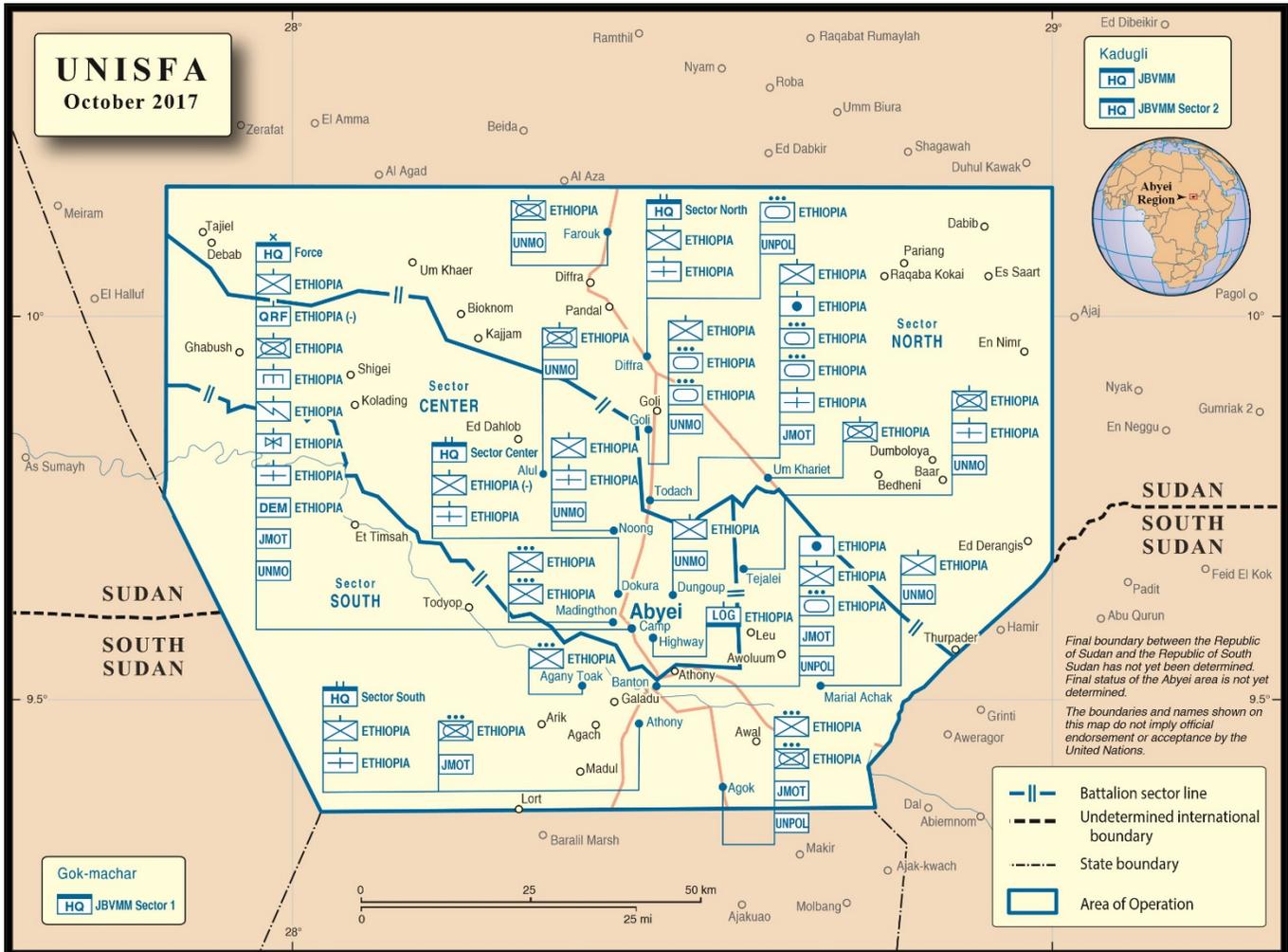




Peacekeeping and Stability Operations Institute (PKSOI)

**Peace Operations Estimate – UNISFA**  
**United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei**  
 (updated 30 November 2017)



**UNISFA Deployment Map**

[CIA World Factbook \(Sudan\)](#)  
[Link to CIA World Factbook \(South Sudan\)](#)  
[Link to UNISFA Mission Website](#)

**UNISFA Executive Summary**

Conflict in the Abyei region is at least a half-century old, and while it certainly predates the 2011 independence of South Sudan from the Republic of the Sudan, some observers suggest that control of the oil-rich Abyei region was the “flash point” for the conflict that led to the separation of those States.

The **Abyei Area Administration** was established to permit its citizens to be simultaneously members of the states of South Kurdufan (Republic of the Sudan) and Northern Bahr el Ghazal (South Sudan) until a projected [referendum](#) could be conducted following South Sudan's independence. However, the referendum did not occur as planned, nor has the Administration been fully implemented to date. Instead, when violence increased along the disputed borders, the United Nations mission, UNISFA, was established for "demilitarizing and monitoring peace." The UN peacekeepers—the vast majority of them Ethiopians—travelled overland from Ethiopia just under a week after the mandate was established. In the several decades of peace accords and [agreements relating to Sudan](#), and the nearly seven years since the first UNISFA mandate, the Abyei political situation remains essentially unchanged.

#### Major issues and considerations include:

- Abyei's oil reserves make the region economically desirable to both Sudan and South Sudan. Its border location also leads to conflicting ethnic, cultural, and linguistic claims. Resolving the status of the Abyei Area is one of the essential steps Sudan and South Sudan need to take to [ensure long-term peace in the region](#). Yet, continuing ethnic clashes in the Republic of the Sudan as well as in South Sudan leave Abyei vulnerable as well: "Armed elements from rival ethnic groups and the [proliferation of illegal arms](#) have been commonplace in recent months amid fights over territories."
- After the summer of 2017's fairly successful opening of the [Amiet common market](#), October 2017 saw an [increased level of violence](#), including loss of lives. Observers suggest:

These incidents, coming at a time when the Amiet common market is helping both communities rebuild intercommunal harmony, represent the work of 'spoilers' and criminals bent on reversing the gains made to ensure sustainable peace and security within the Abyei Area.

*The Amiet common market is considered "a crucial joint community-initiated effort." It is governed by representatives of both the Misseriya and Ngok Dinka in the Abyei area.*

- The referendum process remains stalled for a variety of reasons. One main point is the determination of voter eligibility. As the Ngok Dinka tribes live year-around in Abyei, South Sudan strongly advocates for only permanent residents to have voting privileges. However, the Sudan-based Arab Misseriya nomads also spend several months in Abyei every year grazing their herds. Therefore, they demand voting privileges as well. A 2016 proposed resolution by [the African Union mediation team](#) was rejected by the Republic of the Sudan over the same point.
- The essential (and continual) absence of the [Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism \(JBVMM\)](#) remains a concern. The most recent mandate renewal suggests it is "[the final such extension](#)" (for the JBVMM) unless Sudan and South Sudan meet certain criteria by 15 March 2018. However, this is not the first "final notice" levied against the two countries regarding their actions to come to security and political settlements. According to some observers:

...the U.S. appears to be concerned that UNISFA is persisting longer than intended for an interim force, and that Sudan and South Sudan are taking advantage of the relative stability that UNISFA provides to delay attempts to resolve the final status of Abyei.

While the U.S. concerns may be valid, a withdrawal of international support for the JBVMM may "embolden" the disputing parties to act more aggressively towards one another.

*The JBVMM was intended to monitor the Sudan-South Sudan border with the Safe Demilitarized Border Zone (SDBZ), but was suspended in November 2013 following South Sudan's withdrawal from the mission. However, like the referendum process, it is stalled due to continued disagreements between Sudan and South Sudan on its implementation. The Secretary-General's [2015 report set out conditions](#) for the full operating capability of the JBVMM. However, the Secretary-General's [2017 report](#) describes JBVMM progress as "uneven". Despite the conduct of operations in recent months ([September 2017](#)), the JBVMM has only two of four sector headquarters in place—"nearly six years after its establishment."*

## **Mission Overview**

**1. Background.** At the end of Sudan's First Civil War (1955-1972), the [Addis Ababa Agreement on the Problem of South Sudan](#) proposed an Abyei referendum to determine whether they would remain a part of northern Sudan or join the newly formed southern region (at the time, still a part of the Republic of the Sudan). However, Sudan's Second Civil War erupted in 1983, in part because Sudan's President refused to allow Abyei its referendum. To end the Second Civil War, northern and southern Sudan (still the same country) signed the [Comprehensive Peace Agreement](#), or CPA, in 2005. The CPA included the [Abyei Protocol](#), to give Abyei special administrative status until a final status referendum was conducted simultaneous with the southern Sudan Referendum in January 2011. When South Sudan was established as its own State, however, the Abyei referendum did not occur, which in turn led to armed clashes between Sudan Armed Forces (SAF, the army of the Sudanese government in Khartoum), and the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA, the army of South Sudan). Following the outbreak of violence, and the displacement of over 100,000 persons from their homes, both Sudan and South Sudan signed a temporary peace agreement, calling for a UN interim security force of Ethiopian soldiers, the withdrawal of SAF and SPLA troops, and the establishment of a new joint administration.

The UN Security Council's resolution [UNSCR 1990\(2011\)](#) established the **United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA)** and tasked it with "monitoring the flashpoint border between north and south and facilitating the delivery of humanitarian aid" and authorized it "to use force in protecting civilians and humanitarian workers in Abyei." It was to comprise of a maximum of 4,200 military personnel, 50 police personnel, and appropriate civilian support. On 29 May 2013, [UNSCR 2104\(2013\)](#), increased UNISFA's military strength up to 5,326 peacekeepers, as requested by Sudan and South Sudan on 8 March 2013. [UNSCR 2352\(2017\)](#) of May 2017 decreased forces levels to near initial mandate levels.

UNISFA operates in the same countries as both **United Nations-African Union Hybrid Mission in Darfur (UNAMID)** and **United Nations Mission in the Republic of South Sudan (UNMISS)**. While these missions do not appear to share resources, they occasionally share training venues, such as the recent police contingent training "retreat" in Kingali.

**2. Mandate.** On 15 November 2017, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) adopted resolution [UNSCR 2386\(2017\)](#) to extend the UNISFA mandate until 15 May 2018, reiterating the directed tasks from the initial 2011 mandate. The support of the JBVMM, however, is only authorized until 15 April 2018 (one month less than the full UNISFA mandate). At that point, such support will be withdrawn:

...unless Sudan and South Sudan ensure the free, unhindered and expeditious movement to and from Abyei and throughout the Safe Demilitarized Border Zone of all personnel, as well as equipment, provisions, supplies and other goods, including vehicles, aircraft, and spare parts, which are for the exclusive and official use of UNISFA.

**3. Deployment.** [UNSCR 2386\(2017\)](#) maintains "the authorized [troop ceiling of 4,791](#) until 15 April 2018, but the ceiling will decrease to 4,235 unless the Council decides to extend UNISFA's support for the

**Current Authorization:**

- 4,791 military personnel
- 50 police personnel
- An appropriate civilian support

Mechanism. This troop ceiling reflects the changes initially made in UNISFA's May 2017 mandate renewal, which reduced troop authorization from **5,326** to **4,791**. That change was the first in troop levels since 2013.

Of the almost 5,000 personnel deployed in support of the UNISFA, **Ethiopia** provides almost 4,368 of them, or 91%. No other country contributes more than five military personnel to the mission. Zimbabwe (10) and Tanzania (9) provide the bulk of the UNISFA's police presence. The entire force is approximately 7.7% women (369), making UNISFA's mission among the largest female contingents in current peacekeeping operations.

Current Strength:

- Troops: 4,290
- Staff: 112
- Police: 32

**4. Casualties.** There have been [24 total fatalities](#) in UNISFA since its 2011 inception, with three in 2017, all due to accident or illness. Of the 24 fatalities, seven were due to "malicious acts" (or 29%) and 91% of the deaths were Ethiopians (which reflects the overwhelming number of Ethiopians deployed in the mission).

*The UN Development Program, Malicious Acts Insurance Policy, February 4, 2003, defines "[malicious acts](#)" as fatalities as a result of "war; invasion; hostilities; acts of foreign enemies, whether war be declared or not; civil war; revolution; rebellion; insurrection; military or usurped power; riots or civil commotion; sabotage; explosion of war weapons; or terrorist activities." In contrast, "accidents" is defined to include "stray bullets, friendly fire, and road accidents" and other incidents, such as natural disasters.*

However, the total number of fatalities do not reflect the overall level of violence against peacekeepers in general—and throughout the other missions in Sudan and South Sudan. The number of [UN peacekeeper fatalities](#) is steadily rising across all current missions. The most accepted reason for this growth is that UN members are deliberately targeted by increasingly capable armed groups. However, the rise in fatalities may also correspond to significant growth to the overall numbers of peacekeepers, combined with the ever riskier environments in which they are deployed. In fact, a [recent UN casualties analysis](#) suggests exactly this point—that "overall UN fatalities are not substantively on the rise" once data is controlled for deployment numbers. Instead, "total fatality ratios for the period 1990–2011 are declining...for all three levels: the national contingent, UN mission, and global levels."

These totals also do not account for other UNISFA non-fatal [casualties](#) due to injuries, disease, or accidents.

**Situation**

**5. Drivers of Conflict.** The [major driver of conflict](#) regarding Abyei is the issue of economics, in two parts: the rights to the oil reserves found in Abyei, and the use of land in general. Oil is an important commodity to the local citizens and the disputing Sudans. However, the land use disagreements may be of more immediate concerns to local residents, particularly between the nomadic herders that have traditionally grazed the region, and the Ngok Dinka tribes that live—and farm—permanently there. Beyond that, the political rights—especially voting privileges—remains a seemingly inviolable issue as the determination of who can vote will lead to the resolution of the border dispute and the use of the land.

More specifically, in October 2017 the [Assistant Secretary General for Rule of Law and Security Institutions](#) delineated four areas of dispute in Abyei: "the conflict between the Ngok Dinka and Misseriya ethnic groups over grazing land and water; criminality in and around the Amiet Common Market; violence associated with petty crime; and the presence of armed groups."

## 6. Significant Events.

### a. Recent Events.

- **15 November 2017.** UNISFA mandate extended until May 2018.
- **9 November 2017.** The Abyei Joint Oversight Committee, which is meant to enable joint political and administrative oversight of Abyei, reportedly convened. They had not met since May 2017.
- **1 November 2017.** A summit meeting of the presidents of Sudan and South Sudan convened in Khartoum.
- **13-15 October 2017.** An unknown armed group opened fire, killing two women and injuring four others, at the Amiet Common Market. In Banton, located eight kilometers south of Abyei town, three unknown assailants opened fire on a commercial vehicle, leading to the death of one woman and injury to two others.
- **16 and 22 September 2017.** The JJBVMM conducted some joint reconnaissance to the proposed team site locations astride the Safe De-militarized Border Zone (SBDZ).
- **15 May 2017.** UNSC unanimously adopted [resolution 2352](#), reducing number of deployed troops.
- **December 2016-January 2017.** On 21 December at night, in Noong, assailants fired two rocket-propelled grenades, injuring five people, including two women and a three-year-old child. On 9 January, UNISFA troops prevented violence by intercepting around 10 armed Misseriya near Nainai in the central sector. In the ensuing exchange of fire, one Misseriya was killed. The timing of these incidents suggested that the aim of these armed elements was to influence the deliberations at the meetings of intercommunity traditional leaders held on 30 December and 12 January.

### b. Upcoming Events

- **15 April 2018.** JBVMM operationalization assessed to determine continued support.
- **15 May 2018.** UNISFA mandate due for renewal.

## Operational Environment (GPMESII)



**7. Geographic.** The Abyei Area covers 4,000 square miles of desert, farmland, and oil fields located along the ill-defined border between Sudan and South Sudan.

The Sudans are hot with seasonal rainfall influenced by the annual shift of the Inter-Tropical Convergence Zone; rainfall is heaviest in the upland areas of the south and diminishes to the north. The White Nile, flowing north out of the uplands of Central Africa, is the major geographic feature of the countries, supporting agriculture and extensive wild animal populations.

With almost no access to irrigation, food production is largely determined by rainfall. During the dry season (October to March), fields of six-foot-tall grass are burned, causing haze and falling ash. The dry season always brings the possibility of renewed violence and clashes. While violence continues throughout the rainy season, the dry season makes movement possible again and brings with it renewed insecurity. In the dry season, there is an increased risk of local road blocks and extortion as well as armed robbery in addition to overall poor quality roads damaged by the previous rainy season. April is the beginning of what is called "The Hunger Gap," as the previous year's food stores run thin and the next harvest is not until September.

**8. Political.** The determination of “residency” is the major political contention in the ongoing dispute over Abyei—that is, who is allowed to vote on any future referendum on Abyei’s status. Semi-nomadic Misseriya tribes travel through the area seasonally, but South Sudan disputes their actual residency. On the other hand, the Republic of the Sudan advocates that their presence in Abyei for several months of each year allows them residency status.

*In 2013, the Ngok Dinka conducted a [unilateral referendum](#) which indicated they wanted to join South Sudan. However, none of the Governments nor any entity in the international community recognize the outcome.*

In the interim, both Governments “[treat the population of the \(Abyei\) region as its nationals](#)”. As an example, in February 2017, the President of the Republic of the Sudan instructed his authorities “to provide its residents with full administrative services including issuance of identity cards and passports.”

**9. Military/Security.** The security situation in Abyei, while generally improved, remains fragile. As an example, in November 2017, [UN sanctions monitors reported](#):

...despite the catastrophic conditions across South Sudan, armed forces, groups and militias - particularly those affiliated with (South Sudan’s) (President) Kiir and Vice President Taban Deng Gai - continued to “actively impede both humanitarian and peacekeeping operations.”

At this time, UNISFA is the most consistent security force in the Abyei area. In October 2017, the UN Secretary General’s [Special Envoy for Sudan and South Sudan](#) suggested that:

Thanks to UNISFA’s sustained efforts, the risk of Sudan and South Sudan relapsing into conflict was low and the mission’s stabilizing role should inform any decision the international community might be considering regarding Abyei and the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism... (and that) UNISFA’s enabling role was crucial for any future progress towards the implementation of transitional agreements and the resumption of talks on Abyei’s final status.

A functional [JBVMM](#) is projected to be the “next step” for Abyei security. Proposed almost seven years ago, it is still not fully operationalized. The UN [Secretary-General’s 2015 report on Abyei](#) described what “full operating capability” would entail:

...the resolution of the dispute over the Safe Demilitarized Border Zone, a buffer zone along the Sudan-South Sudan border; the resumption of border demarcation discussions; the holding of regular meetings of the Joint Political and Security Mechanism (JPSM) established by the governments of Sudan and South Sudan to discuss political and security matters of mutual concern; and the granting of full freedom of movement for the operations of the JBVMM.

*The [Safe Demilitarized Border Zone \(SDBZ\)](#) was agreed to in 2012 by both Sudan and South Sudan. It is to encompass 10 kilometers along either side of a center line and monitored by the JBVMM. UNISFA is also mandated to include the SDBZ in its operational area.*

As indicated above, progress to meet full operating capability has been negligible and intermittent. However, in September 2017 the JBVMM conducted [a joint air patrol reconnaissance](#). The reconnaissance team included representatives from: African Union Border Program Technical Team, National Monitors from Government of Sudan and South Sudan, and UNISFA military operations/technical staff, JBVMM international observers and military operations staff, and United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS).

Other significant security actors include, but are not limited to, the following:

**a. State Armed Groups.** There are no state-affiliated armed groups operating formally in Abyei, as Abyei's referendum has not yet been held. However, the armies or their affiliates of both South Sudan and the Republic of the Sudan are known to incur into the region in the past.

**(Republic of the Sudan) Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF).** The SAF is the official armed force of the Republic of Sudan. It includes land forces, navy, air force and the **Popular Defence Force** (PDF), which is a civilian militia force. While the SAF is described as committed to the defense of national security of its entire population, it allegedly supported the *Janjaweed* armed group against its citizens residing in Darfur. In November 2017, the Russian [TASS](#) news organization announced that the Russian Defense Ministry will assist the Republic of Sudan "upgrade" its armed forces.

**(South Sudan) Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA).** Divided loyalties and allegations of human rights abuses specifically targeting civilians has marred any real reform or accountability within the SPLA.

The SPLA was accused of shooting down a UN helicopter in 2012 (and possibly again in 2014) and targeting UN humanitarian aid contractors in 2014. As recently as November 2017, the U.S. threatened [further sanctions](#) against the South Sudanese government "if it does not end violence and allow United Nations peacekeepers to do their job."

**b. Non-State Armed Groups.** Local communities, often well-armed and not involved in elite politics, engage in the conflict on their own terms, usually in a self-protection manner (or perceived as such).

**c. Other International Actors.** The relationship between either Sudanese or South Sudan forces with their near-neighbors is complex. Beyond UNIFSA and its neighboring UN missions (the United Nations Mission in South Sudan, or UNMISS; and the African Union - United Nations Mission in Darfur, or UNAMID), there are many other international actors and organizations as well as regional neighbors interested in the determination of Abyei's future (albeit within their own national or regional concerns). The following list is not complete, but provides examples:

**China.** China's interests in both the Republic of Sudan and South Sudan are directly related to its overall economic interests in Africa. Examples of its engagement with each Sudan abound. Of particular note are the Chinese-funded and planned [Sahelian-Saharan Silk Road](#), from Port Sudan to the Chadian capital of N'Djamena; and the [2015 report](#) from [the UN Panel of Experts on South Sudan](#), which indicated that "China has been one of the top sources of arms and ammunition for the South Sudan government."

**Ethiopia.** Ethiopia provides the vast majority of the troops to the UNISFA mission. While it has engaged in a ["diplomatic row"](#) with South Sudan (based on stories that President Salva Kiir has allowed Ethiopian rebels to open their office in the capital Juba), it remains intensely concerned with regional and international efforts to stabilize both the Republic of Sudan and South Sudan. In August 2017, [Ethiopia offered to host](#) a series of talks in Addis Ababa between the parties to address the Abyei conundrum, but it did not occur. (Such talks allegedly [were to resume](#) in November 2017.)

**Russia.** Russia also maintains interest in both the Republic of Sudan and South Sudan. In November 2017, Russian President Vladimir Putin [received Sudanese President Umar al-Bashir](#), who was indicted by the International Criminal Court (ICC) for genocide. During that visit, President al-Bashir said that the Republic of Sudan ["in need of protection from the aggressive acts of the United States."](#) He also complimented Russia' military actions in Syria and expressed gratitude for Russia's offer to assist in modernizing the Sudanese military forces. The Russian and Sudanese presidents also agreed to a [nuclear power cooperation](#) arrangement. At the same time, Russia has indicated it will

thwart any UN attempt to [further sanctions](#) against the South Sudanese government, as threatened by the U.S. in November 2017.

**Sudan and South Sudan.** Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and SPLA have skirmished along the Sudan – South Sudan border, especially in the contested Abyei region. Sudan has bombed towns in South Sudan, with focus on the oil producing areas such as Unity State in South Sudan.

[Sudanese rebels have also supported the SPLA.](#) Sudan also accuses South Sudan of [harboring “rebel groups](#) in South Kordofan, Blue Nile and Darfur.”

**10. Economic.** Abyei is rich in oil resources—or, it was. Production remains limited, but it is uncertain if that is due to oil reserves depletion or the ongoing conflict.

South Sudan is also [rich in natural resources such](#) as oil, however, the ongoing conflict continues to stifle oil production and the drop in global oil prices has reduced government revenues. Years of conflict, poor infrastructure, and an unskilled workforce have kept the impoverished country as one of the poorest in the world. Electricity is powered largely through costly and inefficient diesel generators. Most of the country survives by sustenance farming – s oil is exceptionally fertile. Oil makes up over 90% of the Governments budget revenues, but it is difficult to fully take advantage of these resources with limited infrastructure, unskilled labor, and the oil companies’ aversion to risk. The recent downturn of the global oil market contributes to marked economic depression. In addition, the government intermittently shuts down oil production due to bilateral disagreements with Sudan and management incompetency.

**11. Social.** South Sudan is [very diverse](#), with major ethnicities of Dinka 35.8% and Nuer 15.6%. Other groups are Shilluk, Azande, Bari, Kakwa, Kuku, Murle, Mandari, Didinga, Ndogo, Bviri, Lndi, Anuak, Bongo, Lango, Dungotona, Acholi speaking many languages including English (official language), Arabic (includes Juba and Sudanese variants) and the regional languages which include Dinka, Nuer, Bari, Zande and Shilluk. There are 11,562,695 people and the primary religions are Christian and animist.

However, the Abyei region itself is somewhat homogeneous. It is the [traditional homeland](#) of the Ngok Dinka, a tribal group with strong ethnic, cultural, and linguistic ties to the Dinka of South Sudan. Misseriya herders, members of a northern nomadic Arab tribe, seasonally traverse Abyei and other North-South border areas with their cattle in search of water and pasture in the dry season and to trade goods.

**a. Rule of Law.** UN Office for Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in Sudan’s April 2017 report indicated: “The failure by the parties to establish the Abyei Area Administration, and the resulting sense of insecurity, have hampered governance, the rule of law and the sustainable provision of public services, presenting a considerable impediment to the sustainable return of displaced people...” According to the UN Secretary-General’s [most recent report on Abyei](#):

In the continued absence of the Abyei Police Service owing to a disagreement on its composition, police officers deployed as a part of UNISFA maintained their advisory and capacity-building role with the community protection committees in the central and southern parts of Abyei, with a focus on sustaining law and order...Delays in the establishment of the Abyei Police Service have left a rule-of-law vacuum in the Abyei Area.

**b. Human Rights.** There are no specific allegations of human rights violations in the Abyei region, excepting the seasonal clashes between the nomadic Misseriya herders and the Ngok Dinka tribes.

**c. Humanitarian Assistance.** According to the UN Secretary-General’s [most recent report on Abyei](#), the humanitarian situation consists of:

Limited or absent basic services, displacements from South Sudan and returnees to the area who had left at the onset of the Abyei crisis resulted in continued significant humanitarian needs in the Abyei Area. United Nations agencies, funds and programmes [sic] and non-governmental organizations continued to provide humanitarian and recovery assistance to 163,000 vulnerable people. These included persons displaced from neighbouring [sic] areas in South Sudan and seasonal Misseriya nomads. Since my previous report, an estimated 7,500 people displaced by conflict in South Sudan have transited through Abyei to reach destinations in the Sudan. In addition, there were reports of new arrivals from South Sudan who had recently settled in Abyei...



**12. Information.** It is unclear what information mechanisms are in place in the Abyei region, other than those provided by UNISFA.

**13. Infrastructure.** Similar to both Sudan and South Sudan, most of the Abyei region does not have electricity, and apparently lacks all aspects of physical infrastructure needed to support an efficient, productive economy. This dearth of infrastructure prevents many areas from becoming economically viable, leaving communities vulnerable to resource conflicts and food insecurity. During the rainy season many communities can only be reached by food air drops. According to the UN Secretary-General's [most recent report on Abyei](#):

During the reporting period, the mission completed the rotation of 2,105 troops (1,062 inbound and 1,043 outbound) and the transportation of 116,063 kg of goods (41,935 kg inbound and 74,128 kg outbound) through the Kadugli airport, as the mission remained unauthorized by the Government of the Sudan to use the 90 per cent completed airstrip in Athony, which continued to put a considerable strain on its air assets. Similarly, 115,026 kg (41,230 kg inbound and 73,796 kg outbound) of goods were transported by road through Kadugli.

## **Peace Operations Functions**

### **14. Command and Control.**

**Acting Head of Mission and Force Commander:** Major General [Tesfay Gidey Hailemichael](#) (Ethiopia)

**15. Intelligence.** It is unclear what specific intelligence assets are available to UNISFA.

**16. Operations.** It is unclear what specific operational events have occurred in UNISFA at this time, other than those involving the JBVMM. According to the UN Secretary-General's [most recent report on Abyei](#):

UNISFA continued to operate four helicopters and three fixed-wing aircraft. Of the missions undertaken during the reporting period, 13 were aerial patrols of the Abyei Area, 9 were in support of the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism and others were reconnaissance missions.

### **17. Protection.**

**a. Mission Protection.** While UNISFA casualties are much less than those experienced in other UN Missions, all missions are experiencing increasingly hostile and insecure environments for UN personnel and other aid, humanitarian, and development agency personnel. In late-2016 and early 2017, several [hijackings of international aid workers](#) in and around the Abyei region led UNISFA to reinforce safety procedures for its staff and related workers.

**b. Protection of Civilians.** Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) occupy—and traverse—the Abyei region.

Most of the regional Protection of Civilians (PoC) sites are in South Sudan. Intended originally to be a [short-term solution to a temporary crisis](#), the sites have become settlements of sorts for IDPs. Yet, the living spaces have still not been proportionately expanded and sanitation and water services have not been sufficiently improved, posing major health and protection risks, including the potential for outbreaks of communicable diseases like cholera, and both internal (to camps) and external security threats.

**18. Sustainment.** Poor infrastructure and the desert environment contribute to any UNISFA sustainment challenges. The UNISFA mission is [budgeted](#) until June 2018, \$266,700,000.00 from a separate UN fund. It also [shares costs](#) of one of its aircraft with the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) and receives ground-handling support from both MONUSCO and UNAMID in Entebbe, Uganda, and Khartoum, Sudan respectively.

## **Issues and Considerations**

**19. Issues.** The major issues confronting UNISFA are summarized as follows:

- The roots of this conflict are embedded in the social and political fabric of several decades. Historical tensions are easily enflamed. Political solution remains elusive.
- The situation for civilians sheltering in the vicinity of UNISFA (and UNMISS) bases presents a challenge to humanitarians, who typically do not provide services inside military bases but have responded due to the unprecedented situation and level of need.

## 20. Considerations.

**a. U.S.** [The U.S. government remains the leading international donor to South Sudan](#). Specific to Abyei, the Trump Administration has not announced any changes or modifications to the U.S. approach, except in its review of mandates by the U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations in the early months of 2017. After the review, the U.S. advocated that the UN refocus on political solutions to ongoing peace operations, which included UNISFA. Michele Jean Sison, the United States Deputy Representative to the United Nations, [remarked](#) at November 2017's UNISFA mandate renewal:

...The mission's efforts in working with local communities to strengthen ties, resolve disputes, and increase stability have greatly contributed to the general calm in this contested area between Sudan and South Sudan...Since 2011, however, Sudan and South Sudan have made little concrete progress on implementing their agreements related to Abyei and the border. As a result, UNISFA has been regularly prevented from fully implementing its mandate, particularly with respect to supporting the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism, JBVMM, which has not functioned as intended for almost six years...While we continue to support the JBVMM concept, the Security Council cannot continue to support and resource a mechanism for which the parties themselves do not expeditiously take tangible steps to implement...In addition, we remain seriously concerned about reports that armed forces continue to occupy areas within the agreed Safe Demilitarized Border Zone and that Sudanese armed police still surround the Diffra oil complex. These actions are inconsistent with the June 20, 2011 Agreement and several Security Council resolutions...(therefore)...we support today's resolution to renew the overall mission mandate for another six months while giving the parties a final four months to complete the steps to which they have previously agreed with respect to fully implementing the JBVMM.

**b. UN.** According to the UN Secretary-General's [most recent report on Abyei](#), it appears self-evident that UNISFA is essential to the continued peace in the region—as long as there is no formal political agreement to the administration of the Abyei region.

**c. Sudan, South Sudan, and Abyei.** The role of various TCCs in the greater region influences the perception of the UNISFA (and UNMISS and UNAMID) by the population and the various conflict entities. All governments involved, and some citizens, have indicated distrust of either the UN, or its missions, or the [security forces of neighboring states](#) that may be part of those missions or other regional peace-facilitating initiatives. However, it is obvious that the [greatest sense of distrust](#) is between the two nations—Sudan and South Sudan. Both Ambassadors to the UN alleged malfeasance on the part of the other during the May 2017 discussions on UNISFA mandate renewal:

The **Sudanese Ambassador**...blamed the South Sudan for delaying the implementation of the cooperation agreement and Abyei interim intuitions. On the joint monitoring body, he declared: "We have never restricted the movement of this Mechanism." He was pointing to the UN Secretary General report which said that the JBVMM had cancelled 18 air patrols due to delayed approval by South Sudan...**South Sudan's Ambassador**...said that the withdrawal of support for the JBVMM would negatively impact the cooperation agreement between South Sudan and Sudan, emboldening each side to take a more combative posture along the border, he cautioned, pointing out that ceasing support could lead to proxy fights. He further pointed to the need fill the "vacuum of State responsibility", and called on the international community to provide the need support adding it is "urgently needed to stabilise [*sic*] the situation in the

area and create a conducive environment for a more constructive and fruitful dialogue on the future of Abyei."

There are no serious indications that this mistrust has been alleviated or at least set aside to address the Abyei issue.

## **Resources**

### **21. Key Documents and On-Line References (Selected).**

- [Better World Campaign UN Peacekeeping Abyei](#)
- [CIA, The World Fact Book--South Sudan](#)
- [Department of State, U.S. Embassy South Sudan](#) and [USAID, South Sudan](#)
- [Department of State U.S. South Sudan Fact Sheet \(October 2017\)](#)
- [Enough Project What is Abyei and Why is it Disputed?](#)
- [Global Security Abyei](#)
- United Nations, General Assembly Fifth Committee Seventy-first Session, 33rd Meeting (AM) [Stressing That Cost Cutting Must Not Undermine Mandates](#) (9 May 2017)
- [UNMIS \(Closed Mission\) Abyei Protocol Fact Sheet \(2009\)](#)
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