Multidimensional Peacekeeping: Local Peace does not last when National Peace Fails

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Abstract: The United Nations' multidimensional operations have recently been authorised to use force to protect civilians. Among their peacekeeping activities are initiatives to deal with conflict management/resolution at the local level. While contemporary peacekeeping tends to be highly concentrated at the national level, it has increasingly striven to implement initiatives at the local level. However, local level operations face certain difficulties. To address this, the UN tends to focus on the initiatives, approaches, and strategies it employs at the local level, one of which is the use of force to protect civilians during peace operations. The present analysis revolves around the argument that 'local peace' will not last long unless a peace agreement is achieved and sustained at the national level, and, consequently, that the connection between peace and conflict at both the local and national levels is key to tackling conflicts. This paper uses primary documents, secondary sources, and interviews, as well as specific examples from operations in South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and the Central African Republic, to inductively confirm this argument, and discuss the difficulties that peace operations face on the issue.

Keywords: Peacekeeping Operations; Local Peace; Central African Republic; Democratic Republic of Congo; South Sudan**.**

Introduction

Over the past few decades, persistent violence has led to an increase in international interventions and peace operations, as well as the involvement of the UN, its agencies, programmes and funds, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), national development agencies, and donors (see, for example, Duffey 2000; Anderson and Olson 2003; Werker and Ahmed 2008).

In conflict-affected countries, peacekeeping operations are intended to manage conflict, while peacebuilding efforts address a broader range of activities, often assigned to the umbrella term of 'liberal peace' (see e.g., Paris 2010; Richmond 2011). For most

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of the contemporary conflicts in which the UN has intervened, peacebuilding and peacekeeping activities have been carried out side by side. Moreover, since the 1990s, peacekeeping operations have been tasked with protecting civilians as well as being authorised to use all means necessary to accomplish their mandates. Consequently, research and debates have also been concerned with how the use of force to protect civilians can support lasting peace at both the local and national levels.

Literature demonstrates that peacekeeping operations are an effective way to reduce violence while intervening in ongoing conflicts (Hultman; Kathman; Shannon, 2014), and that they contribute to long-lasting peace (Fortna 2008; Gilligan and Sergenti 2008; Goldstein 2011). However, despite their alleged commitment to saving the lives of the most vulnerable, the core institutions involved in peace operations have been widely criticised for serving global elite interests ahead of the needs of local populations. For strategic reasons, the UN works closely with national elites to stop violence from the top down. By collaborating with national elites, peacekeepers fail because competition between the national, international, and local levels can often result in warfare (Autesserre 2018). In this way, local and bottom-up conflict resolution are crucial to controlling violence (Mitchell and Hancock 2012; Odendaal 2013; Hughes, Ojendal, and Schierenbeck 2015; Leonardsson and Rudd 2015). In this context, the studies and debates that have emerged among academics and practitioners have been most concerned with the local dynamics of peace, the construction of peace at the local level, and interactions between local and international actors (e.g., Mac Ginty 2010; Richmond 2011; Millar, Van Der Lijn and Verkoren, 2013).

In general, peacekeeping operations have so far found difficult to align their activities with local realities, despite several initiatives that have addressed (and continue addressing) local contexts. Most on-the-ground activities focus on conflict resolution between governments and rebel groups, including through the use of force. Some local peace agreements are relatively effective in terms of ending conflict between armed groups, while others working to stabilise local communities are unable to hold armed groups to their promises. Consequently, local peace initiatives and agreements bring stability to certain areas, fail to stabilise others, and are sometimes never even attempted.

Both existing research and ongoing peacebuilding practices at the subnational level show ambiguous results, fluctuating between success and failure. Continued research on the subject is therefore needed. In this way, this article addresses multidimensional peace operation efforts to construct peace at the local level. I argue that despite 'local peace' being an important tool in the field of conflict management and resolution, it cannot be long-lasting unless integrated within a broader peace process at the national level. Locally focused peacekeeping initiatives do not survive unless they are connected with national – or in some cases, regional – level initiatives. I use the cases of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), South Sudan, and the Central African Republic (CAR) to substantiate these arguments inductively. Peace operations in these countries have addressed local contexts in a number of ways. In the CAR, they did so by assisting the government in mediation and reconciliation processes at both the national and local levels, developing and implementing community violence reduction programmes (UN 2014c); in South

Sudan, by addressing the underlying causes of inter-communal violence (UN 2013) and facilitating inter-communal reconciliation in areas of high risk of conflict (UN 2014d); and in the DRC, by implementing provincial stabilisation plans (UN 2015d). Moreover, the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) (and its predecessor, the UN Organization Mission in the DRC – MONUC), the United Nations Mission in the Republic of South Sudan (UNMISS), and the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Central African Republic (MINUSCA) have all been authorised to use all necessary means to accomplish their mandates, in which the protection of civilians (PoC) is often a priority. While the three missions present a range of initiatives for dealing with conflict and peace locally, none have managed to ensure lasting peace so far.

In this paper, 'local' is synonymous with domestic or subnational, i.e., everything below the national level: the individual, family, clan, ethnic group, county, and province (Autesserre 2017). It also refers to activities or institutions that occupy a specific geographic space within the conflict-affected country. Contemporary civil wars have shown that localised violence precedes, succeeds, and/or runs parallel to fighting between national security forces and rebel groups. Local violence is thus part (or is becoming part) of the broader conflict dynamics in which the country is immersed. Although 'local peace' is discussed at all levels of the conflict cycle, this article limits itself to locally focused initiatives that take place during peacekeeping operations. Since the term 'peacekeeping' has generally been used as an alternative to 'peace operations', this paper uses both terms interchangeably.

The three case studies were chosen because their operation reports emphasised locally focused initiatives. In all three cases, however, the conflicts remain unresolved. The operations faced significant difficulties in accomplishing their mandates, particularly in terms of protecting civilians, even when authorised to use force. In this way, against a wide range of possible explanations, I examine specific instances in which efforts were made to obtain peace locally and outline the main reasons that they did not last. Consequently, this paper focuses on specific aspects of local initiatives rather than the broader range of features involved in the so-called 'local peace' process and does not aim to generalise its conclusions, rather, to provide insights for future research on the subject. The analysis is based on official documents, secondary sources, and interviews with UN officers and former officers conducted between 2017 and 2019 in Brazil, South Sudan, and the DRC. The interviewees spoke on condition of anonymity; hence, in this article, I refer to the interviews generically by date only.

The article is divided into four parts. First, I present considerations regarding peace operations and their local-level application. Next, I look at the connections between local and national level initiatives in the chosen case studies. In the third part, I discuss the failure of local and national peacebuilding efforts in these three multidimensional operations. The last section concludes.

Peace operations and the local level

The UN Secretary General's report *An Agenda for Peace* and its *Supplement* present the key underlying concepts of peace operations. Peacekeeping was conceptualised as 'the deployment of a United Nations presence in the field, hitherto with the consent of all the parties concerned, normally involving United Nations military and/or police personnel and frequently civilians as well' (UN 1992: par. 20). Peacebuilding is an 'action to identify and support structures which will tend to strengthen and solidify peace in order to avoid a relapse into conflict' (UN 1992: par. 21). Thus, it needs to be thought of in the long-term, in order to support the re-establishment of an 'effective government', including 'the building up of national institutions, the promotion of human rights, the creation of civilian police forces and other actions in the political field' (UN 1995: par. 13). In practice, peacebuilding is an umbrella term which encompasses a broad range of activities in countries affected by political violence (UN 2015e; Barnett 2006; Paris 2010). To address the problem of recurring violence, the term has been widened to include activities carried out both during and after conflict has taken place. Once peacekeepers have acquired the basic levels of necessary security, operations can be expanded to include simultaneous peacebuilding activities.

Peacebuilding was initially associated with what would later be known as 'liberal peace', an approach that emphasises security, democratic political structures, economic reform, and development, which, in turn, would help to address the root causes of conflict (e.g., social injustices) and facilitate the process of reconciliation, among other things. However, after almost 30 years of peacebuilding, there are still concerns about the efficacy of operations as they attempt to promote stability in war-torn countries and guarantee lasting peace (e.g., Paris 2004; Paffenholz 2005; Doyle and Sambanis 2006; Call and Cousens 2008; Sandole 2010). In fact, the liberal peacebuilding model has been seen as a failure and has been modified as attention turns to local ownership as well as the potential of hybrid political orders, whose instrumentalisation is also problematic (Mac Ginty and Richmond 2015).

Debates around liberal peacebuilding pointed out that the intervention and assistance of external actors were too focused 'on 'imported models' of conflict prevention and peace-building rather than on the context that the conflict prevention activity will be undertaken in' (Hauge et al 2015:266), and that the top-down strategies used by the UN and aid workers were often limited (Autesserre 2014). Consequently, peacebuilding was uniformed, professionalised, and evaluated, but little focus was given to how it was experienced by local people on the ground (Millar 2014).

The so-called 'local turn' in peacebuilding meant a shift in perspective to prioritise local actors as an alternative approach to peacebuilding (Mac Ginty and Richmond 2013). In the early 1990s, Lederach (1997) and Curle (1990, 1995; see also Woodhouse 2010) highlighted the need to prioritise local empowerment during peace processes. Lederach divided the actors involved in conflict into three tracks: Track I – the top leadership (military/political/religious leaders with high visibility); Track II – the middle

level leadership (leaders respected in sectors, ethnic/religious leaders, academics/ intellectuals, and humanitarian leaders); and Track III – the grassroots (local leaders, leaders of indigenous groups, community developers, local health officials, and refugee camp leaders) (Lederach 1997). Almost 20 years later, Track I actors continue to be the most influential in supporting war and peace, while Track II actors are known as important players at regional and local levels (Paffenholz 2014).

While the first 'wave' of the 'local-turn' 'emphasised the necessity of empowering local people as the primary authors of peacebuilding instead of externally designed and driven peace interventions', a second wave focused on analysing 'interventions and their interaction or non-interaction with local communities; hybrid forms of peace and governance structures mixing local and international norms and procedures; and local infrastructures for peace' (Paffenholz 2015:859).

The continuously low success rate of peacebuilding missions generated a new wave of critiques, which claimed that a better understanding of the asymmetries between external and local actors would allow programmes to be more appropriately designed and implemented according to local dynamics. These critiques targeted the universalist approach to peacebuilding and advocated for greater consideration for local politics, its dynamism, and its root causes (Piccollino 2019), cultures, and power structures, as well as recognising and stimulating local solutions for peace (Richmond 2011; Mac Ginty and Richmond 2013; Millar 2014).

Critiques have also highlighted a 'romanticisation' of the 'local' as a homogenous and necessarily good entity 'instead of consisting of people who have ties with varied religious, political, economic, cultural, and social groupings' (Paananen 2021). This image of the local has led outside support to ignore existing power relations and be 'largely directed to moderate, like-minded, urban, non-membership, elite-based peacebuilding NGOs at the expense of other civil society actors' (Paffenholz 2014:22). This is especially the case during security provision, which leads people to 'rely on clan and family structures, patronage networks, or even on protection by warlords, or may create their own security communities' (Verkoren and van Leeuwen 2013, 163). Criticisms have also emphasised that support is generally centred around a limited set of activities, ignoring and excluding more comprehensive regional or national peacebuilding strategies (Paffenholz 2014). Moreover, when UN staff share peacebuilding efforts with local actors, they select partners based either on the degree to which they support liberal principles or their capacity to contribute to the efficient delivery of concrete outputs (Billerbeck 2015, 2017).

Meanwhile, since the mid-1990s, the use of force has regularly been authorised by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) to protect civilians. While some argue that UN peacekeeping efforts fail to contain intra-communal disputes because of a top-down focus on elites (e.g. Autesserre 2014), others find evidence to suggest that UN peacekeepers are able to contain local-level conflicts by imposing physical and reputational constraints on coercion (Fjelde, Hultman, and Nilsson 2019), facilitating communication between belligerents (Fortna 2008), and assisting the implementation of locally rooted mechanisms for managing disputes (Menkhaus 1996). Peace operations

that are authorised to use force beyond self-defence can enforce peace at the local level while also preventing the escalation of intra-communal disputes by showing their willingness to respond if local actors use violence (Nomikos 2019).

In current conflicts and wars, violence does not occur across the entire national territory (Kalyvas 2006). The DRC is a great example of this, since its conflict has been concentrated in the eastern part of the country. If community dynamics play an important role in the outbreak and continuation of conflict (Allouche and Jackson 2018), they must also be considered a consequence of dynamics at the national level (Kalyvas 2006). Moreover, certain zones of insecurity are geographically linked, through which a plurality of actors interact in complex networks and across different levels of action, forming a regional conflict system (Ansorg 2014). In such cases, regional dynamics should also be taken into consideration.

Although literature on the local turn criticises the top-down approach of 'internationals', it constantly neglects the interconnection between local and national levels, which is always present and often more pronounced during conflicts. Autesserre (2021) shows that local peace is possible in some cases, such as in the island of Idjwi in the DRC, where a culture of peace was developed through local leadership, citizen cooperation, and social practices, as well as through a bottom-up approach of local empowerment carried out by a non-governmental organisation. There are other successful examples of local peace, however, these cases appear to be islands in the middle of a protracted conflict. Moreover, peace operations, as with any kind of intervention, affect and are affected by national and local dynamics. Despite claims that the UN often engages with the political elite, peacekeepers are increasingly involved in local initiatives to resolve disputes (UN 2015c). In current-day multidimensional peace operations, mission leadership focuses on the national level while military, police, and civilian components carry out activities at local level. However, operations are constantly challenged with how to properly align the use of force with the political process, how to incentivise individuals to collaborate with the UN (Kalyvas 2006; Pouligny 2006), and how to align local peace activities with the peace process at the national level, and vice-versa.

Although peacebuilding at the local level might be considered key to tackling conflicts (Autessere 2019), the top-down approach cannot be neglected. I therefore argue that rather than focusing on either one, it is the interconnection between different levels of peace and conflict processes that is key. Local peace achievements will not last long if a peace pact is not reached and sustained by the political elite at the national level. Moreover, when violence is part of a broader regional conflict system, this interconnection should also include the regional actors that influence dynamics.

Interconnection between peace and conflict at the local and national levels

Although foreign actors contribute to conflict resolution, civil wars only end when hostile parties at the local, provincial, and national levels stop using violence to resolve their differences. The efficacy of peacekeeping efforts to achieve sustainable peace depends on

establishing a connection between national/regional political processes and the conflict dynamics and peace processes ongoing at the local level. Thus, locally led initiatives for peace that are supported by peacekeeping operations must also maintain dialogue with high-level goals, national interests, broader development plans, etc. In the DRC, several initiatives to establish peace locally did not last because of negative interconnections with national and regional actors. In South Sudan, peace operations were thought of from below as the 'internationals' supported solutions presented by local representatives around the country. However, this strategy did not survive the political elite struggle at the national level. In the CAR, although several local initiatives were established around the country, they did not last, and the conflict worsened in 2021 due to disagreements surrounding national elections.

The DRC: local initiatives undermined by the national and regional levels

In the DRC, during the peak of the Second Congolese war, the province of Ituri became extremely violent, which resulted in large-scale massacres by members of different ethnic factions, mainly the Lendu and the Hema, as well as the displacement of civilians. In September 2002, in line with the Luanda Accords, Uganda and the DRC agreed to establish an interim structure – the Ituri Pacification Commission (IPC) – to govern Ituri after the departure of the Ugandan army and until a regular Congolese administration could be set up. The IPC was considered a 'model for peacebuilding' and was launched with the support of the international community as it aimed to settle the violence while simultaneously addressing the external and internal dimensions of the crisis. The UN plan was to establish an ethnically balanced administration that could lead to reconciliation. Consequently, the Ituri Interim Administration included representatives from every Ituri ethnic community, a verification committee that looked into the causes of the crisis and drew up measures to prevent new escalations, a security committee that oversaw the cantonment of armed groups and the demobilisation of child soldiers, and a human rights committee that investigated human rights abuses. Local councils established to arbitrate land claims consisted of respected Hema and Lendu elders, who used traditional dispute resolution practices called 'shared commons' to settle disputes (Ituri 2018).

However, problems soon appeared. Competition between Lendu and Hema ethnic communities, coupled with the influence of Ugandan officials and hinderances from national authorities, undermined the peace initiatives. The Ituri Interim Administration had no real force with which to execute its decisions, while Ugandan officials tried to impose their interests despite the agreement. When Ugandan forces left in May 2003, violent clashes were accompanied by widespread looting and the killing of hundreds of civilians re-emerged between Hema and Lendu-based militia groups who sought to establish control over the city of Bunia (UN 2003).

Local efforts in Ituri did not resist the diverse dynamics of the conflict, which encompassed local, provincial, national, and regional connections. Uganda did not cease to influence the conflict in Ituri. At the same time, national politicians perceived the

Interim Administration as hindering Kinshasa's authority, and it was dissolved two years after it had been established (Ituri 2018). Thus, the 'model for peacebuilding' did not last because of the negative interconnection between the national and regional levels.

Years later, the defeat of the *Mouvement du 23-Mars* (M23)[1] in 2013 brought additional armed groups into the peace process, which led to the concept of an 'island of stability'. The main point of the concept was to assist the Congolese government in restoring State authority and stabilising areas cleared of armed groups. The area-based approach was organised through a separate planning directive issued by the Chief of Staff and coordinated from Goma by the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) of the Rule of Law. Through regular high-level government meetings in Kinshasa, MONUSCO advocated for the deployment and improvement of State services in areas that were formally under the control of armed groups. A Joint Operations Planning Team was set up in the East, and provincial stabilisation plans in 13 priority zones were prepared (UN 2015b).

The 'island of stability' relied on joint efforts of territorial administrators, the national police (PNC), the national army (FARDC), and community members in order to foster community dialogue around the solution of conflicts. Joint civilian teams were deployed to remote liberated areas 'in order to support the State in its role of administrator and build capacity in the local administration, the justice system and the police'. Civil Affairs officials had the mission identifying civil society activists with the aim of creating future partnerships between civil society groups and the UN mission. These groups were viewed as 'key partners of local authorities in their efforts to get closer to the local po-pulation and raise awareness about peaceful coexistence'. Local Stabilization Committees were also created in these areas, comprising local authorities and civil society activists (traditional and religious leaders, youth, women's groups' representatives, etc.), to promote inclusive state-society dialogue (UN 2015a). In 2014, a total of 10 'islands of stability' were developed in North Kivu, in the Province Orientale and Katanga (UN 2015a). However, the operation was unable to spread the 'islands of stability' acquired by peacekeepers. The national government had neither the resources nor the will to carry forward the strategy, and the peace operation did not have resources to keep the 'islands' stable. Besides, it was never the intention that the government would be able to maintain such stability on its own in the future. Consequently, the strategy that was created and established locally did not advance and, over time, was left aside.

In the DRC, the peace operation focused on the government and its institutions (national level), but it was also required to act on stabilisation at the local level. The two examples above indicate relevant efforts to seek peace locally as a spearhead to expand these models to broader areas. Local actions were developed as and when they were needed to ensure the reduction of violence, however, these cases highlight the difficulty of engaging national authorities in local initiatives when they believe their power is or could be threatened by such initiatives, or when the state lacks the capacity to sustain them. Without the will, capacity, and commitment of the national level, it was not possible to sustain local actions in the country.

South Sudan: a local approach that did not resist the national political struggle

In South Sudan, local efforts became the main focus of a broad strategy aiming to understand and deal with conflict dynamics at the national and provincial levels. It was hoped that these local efforts would provide the conditions for lasting peace at the national level.

The birth of the Republic of South Sudan in 2011 led the UNSC to establish the UNMISS, which was required to support the Government in exercising its responsibilities of conflict prevention, mitigation and resolution, and to protect civilians (UN 2011). For the first time in UN peacekeeping history, a peace operation was established as part of a locally based strategy. The concept underlying this strategy was that by resolving local conflicts and expanding a state presence throughout the newly established country, violence would be contained, civilians would be protected, and development would begin.

The UNMISS strategy established an on-the-ground presence in each of the ten South Sudanese states through State Offices (State Support Bases – SSBs) led by a State Coordinator (SC), who exercised 'a high degree of authority to manage day-to-day operations and coordinate the different functions of the Mission', controlling military, police, and logistical assets, as well as County Support Bases (CSBs), led by County Coordinators (CCs) (UN 2012a:2; UN 2012c). A network of CSBs was established to build 'a platform for the UN system as a whole and a portal for UN agencies, funds and programmes to support the government in scaling-up the delivery of core governance functions and development dividends' (UN 2012a:3). They were intended to reach 35 of the country's 79 counties by mid-2014.

According to this design, the County Coordinator worked with the County Commissioner, which meant that the most substantive functions would be carried out in collaboration with county authorities. The civilian departments/sections worked with appropriate counterparts of the county administration. Civil affairs officials, together with civilian, military, and UN Police sections, engaged with local leaders (community, political parties, faith-based communities, civil society) as well as with NGOs and international agencies (UN 2012c: Annex 6).

By working with locals, UNMISS could better identify and understand the main sources of violence, and consequently, through these joint actions, civilians were preventively, pre-emptively, and responsively protected. The CSBs set up PoC Teams and prepared to manage risks or threats in line with local action plans for the protection of civilians (UN 2012c). Plans were prepared according to local dynamics and addressed local threats in order to achieve local peace. An early warning/early response mechanism was created by collecting information specific to the environment and its key local actors. In practice, the speed of this strategy's implementation varied from state to state and county to county, and this resulting variation was mainly personality-based, i.e., it depended on the ability and propensity of the individuals in charge. Notwithstanding, it generally ran according to UNMISS officials' expectations (Anonymous Source 2018a, 2018b).

One of the positive results of this approach was an action plan to address the violence in the State of Jonglei. Between April and June 2011, large-scale clashes between the Lou Nuer and Murle ethnic groups resulted in hundreds of deaths and displacements. UNMISS supported the national army's preventative deployments (Sudan People›s Liberation Army - SPLA), reinforced its troops, and increased patrols in the region. In December 2011, a UNMISS military preventive deployment and the SPLA's use of deadly force prevented approximately 8,000-armed Lou Nuer youths from entering the town of Pibor to attack Dinka ethnic groups (UN 2012b).

However, political struggle in the capital, Juba, in 2013, resulted in fighting that rapidly spread through the country. Consequently, over 240,000 civilians sought protection and refuge at existing UNMISS bases. The civil war itself, therefore, literally hindered the continuation of the strategy that was left aside as the operation prioritised protection within the PoC sites and, resources permitting, to reduce the armed conflict and violence against civilians beyond the sites (UN 2014d).

The civil war that erupted in 2013 involved two main actors – the Sudan People›s Liberation Army (SPLA) and the Sudan People›s Liberation Army-in Opposition (SPLA-iO), as well as local groups that aligned with either side. When the violence broke out, relations worsened as the government became a belligerent in the conflict. The SPLA violated the Status of Forces Agreement on numerous occasions (e.g., harassment, coercion, physical assault, arrest, and detention of UN personnel) (UN 2014e). Moreover, since a UNMISS helicopter was shot down in Unity State killing three personnel in August 2014, the government and SPLA-iO controlled the movement of UN personnel throughout the country. The combination of control over UNMISS actions and persistent violence against civilians resulted in some parties of the conflict no longer considering the UN to be neutral, which undermined the legitimacy of the UN's presence (Anonymous Source 2018c, 2018d).

Ethnically motivated conflict posed new challenges to UNMISS. As violence spread throughout the country, groups (mostly acting independently) attacked civilians either to gain or regain control of the main cities or simply to kill members of other ethnic groups. Moreover, major parties to the conflict controlled the movement of UN personnel throughout the country as well as obstructing the delivery of humanitarian assistance. UN troops were limited to securing their bases and were mostly concerned with protecting civilians across the PoC sites (Anonymous Source 2018e, 2018f). Consequently, the mission faced difficulties in extending protection beyond the bases, communities had to provide their own security autonomously, and coordination among the actors (internal and external) became difficult.

Furthermore, according to a report from the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS), 'UNMISS has been noted as having a 'pattern of non-intervention' and was less than effective during the November-December 2012 crisis that resulted in more than 600 civilian deaths' (UN 2014a:19). In February 2013, an attack on a community in Wangar, Jonglei State, by armed elements from rival communities led to more than 100 civilian deaths. In July 2013, inter-communal violence in several locations in Pibor County resulted in 328 civilian deaths. Of the incidents involving civilians reported by

the United Nations Secretary General until 2013, only 10 percent received an immediate response from UNMISS (UN 2014a:9-10).

Consequently, in South Sudan, local peace efforts did not last because they failed to integrate local initiatives and national political processes. The strategy designed by UNMISS was not enough to reduce national levels of political conflict. The breaking of a political pact, consequent violence in the capital, and the general spread of violence across the country resulted in a civil war and the bankruptcy of the operation's design.

The CAR: good will of local peace, bad national reconciliation

In the Central African Republic (CAR), the return of violence in 2013 was centred around fighting between the Muslim Séléka rebel coalition and the Christian anti-Balaka movement. In 2014, the UNSC established the MINUSCA which aimed to stop the killings, protect civilians, provide humanitarian relief, and find a peaceful resolution to the conflict (UN 2014c).

After the peak of violence in the country, local clashes between Christian and Muslim communities persisted both as a product and a driver of the national-level conflict. Enclaves were created across several locations by Muslims fleeing Anti-Balaka violence in 2014 and continued to persist after the violence subsided. For example, in Bouar, the city centre and some of its surrounding quarters were controlled by Anti-Balaka elements, which meant Muslims were unable to gain access. Local actors also clashed over the control of natural resources and mineral areas (Shifting 2016).

The conflict between the government and ex-Séléka and Anti-Balaka groups represents only a small fraction of the overall conflict dynamics of the country, in which local conflicts regularly posed major threats to civilians. However, local-level conflicts are often linked to the national-level conflict in complex ways. The so-called 'cattle war' illustrates how the escalation of local-level disputes can destabilise an entire country. The phenomenon of transhumance, which involves over a million head of cattle per year, is part of 'the CAR's life' and is viewed positively by the majority of the country's population. Some villages in CAR are even considered 'itinerant', because they move each year to get closer to transhumance circuits where they can trade. According to MINUSCA, the 'problem of rural damage caused by cattle during transhumance is not a significant factor of tension' and 'incidents have always been settled amicably between the farmer and the farmer concerned'. However, due to the civil war, transhumants became well-armed and, in certain areas, linked to actors directly involved in the conflict (UN 2014b). Certain pastoralists thus came to be perceived as allies of ex-Séléka communities and were consequently targeted by Anti-Balaka groups. In response, they armed themselves for self-protection, and certain groups even aligned themselves with ex-Séléka factions for protection (Shifting 2016). This created a situation where the majority of Christian militias (Anti-Balaka) were targeting Muslim Peulh (Fulbe) civilians and their cattle, resulting in thousands of deaths and the displacement of the Peulh community without their cattle (Shifting 2016).

Thereby, clashes between pastoralists and agriculturalists became a predominant source of local conflict. Approximately 60 percent of incidents related to the 'protection of civilians' that took place in the transhumance corridor were linked to clashes between herders and armed groups or bandits (UNHCR 2016). Moreover, beyond clashes between factions and herders, rancour exacerbated, and the security situation changed the normal circuit of the transhumance period. Herders were blocked in the north and could not move along their regular corridor, while the violence between armed and transhumant groups increased. Thereby, when the 'cattle war', which was almost entirely driven by local agendas, encountered the civil war, it changed the shape of the economy and destabilised the entire country (News 24 2015; Scholz and Kriesch 2017).

After the peak of violence between 2013 and 2014, MINUSCA tried to control the security situation by deploying bases across the country and putting forward a series of local initiatives to address violence and ensure the protection of civilians. All sections and components of MINUSCA would contribute to national and local authorities' ability to fulfil their PoC responsibilities (Anonymous Source 2017a). The way the mission dealt with the issue of transhumance presents a positive example of how integrated action between the mission components can preventively deal with conflict drivers and protect civilians.

Until 2012, the CAR government dealt with the transhumance phenomenon through the Transhumance Committee, under the direction of the Ministry of Livestock (itself under the supervision of the Ministry of Rural Development). The Committee discussed routes and practical modalities, and reviewed problems faced during the previous year's pre-transhumance period. During the peacekeeping operation, based on government decisions and information gathered on transhumance routes by the MINUSCA Protection Cluster, military forces planned to reinforce security by patrolling the routes and setting up temporary operational bases (TOBs) at specific locations along the cattle passage (UN 2014b). From early 2016, 'MINUSCA's civil affairs division conducted several conflict-resolution trainings for agro-pastoral communities in conjunction with the government of CAR', workshops were held to define strategies for transhumance corridors, and 'several transhumance mediation committees were established throughout the country' (Zahar and Mechoulan 2017:20).

At the same time, MINUSCA's PoC Response Model also sought to promote community dialogue and reconciliation at the local level in close coordination with local authorities, humanitarian organisations, and other political and/or conflict resolution actors, which was supported by elements of the police force through presence, deterrence, or robust action. A PoC Coordination Team was created to co-ordinate all PoC Strategy activities at both the national and local levels. MINUSCA's protection strategy involved engaging with the local population, and proactively using patrols, checkpoints, and rapid and temporary military or police deployments and operations, among other things (Anonymous Source 2017b, 2018g).

In Bangui, a positive example of coordinated efforts to address local conflict was the reopening of a Muslim cemetery in the PK5 neighbourhood, access to which had been cut off until personnel from sections of MINUSCA (Civil Affairs and Political Affairs),

the French embassy, and other actors worked together with various stakeholders to reopen it (Shifting 2016). However, as with most initiatives, it was localised, and the same effort could not be applied to other locations.

As part of the attempts to resolve the conflict, local nonaggression pacts and agreements were signed across the country between armed groups that committed 'to cessations of hostilities, weapon-free zones, free movement of persons and goods, non-interference in the activities of public services including schools and health facilities, and protection of private property' (Zahar and Mechoulan 2017:19). Community mediation efforts were often initiated by 'local notables including state officials (neighbourhood leaders, or chefs de quartiers, municipal employees, gendarmes, prefects), religious authorities, traditional authorities (particularly sultans), respected elders, traders, school headmasters, youth and women leaders' (Zahar and Mechoulan 2017:21). The spontaneous emergence of local initiatives towards reconciliation and social cohesion across various communities can be partially explained by CAR's active civil society, where 'local communities still use traditional conflict resolution mechanisms, relying on traditional chiefs, respected and reliable local personalities, or trade associations for mediation' (World Bank 2017).

Local mediation committees were created and became involved in 'facilitating intercommunal dialogue or dialogues with armed groups; promoting reconstruction and reconciliation initiatives; monitoring security and crime in neighbourhoods or villages; and working as an early-warning system and alerting the various bodies responsible for security about imminent risks' (Zahar and Mechoulan 2017:22). These efforts were supported by MINUSCA, UN agencies, a number of NGOs, and international agencies.

In December 2016, the government launched the national programme for the establishment of a network of local peace and reconciliation committees under the leadership of the Ministry of National Reconciliation. The seven elected members of each committee included a women's representative, a youth representative, and a notable or representative of traditional or customary authorities (Zahar and Mechoulan 2017:28).

However, violence did not cease. Although some locations were declared 'weapons-free zones' in 2015, ex-Séléka and anti-Balaka groups remained armed and several intercommunal clashes resulted in civilian deaths (Reuters 2016; UN News Center 2016; Anadolu Agency 2019; Aljazeera 2020). After the departure of French, Ugandan, and American troops from 2016, which were operating in the CAR outside MINUSCA, 'armed groups [have] gained control of approximately 80 percent of the country' (Howard 2019:179). The situation worsened during the electoral process of 2020 when the Constitutional Court rejected former President François Bozizé's candidacy, generating an upsurge in violence. Bozizé joined a coalition of armed groups, the Coalition of Patriots for Change (CPC), some of whom were formerly part of the Séléka coalition, which attacked several towns and got around the outskirts of Bangui in January 2021 (Buchanan-Clarke 2021).

The management of conflict in the CAR has presented numerous local initiatives, led by the peace operation, UN agencies, international institutions, international and local NGOs, and local personalities. However, these initiatives were unable to guarantee

lasting peace in the country, as the violence surrounding the electoral process from late 2021 indicates. The UNSC focused on strengthening government and state institutions, but also required actions at the local level. However, the government's lack of capacity and will to act hindered its ability to engage systematically with local-level activities, some of which did not last due mainly to the political impasse at the national level.

Multidimensional peace operations and the failure of local peace

The cases discussed so far illustrate attempts to deal with peace locally. Although the UN has been highly engaged with elites, multidimensional operations in the DRC, CAR, and South Sudan have shown that they have also carried out activities at the local level. Despite UN representatives having appointed a portion of local interlocutors themselves, space was left so that part of the committee could be chosen (elected) by the communities they would be working in. Above all, these cases highlight the challenges of working in volatile environments and demonstrate the dangers of failing to advance the peace process at the national level. The question remains as to what can explain the difficulties that peace operations, in general, face when attempting to connect various levels of peace initiatives.

The first and possibly most significant point is the challenge of managing/resolving conflict at the intersection between the national and local levels. In the DRC, the relationship between political leaders based in the capital and the heads of local armed groups is complex. As the Ituri case demonstrates, when political leaders at the national level see their power threatened, they tend to undermine local efforts to build peace. Furthermore, the regional issue is also relevant in the DRC, where conflict revolves around the interests of neighbouring countries and the Congolese government's relations with its counterparts in the region. In the case of Ituri, Uganda was the main stakeholder, meaning that initiatives relied on the commitment of the Ugandan elite, which did not, in practice, turn out to be so strong. In South Sudan, the peace operation initially focused on the subnational level. However, a political stalemate in the capital led to violence that quickly spread across the country, meaning initial gains at the local level were undone when local leaders aligned themselves with one of the two main groups (SPLA and SPLA-iO), over ethnic, tribal or clan ties, or particular interests. The cases of the DRC and the CAR indicate the difficulty in connecting the national and local levels, either because of the low capacity of governments or the lack of interest of elites. The islands of stability did not last in the DRC because the government did not commit the necessary resources (personnel and material) due to a lack of capacity and interest in sustaining the project, much less extending it to other areas. In the CAR, a major difficulty was the lack of state capacity to be present across the country and a certain lack of willingness to improve this capacity. According to a MINUSCA officer, to '"deal with a government which is neither professional nor reliable" and where dialogue occurs with "people, not institutions"' remains a challenge to the Mission (UN 2017b, 24). Moreover, even though plans were created, meetings and consultations held, agreements signed, and state institutions established, there has been little commitment from CAR authorities. For example, part of

state authority 'did not see reconciliation with Muslims as a necessary component of the peace process' (Conciliation Resources 2015, 19). Without a State presence to reinforce local gains and with armed groups still highly active across the country, most initiatives did not last. Adding to this, a political stalemate during the 2020 election process resulted in groups gathering against the President and initiating a new wave of violence as the coalition arrived in the vicinity of Bangui in January 2021.

Secondly, the UN and local leaders (community, religious, etc.) have constantly had their legitimacy questioned. Legitimation and competition at the local and national levels are part of the dynamics of civil wars. Civil wars will always bring about increased competition between local actors, and armed groups that have broken into factions based on particular interests, as well as leadership struggles between county, provincial, and national representatives. Peace is harder to achieve when local populations do not accept the authority of local leaders. In South Sudan, the legitimacy of UNMISS as a neutral actor was questioned when the mission supported national government forces that were part of the conflict (Anonymous Source 2018h). In the CAR, a network of local peace and reconciliation committees was incorporated into a broader programme in which all tracks of actors were involved. Nonetheless, clashes between local communities persisted due to the variety of political, economic, and security interests and agendas of those involved. The lack of community structures in some areas led to the creation of 'artificial local committees'. These committees were, on the one hand, the main interlocutors of international actors, but were also 'perceived by the state as one of its organs'. In Bangui, the 'committees include the district mayors, neighbourhood leaders (*chefs de quartier*), religious notables, and representatives of civil society, women, and youth'. However, 'neighborhood and religious leaders were not all accepted by the population; many were perceived as tainted and partial' (Zahar and Mechoulan 2017:28). MINUSCA also suffered from a lack of legitimacy and credibility within the general population; Christians accused the mission of favouring and defending Muslims, being passive, and ultimately failing to protect civilians. There were even rumours that the operation actively worked with armed groups by distributing arms (Shifting 2016; Stimson 2017).

The third difficulty is dealing with the specific dynamics of local conflicts. There is a general tendency to treat local conflicts as the result of state weakness, which leads missions to focus on strengthening state institutions. There are also several cases in which local conflicts are addressed in isolation from the political context in which they take place (e.g., Elfversson 2019). One of the key characteristics of contemporary civil wars is the presence of localised militias or criminal groups with a wide variety of objectives and interests, which perpetrate much of the violence throughout the countries. In the CAR and South Sudan, tensions were not only between ex-Séléka and anti-Balakas, or between Murle and Nuers, respectively, but also clan and religious rivalries or conflicts between herders and farmers, among others. Different types of conflict and dynamics of violence require different types of intervention and civilian protection strategies. However, the 'internationals' (peacekeepers, donor representatives, and NGOs officials, among others) face difficulties in defining the 'local', and thus fail to properly analyse the dynamics, linkages, impacts, and legacies involved in local conflicts (Krause 2019).

There are certain problems inherent to peace operations that also contribute to the challenges of acting at both the national and local levels. Multidimensional peace operations often encompass thousands of peacekeepers. Despite counting on large numbers, they are not always sufficiently prepared for the tasks required by the UNSC. They regularly receive less troops than needed, and routinely operate with a shortage of civilian staff and equipment. The tasks are many and resources (personnel and financial) are limited, which means the operations cannot afford neither to contract experts nor support all necessary local initiatives financially and logistically (Anonymous Source 2018i). Although contemporary UN peacekeeping is centred on integrated planning and execution under the concept of the 'whole of mission', there is little talk about how to connect peace initiatives across different levels. Since resources are inevitably limited and the operations are often overstretched, prioritisation is critical. In the CAR, prevention was allocated by identifying higher-priority situations, for example, towns with mixed populations, such as the capital of Bangui, where inter-community and armed group violence and the number of internally displaced person (IDPs) posed a significant threat to local populations (Anonymous Source 2017c). MONUSCO, UNMISS, and MINUSCA developed a flashpoint matrix to enable the operation to assess the degree of threats, the level of a community's vulnerability, and the presence of protection actors, among other indicators, in order to prioritise how and where peacekeepers should engage in protecting civilians first (Anonymous Source 2017d, 2018j, 2019a). In the DRC, the 'protection by presence' approach resulted in several bases being set up across the eastern provinces (Anonymous Source 2019b). In the CAR, nearly 50 integrated, temporary, and permanent bases were established across the country (UN 2017a). However, in practice, and as much as these security measures were needed, engagement with local populations was limited. For example, MINUSCA's layout required approximately 30% of the force to be engaged in its own protection, leaving only 39% of troops available for PoC related tasks (UN 2017a).

Peacekeeping operations are required to guarantee the physical protection of civilians when and where necessary (including by the use of force) to provide the basic conditions for working towards lasting peace. There is a consensus that the use of force to protect civilians should be part of the political process and not as an end in itself, but it often tends to be employed locally, at a tactical level. A robust peacekeeping operation is expected to mobilise the use of force more systematically where troops are deployed (or in its areas of responsibility) so as to protect civilians and align their actions with the political process, taking into account drivers of conflict and their wider networks. The use of force and PoC have been closely connected to local initiatives. However, since the missions operate with troop shortages, deployments tend to only target priority areas. Hence, difficult decisions need to be made in terms of how to balance needs and means. When international troops fail to use force to stabilise certain regions, it compromises the overall objectives of the operation and the peace process at the national level.

Local, on-the-ground peace practices are generally ad hoc. Although peacekeeping has increasingly reached out to people, engaging with local communities and ordinary citizens alike, practices on the ground are often ad hoc and can struggle to interact with

local communities (UN 2015c). What operations find most challenging is to identify community representatives who can speak on behalf of local people, and analysing local realities. Such analysis would include: detecting and understanding the impact of peace operations on communities, people's protection needs, and the community's capacity to generate peace with resilience, including local norms, structures, networks, and traditional forms of governance (UN 2015c). Finally, local mechanisms and initiatives are often geographically restricted. The cases analysed here have shown that local initiatives are generally restricted to specific areas, only partially covering the host country's territory, as peacekeeping operations do not have the capacity to be present in all locations at all times. Local initiatives are context-specific, making them hard to replicate. The small scale of local initiatives also means that they require micro-management, and when peacekeepers need to prioritise certain local initiatives over others, it becomes impossible for them to act neutrally. On the other hand, peacekeepers decide on the local projects in line with the missions' procedures, through specific assessments that keep in mind their capacities in terms of personnel and material resources.

Conclusions

The local level of peace processes has been a topic of study since the 1990s. The general consensus is that locally implemented tools for peace present a viable solution to conflict, and that civil society could assist peacekeeping in achieving peace locally. Some scholars, policy makers, and practitioners have presented the 'local' as the key to peacebuilding. Some have even romanticised the idea. Peace operations are criticised for how much they engage with political elites. Meanwhile, multidimensional operations have increased their engagement with the local communities that wish to reduce their levels of violence, which can open the door to longer-lasting peace. In any case, operations face difficulties when addressing local conflicts.

This paper has argued, on the one hand, that local-based strategies and initiatives would have lasted longer had they worked to improve political processes at the national level, and on the other hand, that they were hindered by the non-existence or rupture of political consensus and its consequent violence. Thus, this paper sets out to highlight that the interconnections of peace and conflict between local and national levels play a key role in peacekeeping, drawing from three examples of multidimensional peace operations.

Peacekeeping operations sought to deploy their personnel and resources according to where violence had taken place. Local initiatives can begin as soon as the basic security conditions allow the operation's civilian component to take action. Therefore, the local stabilisation of conflict, whether through preventive, pre-emptive, or reactive force, is essential. In addition, it is at the local level that the protection of civilians is initially guaranteed (or attempted). The DRC, South Sudan, and the CAR all demonstrated efforts to create local mechanisms, support spontaneous local initiatives to handle conflict, use force to protect civilians, and incorporate armed groups into peace processes. These examples, thus, illustrate that a deficiency of resources can lower the capacity to analyse

local dynamics, forcing peacekeeping operations to prioritise some actions over others. Peacekeeping, therefore, faces difficulties when it comes to understanding local dynamics (heterogeneity of actors, existing power relations, competition between actors, etc.) and taking specific actions in response. Local initiatives were in general ad hoc, confined to specific areas, and difficult to expand due to resource shortages and a lack of political commitment. The initiatives were also shaped by the specific characteristics and nature of the actors involved, such as their level of legitimacy. Finally, the three cases showed that on several occasions, initiatives to bring about peace at the local level were unable to improve nation-wide security or guarantee lasting peace. Local initiatives were hindered by failures to improve the peace process at the national level.

Notes

1   The M23 is a rebel military group based in in the Eastern DRC, composed of ethnic Tutsi and supported by Rwanda. During the 2012-13 rebellion against the DRC government, the group took control of Goma, the North Kiwu capital. It was defeated at the end of 2013. In 2017, the group resumed fighting until November 2022, when it agreed to cease fire (Al Jazeera, 2022).

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Manutenção da Paz Multidimensional: A paz local não dura quando a paz nacional falha

Resumo: As operações multidimensionais das Nações Unidas foram recentemente autorizadas a usar a força para proteger os civis. Entre suas atividades de manutenção da paz estão iniciativas para lidar com a gestão/resolução de conflitos em nível local. Enquanto a manutenção da paz contemporânea tende a ser altamente concentrada em nível nacional, ela tem se esforçado cada vez mais para implementar iniciativas em nível local. Entretanto, as operações de nível local enfrentam certas dificuldades. Para resolver isto, a ONU tende a se concentrar nas iniciativas, abordagens e estratégias que emprega em nível local, uma das quais é o uso da força para proteger os civis durante as operações de paz. A presente análise gira em torno do argumento de que a 'paz local' não durará muito, a menos que um acordo de paz seja alcançado e sustentado em nível nacional e, consequentemente, que a conexão entre paz e conflito, tanto em nível local quanto nacional, é fundamental para enfrentar conflitos. O documento utiliza documentos primários, fontes secundárias e entrevistas, assim como exemplos específicos de operações no Sul do Sudão, na República Democrática do Congo e na República Centro-Africana, para confirmar indutivamente este argumento e discutir as dificuldades que as operações de paz enfrentam sobre o assunto.

Palavras-chave: Operações de manutenção da paz; Paz local; República Centro-Africana; República Democrática do Congo; Sudão do Sul.