions on peacekeeping effectiveness. The goal of prioritized and sequenced mandates is to ensure that peacekeeping missions’ mandates are tailored, achievable, and effective. Prioritization and sequencing aim to ensure that peacekeeping missions are focusing their efforts strategically on the activities that will help them to achieve their most important objectives at any given time, rather than spreading their efforts thinly across many disjointed activities. In this way, prioritization and sequencing are intended to maximize peacekeeping missions’ overall impact.

The idea of prioritization and sequencing has a long history in U.N. peacekeeping reform. In 2000, the Brahimi Report (the first comprehensive review of U.N. peacekeeping) identified unrealistic and unachievable mandates for U.N. peacekeeping missions as a threat to effective peacekeeping. This theme has been echoed in many peacekeeping reform initiatives since then, and has received broad rhetorical support across member states, the Secretariat, and experts. Most recently, the idea of prioritized and sequenced mandates was emphasized in the Action for Peacekeeping reform initiative, launched in 2018. Policymakers and practitioners today view prioritization and sequencing as key to achieving “clear, realistic, and up-to-date” mandates.

Historically, most discussion of prioritization and sequencing has focused on mandates — ensuring that the mandates produced by the U.N. Security Council do not burden peacekeeping missions with too many disparate or unachievable tasks. In this report, we examine prioritization and sequencing from a field-driven perspective. We ask what peacekeeping missions are doing, and could do better, to prioritize and sequence activities in the field, and what changes need to be instituted by member states, the Secretariat, and senior mission leaders to facilitate those processes.

Our report builds on the companion report Prioritisation and Sequencing of Council Mandates: Walking the Walk?, published by Security Council Report in January 2020. The Security Council Report analysis focuses on how the Security Council (together with the Secretariat) has tried to operationalize the idea of prioritization and sequencing through mandates. Our report complements this analysis by examining how the concepts have been operationalized in the field. Together, the two reports aim to support the implementation of the Action for Peacekeeping commitment “to pursue clear, focused, sequenced, prioritized and achievable mandates,” as well as the Secretariat’s commitment to develop parameters for prioritization and sequencing.
Building on the definitions proposed by Security Council Report, we understand prioritization as a process that aims to ensure that the mission is focusing its resources and capacities on activities that directly advance its most important objectives. We define sequencing as a process that aims to determine the best timing for the mission to implement those activities in order to achieve its most important objectives. We propose that sequencing falls into two types: “feasibility sequencing,” or the sequencing of different activities based on whether conditions are conducive to their implementation at a given time, and “strategic sequencing,” or the sequencing of different activities based on how their relative timing or interaction could produce the desired outcome.

Our report begins by summarizing basic processes that missions apply to prioritize and sequence their activities. Next, it presents innovations and good practices that some missions have recently added on top of these basic processes, which could serve as models for other missions. The report then outlines the main gaps that undermine prioritization and sequencing in the field: gaps in mandates and concepts, leadership, processes, capacities, and budget and personnel arrangements. Finally, it offers recommendations on how peacekeeping missions in the field can address these gaps and better prioritize and sequence their activities to strengthen their impact.

**Methodology**

The report focuses its analysis on five peacekeeping missions: the U.N.–African Union Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID), Sudan; the U.N. Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUSCO); the U.N. Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS); the U.N. Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), and the U.N. Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA). These missions were selected because they are all large, multidimensional, currently deployed peacekeeping operations whose mandates are renewed regularly and have included recent language on prioritization. (The U.N. Interim Force in Lebanon, or UNIFIL, also received some mandated language on prioritization, but this language appears not to have had a significant effect on the mission’s activities, and so the mission was excluded from this analysis.)

The report draws on a documentary analysis of reports of the Secretary-General, budget reports, mission concepts, and protection of civilians strategies for the five missions. It also draws on interviews with more than 150 interlocutors, conducted between June 2019 and July 2020. This includes interviews conducted during visits to Mali in August 2019 and the Democratic Republic of Congo in November 2019 with representatives of peacekeeping missions, U.N. country teams, international nongovernmental organizations, and civil society. The report’s analysis is further informed by additional field interviews conducted between 2014 and 2019 with peacekeeping personnel and other stakeholders in the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Mali, and South Sudan. To protect the anonymity of the interviewees, detailed citations of author interviews are not provided.
BASIC PROCESSES FOR PRIORITIZATION AND SEQUENCING

This section summarizes the basic processes for prioritization and sequencing instituted in the five missions examined over the past several years. More recent innovations piloted by the five missions that augment these basic processes are outlined in the “Innovations and Good Practices” section on page 16.

Basic Processes for Prioritization

Processes for prioritization within missions vary considerably, but for the five missions under review, there are considerable gaps and many processes have developed ad hoc. The variation in process among missions is a function of many factors, including the extent to which senior mission leaders see prioritization as an important part of their work and the strength of missions’ planning capacities.

Through a combination of efforts by the Secretariat, the Security Council, and field missions themselves, several basic processes have been established to support missions with priority-setting. After the Security Council authorizes a mandate, if priorities need to be revisited, the U.N. Department of Peace Operations’ integrated operational teams in New York lead the development of a mission concept. The mission concept is intended to help translate the mandate into a strategy that outlines the plan for the mission’s implementation of mandated tasks. While the mission concept is generally expected to outline a strategy that spans the full duration of the mission, it may be revised when conditions on the ground or the mission’s mandate change significantly. The mission concept generally contains several elements, such as a context analysis, a description of the mission’s end state, planning assumptions, and risk factors. It also often states the mission’s priorities (interpreted from the mandate), and sometimes presents a series of phases that correspond to different focuses for the mission from the present to the mission’s closure. In this way, the mission concept offers some guidance to the mission on prioritization and sequencing.

Mission concepts used to be developed by missions themselves, but this process changed in 2019 (linked to other changes made pursuant to the Secretary-General’s Delegation of Authority directive, which took effect in January 2019). Now, mission concepts are developed by Secretariat counterparts in New York in close consultation with heads of mission (though this default process can be changed if a mission and the Secretariat agree otherwise). Missions also now sometimes produce their own mission plan (also referred to as a mission strategy or vision). In some cases, the mission concept and mission plan complement each other (e.g., the former taking a very high-level and/or long-term approach, and the latter taking a more practical and/or medium-term approach), while in other cases there is significant duplication. Mission plans may take any format or include any contents that the mission leadership wishes, though forthcoming guidance from the Secretariat on mission plans may create greater consistency across missions and address duplication between mission concepts and plans.

All of the missions examined for this study held a mission retreat after receiving a new mandate. The retreat is an opportunity for senior mission leadership (including chiefs of staff, directors of mission support, heads of components, heads of field offices, and mission planners) to parse the new mandate and adjust their priorities accordingly. The mission retreat is thus a forum for mission leaders to set a strategic vision for the coming year.
Based on discussions at the mission retreat and the development of the mission plan, other strategy documents may be prepared or adjusted. These include mandatory documents, such as protection of civilians strategies (which are required of all missions with protection of civilians mandates) or gender strategies (translating the Department of Peace Operations’ gender policy to country- and mandate-specific contexts), as well as nonmandatory documents, such as political strategies (outlining the mission’s political objectives and how it intends to achieve them) and field office strategies (translating the mission’s strategic priorities to each field office context). These strategies may be stand-alone documents or integrated into mission plans or other strategic documents.

Meanwhile, after the release of a new mandate and the occurrence of a mission retreat, mission planners commence a process of planning for the mission’s priorities (in practice, the planning process often begins even earlier, e.g., based on information the mission receives about whether and how the Council is likely to alter the mission’s mandate). Military and police planners develop or adjust concepts of operations to guide activities for the uniformed components (this process is led by military and police planning counterparts in New York, but in more established missions the documents may be primarily developed in the field). Civilian components develop or adjust section plans (usually annual plans, but sometimes also multiyear work plans), which lay out at a more operational level the types of activities that they intend to undertake to fulfill the parts of the mandate that pertain to them.

Personnel in mission support and planning units work to ensure that resources and finances are distributed to enable the activities that a mission intends to undertake in the new mandate period. Budget reporting processes drive mission planning to a large extent. Missions’ proposed budgets are generally prepared and approved well before missions receive their new mandates; this means the budgets may require adjustment based on any changes in the mandates (see page 38). Although they are called “results-based” budgets, they in fact do not capture results. Rather, budget reports present the expected accomplishments, indicators of achievement, and outputs expected for the missions over the fiscal year. As such, they do not provide the missions with meaningful information about whether mission activities are contributing toward the execution of mission priorities as expected. (This is a gap that the Comprehensive Performance Assessment System, described further on page 16, was designed to fill.) Missions are required to produce budget-performance reports for the results-based budget process. These reports are a way for missions to report to member states about how they have used the funding provided to them.
Some missions have also developed a few operational tools to guide the execution of priorities. These include protection of civilians matrices (which ask missions to identify on a regular basis the areas with the most severe threats to civilians, and identify how missions will respond with protection interventions in each area) and early warning matrices (which ask missions to identify on a regular basis the areas that are at greatest risk for insecurity, to inform decision-making about mission presence and activities).

In addition to prioritizing their own activities, integrated missions are also expected to engage in shared prioritization with U.N. agencies, funds, and programs, collectively known as the U.N. country team (UNCT). All multidimensional U.N. peacekeeping missions operate under the principle of integration; all missions examined for this study except UNAMID are also structurally integrated, with one of the mission’s deputy heads also serving as the country’s humanitarian coordinator and another as resident coordinator (the senior-most officials responsible for coordinating the UNCT’s humanitarian and development efforts, respectively). Integration is intended to “maximize the individual and collective impact of the United Nations’ response.”

In theory, integration should involve missions and UNCTs working together to identify and execute shared priorities to achieve the greatest possible impact. However, most interviewees did not believe that there were strong processes implemented for shared prioritization between missions and UNCTs (see page 32). Several interviewees said that shared priority-setting largely happened at two stages: first, when agreeing on shared priorities, roles, and responsibilities at the start of a mission (and sometimes when there was a dramatic change in conditions on the ground), and second, when agreeing on shared priorities, roles, and responsibilities as the mission began to plan its exit.

At the field level, missions and UNCTs are expected to engage in shared prioritization guided by the U.N. Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework, a revised version of the U.N. Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF). The Cooperation Framework is intended to be the starting point for UNCT activities in each country context. It took effect in some countries at the beginning of 2020, with a gradual rollout planned to other countries. It aims to drive “planning, implementation, monitoring, reporting and evaluation of collective U.N. support for achieving the 2030 Agenda.” The Cooperation Framework incorporates some changes that might improve shared prioritization by missions and UNCTs compared to the UNDAF — for example, it has shifted from the one-time country analysis that informed the UNDAF to an iterative country analysis that is better suited to evolving situations. The signature of the Cooperation Framework is also intended to kick off a budgeting process, unlike the UNDAF, which is not directly linked to funding.

Missions and UNCTs may also articulate their shared priorities through the Integrated Strategic Framework (ISF). The purpose of an ISF is “to bring together the mission and the UNCT’s mandates around a set of agreed priorities and measures to maximize the individual and collective impact of the United Nations system on the country/context’s peace consolidation needs.” The ISF must contain a “clear definition and expression of peace consolidation priorities for the UN, including for national capacity development and institution-building.” The Integrated Analysis and Planning Handbook notes that the priorities identified in the ISF may be related to programming (e.g., priorities related to disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration of ex-combatants, or DDR), policy (e.g., common approaches to address gender), and/or operations (e.g., sharing assets).

In theory, for peacekeeping missions, the ISF or Cooperation Framework sits directly under the mandate, and above the mission concept, in the hierarchy of prioritization tools. In practice, however, these tools have often not been used to substantively influence the prioritization and sequencing of either mission or UNCT activities (see page 32).
Basic Processes for Sequencing

Sequencing has received much less attention than prioritization in U.N. reform discussions at UN Headquarters, and also receives much less attention in field settings. While most interviewees for this study engaged readily on the topic of prioritization, they generally had far less to say on the topic of sequencing. Some did not initially see a meaningful distinction between the two concepts, and assumed that the highest-priority activities should be done sooner and the lowest-priority activities should be left to later. Many interviewees said that sequencing was seen for the most part as a technical issue, largely left to heads of components to manage, and rarely discussed at the senior mission leadership level.

We identify two types of sequencing that are relevant for peacekeeping missions. The first is “feasibility sequencing,” or the sequencing of different activities based on whether conditions are conducive to their implementation at a given time. This is by far the most common way that sequencing was conceptualized in our interviews with peacekeeping personnel. The second type is “strategic sequencing,” or the sequencing of different activities based on how their relative timing or interaction could produce the desired outcome.

Many interviewees felt there was significant potential for greater feasibility and strategic sequencing in peacekeeping settings, and that more sequencing could enhance peacekeepers’ impact in the field. Several interviewees also said that the simple fact of being prompted to think about these questions systematically could make a big difference to their effectiveness — but that these questions did not consistently arise through their usual processes. Unlike with prioritization, interviewees tended not to reference mandates as starting points for missions’ thinking on sequencing. This is in large part because the Security Council has been far less specific on sequencing in mandates than it has been on prioritization.

Most sequencing in peacekeeping missions happens at the component level. Each component has its own approaches with respect to sequencing. Some sequencing approaches are captured in guidance documents, while many others are more informally held as conventional wisdom or developed through field experience. Components’ sequencing approaches then shape the contents of military and police components’ concepts of operations and civilian components’ work plans.

### Feasibility Sequencing Considerations

- Does the mission have the capacity to implement this activity?
- Do national/international stakeholders have the capacity or will to support this activity?
- Are the political conditions in place to enable this activity?
- Are the security conditions in place to enable this activity?

### Strategic Sequencing Considerations

- Which geographic areas should be addressed first and which addressed later?
- Which activities could have the biggest impact if implemented sooner?
- Which activities could complement or build on one another?
- Which activities could undermine or create tensions with one another?
- Which activities are most urgent from national stakeholders’ perspectives?
However, there are very few standard processes within peacekeeping missions that involve sequencing across different components. The main exception is in the development of mission concepts, mission plans, and other strategy documents, which sometimes describe an intention for the mission to emphasize different activities at different times. For example, the 2016 mission concept for MONUSCO and the 2013 mission concept for MINUSMA both projected different phases for mission activities from the time of mission concept development through the missions’ eventual transitions, putting greater emphasis on different areas in each phase. At present, relatively few mission concepts or other strategy documents explicitly include an analysis of sequencing (though guidance for mission concepts is currently under revision and may recommend that this sequencing analysis be included more consistently in the future).

In the five missions examined for this study, strategic sequencing across different components tended to occur ad hoc, in the context of specific initiatives or campaigns rather than through regular processes. The sequencing required for these initiatives might be developed through written strategies, senior management meetings, meetings of new or existing working groups, and similar mechanisms. A well-known (though heavily criticized) example of this approach is MONUSCO’s 2014 “islands of stability” initiative. Spearheaded by then-Special Representative of the Secretary-General Martin Kobler, this initiative was based on a “shape-clear-hold-build” sequenced approach originally developed for counterinsurgency operations. The mission planned to conduct joint military operations with the Congolese armed forces to clear armed groups from key population centers, and then deploy military or police personnel from the mission and/or the Congolese security sector to secure the areas. It then planned to implement a range of stabilization and conflict transformation initiatives from the mission’s civilian components, introduce quick impact projects, and facilitate access for the UNCT to provide urgent assistance. Finally, it aimed to work with the Congolese government to ensure that “all the ingredients of the State” were restored to recently stabilized areas, from a functioning judiciary to basic services like health and education.\textsuperscript{18} Kobler’s vision was also geographically sequenced, as it aimed to gradually increase the number of these “islands” until ultimately the mission achieved a “continent of stability” across the country.\textsuperscript{19}

Similar models of strategic sequencing, combining military or police operations to establish security, civilian component initiatives for stabilization and conflict transformation, support for humanitarian and development assistance from the UNCT, and support to the state to deliver basic...
services, have been attempted in other instances as well. Examples include MINUSCA’s initiative to reopen access to a Muslim cemetery in the PK5 neighborhood of Bangui in 2016, and MONUSCO’s responses to the Yumbi massacre in 2018 and herder-farmer tensions in Minembwe in 2019.

Another example of strategic sequencing across different components can be seen in UNMISS’s efforts to foster the return and reintegration of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in South Sudan in 2019. The mission’s approach involved sequencing a range of activities targeted at the displaced populations themselves, communities living in potential areas of return, and state and non-state authorities. These activities included facilitating a reconnaissance visit by IDPs to assess conditions for return; “establishing a working group to deal with housing, land, and property issues”; supporting local authorities to produce action plans for returns; supporting the government to launch a cleaning campaign in potential areas of return; sensitizing IDPs, host communities, local authorities, and other stakeholders on their responsibilities with respect to returns and reintegration; and coordinating with the UNCT on resilience and recovery programs to support returnees.

The earlier examples all illustrate ad hoc approaches to cross-component sequencing to advance specific initiatives (stabilization, freedom of movement, IDP returns). In our research, we also encountered a few rare examples of systematic approaches to cross-component sequencing. For example, since April 2020, MINUSMA’s field office in the Mopti area has been working with the UNCT to apply a sequenced approach to their collective efforts. They decided to collaborate to identify common areas of priority and develop six integrated action plans, identifying main priorities for what they wanted to achieve in each of the six locations and what role each actor would play toward achieving those priorities. They then used their monthly integrated meetings, known as One U.N. meetings, to check in on progress. They found that progress had been particularly slow for the action plan in the Djenne area, where their priority had been to facilitate voluntary returns of IDPs. To achieve the goal, a large number of activities were needed from different components, agencies, funds, and programs. These included conducting humanitarian needs assessments, establishing police and force presence, building shelters, implementing livelihood programs, implementing social cohesion and reconciliation programs, and liaising with local authorities. Through joint analysis at One U.N. meetings, they realized that improper sequencing of these activities had been contributing to slow progress in Djenne, and worked to revise the sequencing of activities in their action plan.

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MONUSCO’s support for the International Security and Stabilization Support Strategy (ISSSS) in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is another example of systematic sequencing across different components. Like the Mopti example, the ISSSS involves a peacekeeping mission applying strategic sequencing considerations through a systematic process to inform programming across multiple mission components (in the case of the ISSSS, in support of a national government action plan). Yet there were limits to both of these attempts at systematic sequencing: In the case of MINUSMA, it was restricted to one field office, and in the case of MONUSCO, the ISSSS was only one factor of many that informed the programming of the relevant mission’s components.

Overall, the basic processes for prioritization and sequencing described above leave many gaps that undermine mission effectiveness. Missions have developed creative practices to augment some of these basic processes, which are described in the next section. Yet deeply rooted and systemic gaps remain, and we examine these in subsequent sections.
INNOVATIONS AND GOOD PRACTICES

In this section, we outline a few recent innovations and good practices piloted by the five missions examined for this report, which augment the basic processes described in the previous section. These innovations were developed by individual missions to address challenges they were experiencing, but they could be learned from, adapted, and applied by other missions. It is worth noting that there are many more examples of innovation in prioritization than in sequencing — an illustration of the relatively little attention that sequencing has received. Some of these good practices may be reflected in forthcoming guidance from the Secretariat on mission plans. The guidance aims, among other things, to help missions articulate their priorities through the mission plan, as well as the roles that each component will play in service of those priorities.

1. Leadership clearly articulating mission priorities. UNMISS’s leadership has been particularly clear about its priorities and how it communicates them to the rest of the mission. The strategy developed in 2017 defined two “pillars” for the mission’s work: protecting civilians and building a durable peace. All of the mission’s activities were expected to contribute to one or both of these pillars. Under UNMISS’s “effects-based” approach, components and field offices were tasked with explaining how the activities they propose to undertake will contribute to the mission’s two

Comprehensive Performance Assessment System

One important innovation that has contributed to some of the examples mentioned in this section is the Comprehensive Planning and Performance Assessment System (CPAS). This is a tool designed to improve the effectiveness of peace operations, and ultimately aims to inform decision-making by mission leaders to enhance the impact of mandate implementation (e.g., how a mission can plan for integrated mandate delivery, conduct an evidence-based performance assessment, and adjust as necessary). The system is relatively recent; it began its rollout in August 2018 and has been gradually introduced into all missions examined for this study. As such, CPAS’s long-term impact on performance assessment is yet to be seen.

CPAS aims to provide evidence-based performance assessments that could help inform and systematize prioritization and sequencing in peacekeeping missions. For example, CPAS requests each mission to define one or more priority objectives (i.e., the main objectives the mission’s leadership wishes to focus on, derived from the mandate). It then requires missions to link their priority objectives to intended outcome and intended impact indicators. This performance assessment aims to enable senior leaders to track the impact that mission mandate delivery is having within the current context, to assess whether activities are in fact advancing the mission’s priorities as intended and help them change course as needed.

Moreover, the processes that CPAS recommends may help to make prioritization less ad hoc in missions. For example, CPAS recommends setting up integrated working groups bringing together key personnel from each component involved in executing each priority objective. These working groups could be a useful forum for tracking the execution of priorities at an operational level. CPAS also involves sharing analysis on the mission’s performance and recommendations attached to that analysis with mission leadership via both a report and through an online dashboard. This process could be a useful forum for engaging senior leadership in discussions and decision-making on prioritization, and ensuring that those decisions are disseminated to the rest of the mission. Some of these processes are already beginning to take place in a few missions, and CPAS contributes to several of the recent innovations and possible good practices for prioritization and sequencing, identified in this section.
strategic objectives, and finding ways to measure their impact. The approach is still relatively new, but it could help mission personnel develop a clearer understanding of the leadership’s vision and how different parts of the mission are expected to contribute to that vision. A study by the Effectiveness of Peace Operations Network raised some criticisms of the effects-based approach, including that 1) a culture of impact measurement was not yet embedded across the mission, and 2) many parts of the mission had merely repackaged plans that they had developed earlier.

2. Defining priorities through a collaborative process. UNAMID recently adopted a less siloed approach to priority-setting at its mission retreat. The mission had for many years held a retreat after it received each new mandate, where senior mission personnel (including the joint special representative and deputy joint special representative, the force commander, the police commissioner, the chief of staff, heads of civilian components, the mission support director, the chief of security, and the head of strategic planning) gathered to discuss the new mandate, and each component presented their proposed activities for the coming mandate period. In 2019, spurred by the pressure to plan for UNAMID’s departure as well as by the preferences of the mission leadership team, the retreat took a different format. Mission personnel identified the priority objectives defined by the mandate, and then all components that were expected to contribute to each objective collaborated on a joint presentation. For example, instead of an individual presentation by the protection of civilians advisor, as was done in previous years, a joint presentation was made by the different components that contribute to the protection of civilians in UNAMID. One mission representative said that this format helped the retreat participants to consider which of their activities were most important to achieve the core objectives, and how they could collaborate with other components to execute them.

3. Aligning mission components behind common priorities. In 2017, MINUSCA developed its first written political strategy, which was informed by an analysis of sources of violence in the Central African Republic, including the perpetrators’ motivations and capacities, and what kinds of interventions were likely to influence their behavior. The strategy included approaches to influence each of these perpetrators, broken down into four components in the political strategy: local dialogue initiatives, military or police actions, programmatic tools such as community violence reduction, and state-building support. This strategy allowed different mission components to see the contributions they could make through their different means toward the common goal of reducing the threat posed by armed groups. This helped the mission better integrate the activities of its military, police, and civilian components. It also helped highlight the contributions that
different components of the mission make toward political objectives — including components like DDR or justice, and corrections that are often wrongly understood as playing “technical” rather than “political” roles.

4. Aligning local and national priorities. UNMISS developed a mission strategy for 2017-19, identifying the protection of civilians and the building of a durable peace as the two strategic priorities of the mission. The Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) issued a directive identifying operational priorities for each field office designed to advance the two strategic priorities. Each field office was then required to develop an integrated plan, laying out how the mission’s and the UNCT’s activities in that area would contribute to the operational priorities. This ambitious approach attempts to tie together the national and field office levels as well as to coordinate the work of the mission and the UNCT. The 2019 study by the Effectiveness of Peace Operations Network relayed some concerns around the implementation of this approach, including that 1) coordination between the military and civilian components was sometimes undermined because the military’s command structure did not align neatly with the civilian field office command structure, and 2) the success of the approach depended upon the capacity of the head of field office, in which there was significant variation.

5. Defining tailored local priorities. MONUSCO has applied a more decentralized approach to setting priorities through the introduction of “comprehensive protection plans.” While the protection of civilians remains the top priority across the mission, these locally tailored strategies gather all relevant components around the table to devise a plan and identify priority activities to effectively protect from a specific, local protection threat. For example, the first comprehensive protection plan was designed around eliminating the threat posed by the Patriotic Resistance Force of Ituri (FPRI) armed group in and around Bunia. When comprehensive protection plans were first implemented in MONUSCO, the mission struggled to implement them as a result of a lack of capacity at the field office level to effectively plan and sequence. This challenge was partially alleviated when MONUSCO established field joint operations centers, which allowed heads of field offices to focus more of their time on their duties as head strategists and mission representatives.

6. Rapidly adapting to new priorities. In the context of presidential elections in the DRC in 2018, when the priority level of election efforts rose quickly, MONUSCO saw a need to strengthen and enable collaboration across components on this key priority. The mission established several thematic working groups, including one on elections security headed by the Department of Safety and Security and another on risk analysis headed by the Joint Mission Analysis Center. These working groups met weekly to discuss developments across components, and periodically briefed senior leadership on their progress toward the mission’s election support objectives.

7. Strengthening collaborative planning for priorities. MINUSMA’s strategic planning unit is particularly strong, due to both its larger size and the fact that it integrates planners from both the force and the police in addition to its civilian staff. After the introduction of a new strategic priority in its June 2019 mandate to address violence in central Mali, the mission’s strategic planning unit identified six priority areas for execution in the mandate period. These areas were aligned with the mission concept, the ISF, and the preliminary CPAS impact areas it had recently developed. It then asked the mission’s senior leadership team to designate one lead component for each of the six priority areas. Each of these lead components then determined the set of deliverables it intended to produce by the end of the mandate period. This process was intended to push mission personnel to go beyond section plans and engage in collaborative planning around shared priorities. This planning approach could potentially also enable sequencing outside the component level, since the collaborative planning process would allow different components involved in each priority area to discuss when and how to implement their activities to advance
common priorities (however, the mission did not identify examples of such sequencing happening as a result of this approach).

8. Translating priorities into operational terms. Based on MINUSCA’s 2017 political strategy, the mission leadership developed a strategic objectives matrix for each field office that translated the political strategy into practical objectives for each field office. These objectives were reviewed every month or two months by the deputy heads of mission together with senior personnel from military, police, and civilian components in mission headquarters and field offices to determine their relevance and feasibility, as well as the required resources. These matrices helped the mission compare the relative level of priority of each field office’s work — for example, to decide where to allocate scarce assets in a given month based on the mission’s strategic priorities. It also helped the mission translate from the political strategy document (which needed to define priorities in a way that would remain relevant over a years-long time scale) to the operational context of a rapidly changing conflict environment (for which activities needed to be revised every month or two).

9. Evaluating and revising prioritization and sequencing. In mid-2020, MINUSMA’s protection of civilians team produced an analysis of the effectiveness of temporary operating bases, looking at the relationship between the deployment of these bases and levels of violence against civilians over geographic areas and over time. It found that the deployment of a new temporary operating base created a two- to three-week window of reduced violence in that area, after which the effect dissipated. It also found that temporary operating bases were not effective at reducing violence in certain areas (such as strategically important bridges). This analysis was very relevant to the mission’s activities, since the deployment of temporary operating bases was seen as a critical component of MINUSMA’s approach to scaling up protection efforts in central Mali. The mission intends to use this analysis to inform both its prioritization (e.g., reconsidering the deployment of temporary operating bases in some areas as a priority activity for protection) as well as its sequencing (e.g., timing the implementation of civilian components’ activities so that they take advantage of the window of reduced violence after the deployment of a new temporary operating base).

10. Linking prioritization with budgets. One of the hardest challenges for peacekeeping missions seeking to prioritize their efforts is ensuring that priorities are aligned with budgets. MINUSMA has made a recent effort to address this challenge by linking CPAS evaluation with the quarterly
meetings of the senior leadership team under the framework of the integrated operational planning and coordination process. These meetings, chaired by the SRSG, are an opportunity for the leadership to evaluate progress, reassess priorities, and ensure strategic-level integrated planning. MINUSMA’s strategic planning unit has begun presenting high-level analysis of the mission’s effectiveness (developed through the CPAS framework) at these quarterly meetings, so that mission leadership can use that analysis to inform their thinking about strategic priorities over the coming quarter and ensure that revised priorities are facilitated by the mission’s budget. MINUSMA has also linked its CPAS evaluation to the development of its 2021 budget, so that the mission can better align the impact it aims to have with the way it plans to use its resources. These efforts to link CPAS with the integrated operational planning and coordination process and the budget process are an attempt to ensure that the mission can revise its priorities based on information about its impact, and that the execution of revised priorities is enabled by the mission’s budget.

11. Sequencing uniformed and civilian activities. MINUSCA’s civilian, police, and military components all work to support the extension of state authority, but had previously been planning their activities through largely separate processes. For example, the justice and corrections component together with the civil affairs component were supporting the deployment of judicial authorities; the police component was supporting the deployment of Central African police and gendarmes; and the military component was supporting the deployment of the Central African military forces. The mission created a working group on the restoration and extension of state authority to bring these components together, map their respective efforts, and analyze their effectiveness using CPAS analysis. Through this process, the working group found that the lack of sequencing was undermining the effectiveness of its efforts — for example, the deployment of judicial authorities in areas where security forces had not yet been deployed was less effective, because the security conditions needed for the judicial authorities to do their jobs were not in place. The working group responded by adopting a sequenced approach to the extension of state authority, facilitated by integrated planning among the working group members.

12. Sequencing mission and country team activities. MINUSMA’s Mopti field office has developed a new initiative that brings together the heads of each component of the mission as well as U.N. agencies, funds, and programs serving in the Mopti area to jointly develop and plan for priorities. They collectively identified six areas in the region that were considered priorities to all of them, and developed integrated One U.N. action plans for each of the six areas. They then met in their regular One U.N. monthly meetings to check in on the implementation of these action plans, address blockages, coordinate next steps, and assess what was and was not working (including by using CPAS analysis). Through this forum, they realized that the lack of sequencing was leading to problems and inefficiencies, and adjusted their approach in response. This initiative was enabled by MINUSMA’s deployment of a dedicated planning officer to its Mopti field office, who could translate the mission’s and the UNCT’s priorities into coordinated planning documents and lead the analysis of the joint efforts. (For more information on this MINUSMA initiative, see page 15.)
GAPS IN CONCEPTS AND MANDATES

The previous section highlights some innovative approaches developed by different missions to enable prioritization and sequencing, but major gaps remain. Although prioritization and sequencing has been a regular theme in peacekeeping reform initiatives since the Brahimi Report two decades ago, there has been little progress in operationalizing these ideas. This is in part due to confusion about how the terms “prioritization” and “sequencing” should be understood and applied. This was reflected in our field interviews; many peacekeeping personnel did not see a distinction between the two concepts, or have a clear idea of how they could be applied in their own missions. This section explores some of the gaps related to how prioritization and sequencing are conceptualized and treated in mandates and other strategic mission documents.

Task-Focused Mandates

Past reform initiatives have focused almost exclusively on addressing prioritization and sequencing through Security Council resolutions. Many interviewees in field missions saw mandates as a starting point for prioritization, but noted that they offer only limited help. Several interviewees said that they found the inclusion of strategic priorities or strategic objectives in mandates useful for clarifying the Council’s expectations about the mission’s priorities.

However, mission personnel sometimes found the Council’s efforts to prioritize tasks in mission mandates confusing. The Council’s efforts to prioritize have not led to fewer tasks in mandates, but rather to increasingly specific, and sometimes unhelpful, ordering of different tasks by priority level. For example, in 2015, MINUSCA’s mandate distinguished between immediate priority tasks (eight), essential tasks (three), and additional tasks (five); in 2017, it distinguished between priority tasks (four), tasks that are mutually reinforcing with the priority tasks (six), and additional tasks (five); and in 2019, the mandate distinguished between priority tasks (five), other tasks (five), and additional tasks (five). Moreover, Security Council members are removed from the field and often do not have the relevant technical expertise to prioritize tasks in this way, and these efforts at prioritizing tasks in mandates may make it harder for missions to respond flexibly to changes on the ground.

Linear Models of Conflict Transformation

Mandates, mission concepts, and other strategy documents examined for this study reveal a common belief that mission activities should be sequenced by putting greater emphasis on initially establishing physical security and supporting political processes, and then later, once the security situation has stabilized, putting growing emphasis on supporting the development of effective and accountable security, justice, and governance institutions. Support to institutions is positioned in this sequencing concept as an exit strategy for the mission — if the mission can strengthen institutions to the point where they are capable of taking over the basic functions of the state, then the mission can withdraw without fear of a relapse into violence.

Yet none of the five missions examined for this study experienced the linear model of conflict transformation that underlies this idea of sequencing. Darfur’s conflict remained in largely stagnant form until the unexpected ousting of President Bashir in 2019, with limited opportunities for support in strengthening institutions during his presidency. MONUSCO experienced a similar stagnation, with periodic spikes in violence in the east of the country (e.g., South Kivu, Ituri, and North Kivu) and elsewhere (e.g., the Kasais). The mission enjoyed little opportunity
to make lasting impact in strengthening institutions in the DRC through most of the mission’s deployment (with key exceptions, such as meaningful progress in reducing child recruitment and impunity for sexual violence among the FARDC). UNMISS enjoyed relative stability at the start of its deployment and saw a gradual growth and spreading of intercommunal violence over its first two years. It seemed to make significant progress in some rule-of-law areas early in its deployment, but this was derailed by the outbreak of the civil war, and the mission is now beginning to reengage on those issues in the context of a new political process and under very difficult circumstances. MINUSMA and MINUSCA both deployed in contexts of insecurity, and have seen conflict dynamics morph over time; even as they have managed to bring relative stability to the countries’ capital cities, they have experienced changes in armed group goals and configurations, and surges in intercommunal tensions that created significant instability of different kinds.

Several problems stem from this linear thinking. First, because it rarely matches up with the reality of conflict transformation, basing missions’ prioritization and sequencing on this unrealistic model can lead to problems with the mandates, concepts, strategies, and plans that undergird missions. This is linked to the challenge of planning for mission transitions (as discussed on page 32). If a mission is deployed with a specific end state in mind, and an assumption that that end state will be achieved through a specific, linear model of conflict transformation, then it will develop its priorities and sequencing accordingly from the outset. Yet if U.N. stakeholders abandoned that linear model, the mission may be able to prioritize and sequence in a more creative way, without a predetermined idea of how its activities should unfold over time.

Second, it obscures the vital contributions that many different capacities in peacekeeping missions can bring to bear in supporting conflict transformation at different stages. Mission leadership may be less inclined to think creatively about what roles different components can play at different times if they are guided by this model (this includes the roles of rule-of-law components, as discussed on page 23, but also other components such as human rights that can offer a wide range of capacities depending on the conflict dynamics). Third, it feeds into faulty thinking about mission transitions (as discussed on page 32). Fourth, it can exacerbate tensions with UNCTs that do not operate according to these linear models and whose presence in the country may long precede and outlast peacekeeping missions’ (as discussed on page 32).
Addressing Root Causes

Another conceptual issue that has affected missions’ ability to prioritize and sequence their activities is ambiguity over peacekeeping objectives. Over time, the Security Council has embraced an expansive concept of peacekeeping, expecting missions to address both immediate drivers of violence as well as root causes of conflict. Of the five missions examined for the study, the most recent mandates of MINUSCA and MONUSCO explicitly task the missions to address the root causes of conflict. Other missions’ mandates arguably also do so, though more indirectly (e.g., MINUSMA’s mandate tasks the mission to “support the Government’s efforts for the effective restoration and extension of State authority and rule of law throughout the territory”).

At the same time, peacekeeping missions are intended to be short-term interventions. The Security Council generally authorizes missions for one year at a time. Council members have at times expressed frustration at missions with long deployments. Moreover, all five of the missions examined for this study were deployed in places with limited national capacities to absorb support aimed at addressing root causes of conflict, which may require intensive institutional and policy reforms.

This question is fundamental to the issue of prioritization and sequencing, since it affects the scope and type of activities that missions should conduct. If activities focused on addressing immediate drivers of violence are in tension with activities aimed at addressing root causes, or if missions have limited resources to allocate between the two, which should be prioritized? For example, a mission focused on addressing immediate drivers of violence might work to address poor or inequitable governance that motivates violence by cultivating local informal governance structures, reporting on abuses by state security forces, or supporting efforts to mediate disputes between local communities. On the other hand, a mission focused on addressing root causes may wish to take a longer-term approach that is more focused on developing effective and accountable state institutions and avoids some shorter-term measures to minimize the risk that the peacekeeping mission may be seen as substituting for the state.

Given the constraints within which peacekeeping missions operate in terms of time frames, resources, and national capacities, the Council and the Secretariat should ask themselves tough questions about whether it is realistic for peacekeeping missions to address root causes of conflict. They should revisit fundamental assumptions about whether it is possible or even desirable for international actors to address root causes — particularly since some of these assumptions may be based on outdated research. They should then convey to missions their clear expectations on this question. If the Council does decide that peacekeeping missions should aim to address the root causes of conflict, this may require Council members to modify their own expectations for how long a peacekeeping deployment should last, and ensure that mission resources match this more ambitious objective.

Sequencing Rule-of-Law Activities

There is a widespread misunderstanding of the roles that rule-of-law components can play in peacekeeping missions. Within the Security Council, some parts of the Secretariat, and some parts of missions themselves, there is a widely held view that the main contribution of rule-of-law components is to help strengthen institutions. Similarly, there is a widely held view that the work of rule-of-law components is largely technical in nature, rather than political. Because human rights, the protection of civilians, and support for political processes tend to be emphasized initially in the types of multidimensional missions examined for this study, and institution-building activities emphasized later, this means that some stakeholders within the U.N. system see rule-of-law activities as less important at the start of a mission’s deployment and more important toward the end of a mission’s deployment.
This obscures the important roles that rule-of-law components can play in contexts with high levels of insecurity and the contributions they can make other than support to institutions. In environments where a political process is still being negotiated, personnel with expertise on issues like DDR, security sector reform (SSR), justice and corrections, constitutional development, and governance reform can provide insights on pitfalls to avoid and opportunities to grasp during the negotiation process. In environments with high insecurity, SSR experts can advise on systemic issues leading to violence against civilians perpetrated by state security forces and possible corrective measures, and DDR components can advise on ways to disincentivize non-state armed groups from using violence against civilians. Mine-action components can provide rapid peace dividends through the clearance of explosive ordnance in conflict-affected communities.

Several interviewees raised concerns that these misunderstandings about rule-of-law components have undermined broader prioritization efforts. Such misunderstandings have sometimes led rule-of-law components in missions to focus on the technical or programmatic aspects of their work rather than on the political aspects. This can manifest in rule-of-law components undertaking sprawling sets of disjointed projects, which do not add up to meaningful progress on core mission priorities such as the protection of civilians or support to political processes.

These misunderstandings can also exacerbate problems with shared prioritization and sequencing between missions and UNCTs (as discussed on page 24). Rule-of-law components in peacekeeping missions work on many of the same issues as U.N. agencies. In theory, rule-of-law components’ comparative advantage lies in their political role — they can draw on the good offices of SRSGs and leverage the political efforts of other mission components to advance their goals. The UNCTs’ comparative advantage, on the other hand, lies in their access to programmatic funding and their long-term presence, which sets them up to deliver more effectively on the technical or programmatic side. In cases where rule-of-law components emphasize their technical roles and not their political roles, that plays against their comparative advantages and can cause friction and poor coordination with UNCTs.

In recent years, many offices supporting rule-of-law components in peacekeeping missions have pushed back against these misunderstandings. DDR guidance includes a module on “The Politics of DDR,” which addresses, among other things, the political optics of DDR programs and the linkages between DDR and elections as well as between DDR and political processes.38 Similarly, a recent report, *The Extension of State Authority in the Areas of Justice and Corrections*, argued that efforts to extend state authority should be linked to broader political strategies, and that “[r]ule of law interventions must be politically engaged.”39 More work is needed to ensure that peacekeeping stakeholders think creatively about how and when rule-of-law components’ work contributes to each peacekeeping mission’s priorities.
GAPS IN MISSION LEADERSHIP

Many mission personnel interviewed for this project identified a lack of consistent and effective involvement by senior leadership as a critical gap in prioritization and sequencing. Mission leaders’ aptitude and willingness to prioritize and sequence varied widely between missions, depending on individual personalities and backgrounds. Without senior mission leaders who understand the need to prioritize and sequence, institute the right processes, communicate priorities to the operational level, and make decisions to keep priorities on track, missions cannot effectively prioritize and sequence. Yet this kind of engagement from mission leaders was not present in some of the missions examined for this study. As one long-serving mission representative said, “If you did a spontaneous survey in [this mission], I think you'd receive a lot of generic responses, but people couldn’t really tell you what the SRSG’s priorities for the next week or the next month would be.”

Interviewees offered a range of reasons as to why some mission leaders might not be effective at prioritization and sequencing. Some may excel at diplomacy but lack extensive experience with management roles — these leaders may have strong ideas for prioritization and sequencing, but fail to effectively translate them into action points for each component and field office. Some mission leaders may simply not see a need to prioritize or sequence beyond what is laid out in the mandate. Some mission leaders may be reluctant to define certain activities as priorities, and thus implicitly deprioritize other activities, out of concern that they might cause friction with heads of components or be criticized by UN Headquarters. Some mission leaders are unable to exert decisive authority over all civilian, military, and police components of the mission. The lack of clarity as to the respective authorities, roles, and responsibilities of the SRSG, the Deputy Special Representatives of the Secretary-General (DSRSGs), and the chief of staff, among others, in missionwide prioritization and sequencing, also plays a role.

Several interviewees described trying to come up with ways to fill the leadership gap, but struggling to implement any systems for prioritization and sequencing that did not have real buy-in from the senior leadership team and especially the SRSG. Many interviewees expressed frustration with leadership that did not engage meaningfully on prioritization and sequencing, and did not make decisions that allowed missions to focus their resources on the highest-priority objectives. Without a strong vision from the senior leadership, clearly communicated to the rest of the mission, many interviewees believed that effective prioritization and sequencing was nearly impossible.
**Political Strategy**

Political strategies are a critical vehicle for expressing the mission leadership’s vision for prioritization and sequencing. A successful political strategy should articulate the mission’s top priorities and help each component of the mission understand how and when its activities can best contribute to those priorities.

All five of the missions examined for this study were large, multidimensional missions whose priorities included the protection of civilians and support for political processes, among a wide array of other activities. Not all of them had cohesive political strategies to ensure all mission components were working together toward common political objectives. Missions faced particular challenges linking their protection and political objectives, including ensuring that military and police operations to protect civilians were undertaken, where possible, in the service of broader political goals. Missions have also sometimes struggled to link their other activities to their protection and political objectives. This can lead to disjointed initiatives that do not have lasting impact.

MINUSCA’s approach to developing a political strategy (described on page 17) was widely seen as successful at bringing together different mission components around common priorities. This political strategy took as its starting point the strategic objective identified by the Security Council in MINUSCA’s mandate, namely to “support the creation of conditions conducive to the sustainable reduction of the presence of, and threat posed by, armed groups through a comprehensive approach and a proactive and robust posture.” Among the foundation of the political strategy was an analysis of the sources of violence in the Central African Republic, including understanding who the perpetrators were, what their motivations were, and what actions might be likely to influence them. This analysis then informed decisions, articulated in the strategy, about which mission capacities to bring to bear to address each threat (through interventions aimed at armed groups, or through interventions aimed at the deeper causes of the violence). Because the political strategy was founded upon an analysis of violence, it coherently tied together the mission’s two highest priorities: the protection of civilians and support to political processes. It also ensured that all components were directly contributing to one or both of those priorities.

For this approach to be successful, mission leaders must understand the full range of capacities that each component can offer. Several interviewees from different components (including human rights and rule-of-law components) said that they did not think that senior leaders understood the varied roles their components could play.

The missions examined for this study have taken different approaches to developing political strategies. Some have produced written documents called political strategies; some have articulated political strategies through their mission plans; and some have not developed written strategies at all. Some, like UNMISS, used extensive consultations with different parts of the mission to ensure buy-in, while others, like MINUSCA, used very limited consultations to ensure that the specific vision of the senior leadership team came through clearly and to avoid “Christmas tree strategies.”

While different mission leaders may prefer different approaches, some consistency would be helpful to address major gaps. Not all missions have written strategies, but these can be useful to ensure that the leadership’s vision is clearly communicated to every part of the mission. Many interviewees in some of the missions examined for this study said they did not have a clear understanding of what the senior leadership’s priorities were. This written strategy does not necessarily have to be a separate document — for example, a mission plan could be used to articulate the mission’s political strategy. The forthcoming guidance on mission plans may help ensure that mission plans address many of these elements.
Host-State Consent

Mission leaders must make host-state consent a central focus when developing their political strategies and deciding how to prioritize and sequence mission activities. Peacekeeping missions’ deployments in the field are conditioned on the consent of host-state governments. Many activities also require host-state governments to actively cooperate with the mission: for example, to implement peace agreements, reform governance structures, strengthen institutions, extend state authority, and conduct joint operations to protect civilians. This makes host-state consent an essential consideration for mission leaders’ decision-making on prioritization and sequencing.

Host-state consent and prioritization

Mission leaders generally take the mandate as their starting point for prioritization, but are also influenced by the priorities of the host-state government. Identifying shared priorities with the government can help mission leaders maintain stronger consent and cooperation, as well as implement those shared priorities more effectively. However, every mission leader is likely to face some degree of divergence between their priorities and the host-state government’s, and this divergence can threaten to undermine host-state consent more broadly. In some cases, a divergence may emerge where the government generally welcomes the mission’s presence but wishes it to support activities that the mission considers low priority or even outside the scope of its mandate. In more serious cases, the host-state government may see the mission’s activities as directly threatening government interests.

It is important for mission leaders to carefully consider where these divergences in priorities lie, so that they can target their own good offices, and their missions’ broader strategic communications capacities, toward those areas. Understanding why these divergences have emerged can help mission leaders target their outreach. This could take the form of persuading the government that the mission’s priorities are also in the government’s interests; explaining why a government priority falls outside the mission’s mandate; developing coordination mechanisms with other actors (such as the UNCT or bilateral donors) to help fill gaps between mission and government priorities; or asserting strong and coordinated diplomacy (with support from the Secretary-General, the Security Council, or influential member states) to back the mission up on priorities that the government perceives as a threat to its interests.
Host-state consent and sequencing

Host-state consent can fluctuate over the course of a mission’s deployment based on a range of domestic and international political factors. Moreover, past experience shows us that peacekeeping missions’ own activities may sometimes trigger a deterioration of consent. Changes in host-state consent will affect both the urgency and the feasibility of different activities. This means that host-state consent should be treated as an important consideration for the sequencing of mission activities.

As mission leaders determine their priorities for the year ahead (e.g., when developing proposed budgets or during mission retreats), they should consider how their planned activities might strengthen or weaken host-state consent. This could help mission leaders identify windows of opportunity to advance more sensitive objectives and plan more realistically for activities that rely on host-state cooperation. This would require mission leaders to take a more proactive approach to host-state consent. At present, if a mission enjoys strong consent at the outset, mission leaders may not treat the strength of host-state consent as an important concern unless and until it begins to deteriorate.

Assessing host-state consent is critical to applying many of the feasibility sequencing considerations and strategic sequencing considerations listed on page 13, including:

- Do national/international stakeholders have the capacity or will to support this activity?
- Are the political conditions in place to enable this activity?
- Which activities could have the biggest impact if implemented sooner?
- Which activities could complement or build on one another?
- Which activities could undermine or create tensions with one another?
- Which activities are most urgent from national stakeholders’ perspectives?

How host-state consent might factor into tensions between activities is perhaps one of the least obvious of these questions, but it is an important consideration. The five missions examined for this study were large and multidimensional, with broad mandates authorizing numerous tasks to address many aspects of conflicts. When the Security Council authorizes these mandates, it believes that all the tasks they contain are mutually reinforcing since they are all conducted in the
service of peace and security — and indeed, that is often the case. But mission personnel in the field have sometimes found that their tasks can also come into tension with one another. Most of the tensions reported by interviewees for this study can be described as bureaucratic — for example, having to do with competition between different components over areas of responsibility or access to resources, personality clashes between heads of components, and so on. Yet some of these tensions can be characterized as substantive in that it is the activities themselves (their immediate goals, their approaches, etc.) that are in tension.

The relationship between the mission and the host-state government comprises the fault line for many of these substantive tensions. Most components in multidimensional peacekeeping missions must constantly straddle a line between maintaining impartiality (one of the core principles of peacekeeping) and soliciting cooperation and partnerships with the host-state government in order to deliver outcomes. For example, the protection of civilians by U.N. peacekeepers can require both impartiality (such as protecting civilians from violence even if the source of that violence is the host-state government itself) and cooperation with the host-state government (such as conducting joint military operations with the host-state government to protect civilians from violent non-state actors). Similarly, support to security sector reform requires impartiality (making the security sector more accountable to the people) as well as cooperation with the host-state government (making the security sector more effective at responding to violence).46

Yet, at their core, some activities particularly emphasize impartiality while others particularly emphasize cooperation and partnerships with the host-state government. These two types of activities may be more likely to experience substantive tensions with one another. Examples of activities that emphasize impartiality include human rights monitoring and reporting, efforts to protect civilians from violence perpetrated by the state (including through political dialogue or military or police operations), and in some cases supporting political processes or mediation efforts. Examples of activities that emphasize cooperation and partnerships with the host-state government include support to strengthening state institutions and support to the extension of state authority.

With systematic processes and analytical frameworks for prioritization and sequencing in place (see page 36), mission leaders could consider these tensions when sequencing activities in their specific contexts. Their analysis might lead them to implement activities that emphasize impartiality simultaneously with those that emphasize cooperation, so that they offset each other. For example, recent guidance on supporting the restoration and extension of state authority has tried to mitigate some of these tensions by recommending that greater emphasis be placed on building the legitimacy of the state at the same time as its capacity.47 On the other hand, mission leaders’ analysis might lead them to sequence these types of activities one after the other so they do not undermine each other. For example, if there is a poor perception of a mission’s legitimacy because it is seen as taking sides in the conflict, it may prefer to put greater focus on the activities that emphasize impartiality early on, and add in more activities that emphasize host-state cooperation later.
GAPS IN MISSION PROCESSES

While there is some variation across missions, processes for prioritization are generally unsystematic and incomplete. As one experienced mission representative warned, without processes in place, mission priorities sometimes emerge ad hoc, based on a single anecdote or one person’s impulsive decision.48

Many interviewees consulted for this report understood “prioritization” to mean the act of setting priorities. This very narrow understanding obscures the effort and capacities (in analysis, planning, coordination, etc.) required to change ways of working within missions and reorient activities around priorities as conditions change. Prioritization can be better understood as a cycle encompassing four different stages, described below. This understanding could help institutionalize prioritization more effectively and systematically within peacekeeping missions.

1. **Setting priorities.** This can include setting geographic priorities (identifying which geographic areas are the most important for peacekeepers to take action in) as well as setting thematic priorities (e.g., identifying which elements of a peace agreement are most important to support to prevent a relapse into violence, or which types of protection interventions are most important to reduce violence against civilians).

2. **Planning for priorities.** Developing plans detailing how, when, where, and by whom activities will be executed to achieve the priority objectives, and ensuring that the necessary resources and capacities are available to implement those plans.

3. **Executing priorities.** Ensuring that priorities are collectively understood and tracking their execution. This includes making sure that activities conducted by the mission are contributing to its stated priorities.

4. **Evaluating priorities.** Measuring the mission’s progress toward executing priorities, updating the context analysis, and assessing the mission’s future priorities accordingly. For example, if the mission is finding that it is making little progress on one of its priorities, it could consider changing the sequencing to create more conducive conditions for that priority to be implemented later, diverting more resources to that priority, removing that priority, etc. Alternatively, an evaluation might reveal that an issue that the mission has thus far treated as a low priority (or not engaged on at all) should be a high priority.

There are some standard processes in place for setting and planning for priorities, but fewer for executing priorities, and virtually none for evaluating priorities. Given the volatile contexts in which missions operate, missions need to regularly track whether their activities are contributing toward their priorities as intended, whether their plans need to be adjusted, or whether their priorities need to be adapted amid changing conditions. Missions have developed some mechanisms such as ad hoc working groups to track operations, but there remains a need in many missions for senior mission leadership involvement in tracking the execution of priorities at the strategic level in order to ensure that decisions can be made to adjust course. There is also a particular gap between strategic-level and operational-level planning; several personnel said that components’ plans often were not changed significantly to match discussions about priority objectives.

No standard internal processes exist for missions to evaluate whether they should discontinue or de-emphasize certain priorities, or add or emphasize new ones, though MINUSCA and MINUSMA have instituted recent initiatives (linked to the implementation of CPAS) to evaluate and revise their priorities. Missions also contribute to this thinking when it happens in the context of a strategic review.
Sequencing is rarely discussed at a missionwide level, and largely occurs at the component level; there are no standard processes for sequencing activities across different components. Moreover, different components each have their own processes or approaches to sequencing. This leads to ineffectiveness and missed opportunities. Interviewees suggested that the sequencing of activities that fall under the leadership of multiple components is rare in field settings, for three main reasons. First, it requires collaborative planning across different components, which is challenging given limited planning capacities and siloed organizational cultures in peacekeeping missions. Second, it requires a type of managerial engagement from mission leadership that many personnel found to be lacking. Third, given the volatility of the environments and the importance of reporting through the results-based budget process, component heads are incentivized to try to implement programmatic activities as soon as possible to reduce the risk that they might be left with unspent funds at the end of the fiscal year. This means they are reluctant for the timing of their component’s activities to be dependent on the implementation of another component’s activities.

Finally, there are particular gaps in documentation (printed or electronic products) in peacekeeping missions for communicating senior mission leaders’ decisions on prioritization. Several interviewees pointed to the lack of documentation as a significant problem for prioritization for many reasons. First, since most missions do not have an established culture of prioritization, tools or products that prompt missions to consider questions of prioritization can be valuable. Second, if there is no requirement to document decisions on prioritization, mission leaders may use discussions simply to exchange information rather than make decisions. Third, without documentation, the decisions that are reached may not be disseminated beyond the senior leadership level, or beyond the senior management level, to the working level personnel who are tasked with implementing those decisions. Fourth, uniformed personnel in general may find it more difficult to execute decisions that are not put in writing.

**Mission Silos**

Interviewees across all missions identified a tendency for different components to work on their own issue areas in silos. Interviewees reported that civilian components’ section plans and military and police components’ concepts of operations are generally developed independently of each other. This presents a serious obstacle to effective prioritization, which requires missions to combine all their resources and activities to work toward shared priorities. It also presents an
obstacle to sequencing, which requires missions to think about whether certain objectives are more likely to be reached if activities are implemented with a particular timing or in a particular order (including activities managed by different components, or by UNCTs).

Some mission personnel reported that CPAS had helped to bring mission personnel together across different components, fostering a more collaborative approach. Yet many competing factors and processes still incentivize a siloed culture. With respect to silos between different civilian components, the fact that mission budgets are structured around different components is an important factor. One planner highlighted the challenge of getting different components to collaborate on the planning and execution of the same priority, noting that in an environment of budget cuts, components are particularly incentivized to want recognition for their activities to secure continued funding, and thus disincentivized from wanting to collaborate with others and share the credit. Silos between military, police, and civilian components stem in part from largely separate planning processes, which discourages cooperation toward shared priorities or sequencing of activities by uniformed and nonuniformed personnel.

Silos between mission headquarters and field offices also impede missions’ ability to ensure that all field office activities are contributing toward the mission’s strategic priorities. Several interviewees raised concerns about field offices’ work not being sufficiently linked to missionwide priorities, some speculating that this was in part because heads of field offices were rarely involved in planning discussions at headquarters. One planner said that they had previously tried to engage heads of field offices in mission-headquarters-level planning discussions, but their attempts failed as a result of concerns from the heads of field offices that they would create tensions with heads of components as well as the planning unit’s own lack of capacity.

Finally, silos between missions and UNCTs interfere with shared prioritization and sequencing and also undermine eventual transitions. In some cases, interviewees said that the mission and the UNCT largely agreed in their analysis of which issues were priorities in the country. However, many mission and agency personnel we interviewed agreed that there was little collaboration between missions and UNCTs on planning for, executing, or evaluating shared priorities, and little discussion of sequencing (though in the case of UNAMID, this changed after the mission initiated its transition planning in earnest). Most interviewees agreed that shared prioritization documents like the ISF were frequently treated as a box-checking exercise and did not influence strategies or plans on either the mission or the UNCT side. The review of the integrated assessment and planning policy, which is ongoing at the time of this writing, may help generate greater insight on these challenges, which largely fell outside the scope of this study.

Prioritization and Sequencing in the Context of Transitions

There are important gaps in understanding on how prioritization and sequencing should be approached in the context of mission transitions. The U.N. policy on transitions, and a recent planning directive on transitions issued by the Secretary-General, emphasize the importance of early planning: They underscore that transitions should be planned for from the beginning. This reinforces the importance of better-integrated prioritization and sequencing between missions and UNCTs from the outset, as described in the previous section.

A recent study on U.N. transitions identifies several problems with how transitions have been conceived that have implications for prioritization and sequencing. The study, from the U.N. University–Centre for Policy Research (UNU-CPR), offers several findings with implications for prioritization and sequencing during transitions, including the following.
Sequencing drawdowns geographically based on security conditions can have drawbacks. The study describes MONUSCO as having taken a “phased” approach to its transition over the past few years, gradually reducing and redeploying its military presence in the DRC based on analysis of security conditions. It notes that this gradual approach to transition has the benefit of flexibility, allowing the Council to scale the mission’s presence up or down as conditions change. But it also notes that this approach, in emphasizing security as the main determinant of the mission’s reduced presence, plays into the DRC government’s refusal to engage with human rights and good governance dimensions of the mandate.

- **Funding structures may undermine sequencing.** Differences in financing structures for missions and UNCTs, and a reduction in donor interest as missions pull out, can mean that funding reduces sharply in the years following mission exits. This means that a sequencing approach based on the UNCT taking on greater tasks after the mission withdraws may not be feasible in practice under current funding structures.

- **Elections may undermine sequencing plans.** Elections are often cast as final milestones before peacekeeping mission exits. However, a new government (if one is elected) may not agree with the transition plan that the mission developed with the previous government, which can render any prioritization and sequencing planning obsolete. The implication for sequencing is that the Council should consider allowing more time after elections before closing missions.

- **Sequencing flexibly based on risk analysis can be valuable.** Even in contexts that appear relatively stable, there is a risk that conflicts will reemerge during or soon after a mission’s exit. The study recommends developing configurations that are tailored to the risk of relapse (e.g., the police capacity of the UN Mission for Justice Support in Haiti or the rule-of-law capacity of the UN Integrated Office in Haiti. In other words, it recommends that sequencing in transition contexts should be based on risk analysis, and that sequencing should not be understood as following a template through which peacekeeping missions “hand over” to special political missions and/or UNCTs with their respective typical responsibilities.
The “Nexus” Approach in the DRC

In May 2018, the Joint Steering Committee on the New Way of Working identified the Democratic Republic of Congo as one of five priority countries for implementing a Nexus approach to coordinating security, humanitarian, and development actors. This framework equipped MONUSCO and its UNCT partners in the DRC with several tools and processes designed to streamline coordination, which is particularly important as the mission prepares to transition.

MONUSCO received a full-time Nexus advisor within the office of the DSRSG/Resident Coordinator/Humanitarian Coordinator to coordinate across stakeholders, develop a cohesive road map, and foster buy-in from multilateral, bilateral, and national stakeholders, as well as nongovernmental actors. This advisor oversaw the formation of several Nexus working groups, including provincial-level working groups and a donor working group, which met regularly to discuss joint strategy and planning. They also initiated Nexus pilot projects, where pairs of partners were selected in various thematic areas to catalyze the transition from humanitarian to development activities in three specific provinces. While the Nexus approach continues to face obstacles, such as differences in principles and organizational cultures among security, humanitarian, and development actors, and continued competition over limited funding, many interviewees believed that it had improved MONUSCO’s ability to coordinate with the UNCT as well as donors.

The State Liaison Function Approach in Darfur

In 2018, UNAMID was mandated to adopt a two-pronged approach, prioritizing peacekeeping activities in the Jebel Marra area and focusing on the transition to peacebuilding in the rest of Darfur. Pursuant to this mandate, the mission created a new State Liaison Function (SLF) framework for UNAMID and the UNCT to undertake activities in four areas where their mandates overlap: rule of law, human rights, displaced population livelihoods, and IDP service delivery. The SLFs received programmatic funding through UNAMID, but were implemented with the UNCT in the programmatic lead.

One unusual feature of the SLF structure is that it involved the co-location of UNAMID staff with the UNCT. This arrangement was intended to help UNAMID and the UNCT implement programs together in an integrated way in the four identified areas. It also helped with some of the resource and personnel challenges associated with transition, since it boosted the human resources capacities of the UNCT and allowed it to expand programming while UNAMID’s retracted, avoiding abrupt cuts to UNAMID personnel as the mission’s staffing was decreasing; and made use of the larger and more consistent funding available to U.N. peacekeeping missions to help the UNCT with its growing areas of engagement.

A forthcoming study by the Geneva Center for Security Sector Governance on the SLF model will offer more analysis about its applicability in other mission transition settings. The SLF model could also offer important lessons and interesting structures for improving shared prioritization between missions and UNCTs even when there is no active transition process underway.

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v. Ibid.
Two of the missions examined for this study were in the process of preparing for transition: UNAMID was actively planning for its imminent exit, while MONUSCO was planning for a more gradual drawdown. Each has implemented new processes to improve prioritization and sequencing with the UNCT, which may offer lessons for adopting a different approach to transitions in the future.

The 2013 U.N. policy on transitions and the Secretary-General’s 2019 directive on transitions both emphasize the need for shared prioritization and sequencing by the full U.N. presence starting early on in a mission’s deployment, which is rarely found at present. New approaches like the ones being piloted in the DRC and Darfur could offer opportunities to improve this shared prioritization and sequencing. The new Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework approach might also help alleviate some of these challenges, as discussed earlier on page 12.

But enabling a different model of prioritization and sequencing during transitions will also require different conceptual approaches by Security Council members, donors, host-state governments, and other actors. These new conceptual approaches will have to be matched by different practices around mandating, funding, and strategizing. They will also require stronger planning capacities for missions. Several interviewees raised the need for additional planning support during transitions, including to support coordinated prioritization and sequencing between the mission and the UNCT. One Secretariat representative noted that additional planners could sometimes be deployed to the field to offer additional support during transitions, but that if there were multiple transitions happening at the same time, then missions had to fight to receive additional planning support in a timely manner.55

The issue of how to improve prioritization between missions and UNCTs, particularly during transitions, deserves further research. This research could inform several ongoing processes (including a review of the policy on integrated assessment and planning, and the implementation of the country cooperation frameworks), which could have important effects on the capacity of missions and UNCTs to coordinate more closely on executing shared priorities.
GAPS IN MISSION CAPACITIES

Many peacekeeping personnel interviewed for this project identified important capacity gaps that undermined missions’ abilities to prioritize and sequence. These include gaps in planning capacities, which are critical to keep the implementation of priorities on track and to facilitate cross-component sequencing. They also include gaps in analytical tools and capacities, which are important to take a forward-looking approach to prioritization and sequencing, anticipating future changes to political and security conditions. This section describes each of these capacity gaps.

Planning Capacities

If mission leaders are the key players in setting priorities, then mission planners (under the direction of mission chiefs of staff) are the key players in executing them. Mission planners need to be able to work across the mission, enabling joint or coordinated planning by different components, between mission headquarters and field offices, and between missions and UNCTs. They need to be able to engage closely with senior mission leaders, help them track the execution of priorities, and give them the analysis they need to inform decision-making on whether and how to adjust activities. They need to inform the evaluation of priorities by senior mission leaders. And they need to manage reporting to member states on whether and why planned activities may have been changed to ensure the mission’s activities were targeted at its highest priorities.

Mission planners had different ideas about whether they needed additional personnel in order to perform all these functions. Some believed that integrating military and police planners into planning units and/or co-locating planners from across the mission could improve planning capacities without adding new personnel. Some believed that the lack of dedicated planners that could work across different components (e.g., in the offices of the DSRSGs) hindered efforts at missionwide sequencing, since there were strong incentives in place for component heads to sequence in silos that had to be overcome. Some also believed that the lack of dedicated planners at field offices hindered prioritization and sequencing at the operational level. All the mission planners interviewed for this study agreed, however, that there were very serious gaps in missions’ planning capacities that made it very difficult to operationalize the idea of prioritization and sequencing. This may be even truer for other peacekeeping missions that do not have the benefit of strategic planning units, unlike the five missions examined for this study.

Analysis Tools and Capacities

Even if the mandate makes it clear to a mission what its highest priority objectives are (for example, supporting the implementation of a peace agreement, protecting civilians, or supporting the extension of state authority), it is not always clear to the mission how to prioritize its activities to achieve those objectives. For example, support for the implementation of a peace agreement may be a priority. But if the mission has limited political capital to help urge governments or armed groups to adhere to their commitments in a peace agreement, on which elements of the peace agreement is it most critical to spend that political capital? Protection of civilians may be a priority, but if the mission has limited mobility assets to deploy to sites of current or potential violence against civilians, which ones should it prioritize?

Missions need analytical tools to help them answer these questions in a structured way. This would help missions fill gaps in defining, planning for, executing, and evaluating priorities (as discussed on page 30) and avoid challenges that arise when mission leaders define priorities ad hoc (as discussed on page 25).
In 2017, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and Department of Field Support produced a report on the role of U.N. peacekeeping missions in managing intercommunal conflict. The report recognized that missions’ approaches to intercommunal conflict had been ad hoc and recommended that missions prioritize these conflicts more systematically in order to use their resources strategically. It recommended applying a framework consisting of three criteria, namely that missions should prioritize the local conflicts that involved: 1) high rates of violence against civilians, 2) a risk of atrocities, and 3) a risk of destabilizing the national peace process. This framework could be seen as a model for developing analytical frameworks for missions to apply to their highest-priority mandated objectives, in order to prioritize how and where to act within those objectives. For example, the same three criteria could be seen as a framework for defining protection of civilians priorities for the mission more broadly.

Similar frameworks are needed to help missions prioritize activities in support of other priority objectives. For example, an analytical framework to prioritize support for peace agreements could ask missions to focus their efforts on the parts of a peace agreement where 1) failure carries the highest risk of reigniting violence, and 2) there is the greatest opportunity for the mission to have impact.

After applying analytical frameworks to define priority activities, missions could then apply analytical frameworks to determine how to sequence those activities. This could take the form of a short set of questions (such as the feasibility sequencing considerations and strategic sequencing considerations listed on page 13) to help missions determine the best timing for each activity. This would ensure that missions are consistently engaging in sequencing across different components, instead of leaving sequencing entirely ad hoc or largely siloed within components.

Analytical frameworks for this purpose must be flexible, offering a structured approach to prioritization and sequencing while letting missions apply their knowledge of the context to define their own priorities. They must also be forward-looking, allowing missions to define priorities that will remain relevant over the coming months or years. The framework examples offered above both incorporate analysis of likely future risks. If missions define priorities without attempting to anticipate major changes to political and security dynamics, the identified priorities may be quickly overtaken by events, and the missions’ attempts at sequencing will in turn be undermined.

Yet missions lack sufficient capacities for forward-looking analysis. Peacekeeping missions have joint mission analysis centers, which produce some forward-looking analysis to inform decision-making in missions, but additional capacities are needed. Regional experts are needed to help missions understand cross-border threats, regional trends, and political and security dynamics in neighboring countries that are likely to affect the mission’s area of operation. Political economy experts are also needed to help missions understand the economic dimensions of conflict. Peacekeeping missions are not mandated to support economic development, which means they do not consistently monitor and analyze these issues. But trends and events related to political economy can have very important impacts on domestic politics, armed groups’ motivations, populations’ support for political processes, host-states’ capacity to implement reforms or offer services, and more. Political economists are needed to help missions understand how these developments may affect their own planned activities and inform their prioritization and sequencing.

Human rights components could also play an important role in offering forward-looking analysis. There is a sizable body of scholarly literature in the fields of atrocity prevention and conflict prevention that analyzes the relationships between certain types of human rights violations and the outbreak of atrocities or conflict. This means considerable data are available on human rights violations as indicators of future violence. Mission leaders could more consistently ask their human rights components to share this kind of analysis to inform the application of analytical frameworks for prioritization.
GAPS IN BUDGET AND PERSONNEL ARRANGEMENTS

Prioritization and sequencing require missions to be able to flexibly scale and move personnel and resources, in order to direct resources toward the activities that are most needed at any given time. This has historically been very difficult for peacekeeping missions to do because of complex regulations around budget approval, as well as reallocating budgets and personnel. Moreover, missions have been concerned that taking these actions would trigger criticisms from member states.

One impediment is the misalignment between budgeting and mandating timelines. The timing of each mission’s mandate renewal is different based on when it was first authorized and the duration of each mandate period, which means the fiscal year and the mandate period usually do not align. In addition, a mission’s proposed budgets are prepared and approved well before it receives its new mandate, meaning the budget may require adjustment based on any changes in the mandate. This does not cause many problems for renewals when the mandate stays largely the same, but major changes to the mandate can create significant challenges for mission planners to align the budget with the new priorities.

The Secretary-General’s Delegation of Authority (DOA) directive, which took effect in January 2019, aimed to give mission leaders much greater scope to reallocate posts, personnel, equipment, and programmatic funding. Yet there was a strong divergence between perspectives in the field and at UN Headquarters about whether the DOA had in fact given missions the flexibility they needed for prioritization and sequencing.

Interviewees in New York argued that field missions had not truly taken advantage of the flexibility available to them under the DOA. Some believed that missions may not fully understand the provisions of the DOA, may not have enough experience to take advantage of them, may not want to be the first to take risks in experimenting with the new options available under the DOA, or may be using a lack of flexibility in budgets and personnel as an excuse for inaction on prioritization and sequencing.

Interviewees in the field consistently pointed to inflexible budgeting and personnel systems as major impediments to prioritization and sequencing, and said that the DOA had had very little...
effect on those impediments. They argued that the results-based budget process still required
them to report on all tasks listed in the mandate (whether or not they were identified as priorities),
meaning that in practice they had to treat all mandated tasks as priorities. They said that while they
could explain a decision not to implement a task in order to redirect those resources elsewhere,
such situations were rare and had to be justified by extraordinary circumstances. Otherwise, they
worried that failing to report in the results-based budget on the implementation of a mandated
activity would lead to budget cuts for the mission. They argued that changes to posts in missions
still had to be approved by member states, even under the DOA. They also noted that the SRSG
has relatively little influence over the recruitment of uniformed capacities (that power still lies
with the Office of Military Affairs in New York), which has also inhibited the ability of the DOA
to result in more flexible and agile missions.

The gaps described above are compounded by some endemic peacekeeping challenges over which
missions have little control, but which can hinder their ability to prioritize and sequence effectively:

- **Inadequate political influence.** U.N. peacekeeping missions are not always designated as
  the lead in negotiating or mediating a political solution, and sometimes this process is led
  by actors who are entirely outside the U.N. system. Missions can find themselves supporting
  the implementation of peace agreements over whose contents they had very little influence.
  Peace agreement signatories’ expectations are sometimes misaligned with the expectations
  the Security Council has set for the mission in its mandate.

- **Mismatched budgets and limited resources.** Peacekeeping missions are often not given
  adequate budgetary resources to effectively implement their mandates. This makes it difficult
  for missions to effectively execute all the activities that the Security Council has deemed to
  be priorities.

- **Difficult logistics and infrastructure.** Many peacekeeping missions deploy to countries
  where violence is taking place in areas with difficult terrain, poor transportation infrastruc-
  ture, and significant safety and security risks. Air assets are expensive and in high demand,
  especially in the start-up phases of a mission or during humanitarian or protection crises.
  Interviews revealed that logistical constraints were a common consideration in missions’
  decisions to prioritize certain areas or activities over others, even if this diverged from what
  they would analyze as the ideal strategy.
RECOMMENDATIONS

Concepts and Mandates

1. **Allow prioritization and sequencing to be driven by the field, not by mandates.** The Security Council and the Secretariat should understand prioritization and sequencing as a field-driven process rather than a mandate-driven process. We endorse Security Council Report’s recommendation that the Security Council should start producing mandates that state strategic objectives instead of listing tasks. This will allow missions greater flexibility to determine how to prioritize and sequence their own activities to achieve the strategic objectives. This should be matched by more supportive approaches from the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions and the Fifth Committee, where missions must also account for which tasks were prioritized over others and which have their own sets of supply-driven preferences.

2. **Reject linear models of sequencing.** In mandates, mission concepts, and mindsets, the Council and the Secretariat should embrace a nuanced understanding of how different peacekeeping components may sequence their activities over the course of a mission’s deployment. They should reject a linear model of conflict transformation, in which it is assumed that the protection of civilians and support for political processes will be prioritized at the start of the deployment when violence is high, and support for institutions will be increasingly prioritized as violence decreases until the mission can “hand over” responsibilities to the state. This model is not only unrealistic, but obscures the vital contributions that many different mission components can make at different moments in a mission’s deployment.

Mission Leadership

3. **Emphasize prioritization and sequencing in the selection of new senior mission leaders.** Although prioritization and sequencing have been important themes in peacekeeping reform for two decades, the conversation has focused almost exclusively on how they can be operationalized through mandates. To shift this process to the field, senior leaders will need to develop and communicate their specific visions for prioritization and sequencing. The Secretary-General should ensure that any senior mission leaders he appoints have the skills and experience required to prioritize and sequence mission activities.

4. **Ensure that senior mission leadership teams are trained and incentivized to engage regularly with prioritization and sequencing.** There is wide variation in mission leaders’ approaches to prioritization and sequencing, but all missions need a strong, specific political strategy from mission leadership that is clearly communicated to all components and field offices. They also need mission leaders to regularly engage in decision-making on which activities to prioritize that is informed by sound analysis from their in-mission advisors. The Secretariat should ensure through its reporting requests, personnel evaluations, and guidance (including the forthcoming guidance on mission plans) that mission leaders are engaged in these processes. This includes chiefs of staff, who have critical roles to play; as the bridge between strategic planning units and senior leaders, they are essential to harmonizing and sequencing the work of different components and field offices. The Department of Peace Operations parameters paper on prioritization and sequencing should include guidance for mission leaders on how to gauge and anticipate changes in
the strength of host-state consent, and how to incorporate this analysis into their decision-making on prioritization and sequencing. New senior leaders should receive induction training on what prioritization and sequencing mean and how to operationalize them.

5. **Offer opportunities for exchange among mission leaders.** The Secretariat should make prioritization and sequencing a theme of the next meeting of heads of peacekeeping missions, offering a platform for mission leaders to exchange ideas with one another on effective processes.

6. **Ask mission leaders to brief the Security Council on prioritization and sequencing.** If the Security Council allows prioritization and sequencing to be more field-driven, missions should in return provide more information (through Council briefings and reports of the Secretary-General) on how they are prioritizing and sequencing their activities. Instead of offering a comprehensive accounting of mission activities, reports of the Secretary-General should offer a clear narrative of what the mission is choosing to emphasize and why.

### Mission Processes

7. **Share good practices.** The Secretariat should share innovations and good practices on prioritization and sequencing processes (including those identified in this report) with the field and ensure that these good practices are reflected in its forthcoming guidance on mission plans. The Secretariat should also conduct a follow-on study to identify good practices for shared prioritization and sequencing between missions and UNCTs, share them with field missions, and use the findings to inform the revised policy on integrated assessment and planning as well as the implementation of the new country cooperation frameworks.

8. **Produce follow-up research and guidance to strengthen shared prioritization and sequencing between missions and U.N. agencies, funds, and programs.** The Secretariat should produce research and guidance on how to address challenges that missions face in prioritization and sequencing in partnership with the UNCT, particularly with a view toward eventual transitions.

### Mission Capacities

9. **Strengthen planning capacities.** In 2018, the report of the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations called for improved planning in peacekeeping missions. Member states should operationalize this by supporting stronger planning capacities in field missions to enable the planning required for prioritization and sequencing. The Secretariat should consult with individual field missions to understand the specific planning capacities and structures they need in order to effectively prioritize and sequence their activities. This could include some or all of the following:

- Increasing the number of planners in the planning unit, so that they have the capacity to reach out to field offices and heads of components to support their prioritized and sequenced planning.
- Adding new positions for strategic planning within pillars (in the offices of DSRSGs) to enable prioritized and sequenced planning across components at the strategic level.
- Adding new positions for strategic planning within field offices (i.e., in the offices of the heads of field offices) to enable prioritized and sequenced planning across components at the operational level.
• Integrating military and police planners into the planning unit to improve the sequencing of military, police, and civilian component activities.
• Co-locating all mission planners to improve sequencing across different components.
• Providing access to a standby planning capacity at headquarters that could inject necessary expertise at critical moments (including during start-up, transition, and at moments of significant change to the mission strategy) and also contribute to the aligning of priorities between the mission and UN Headquarters.

10. **Strengthen analysis capacities.** The Secretariat should develop analytical frameworks to help missions prioritize their activities. Moreover, the Secretariat should invest in analytical capacities to help missions anticipate changes to political and security dynamics that would inform thinking on prioritization and sequencing. This could include rosters to access regional experts and experts in political economy.

### Budget and Personnel Arrangements

11. **Proactively encourage flexible budget and personnel arrangements.** Many mission personnel are concerned that member states will criticize them or reduce their budgets if they do not report that they have implemented every activity listed in the mandate. This rigidity is incompatible with the flexibility needed for prioritization and sequencing: if everything is a priority then, effectively, nothing is a priority. Member states and the Secretariat should proactively encourage missions to reallocate posts and funding flexibly to enable prioritization and sequencing.

12. **Clarify the Delegation of Authority.** There are stark differences in interpretation between field missions and U.N. Headquarters on what the 2019 Delegation of Authority allows missions to do with regard to flexible budgeting and personnel arrangements. The Secretariat should redouble its efforts to work with the field to resolve these differences. The Secretariat should explicitly communicate options available to missions to improve flexibility on budgeting and personnel arrangements. These could include:

   • Limiting requests for posts to senior management (D-1 and above) and support functions (mission support and chief of staff components), and using General Temporary Assistance funding for the bulk of substantive staff functions. This would allow missions greater flexibility on hiring and internal structures based on the requirements on the ground and whether conditions are ready for various tasks.

   • Using new arrangements that allow missions to loan staff between components or to the UNCT as needed (e.g., exploring variations on the UNAMID State Liaison Function model).

Despite U.N. member states’ broad rhetorical support for prioritization and sequencing over the past two decades, little progress has been made in practice to implement these ideas. We hope that this report will offer useful ideas to U.N. member states, the Secretariat, and field missions on how to change that trend. Our recommendations aim to put the field at the center of prioritization and sequencing, and to allow senior mission leaders to think critically and act flexibly to prioritize and sequence missions’ activities. With effective prioritization and sequencing, missions will be able to focus their resources on the activities that will help them achieve their most important objectives at different points in time, meet the evolving needs on the ground, and maximize their impact to support sustainable transformations from violent conflict to peace.
ENDNOTES


5. N.B.: For ease of reference, the word “component” is used to refer to components, sections, and divisions within missions.


7. The humanitarian coordinator leads the response of the humanitarian country team, which also includes some non-U.N. entities such as the International Committee of the Red Cross.


12. Ibid.


15. Ibid., 74.


17. Security Council Report, Walking the Walk?


19. Ibid.


23. Ibid.

24. Interviews by authors.

25. Effectiveness of Peace Operations Network, Assessing Effectiveness of UNMISS, 51. The strategy refers to them as pillars rather than strategic priorities.

26. Ibid., 52.

27. Ibid., 53.
28. Ibid., 53.
40. Interviews by authors.
44. Ibid.
45. Ibid., 23.
46. On the tensions between the protection of civilians and security sector reform, see Chappuis and Gorur, “Conflicting Means, Converging Goals.”
48. Interviews by authors.
49. Interviews by authors.
50. Interviews by authors.
51. Interviews by authors.
54. Ibid., 17.
55. Interviews by authors.
57. Ibid., 19, 42.
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Prioritization and Sequencing by Peacekeepers: LEADING FROM THE FIELD

The idea of prioritization and sequencing has a long history in U.N. peacekeeping reform. Prioritization and sequencing aim to ensure that peacekeeping missions are focusing their efforts strategically on the activities that will help them to achieve their most important objectives at any given time, rather than spreading their efforts thinly across many disjointed activities. In this way, prioritization and sequencing are intended to maximize peacekeeping missions’ overall impact.

Historically, most discussion of prioritization and sequencing has focused on mandates — ensuring that the mandates produced by the U.N. Security Council do not burden peacekeeping missions with too many disparate or unachievable tasks. In this report, we examine prioritization and sequencing from a field-driven perspective. We ask what peacekeeping missions are doing, and could do better, to prioritize and sequence activities in the field, and what changes need to be instituted by member states, the Secretariat, and senior mission leaders to facilitate those processes.