



Jumuga Journal of Education,
Oral Studies, and Human Sciences (JJEOSHS)
editor@jumugajournal.org
<http://www.jumugajournal.org>
Volume 8, Issue 1, 2025
<https://doi.org/10.35544/jjeoshs.v8i1.107>

Protracted Conflicts and Peacekeeping Strategy: Assessing the United Nations' Role in the Central African Republic

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Abstract

The research article examines the efficacy of the United Nations peacekeeping strategy in resolving protracted conflicts in the Central African Republic (2014–2023), underpinned by Liberal Peace theory. Using a mixed concurrent methodology, data was collected from MINUSCA personnel, residents, NGO workers, and local administrators in Vakaga Prefecture, Birao Sub-prefecture, a conflict hotspot. A sample of 311 respondents was selected through convenience and random sampling. Primary data was gathered using questionnaires, interviews, and focus group discussions, analysed thematically for qualitative data, and descriptively with SPSS for quantitative data. Findings indicated a significant reduction in violent conflict in Vakaga, though civilian-targeted incidents persist. MINUSCA's strategies effectively resolved protracted conflicts by preventing escalation, disarming armed groups, providing humanitarian aid, establishing safe zones for civilians, and supporting democratic electoral processes through dialogue and mediation. The study recommends extending MINUSCA's mandate to focus on transformative strategies, linking the peace process to justice mechanisms, strengthening CAR's national capacity to protect citizens from threats, and ensuring sustainable conflict resolution.

Key Words: Humanitarian, Conflicts, Peacekeeping, Protracted, Security, Strategy.

1.0 Introduction

1.1 An Overview of the Protracted Conflicts

The international community faces numerous protracted conflicts that persist over extended periods, posing significant challenges to global peace and stability. These conflicts often involve complex geopolitical, ethnic, religious, or socioeconomic factors contributing to their intractability. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict remains a deeply entrenched and multifaceted issue, with a range of historical, political, and cultural factors contributing to its complexity. Some of the key causes of protracted conflict between Israel and Palestine include the Partition and Creation of the State of Israel between the years 1947 and 1948 by the UN, which led to tensions and conflict as neighbouring Arab states opposed the creation of Israel. Jerusalem is a city of religious significance for Jews, Christians, and Muslims. The control and status of Jerusalem, particularly East Jerusalem, which was annexed by Israel in 1967, is a major point of contention in the conflict (Caplan, 2019). Ndiyun (2023) analyses sectarian conflict in the CAR from 2012 to 2020 through the protracted social conflict theory framework. The author argues that while various factors contribute to the violent and enduring nature of the conflict, sectarianism stands out as the most prominent and significant catalyst. Ndiyun emphasizes that the inability of the Bozizé administration to fulfil the terms of the 2007 peace agreement, along with other economic and political motivations, played a crucial role in the emergence of the Seleka insurgency. The rapid escalation of events subsequently intensified the conflict, leading to deep-rooted sectarian tensions between Muslim and Christian communities, as well as among different ethnic groups, which further prolonged the strife (Ndiyun, 2023).

Central African Republic is experiencing a high-scale abuse of human rights by armed groups owing to protracted conflict. The ongoing conflict has resulted in the Central African Republic, one of the most impoverished nations globally,

facing a critical health crisis marked by the highest recorded national mortality rate worldwide (Gang et al., 2023). This turmoil has caused widespread displacement, with estimates indicating that over 515,000 individuals were internally displaced within the country as of December 2022 (ACPS, 2023). Additionally, the conflict has led to the displacement of 320,000 individuals who have sought refuge in neighboring nations, such as the DRC, Chad, and Congo. Therefore, there is a desperate need for aid and programs to restore peace and tranquility and restart local economies. This issue holds significant relevance in rural regions beyond the government's control. Although specific humanitarian organizations are striving to assist, the high mortality rate indicative of the crisis implies that the needs within the Central African Republic are predominantly unaddressed (Gang et al., 2023).

1.2 UN Peacekeeping Strategy in Combating Protracted Conflicts in CAR

The UN has been actively engaged in CAR for over a decade through its peacekeeping initiative known as MINUSCA, which is aimed at addressing the conflict in the region. The UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA), which derives its name from the French term *Mission multidimensionnelle intégrée des Nations unies pour la stabilisation en Centrafrique*, was established on April 10, 2014, with the primary goal of safeguarding civilians in CAR under Chapter VII of the UN Charter. The mission officially commenced operations on September 15, 2014, and as of September 30, 2021, it comprised over 15,000 military personnel, police officers, and civilian staff deployed in the area (Musya, 2023).

The UN peacekeeping strategy implemented in CAR via MINUSCA, just like in other protracted conflict situations, has three components: Facilitating the establishment of enduring peace, fostering cooperative initiatives between the United Nations and various international organizations to create and sustain these conditions following the departure of peacekeeping forces, and developing clear objectives along with results-driven metrics to assess and determine the appropriate timing for the withdrawal of peacekeepers from a nation (ICRC, Protracted conflict and humanitarian action: some recent ICRC experiences, 2016). The key roles of MINUSCA include facilitating humanitarian assistance, supporting the transition process, promoting and protecting human rights, disarmament, supporting justice and the rule of law, demobilization, reintegration, and repatriation.

The protracted conflict persists despite a UN peacekeeping strategy via MINUSCA in CAR (Musya, 2017). Therefore, the effectiveness of the peacekeeping mission has been called into question by various quarters. There have been various reported complaints about the peacekeeping mission that might have dented its efficacy in resolving the protracted conflict in CAR. In August 2015, there was an allegation levelled against DRC soldiers, including rape of women and child sexual exploitation in the town of Bambari (Shemalla & Tomb, 2017). Such allegation points to the mission's failure in its critical goal of protecting the civilians. Therefore, there was a need to examine the efficacy of the United Nations peacekeeping strategy in resolving protests in the Central African Republic between 2014 and 2023.

1.3 Research Question

To assess the effectiveness of the UN peacekeeping strategy in addressing protracted conflicts in the Central African Republic. This research question aims to investigate the balance between military intervention and peacebuilding in the region, with a particular focus on the effects of UN peacekeeping operations on humanitarian outcomes, state stability, and conflict resolution. The study assessed the degree to which peacekeeping efforts address the underlying causes of ongoing conflicts or increase pre-existing tensions, as well as how well they align with the UN's objectives of sustainable peace and security.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Application of Liberal Peace Theory to UN Peace Building

Liberal peace theory focuses on peacebuilding interventions in conflict-affected countries like CAR, emphasizing liberal democratic principles and institutions to promote peace and stability. Rooted in Kant's democratic peace hypothesis, it posits that democracies, characterized by shared values and the rule of law, are less likely to engage in war (Beruashvili, 2022). In CAR, democratic deficits, such as Michel Djotodia's self-declaration as president, have contributed to renewed conflicts between Séléka and Anti-balaka militias (Piquard, 2022). Institutionalism, another pillar of the theory, highlights the role of institutions like the UN in fostering cooperation and resolving conflicts (Dijkstra & Debre, 2024).

The rule of law and human rights are central to liberal peace theory, advocating for legal and human dignity frameworks to ensure sustainable peace (Apodaca, 2003). Diplomatic conflict resolution, such as CAR's 2007 peace agreement with rebel forces, aligns with this approach (Gawerc, 2006). Humanitarian intervention, justified under liberal values, underpins the UN's MINUSCA mission to protect civilians in CAR (Farrell, 2002). Critics argue that liberal peace interventions, while idealistic, may undermine sovereignty and perpetuate conflict patterns, as seen in CAR's fragile peace

agreements (Newman et al., 2009). Nevertheless, the theory informs this article's focus on the effectiveness of the MINUSCA's peacekeeping strategy to address CAR's protracted conflicts.

2.2 UN Charter Chapters V and VI

Chapter V of the United Nations Charter delineates the framework, roles, and authorities of the Security Council, which serves as one of the key organs of the United Nations tasked with preserving international peace and security (Musya, 2023). The essential elements of Chapter V encompass Composition, Functions and Powers, Decision-Making, Voting Procedures, and Meetings and Procedures. The Security Council's foremost duty is to uphold international peace and security in alignment with the objectives and principles of the United Nations. The Security Council wields extensive powers to achieve this objective, including establishing peacekeeping missions, implementing sanctions, authorizing military interventions, and resolving disputes through diplomatic channels (Lowe, Roberts, & Welsh, 2012; United Nations, 1945).

The Security Council functions based on the principle of collective security, where decisions are reached through the affirmative votes of nine members, which must include the agreement of all five permanent members (Musya, 2017). Each member holds one vote within the Council. The Security Council convenes regularly to deliberate on international peace and security issues. It can assemble at any time deemed necessary, either at the request of a member state or initiated by the President of the Security Council (Lowe, Roberts, & Welsh, 2012).

Chapter VI of the United Nations Charter is titled "Pacific Settlement of Disputes." This chapter outlines the principles and procedures for the peaceful resolution of international disputes through negotiation, mediation, arbitration, and other peaceful means. The major provisions of Chapter VI include General Principles, Negotiation, Mediation, Arbitration, and other peaceful means, and the Role of the Security Council. Chapter VI reaffirms the commitment of member states to the peaceful settlement of disputes and the prohibition of the threat or use of force in international relations (Lowe, Roberts, & Welsh, 2012).

The primary method for the peaceful settlement of disputes outlined in Chapter VI is negotiation. Member states are encouraged to seek mutually acceptable solutions to their disputes through direct negotiations or other diplomatic channels. Chapter VI recognizes the importance of mediation as a means of facilitating the resolution of conflicts. It encourages member states to use the services of the Secretary-General or other third-party mediators to assist in the mediation process and help parties reach mutually acceptable agreements (Musya, 2023). In addition to negotiation and mediation, Chapter VI mentions other peaceful means of dispute settlement, including arbitration and using regional agencies or arrangements, where appropriate. While Chapter VI primarily deals with the peaceful settlement of disputes through diplomatic means, it also acknowledges the role of the Security Council in addressing threats to international peace and security. The Security Council may act under Chapter VI to recommend or facilitate the settlement of disputes and promote compliance with peaceful settlement measures agreed upon by the parties. Generally, Chapter VI reflects the United Nations' commitment to the peaceful resolution of disputes and promoting international peace and security through dialogue, negotiation, and cooperation among member states. It provides a framework for resolving conflicts and preventing their escalation into broader crises or armed conflicts (Lowe et al., 2012).

2.3 Empirical Literature Review

2.3.1 The Effectiveness of the UN Peacekeeping Strategy in Combating Protracted Conflicts

The research conducted by Albrecht and Cold-Ravnkilde (2020) delved into the Peacekeeping mission in Somalia. The study focused on the AU Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) and the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), the two largest contemporary missions in Africa. These missions lead to significant levels of instability. The study specifically examined the dynamics among troop-contributing countries within these missions. It established that national interests significantly affect how missions fulfill their mandates, as national interests often precede the mission's objectives. Conflicting national interests create tensions that impair the direction and coherence of operations. Albrecht and Cold-Ravnkilde (2020) was however focused on conflict situations in Somali and Mali which have got different contexts from Central Africa Republic. There is a need for another study focusing on the UN peacekeeping mission in CAR.

A study conducted by Berg (2008) with specific attention to Central African Conflict Dynamics noted that the fundamental causes of protracted conflict in those three countries, particularly in CAR, is the autocratic and dictatorial character of the regimes. Political systems have not been providing for the consideration of different interests in decision-making (Berg, 2008). However, the study failed to account for the measures that can be operationalized to combat the protracted conflict, especially the UN peacekeeping strategy. The study nonetheless notes that a lasting solution to the region's problems is inconceivable and that there is a need for the existing architecture of international peace efforts to be urgently revised to combat protracted conflict in CAR. This sets the base for this study that intends to evaluate the

effectiveness of UN peacekeeping strategy via MINUSCA to combat protracted conflicts and recommend possible intervention strategies for addressing protracted conflicts in the CAR.

A research study by Ndiyun (2023) on analysis of Sectarian Conflict in the Central African Republic asserts that while various factors contribute to the violent and enduring nature of the conflict, sectarianism stands out as the most prominent and significant catalyst. The study indicates that although sectarianism was not the primary instigator of the conflict in the Central African Republic in 2012, it subsequently emerged as a critical factor. It emphasizes that the inability of the Bozizé administration to fulfil the terms of the 2007 peace agreement, along with other political and economic motivations, played a role in the emergence of the Seleka insurgency. This rapid escalation of events intensified the conflict, leading to entrenched sectarian rivalries between Muslim and Christian communities, as well as among various ethnic groups, thereby prolonging the conflict (Ndiyun, 2023).

In the analysis of UN interventions, Uwazuruike (2021) highlighted that the peacekeeping initiatives in the Central African Republic have been hindered by a lack of a cohesive political strategy and an insufficient grasp of the local context, alongside inadequate and sustained involvement from regional and international stakeholders. The intervening parties have often interpreted the situation in the Central African Republic through pre-existing narratives, consistently employing a flawed approach that includes a temporary halt to hostilities, national dialogue, and commitments to DDR, followed by elections as a means of withdrawal. This methodology has proven ineffective in sustaining peace, as it fails to tackle the fundamental issues at the heart of the conflict, which revolve around identity, citizenship, and a sense of belonging.

3.0 Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The study was based on a mixed concurrent research methodology comprising descriptive and explorative research designs. While using this design, the study collected and analysed both qualitative and quantitative data independently. The collection of qualitative and quantitative data happened simultaneously in the field, with data collection instruments (questionnaires, interview schedule, and focus group discussion) being administered in the same window of time. The quantitative aspects of the data collected and analysed made it possible to examine the efficacy of 'UN peacekeeping strategy in resolving protracted conflicts in Vakaga Prefecture, CAR. Further, the collection and analysis of qualitative data enabled the researcher to expound on the unique application of UN peacekeeping strategy in combating persistent conflicts in Vakaga Prefecture, Central African Republic.

3.2 Population of the Study

The target population in this study comprised the 1,625 MINUSCA personnel and 3,813 local residents (NGO workers, and local administrators) located at Birao Sub-prefecture (one of the hotspot areas) in Vakaga Prefecture, CAR.

3.3 Sample Size

Regarding the sample size of the MINUSCA personnel to participate in the study, the researcher adopted the formulae suggested by Kothari (2004). The formula is presented as:

$$\text{Thus, } n = \frac{Z \cdot Z \cdot p \cdot q \cdot N}{e \cdot e \cdot (N - 1) + Z \cdot Z \cdot p \cdot q}$$

In this context, e represents the error, which is set at 8%; p denotes the population reliability, specified as p=0.5; q is defined as (1-p), Z corresponds to the normal distribution at a significance level of 0.05, where z equals 1.96, N indicates the target population, and n signifies the sample size. Consequently, the sample size was computed as detailed below.

$$n = \frac{1.96 \cdot 1.96 \cdot 0.5 \cdot 0.5 \cdot 1625}{(0.08 \cdot 0.08 \cdot 1624) + (1.96 \cdot 1.96 \cdot 0.5 \cdot 0.5)} = \frac{1560.65}{10.3936 + 0.9604} = \frac{1560.65}{11.354} = 137.45 = 137$$

The researcher also adopted formulae suggested by regarding the sample size of the local residents to be included in the study (Kothari, 2004).

$$n = \frac{1.96 \cdot 1.96 \cdot 0.5 \cdot 0.5 \cdot 3813}{(0.08 \cdot 0.08 \cdot 3812) + (1.96 \cdot 1.96 \cdot 0.5 \cdot 0.5)} = \frac{3662.0052}{24.3968 + 0.9604} = \frac{3662.0052}{25.3572} = 144.41 = 144$$

Finally, the number of NGO workers and Local administration were selected based on the rule of thumb as suggested by Mugenda and Mugenda (2003), who assert that a sample size of 30 and above is adequate to enable the drawing of conclusions and generalization in research. Further, Borg and Gall (2014) hold that for a survey, the sample size should be between 20 - 50 cases in each minor subgroup. Given that NGO personnel and local administrators are a sub-group of the larger population group of local population, therefore, 21 NGO personnel and 9 local administrators, adding up to 30 cases, were selected to participate in the research study.

3.4 Sampling Techniques

The research employed convenience and simple random sampling methods to select the respondents for primary data collection. Convenience sampling is a technique in which participants are chosen based on their accessibility and closeness to the researcher. This approach entails selecting quickly reachable individuals willing to engage in the study. The researcher identified members of the population who are easily reachable and are ready to be involved in the study. The method is preferred when it is not possible to access the whole population; hence, the elements in the population that can be easily reached are picked to participate in the study (Flick, 2015). The convenient method the respondents prefer, such as video-conferencing and e-questionnaires, supplemented the lack of physical access.

The research article also adopts simple random sampling to select MINUSCA personnel to participate in the study. The process involved first creating a list of all MINUSCA personnel operating in the study area. All the staff in the list were allocated unique numbers to identify them. Then, randomization was adopted to select individual staff from the list using the random numbers method. The individuals that correspond to drawn numbers were included in the sample.

3.5 Data Collection Instruments

Secondary data was collected from sources other than primary sources, such as government departments, published documents, and organizational records. Further, primary data was sourced by administering survey questionnaires, interview schedules, and focus group discussions.

3.6 Types of Data

3.6.1 Questionnaire

The MINUSCA personnel (both civilians and soldiers) and local residents participated in filling out the questionnaires. The questionnaire was preferred for MINUSCA personnel and local residents, given that the sample size is large and must be reached within the shortest time possible (Kothari, 2004). The questionnaire was structured, having closed-ended question items. Section A of the questionnaire collected demographic information about study respondents, including designation, gender, age, and occupation while Section B sourced data on the effectiveness of peacekeeping strategy in combating protracted conflicts in CAR.

3.6.2 Interview Schedule

The other respondents, including NGO workers in the area and local administration government officials, were involved in the interview. The adoption of the interview schedule was informed by the need to collect additional in-depth qualitative information from key informants in Vakaga who have more information than the general local population. The schedule had open and probing questions on different research questions, including the effectiveness of peacekeeping strategy in combating protracted conflicts in CAR.

3.6.3 Focus Group Discussion

Focus group discussion was undertaken among local residents, NGO personnel, local administrators, and MINUSCA personnel. The study undertook two (2) FGD sessions, where each session had 8 participants and lasted 60 minutes. The discussion was informed by research questions where members in the group discussed issues around the effectiveness of peacekeeping strategy in combating protracted conflicts in CAR.

3.6.4 Secondary Data

Further, secondary data were collected from MINUSCA records and publications, Government office records and websites, and NGO websites and publications. The secondary data, both hard and soft copy, collected from the relevant sources were organized and stored in secure place awaiting analysis.

3.7 Data Collection Procedure

The researcher developed data collection instruments, including structured questionnaires and interview schedules. The researcher then checked the reliability and validity of the instruments by obtaining the opinion of international relations and diplomacy experts on the validity and reliability of the questionnaires and interview schedule. The researcher followed this with adjustments to the data collection tools to remedy their weak points, compromising reliability and validity. The researcher then applied for a research permit and other necessary authorization to collect data from the study area. The researcher involved 3 research assistants who understand the respondents' English, French, Sango, and local dialects. The research assistants needed to be conversant in spoken and written English, Sango, and French, given that most residents in

CAR talk to French and Sango as their national languages, and a few speak English as one of the official UN working languages. Further, the knowledge of local dialects was necessary for research assistants for respondents, especially residents who struggle with reading and writing in either French or English. Such respondents needed the questions translated by the research assistants in their local dialects. The research assistants were specifically trained on data collection two weeks before actual data collection.

On the study day, the researcher, accompanied by research assistants, data collection tools, and necessary authorizations, visited the study location to collect the needed data. The questionnaires were administered to 137 MINUSCA staff and 144 local residents based on self-administration either in hard copy documents or through electronic means in the form of Google forms shared via emails. Further, the interview schedule was administered to 21 NGO staff and 9 local administrators through various methods based on the preference of the selected respondents. The methods included face-to-face administration, video conferencing, and telephone calls. The researcher recorded the interview process and took notes to be used later at data analysis stage.

Finally, FGD was undertaken in a public hall in Birao Sub-prefecture. Two (2) FGD sessions were undertaken, each with 8 members, excluding the researcher and research assistants. In each of the two sessions, three (3) MINUSCA staff, three (3) local residents, one (1) local administrator, one (1) NGO staff were involved in the discussion. The FGD was guided by trained research assistant. The researcher in the focus group discussion was responsible for observing and documenting the insights that arose during the conversation.

3.8 Pretesting of the Research Instrument

The researcher pretested the questionnaires and interview schedules among 13 MINUSCA staff, 14 local residents, 2 NGOs personnel and 1 local administrator in Birao Sub-prefecture. The number selected for pretesting was based on 10% of the sample size as Mugenda and Mugenda (2003) suggested. The respondents who participated in the pretesting were excluded from the initial research that culminated into this article.

3.8.1 Validity and Reliability

The study adopted data from pre-testing to examine the reliability of the research instruments based on the internal consistency measure of Cronbach alpha. According to Kothari (2004), a Cronbach Alpha of 0.7 and above signifies a reliable study instrument. The study thus adopted Cronbach Alpha of 0.7 as the cut-off point for reliability testing. Further, validity of the data collection instruments was examined. The researcher enlisted the assistance of diplomacy and international studies experts to examine the content validity. Further, the responses from pretesting enabled the researcher to examine the face validity.

3.9 Data Analysis Plan

Qualitative data sourced via administration of interview schedule and FGD were analysed using content analysis. The researcher identified themes in line with research objectives, after which processed data was categorised under identified themes and assigned meaning. The quantitative data was analysed using simple descriptive statistics. Before quantitative analysis began, the data was checked for completeness, after which it was keyed into Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25. The data was then manipulated and analysed based on using simple descriptive statistics such as frequency distribution, percentages, mean, and standard deviation. The secondary data collected from the government sources, as well as from the different published and unpublished written reports from the UNSC and other NGOs in the area, were analysed based on the document analysis method. The document analysis process involved interpreting selected documents to give voice and meaning to major themes, including the effectiveness of MINUSCA strategies.

4.0 Analysis and Presentation of Findings

4.1 Effectiveness of UN peacekeeping strategy

The research article sought to 'evaluate the effectiveness of UN peacekeeping strategy in resolving protracted conflicts in CAR.' The data was collected based on survey questionnaires, KII, and FGD. Based on the survey, the respondents were asked to comment on the effectiveness of UN peacekeeping strategy in resolving protracted conflict in CAR based on 4-point scale where Not effective (NE) =1, somewhat effective (SWE)= 2, moderately effective (ME) = 3 and very effective (VE) =4. The survey responses were analysed based on frequency distribution, percentages, mean and standard deviation (Table 4.1). Additionally, KII and FGD were undertaken and corroborated with survey questionnaire responses.

The survey responses established that MINUSCA effectively prevented conflict escalation between conflicting armed groups in CAR as given by 210(85.7 percent) of the survey respondents noting somewhat to very effective against only

35(14.3 percent) who stated not effective. Additionally, the mean response of 2.85 and standard deviation of 1.12 were nearing moderately effective. The FGD revealed that MINUSCA had been instrumental in preventing conflict escalation in CAR. The respondents indicated that there are various incidences where MINUSCA thwarted conflict escalation. KII 023, an officer attached to UNDP, revealed: *The proactive nature of MINUSCA has ensured improved security and protection of civilians since the rebels' freedom of action is limited. The watch groups operating in Vakaga have also brought great awareness and accountability.* (KII023, UNDP Offices, 01-July, 2024).

The survey respondents also observed that MINUSCA was effective in monitoring peace agreements pact signed by the government and rebels, as evidenced by 210(85.7 percent) of the survey respondents noting somewhat effective to very effective against only 35(14.3 percent) noting otherwise. Moreover, the mean response of 2.71 and standard deviation of 0.88 was nearing moderately effective. The study via the FGD noted that MINUSCA's role in peacebuilding cannot go unnoticed. The discussion revealed that MINUSCA and the United Nations country team aided the Government of CAR in the implementation of the 'National Recovery and Peacebuilding Plan for the period 2017–2021'.

The research article also reveals that MINUSCA effectively undertook disarmament against rebels after peace negotiations, as shown by 213(86.9 percent) of the survey respondents who supported the statement against 32(13 percent) who noted it was ineffective. The mean responses of 2.71 and standard deviation of 1.03 tended to be moderately effective. The FGD sessions discussed the role of MINUSCA in the disarmament of militias in the Vakaga prefecture of CAR. The respondents revealed that MINUSCA has been able to assist the government in the apprehension of militia leaders and the implementation of disarmament initiatives via community violence reduction programs. The respondents also noted that the mission has trained armed forces, which have finally been deployed as Central African armed forces, to undertake nationwide disarmament activities in various prefectures. The respondents noted that such disarmament has resulted in reduced attacks on civilians.

From the survey responses, it was also evident that MINUSCA was effective in providing humanitarian assistance, i.e., food and drugs, as shown by 211(86.1 percent) survey respondents noting somewhat effective to very effective against only 34(13.8 percent) who noted ineffective. The mean response of 2.85 and standard deviation of 0.99 was nearing moderately effective. The FGD sessions revealed that MINUSCA personnel have helped to rehabilitate schools, community centres, prefecture buildings, and health clinics that provide services to civilians affected by violence. Almost all participants in the interviews and focus groups expressed the view that, in the absence of MINUSCA, the humanitarian situation in the country would significantly deteriorate.

The survey revealed that MINUSCA was influential in establishing safe zones where IDP civilians stay in CAR as evidenced by all respondents noting somewhat effective to very effective. Further, the mean response of 3.42 and standard deviation of 0.72 was nearing very effective. Further, MINUSCA was effective in conducting patrols around safe zones established to protect civilians, as evidenced by all respondents in the survey, who noted that it was either moderately or significantly effective. Moreover, the mean response of 3.42 and standard deviation of 0.49 was nearing very effective. The FGD sessions revealed a mission that is working around the clock to protect CAR citizens from militias operating in CAR. The discussion highlighted that MINUSCA has contributed to safeguarding civilians in multiple regions of the country where it operates. They have been able to do this through conducting patrols in safe zones, local peace initiatives and advocacy and military action and arrests whenever required. The participants in the focus group discussion indicated that the Mission has enhanced its early warning systems and fostered better collaboration between military and civilian entities. The mission has also recruited community liaison assistants and established a network of trained protection focal points. However, the discussion revealed that due to insufficient preventive measures, most protection functions are through physical protection by MINUSCA. The KII 013 noted that MINUSCA force was supporting the transport of personnel and cargo to dangerous zones and has undeniably contributed to the protection of civilians and the expansion of state authority, both of which are crucial aspects of its current mandate.

MINUSCA was effective in supporting democratic electoral processes in CAR, as evidenced by 210 (85.7 percent) of the respondents in the survey noting either moderately effective or very effective against only 35(14.3 percent) who stated not effective. The mean response of 3.00 and standard deviation of 0.92 was moderately effective. The respondents in the FGD delved into MINUSCA's role in the democratic electoral process in CAR and its 20 prefectures. The respondents noted that the government sought the support of the UN in preparation for the 2020 and 2021 elections via MINUSCA. The UN sent an electoral needs assessment mission to evaluate the political, security, electoral environment and the electoral legal and institutional framework. The respondents noted that the UN, via MINUSCA, helped set up a workshop on electoral laws that brought civil society, political parties, international partners, and national institutions together. The workshop culminated in drafting electoral law that was finally summited to the National Assembly and approved by the president that guided the 2020 and 2021 elections.

The discussion also revealed that MINUSCA personnel were critical in facilitating the dialogue between the Government and armed groups. MINUSCA facilitated training to prepare armed groups, political leaders, government representatives, and social leaders for direct dialogue. The dialogue aimed to reduce the animosity between the Government and Rebel leaders as the country prepared for the 2020 general election. The dialogue resulted in the adoption of some army generals into the government as special military advisers. Additionally, the discussion highlighted that MINUSCA, in partnership with UN Women and UNDP, facilitated workshops and seminars to encourage women and youth to participate actively in the electoral process.

The research article also reveals that MINUSCA was influential in establishing governance structures in CAR, as evidenced by 175(71.4 percent) who noted either somewhat effective or very effective, compared to 70 (28.6 percent) who noted that it was ineffective. Further, the mean responses of 2.85 and standard deviation of 1.35 was nearing moderately effective. The FGD also revealed that MINUSCA has been assisting the government in extending state authority through restoring governance structures. The discussions noted that while responding to citizens' requests, MINUSCA, in collaboration with UNICEF, supported the setting up the national baccalauréat exams. Further, the respondents revealed that MINUSCA, in collaboration with UNDP, has been working with the Government in developing "Lisango 2.0", an IT software critical in facilitating the planning of civil servant deployments. Additionally, the discussion revealed that new prefects were nominated to replace retiring prefects, such as Bamingui-Bangoran, Nana-Gribizi, Basse-Kotto, Mbomou, and Nana-Mambéré. The KII also revealed that UN peacekeeping via MINUSCA has supported the government in establishing various governance structures. KII 010, religious leader in Kamou Village of Birao, noted that INUSCA has provided training for national police officers and civil servants, as well as facilitated the establishment of CAR's new hybrid Special Criminal Court.

Finally, the survey establishes that MINUSCA was effective in facilitating political dialogue between the government and rebels in CAR as shown by 215(87.8 percent) of the survey respondents either noting somewhat effective or very effective against 30(12.2 percent) who stated otherwise. The mean response of 3.00 and standard deviation of 1.19 was moderately effective. The FGD sessions revealed that MINUSCA has been at the forefront in helping the building of peace infrastructure in the 20 prefectures in CAR, including Vakaga prefecture. The participants in the Focus Group Discussion indicated that the involvement of MINUSCA played a significant role in facilitating the Bangui Forum on National Reconciliation, which was essential for advancing peace-building initiatives. The participants in the KII, in agreement with the survey and FGD responses, also noted that, indeed, MINUSCA has been instrumental in facilitating political dialogues in the country. KII 009, a government officer in Kaffao village in Birao, revealed that MINUSCA has played a pivotal role in establishing local peace and reconciliation committees across the country, along with facilitating various local peace agreements.

The overall mean score was 2.97; hence, it tended to be moderately effective, implying that, in general, peacekeeping strategy in CAR via MINUSCA was moderately effective in combating protracted conflict. The study findings regarding the effectiveness of UN peacekeeping were also examined, with data being sourced based on surveys, interviews, and focus group discussions. The study revealed that MINUSCA effectively prevented conflict escalation between conflicting armed groups in CAR, with various incidences of thwarted conflict escalation reported in multiple areas in Vakaga. This was made possible through conflict prevention measures such as early warning signs and peace and dialogue structures, among other mechanisms. Indeed, the mission has fostered and monitored peace agreements and pacts signed by the government and rebels via ways such as supporting the Government of CAR in implementing the peacebuilding and national recovery plans. The mission has also been instrumental in undertaking disarmament against rebels after peace negotiations. The disarmament has been conducted while working alongside the Central African armed forces. Disarmament has been critical in producing a significant fall in the number of civilian population attacks in recent times. The mission has steadfastly provided humanitarian assistance such as food, medical services, and education. In this regard, MINUSCA has been rehabilitating schools, community centres, and health clinics.

MINUSCA has also established and patrolled safe zones where IDP civilians stay. The safe zones have enabled the mission to protect CAR citizens from militia groups. However, MINUSCA undertakes most of the physical protection of civilians due to insufficient preventive measures. On the political front, MINUSCA has supported democratic electoral processes in CAR. The mission mediated the process of electoral law reforms that enabled the conduct of democratic general elections in 2020 and 2021. The mission has also facilitated training for direct dialogue among armed groups, government representatives, and social and political leaders to reduce the animosity between the Government and Rebel leaders as the country prepared for the 2020 general election. Accompanying political processes, the mission has also been instrumental in establishing governance structures to extend government control. MINUSCA personnel have supported the training for national police officers and civil servants and facilitated the establishment of a new hybrid Special Criminal Court.

5.0 Discussion of Key Findings and Recommendations

5.1 key Findings

The article sought to evaluate the 'effectiveness of UN peacekeeping strategy employed in combating protracted conflicts in CAR.' The study revealed that the UN peacekeeping strategy has effectively resolved most of the persistent conflicts in CAR. MINUSCA effectively prevented conflict escalation between conflicting armed groups in CAR, with various incidences of thwarted conflict escalation reported in multiple areas in Vakaga. Indeed, the mission has fostered and monitored peace agreements and pacts signed by the government and rebels via ways such as supporting the Government of CAR in implementing the Peacebuilding and National Recovery plans. The mission has also been instrumental in undertaking disarmament against rebels after peace negotiations, leading to a significant fall in civilian attacks by urgent groups. The mission has also steadfastly provided humanitarian assistance such as food, medical services, and education. MINUSCA has established safe zones where IDP civilians stay, enabling the mission to protect CAR citizens from militia groups. MINUSCA has been supporting democratic electoral processes in CAR with the mission of mediating the process of electoral law reforms that enabled the conduct of a democratic general election in 2020 and 2021. Accompanying political processes, the mission has also been instrumental in establishing governance structures aimed at extending government control. MINUSCA personnel have supported the training for national police officers and civil servants and facilitated establishing a new hybrid Special Criminal Court. The study concludes that the UN peacekeeping strategy has effectively combat protracted conflicts in the Vakaga prefecture of the Central African Republic, with findings pointing to the need for escalated efforts to stem the conflict entirely. The findings also have implications for the UN to extend the mission's mandate to make them even more effective in resolving the conflict that has existed for decades with untold human suffering.

5.2 Recommendations

- i. It recommends that the United Nations Security Council extend MINUSCA's mandate, facilitating the Mission's transition from a containment approach to transformation in essential sectors—consequently, the reassessment and prioritization of the Mission's objectives and fundamental responsibilities.
- ii. The study also recommends that MINUSCA be deeply integrated into the peace process by enhancing its political involvement and ensuring that the Mission's efforts are closely aligned with this process.
- iii. The government of the Central African Republic and MINUSCA must establish more robust connections between the peace process and the pursuit of justice.

5.3 Areas for Further Research

Future studies can expand along periodisation lines and include a period before 2014 and after 2023. This will provide a wholesome understanding of efforts towards conflict resolution in CAR. Besides, future studies should include other peacekeeping efforts besides MINUSCA to identify their collaborative role and effectiveness in wholesome. This study was also limited to the Vakaga area of CAR, hence limited application and generalization to other prefectures within CAR. Therefore, other studies should be undertaken in other prefectures to enhance the application of findings in different contexts within CAR.

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Acknowledgments

Authors acknowledge the peer reviewer's reports, the editorial input and their sources of funding.

Ethical Pledge

All data collected were handled responsibly, and any findings have been presented accurately, without manipulation or bias.

Competing Interests

There were no competing interests that could have influenced the outcomes of this research. The research was conducted impartially, with no financial, professional, or personal interests that may have biased the results or interpretation.

Author Contributions

The researchers are the sole authors of this research article.

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Ethical Consideration Statement

This article adhered to all ethical guidelines for research involving human or animal subjects. Approval was given by Daystar University and all necessary authorization from relevant authorities in Kenya and the Central African Republic.