Global Alliance for Peace Operations

The Future of United Nations Peace Operations

Compendium of Short Issue Papers and Policy Recommendations for the UN Peacekeeping Ministerial 2025 in Berlin

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About the Global Alliance for Peace Operations

The future of peace operations is at a crucial inflection point, facing a comprehensive set of challenges. Yet, the effectiveness and impact of peace operations have been underlined by a wide range of independent studies and data. Whilst UN peace operations will benefit from further reform, the crucial role of the United Nations and the importance of UN peace operations deserves also a collective and sustained effort of support.

The main aim of the **Global Alliance for Peace Operations** is to foster synergies between communities of **researchers**, **think tank experts** and **civil society representatives** in the run-up to the **Berlin Peacekeeping Ministerial (PKM)**, in order to advance cooperation and joint knowledge on opportunities, challenges and future avenues for UN peace operations. The alliance includes think tanks, universities, civil society organizations, networks, former and current practitioners as well as experts working on peace operations with a global perspective. A particular focus is placed on stimulating exchanges of knowledge with partners from an inclusive geographical range.

The Global Alliance for Peace Operations has been closely liaising with the German Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the German Federal Ministry of Defence. However, all views and opinions expressed in the publications are the views of the individual authors.

Collective Input for the Peacekeeping Ministerial 2025

The **Global Alliance for Peace Operations** brings together more than 50 think tanks, research and training institutes as well as civil society organisations and experts to formulate concrete policy recommendations for the UN Peacekeeping Ministerial Meeting in Berlin on the future of peace operations. Coordinated by the Global Governance Institute, the Center for International Peace Operations (ZIF) and Amani Africa, the Alliance's experts and member organisations have teamed up to draft a total of 8 in-depth Policy Papers (published in a separate collection) and 19 short issue papers with concrete policy recommendations (brought together in this compendium) in order to inform the deliberations and debate on the future of UN Peace operations at a crucial moment in time.

Compendium of Short Issue Papers and Recommendations

This Compendium of 19 short issue papers should be read in conjunction with the 8 longer studies prepared by members of the Global Alliance for Peace Operations, which are also available on the GAPO website. This Compendium includes concrete policy recommendations for a wide range of issues related to the future of UN Peace Operations and will be distributed both publicly and to delegations attending the UN Peacekeeping Ministerial in Berlin.

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Introduction

The world is in flux. The New Agenda for Peace describes a world in transition to a new, more multipolar global order in which the "unity of purpose expressed by Member States in the early 1990s has waned." Instead, competition, disregard for international law and a loss of trust raise questions around how a consensus may be found on future peace operations and multilateral crisis management.

Since their first incarnation in 1948, over 120 UN peace operations have been deployed. They have proven a flexible and effective tool in diverse conflict contexts, and due to their adaptability, have remained relevant as the nature of conflict evolved. Research underscores that peace operations are a cost-efficient and effective multilateral tool for preventing armed conflict, managing and resolving threats to international security, and sustaining peace. Now, in an era of rising global challenges, intensifying geopolitical polarisation and a rapid reconfiguration of the world order, the role of United Nations peace operations is evolving.

At the same time, we are witnessing a marked quantitative and qualitative evolution in the nature of conflict that challenges peace operations and multilateral conflict management overall. Conflict data by the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO) indicates a 28% rise in state-based conflicts over the past decade: 2023 saw a record 59 conflicts where at least one party was a state across 34 countries. In terms of battle-related deaths in such conflicts, "2023 was the third most violent year since 1989."

As global norms erode, civilians become increasingly vulnerable: In mid-2024, over 122 million people were forcibly displaced by violent conflict. An estimated 299 million people were in need of humanitarian aid in 2023, a staggering figure compared to the 81 million covered by humanitarian response plans in 2014. Reports from various conflict zones indicate that conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) has sharply increased.

Clearly, the UN and its Member States need to step up efforts to further develop and improve the collective peace operations toolbox. Concurrently and paradoxically, there is unprecedented political and financial pressure on the UN and the multilateral conflict management system. The UN and the peace operations policy, practice and expert community are under pressure to demonstrate and further enhance the legitimacy, credibility and effectiveness of peace operations.

Member States and partners must seize this moment of transition to reimagine and reform peace operations, without losing the essential features that have ensured its effectiveness in the past.

The *Pact for the Future* offers a glimpse of hope for reform, adaptation and innovation. Member States created a moment of unity in uncertain times by reaffirming their commitment to multilateral conflict management, prevention and peacebuilding and to peace operations as a pivotal tool. In the past, UN peace operations' responses to global crises have demonstrated that significant institutional adaptation is possible with sufficient commitment and support. The upcoming UN Peacekeeping Ministerial 2025 provides its Member States with a strategic opportunity to shape the future of peace operations.

This compendium includes a collection of **19 short issue papers** that touch on core issues related to the future of UN Peace operations. These short papers should be read in conjunction with the Global Alliance for Peace Operation's collection of 8 longer policy papers, released in parallel to this compendium. The short papers featured in this compendium have provided core UN peace operations

experts, think tankers and scholars with the opportunity to explore complementary and additional pressing issues related to the future of UN Peace operations.

After the initial paper on the revitalisation of civilian and military observers and the future of peace operations, the papers are grouped into three thematic areas. Under the heading 'Protection of Civilians and related issues' authors explore the future of the protection of civilians in UN peace operations as well as the related aspects of atrocity prevention and international humanitarian law. Thereafter, a cluster of three papers examine policy issues and recommendations at the intersection of climate change, security and peace operations. The last part encompasses a wide range of additional issues, ranging from topics such as 'ad hoc coalitions', peace enforcement, financing, local perspectives, transnational crime, UN policing and digital challenges.

Taken together, the 19 papers provide concise impulses for thought and concrete policy recommendations for action – with the hope of offering meaningful civil society and research input into the Peacekeeping Ministerial and beyond.

Taking UN Peace Operations to the Next Level: Strategic Revitalization and Reinforcement of UN Military and Civilian Observers[1]

Annika Hilding Norberg, Brig. Gen. Marcel Amstutz, Maj. Gen. (R.)

Dr A. K. Bardalai, Lt. Gen. (R.) Robert Mood, and William Phillips[2]

The world is in turmoil. As a strategic response to the rapidly deteriorating trajectory in international peace and security and how it is impacting UN peace operations, UN Member States through the adoption of the Pact of the Future confirmed their commitment to: "…adapt peace operations to better respond to existing challenges and new realities"[3]. Since then, geopolitical polarization has deepened, causing further deterioration in international relations, and bringing substantial funding cuts of UN programmes and activities in its wake. That UN peace operations are now entering a new period of retrenchment is clear, how best to realign and reposition UN peace operations for an impactful future, is less so.

This study note makes the case for revitalizing and reinforcing one of the longstanding value added of the United Nations and its peace operations capabilities, namely the Military Observers and their Civilian equivalents. Although peace operations have grown in scope of operations and range of capabilities over the years, the most frequent mandated task of UN peacekeeping 1948-2023 was to "observe, monitor, report on military activities"[4]. In addition, Military and Civilian Observers are identified in the study on *Future of Peacekeeping, New Models and Related Capabilities* as key components for successfully delivering the envisioned 30 different models for future peace operations.[5]

The value of UN Military Observers was recently confirmed by several studies focused on the very first and still operating peacekeeping mission, the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO).

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[1] This study note draws on findings of the Annual Senior Officers Seminar 2024 on *Future Peace Operations: Trends, Options and Considerations*, GCSP and Swiss Armed Forces (September 2024); Annika Hilding Norberg, A.K. Bardalai, Robert Mood, *UNTSO: The Role, Relevance, Function and Utility – Lessons for Future Peace Operations*, EPON Study, NUPI (May 2024); Summary Report of International Peacekeeping Day 2024 High-Level Seminar and Expert Symposium session on *Nimble, Adaptive and Effective Peacekeeping: Lessons from UNTSO for Future Options and Models for Peacekeeping*, UN HQs in New York (May 2024); and El-Ghassim Wane, Paul D. Williams and Ai Kihara-Hunt, *The Future of Peacekeeping, New Models, and Related Capabilities,* United Nations (November, 2024).

[2] The co-authors are: Head of Peace Operations and Peacebuilding, GCSP; Senior Defence Adviser of the Swiss Armed Forces to GCSP; Distinguished Research Fellow USI and Former Dep Force Commander UNIFIL; Former Chief of Staff UNTSO and Head of Mission UNSMIS; and Associate Fellow, GCSP, and Former Chief of Staff, MINUSMA. The views raised in this article are those of the authors and not necessarily the organizations they represent.

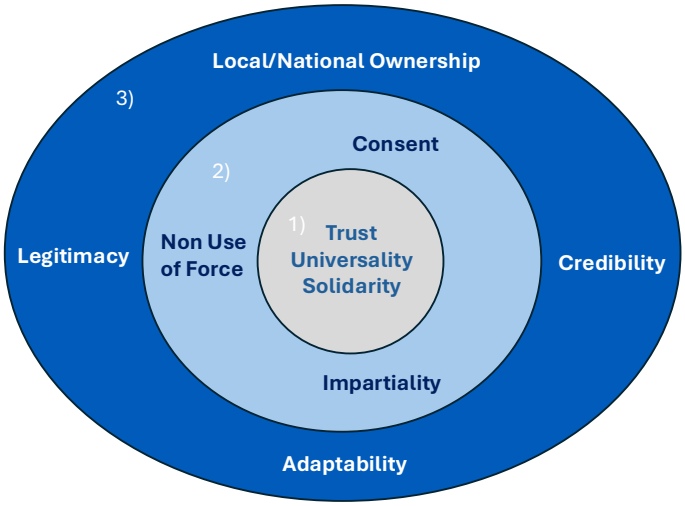
[3] Pact of the Future, Resolution A/Res/79/1, 22 September 2024, p. 17.

[4] UN Peace Missions Data Set, https://www.peacemissions.info hosted by Geneva Graduate Institute and ETH Zurich, accessed 20 April, 2025.

[5] Wane et al, *The Future of Peacekeeping, New Models, and Related Capabilities* (United Nations, 2024).

The **New Agenda for Peace** and the **UN Principles for Peacekeeping** as Applicable to **UN Military Observers**:

Centred by **1) Core Values**, Guided by **2) Principles**, and Mandates Achieved through **3) Factors of Success**



Source: A. Hilding Norberg, Maj. Gen. Dr (R) A.K. Bardalai, Lt. Gen. (R) R. Mood

Despite decades of geopolitical challenges, UNTSO's core mandate has remained relevant and its operational approaches - as measured against its mandate – effective and low cost. Evaluations by the UN Department of Peace Operations (DPO) Office of Military Affairs (Military Capability Study), by the UN DPO Office of Peacekeeping and Strategic Partnership (General Inspection Report) and the independent GCSP-led Effectiveness of Peace Operations Network (EPON) study, all in complementary ways found that UNTSO hold several characteristics, which has proven useful.[6] They include that UNTSO has a 1) flexible and secure mandate, 2) nimble and high-quality reporting, 3) high acceptance by the populations, 4) a Center of Excellence for In-theater training, and 5) is a start-up mission incubator (14 new missions).[7]

More specifically, the EPON Study on UNTSO proposed that UN peace operations could be further enhanced by recognizing, revitalizing and reinforcing the UN Military and Civilian Observers capability. This study note suggests that the time is ripe for:

1. Institutionalizing UNTSO's ad hoc practice of mission support (UNTSO started 14 new missions) by creating a Vanguard Rapid Deployment Capacity of Military and Civilian Observers and other required specialists (Civilians, Police, etc..). This unit would provide an effective, low-cost, and minimally intrusive mechanism for quickly deploying trained personnel to establish or reinforce missions.
2. Establishing a UN Centre of Excellence (CoE) for Military and Civilian Observers as a hub for advanced in theater training, research, and knowledge-sharing. The center would refine observer practices in the field, consolidate lessons learned, and provide mission-specific

[6] UN Chief of Staff/Head of Mission UNTSO Maj. Gen. Patrick Gauchat, presentation made at Annual Senior Officers Seminar 2024, GCSP, Maison de la Paix, Geneva, 26 September 2024.

[7] Ibid.

training, complementing but not duplicating the nationally led UNMOC courses responsible for the basic training. While UNMO courses remain national peacekeeping centers and UNHQ responsibilities, the CoE would help the continuous training of the Military and Civilian Observers during the induction in the field and continuous training during the mission time. Helping 1) military observer missions, 2) integrated missions with military and civilian observers and 3) special political missions, the CoE could extend its exchanges and services across the potential 30 models of missions and with regional organizations, i.e. missions under chapter 8 of the UN Charter.

3. Connected while separate, a concrete link between the Vanguard Concept and the CoE would create multiple synergies and could foster and further strengthen the development of partnerships with regional organizations.

The UN Vanguard Rapid Deployment Capacity of Observers would support mission startups or transitions through rapid deployment (within 10 days) of a mobile military command and staff headquarters element. The element would consist of a Head of Element (command), staff specialists for personnel, intelligence, plans and operations, training, logistics and media relations, and an appropriate number of military observers to initially establish observer presence. The element could be reinforced by Civilian Observers, and civilian logistic, information, technology and communications and other specialists, as needed.

The UN Centre of Excellence personnel, augmented by UNTSO Military Observers, would help with the training and complement the sourcing. The element would receive, train, equip and deploy incoming military and civilian observers provided by UN Member States and would ultimately – within 90 days – be replaced by those observers and redeploy to the UN CoE.

The main recommendations of the EPON UNTSO Study were referenced and endorsed by the *Future Peacekeeping, New Models and Related Capabilities* study as it discussed the need to strengthen UN standby and rapid deployment capabilities.[8] It stated, "when peacekeepers are required for new missions or to reinforce existing ones, they are usually needed quickly. The UN must improve its human resource processes and structures to get the right people in the right place quickly, including via standby capacities and mechanisms for surge deployments... Another interesting proposal *[Read, the UNTSO study recommendations]* is establishing a center of excellence for (uniformed and civilian) observers to generate a cadre of specialized personnel who are prepared for rapid deployment"[9].

To this end, in an age of resurgence in inter-state conflict on the horizon and constrained by having to "do more with fewer peacekeepers", the quality, credibility, legitimacy and adaptability of UN peacekeepers will be critical. Retaining, refining and reinforcing a key UN high-quality comparative advantage, such as the UN Military Observers Capability and its Civilian equivalents, should be a priority.

Earlier potential concerns raised by some about establishing a CoE outside of the UN Headquarters in New York should now come into different light. As the UN Secretariat is required to move staff and functions from New York for cost saving measures, the establishment of the CoE, with agile

[8] Future Peacekeeping, New Models and Related Capabilities, p. 43.

[9] Ibid.

mobile training teams to support as and where required, could help in the transition, globalizing the UN peace operations mechanism, presence and impact, further.

The goal of the UN Peacekeeping Ministerial 2025 in Berlin is to "shape a peacekeeping model that is more agile, intelligent and resilient".[10] UN peace operations preparedness and predictability, which lies at the heart of legitimacy and credibility, need to be further enhanced. The 1) codification of the Vanguard Rapid Deployment Capacity of Observers, and the 2) augmenting of the already de facto existing Centre of Excellence for Observers, are two small, low cost, but high-quality and high-impact, opportunities to make UN peace operations ready for the **New Era of UN Peace Missions and Operations** to come.

[10] As budgets shrink, UN Peacekeeping looks to the future | United Nations Peacekeeping, UN.org website accessed on 2 May 2025.

Protection of Civilians (and related issues)

Prioritizing Protection of Civilians in Future Peace Operations: Applying Lessons from 25 Years of POC

Lisa Sharland[1]

Introduction

Peacekeeping remains one of the most effective tools available to the international community to protect civilians from violence and harm. Despite the immense challenges facing current UN peacekeeping missions, military, police and civilian personnel continue to intervene to protect civilians under threat of violence, often at significant risk to their own safety and security. In the context of the UN, efforts to improve and strengthen protection of civilians (POC) in peace operations have focused almost exclusively on multidimensional UN peacekeeping missions, primarily due to their explicit physical protection mandate. These missions continue to grapple with emerging challenges, including evolving technological threats, a lack of respect for IHL, a proliferation of armed actors, exploitation of natural resources, disinformation, climate change, and obstructions by some host authorities to their presence. Political will to deploy these large missions with protection embedded in their mandates is likely to be constrained going forward due to the potential opposition of conflict parties and the geopolitics on protection and human rights in the Security Council. As the UN and member states look ahead to future scenarios and models, a more comprehensive approach to protection in peace operations is warranted.

Civilians expect to be protected where there is a UN peace operation deployed.[2] This was a core message throughout a dialogue series that the Stimson Center co-hosted with partners in Nairobi, Geneva and New York throughout 2024.[3] Consistent throughout those discussions was the need for protection considerations to underpin the assessment, planning, authorization, deployment, operation and transition of all peace operations, irrespective of whether they have or are likely to have an explicit protection mandate. This included special political missions, which are often engaged in political dialogue and capacity-building to support national authorities with their protection responsibilities. But it also applied to regional peace support operations, including those led by the African Union, where there was greater ambiguity in terms of the escalated risks to civilians in peace enforcement contexts. Combined, the complexity of modern peace operations requires ongoing consideration of the comparative advantages of different peace operations as relates to protection of civilians.

Three Policy Recommendations

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[1] Senior Fellow and Director of the Protecting Civilians & Human Security program at Stimson – with contributions from Julie Gregory and Juliet Weis.

[2] Stimson Center, *Protection of Civilians in the Context of Peace Operations: Nairobi Dialogue*, published November 2024, available here. See also UN Department of Peace Operations and McGill University, *25 Years of Protecting Civilians Through UN Peacekeeping*, October 2024, available here.

[3] The series was co-hosted with Center for Civilians in Conflict, in partnership with the Government of Switzerland, and with dialogues co-hosted by the Governments of Canada and Uruguay.

Delegations preparing for the 2025 Peacekeeping Ministerial should consider how their pledges and political support could influence the efforts to strengthen protection of civilians in current and future UN and regional peace operations through the following:

First, support efforts to center protection concerns in the assessment, planning and deployment of all future models of peace operations. The models proposed in the *Future of Peacekeeping* report respond to a range of operating environments and domains where harm to civilians is caused.[4] The report offers ideas to prepare member states and the UN to plan, deploy and operate in these settings in the future.[5]

- The UN Secretariat should map protection considerations and resource requirements as part of the application of future models of peace operations.
- Troop- and police-contributing (T/PCCs) should prepare their personnel for a range of future operating environments, integrating these future scenarios into training models for personnel to develop a mindset of protection.

Second, encourage contingency planning by the UN Secretariat for situations where civilians are at risk to enable preparedness to respond. The UN Secretariat by default waits for a formal request from the Security Council to start developing options for a new peace operation.[6] The Secretary-General's recommendations in response often draw on a narrow interpretation of the request, guided by the perceived political realities of the Council. This approach means that different options for peace operations are often excluded from consideration from the outset. This lack of advanced planning also hampers efforts to engage member states to explore commitments to future missions in a timely and responsive manner.

- The UN Secretariat should utilize its authority – via the Secretary-General – to develop several options for future peace operations where there is an emerging situation of concern, *explicitly outlining protection needs and considerations* for the Security Council.

Third, facilitate the development of comprehensive guidance and policies for missions on protection across the full spectrum of UN peace operations and those deployed in parallel. Multidimensional UN peacekeeping missions with explicit POC mandates are only one tool that contributes to protection. Peacekeeping missions without explicit protection mandates and special political missions *can* support protection of civilians, particularly efforts to facilitate political dialogue and build a protective environment.[7] But they will often be limited by resourcing (i.e., lack of uniformed enablers) or the mandate. These limitations can be acknowledged but should not preclude a clearer understanding of the contribution of these tools to protection, which remains limited due to a lack of policy and guidance. Often these UN missions operate alongside partners with

[4] United Nations, *The Future of Peacekeeping, New Models, and Related Capabilities*, November 2024, available here.

[5] The Stimson Center is finalizing a publication that maps the protection advantages and considerations for the models presented in the *Future of Peacekeeping* report. It is due for publication in May 2025.

[6] Stimson Center, *Protection of Civilians in the Context of Peace Operations: New York Dialogues*, published January 2025, available here. See also Jenna Russo, United Nations Security Council, 9884th Meeting, 24 March 2025, UN Doc. S/PV.9884.

[7] For example, the UN Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan (UNITAMS) had a mandate for 'civilian protection', however mission personnel had limited understanding of its application, see Julie Gregory, *Civilian Protection in Sudan: Emerging Lessons from UNITAMS,* October 2024, available here.

peace enforcement mandates, blurring lines in terms of responsibilities and coordination on issues related to protection.

- The UN Secretariat should work with partners to develop policy and guidance on protection priorities and contributions from missions without a traditional 'POC' mandate, mapping the comparative advantages of different mission models to protect civilians.

Making a Difference in Protection: Options and Trade-offs along Core Principles

Judith Vorrath[1]

Introduction

Peacekeeping undoubtfully is under pressure. Yet, so are basically all policies and instruments that have been developed over the last decades to end and resolve violent conflict under the realm of the United Nations (UN). This crisis is hardly rooted in peacekeeping failures. In fact, missions have been operating under increasing pressures since a longer time, not only budget-wise. Today's missions have already become more flexible and adaptive – if only out of pure necessity. While there is certainly room for improvement at the operational level, this is not where the future of peacekeeping will be decided. First and foremost, member states will have to send a strong signal at the Peacekeeping Ministerial (PKM) that they continue to see peacekeeping as a critical tool. Significant pledges are clearly one way to do this. Yet, the political message might be even more important including a plan for follow-up after the Berlin meeting. It will be necessary to create the political space for UN peacekeeping in order to make a difference on the ground in the future.

Beyond preserving achievements and contributions by existing missions, the PKM needs to open up discussions on new ways forward. One obvious entry point is the massive need for (better) protection in ongoing armed conflicts. With the number of armed conflicts and the number of fatalities in recent years at a level not seen in decades, we have to face the fact that there is a severe protection crisis. Therefore, protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure is certainly among the most relevant of those modules outlined in the preparatory paper for the PKM – alongside some others like securing access to humanitarian aid, humanitarian protection and atrocity prevention. Experience shows that peacekeeping has been an effective tool for reducing violence against civilians. Clearly, a broader protection concept as outlined in the 2020 Protection of Civilians Handbook is sensible. Yet, it is difficult to see how missions can make a meaningful contribution in volatile contexts without the provision of some kind of physical protection (Tier II).

At the same time, the bleak reality is that comprehensive peace accords have become rare. If agreements are reached by conflict parties, they are often very limited in scope, only last for a specific time frame or are never really implemented. While the need for protective peacekeeping is possibly at an all-time high, its realization has become much more difficult. Defining achievable goals for UN missions that align with actual needs on the ground can seem like squaring the circle in the current context.

Under the prevailing uncertainty, it can be useful to discuss the potential future engagement to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure along the three core principles of peacekeeping: consent of parties; impartiality and use of force for self-defense/in defense of the mandate. These need to be preserved – in rhetoric and practice – but they can also help to assess options and trade-offs in the light of a changing conflict and geopolitical landscape.

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Building consensus for protection

The need for better protecting civilians in today's violent conflicts is indisputable. Yet, Protection of Civilians (PoC) mandates have become increasingly controversial with conflict parties, including host governments. Physical protection needs a significant presence of blue helmets on the ground and thus, some kind of formal agreement on mission activities. It will also be crucial to develop credible exit options. Otherwise, countries' willingness to provide troops and police will be very limited. Building consensus on any mandate with conflict parties will clearly be challenging in the current conflict environments. The following points can at least improve the prospects:

- keep protection high on regional and international agendas,
- secure access to key political and military actors in a given conflict setting to discuss protection issues,
- bring in a broad set of actors in conflict areas including local networks and organisations already providing protection to the population,
- take experiences by all UN entities relevant for protection into account.

Balancing impartiality and engagement

PoC mandates have been challenging for the impartiality of peacekeeping missions at times. In some cases, the operational focus has been more on non-state protection threats. Particularly where large multidimensional missions had the parallel task of strengthening state authority, missions were often seen as taking sides. By now, a high number of intra-state armed conflicts has become internationalized, meaning one or more conflict parties receive (troop) support from a third country. These contexts are particularly difficult for the protection of civilians. On the one hand, these conflicts tend to last longer, on the other hand, they usually lead to a higher number of casualties. For UN missions there is the danger of being dragged into outside power dynamics.

Therefore, impartiality is more crucial than ever. But what mission set-ups could be best suited in this regard? It has been suggested that more specialized missions with a light footprint may be the better option under current circumstances. In addition, peace operations by regional organisations have been promoted as an alternative to UN missions, especially in difficult (security) environments. Yet, neither of them could shoulder PoC mandates and tasks like UN peacekeeping missions have done in the past – despite all their limitations – nor are they necessarily in a better position to remain impartial. There is a need for the UN to be substantially engaged with a focus on:

- playing its part in the respective political process while preserving impartiality,
- political guidance and backing by the Security Council and aligning peacekeeping activities with other instruments, especially mediation. Here, elected members could play a more active role like recently Denmark, Pakistan, and the Republic of Korea with their "peacekeeping trio" initiative,
- TCCs and PCCs as well as supportive member states in the General Assembly holding (permanent) members of the Security Council accountable when it comes to their responsibilities regarding the situation of civilians in armed conflict.

Robust responses without enforcement

It has been a crucial and painful lesson from Srebrenica/Bosnia and Rwanda that only sizeable robust UN peacekeeping can respond to wide-spread human rights abuses and mass atrocities. While PoC across the three tiers is a whole-of-mission activity, it is mainly the military component that runs the risk of being pitted against one or more conflict parties when engaging in tier II protection activities. Since Christmas tree mandates are becoming less likely, missions could focus more on reducing violence against civilians including conflict-related sexual violence. In that case, such tasks should not be combined with enforcement actions like neutralizing "spoilers" within one mandate as this is a fine line to tread. Moreover:

- acting in a robust way to protect civilians has to be part of a broader political strategy,
- make sure peacekeeping missions can deal effectively with dis-/misinformation and hate speech as well as the use of "new" or emerging technologies in their operating environment beyond ongoing efforts,
- the review of peace operations by the Secretary-General should assess options for robust protection mandates as a central part of a future multilateral crisis management toolbox.

Overall, the PKM and its follow-up are an opportunity for getting real on the commitments made in the Pact for the Future 2024 on the protection of all civilians in armed conflict.

Integrating Mass Atrocity Prevention into the Future of Peacekeeping

Ekkehard Strauss[1]

Introduction

The United Nations (UN) is facing new threats to peace and security, including increasing armed conflicts, technological armament, organized crime, the climate crisis and pandemics. Armed conflicts occur in particular as territorial disputes, urban violence and recurring civil wars. These developments are blurring the boundaries between internal and external security for states. In this context, mass atrocities have increasingly been committed.

In 2005, heads of states and government pledged to use appropriate means, in accordance with the UN Charter, to help to protect populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity, including collective action, when national authorities are manifestly failing their responsibility to protect. Since this joint commitment, atrocity prevention was included in the mandate of several peace operations. At the same time, it developed into a distinct academic discipline with significant scope of application, which covers areas related to international law, international relations and international politics. In particular, the analysis of past situations led to different models of risk factors, which, in the framework of increasingly sophisticated early warning systems of regional organisations, States and non-state actors, identify a rather consistent list of countries at-risk of atrocities. Still, the international community was not capable to prevent identity-based mass killings in Ethiopia, Myanmar, Sudan or Syria. Public reaction to these events demonstrated yet again that independent of the respective mandates, ultimately, UN presences are judged on their ability to protect people from imminent physical harm.

The UN is confronted with geopolitical tensions, loss of confidence and financial challenges with regard to its central task of peacekeeping. As a result, it is unlikely that the Security Council will use integrated peace operations with a robust mandate under Chapter VII of the UN Charter as the preferred means of peacekeeping. As a response to the future challenges of peacekeeping, a study commissioned by Germany for the UN Ministerial Conference in Berlin proposed 30 modular deployment models that can respond flexibly to various threats. Atrocity prevention is among the models with the strategic objective to protect populations from targeted violence in situations of ongoing or threatened mass atrocities.

Currently, the prevention of atrocities is not fully integrated into relevant peacekeeping policies, guidance and training. Atrocity prevention is linked operationally to the protection of civilians (POC), but the objective should be distinct regarding the causes of violence. Legally, atrocity prevention is related to human rights protection, though it does not focus on individual human rights violations, but rather a category of international crimes characterised by identity based violence at a larger scale. Politically, atrocity prevention is related to the maintenance of international peace and security,

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though it does not aim at the resolution of a conflict as such, but at addressing particular threats to the peace, security and well-being as 'concerns that affect the international community as a whole'.

Policy recommendations

1. Atrocity prevention needs to be developed into a distinct task within a modular approach to peacekeeping. It needs to be measured by specific indicators for the impact of peacekeeping as part of existing evaluations of public safety, protection of civilians, promoting human rights, extension of state authority, support for institution building, security sector reform, rule of law and supporting community policing. Atrocity prevention needs to be included as such into the pre-deployment training of civilian, military and police capabilities.
2. Regarding early-warning, DPO needs to regularly monitor the risk lists of external mass atrocity prevention institutions in cooperation with the Office of the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide. To this end, the UN needs to define uniformly, processes of escalation, causal dynamics and pattern of violence for the identification of atrocities. The 'Human rights up front' policy should be revised and limited to integrating risks factors and mitigating measures specific to atrocities into the conflict and context analysis, and strategy for countries considered at-risk.
3. Mass atrocities, i.e. genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing as defined in the 2005 Summit outcome document, need to be recognized as a particular subset of international acts described by legal terms read together for their definition. In other words, atrocities are not identical with the legal definition of the respective international crime. Member States and the UN need to embrace strategically the lack of legal precision as necessary to overcome the difficulties in the past of implementing international obligations to prevent mass human rights violations based on identity.
4. Atrocity prevention as a peacekeeping modular approach needs to be defined with a view to the moment, when a state 'is manifestly failing' to meet its international responsibility, including for longer-term training and support activities. This moment should be determined uniformly according to a real risk standard, i.e. when the potential perpetrators and the group at-risk are known, the possible events can be predicted according to scenarios, and the possible triggers can be identified.
5. Atrocities need to be distinguished from violence in the context of armed conflict, POC and general human rights protection. Based on the exceptional character of the situations, the UN response is not predetermined and can use approaches of these related concepts. However, Member States need to support operationally collective action to prevent or halt mass atrocities as legally and substantively different from those concepts.
6. The 'tool box' of atrocity prevention is equipped with a wealth of measures, individual governments, regional organisations, international organisations, and international civil society can implement. The UN needs to deploy mass atrocity prevention advisers to all peacekeeping operations in countries considered at–risk. Reporting directly to the SRSG, they should provide policy guidance, monitor early-warning indicators and identify training and capacity gaps within the mission. UN peacekeeping operations should coordinate and facilitate the activities of others by applying a principle of subsidiarity.

International Humanitarian Law and Peacekeeping

Maj Gen PK Goswami[1]

Introduction

International Humanitarian Law (IHL) is a balance between military necessity and humanity, and it regulates the conduct of armed conflicts, binding parties to reduce human suffering. Although historically applied to state and non-state combatants, the presence of peacekeeping forces in conflict areas has posed intricate legal and operational issues. The application of IHL to UN peacekeeping missions has been influenced by experience, judicial interpretation, and developing doctrinal approaches.

IHL and Peacekeeping

The relationship between IHL and peacekeeping has generated extensive debate, particularly regarding the obligations of UN peacekeepers in operational contexts involving armed conflict. In general, IHL applies when peacekeeping force is involved in active hostilities, compelling them to adhere to the same standards for the protection of civilians and the conduct of hostilities that bind state militaries.[2] The UN Peacekeeping Operations Principles and Guidelines (2008)[3] reaffirm the requirement for peacekeepers to have a clear understanding of the principles (distinction, proportionality and precaution) and rules of IHL and observe them when they apply. This is in consonance with the UN Secretary-Generals Bulletin of 1999 on the Observance by UN Forces of IHL[4], and assert that UN troops, while engaged in hostilities as combatants, are bound by the principles and rules of IHL. This has been affirmed through various Security Council resolutions calling for the respect of IHL by all parties in conflict.[5]

Legal complexities arise concerning accountability, the use of force, and civilian protection. Peacekeeping forces thus must adhere to principles of distinction, proportionality, and necessity when conducting operations. The fragmented nature of command structures, including troop-contributing countries' (TCCs) jurisdiction over their personnel, often complicates compliance and enforcement mechanisms.

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[2] DLP Forum. "International Humanitarian Law and Peacekeeping - DLP Forum," May 11, 2022. https://www.dlpforum.org/2022/05/11/international-humanitarian-law-and-peacekeeping/.

[3] https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/capstone_eng_0.pdf.

[4] https://conduct.unmissions.org/secretary-general%E2%80%99s-bulletin-observance-united-nations-forces-international-humanitarian-law.

[5] Ray Murphy. "The Obligation to Ensure Respect for IHL in the Peacekeeping Context," May 31, 2021. http://opiniojuris.org/2021/05/31/the-obligation-to-ensure-respect-for-ihl-in-the-peacekeeping-context-progress-lessons-and-opportunities-by-leanne-smith/.

A persistent challenge also lies in delineating when peacekeepers transition from their traditional roles to enforcement, thus becoming a party to a conflict. This is more applicable in robust peacekeeping missions with mandates that include direct combat operations, such as the UN Force Intervention Brigade in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (FIB), which involved the use of force. In such scenarios, peacekeepers must navigate between mandates and the imperatives of IHL. Therefore, understanding the intricacies of IHL is essential for peacekeepers, especially in contexts of multifaceted conflicts where legal frameworks may overlap and diverge.

Peacekeepers actions are guided by principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality, and independence to ensure that humanitarian objectives are not compromised. They have a critical responsibility to apply and uphold IHL, which includes protecting civilians, ensuring humanitarian assistance, and facilitating the peace process in accordance with international legal standards.

Recommendations

For formulation of a visionary, holistic, and achievable mandates; triangular consultation between UNSC, Secretariat and the TCCs is a must.

- Best practices of successful missions must be incorporated while planning and drawing mandates for new missions.
- Strengthen the mandate and operational capability of a mission, as well as political will of various parties to a conflict, for a meaningful conflict resolution and desired end state. This will facilitate peacekeeping missions to achieve fundamental tenet of the protection of civilians, especially in areas of conflict where mass atrocities and human rights abuses are common.
- Non-ambiguous mandates with clear directives, to enable peacekeeping forces to take preventative action to safeguard civilians. This was somewhat lacking in some of the previous missions in Rwanda, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and even in the ongoing mission in Congo and South Sudan, which faced huge challenges in stopping mass crimes.
- As the nature of conflict continues to evolve, so too must the strategies and approaches of peacekeeping and its linkages to the IHL.
- To enhance the effectiveness, peacekeeping must keep pace with innovations in technology, changes in mandate design, and accordingly adapt troop training. To face the complexities of modern conflicts, their adaptability will be crucial in upholding peace and IHL.
- Peacekeepers must balance their duties with the imperative to protect human rights and adhere to IHL, to deal with complexity of modern conflicts.

Conclusion

Lessons from past and current peacekeeping operations highlight the dynamic nature of IHL application. Some takeaways from these are the necessity for more precise legal guidelines that differentiate peacekeepers from combatants, more robust accountability mechanisms for breaches of IHL, and better training in protecting civilians.

As peacekeeping becomes more involved in unstable environments, maintaining compliance with IHL can improve protection of human rights, support humanitarian efforts, and contribute to

sustainable peace. Ongoing research, assessments, and training are vital for a continuous improvement of peacekeeping missions considering evolving conflict dynamics. Thus, adhering to IHL principles is imperative to ensure mission legitimacy and effectiveness.

Peace Operations and Climate Change

Building Resilience in the Context of Climate Change: Recommendations and Lessons from Peace Operations in Africa

Cedric de Coning[1], *Andrea Prah*[2] *and Tobias Pietz*[3]

Introduction and Analysis

The impact of 'climate change' is increasingly recognised as a critical developmental, peace and security issue due to its far-reaching impacts on mobility, displacement and existing conflict dynamics. Its impact cannot be isolated from governance and development deficits which include infrastructural challenges and poor disaster risk management. Climate-induced challenges ranging from extreme weather events to exacerbating competition over dwindling resources, have effects on both the ability of missions to achieve their mandates, as well as local conflict dynamics. Recognising the direct and indirect impacts on strategic, operational and tactical dimensions of peace operations, there has been efforts to incorporate climate considerations into mission mandates[4], operational planning, and conflict resolution strategies.

Together with the UN Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA) and the Department of Peace Operations (DPO), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) established the UN Climate Security Mechanism (CSM) in 2018. It provides technical expertise to integrate climate considerations into conflict prevention and peacebuilding strategies. On the African continent, the African Union (AU) has also recognised the security implications of climate change. In May 2018, the AU Peace and Security Council (PSC) initiated a study on the nexus between climate change and conflicts in Africa, which led to the AU Assembly's endorsement in 2022 and 2024 of the need for a Common African Position on Climate, Peace, and Security (CAP-CPS).

However, there remains a need for innovative approaches to ensure that peace operations are climate sensitive, resilient, and adaptive to emerging environmental changes. Two cases of peace operations on the African continent provide examples of both challenges and lessons learnt for operational planning – the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Mission in Mozambique (SAMIM) and the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS). Drawing on these two examples, this paper aims to highlight key policy recommendations to build more resilient peace operations.

Recommendations

[1] NUPI and ACCORD.

[2] ACCORD.

[3] ZIF.

[4] United Nations Peacekeeping. ''Climate, Peace and Security" Accessed April 2, 2025. https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/climate-peace-and-security#:~:text=Peace%20Operations%20and%20Climate&text=The%20multidimensional%20missions%20are%20mandated,stability%20of%20the%20host%20countries.

- **Funding challenges**

The UNSC mandated UNMISS[5] to incorporate the management of climate risks into their plans and operations, but it has not received funding to support this aspect of the mandate. Funding for staff and programming will become even more scarce in the future in the context of increasing financial pressure on the peacekeeping budget. However, additional voluntary **funding opportunities can be explored to support CPS related programming, including from the UN Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) and from climate adaptation funding facilities.**

- **Operational planning and preparedness**

SAMIM operations in Mozambique were significantly affected by heavy rainfall. The mission was only equipped for land warfare and had limited capabilities to adapt to extreme weather conditions and its aftermath, which sometimes gave insurgent forces a strategic advantage.[6] Similarly, UNMISS also had to adapt its operations as a result of flooding which posed a risk for internally displaced people (IDP) camps, and that also created new flashpoints for conflict when communities we forced to relocate to higher ground. **Peace operations, and their T/PCCs, therefore need to anticipate the impact extreme weather events can have on their ability to execute core mandated tasks, such as protection of civilians.**

- **Reliable data, information sharing and pre-deployment planning**

Peace operations are more likely to be better equipped and prepared if climate-related foresight planning informs pre-deployment planning and preparations. For example, in the case of UNMISS, in addition to seasonal rains, excessive flooding is some regions have become more common, and this allowed the mission to map out high ground. In some cases these areas are also hot spots for protection risks. TCCs deployed in these areas should prepare to carry out their mandated tasks despite seasonal flooding as this is now a known mobility issue.

- **Cooperation with and support to the host country**

The extent to which a peace operation can plan for and adapt to climate-related extreme weather events is also influenced by the host country's readiness to respond to natural disasters. **Natural disaster mitigation planning offers an opportunity to integrate preparedness for extreme weather events and other environmental considerations into peace operation planning, as well as into national development and adaptation planning.** IGAD's Climate Prediction and Application Centre (ICPAC) is an example of how a regional early warning capacity can support the preparedness of its member states

[5] United Nations Digital Library. ''Resolution 2625(2022)/adopted by the Security Council at its 8994th meeting, on 15 March 2022" Accessed April 2, 2025. https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3964857?ln=en&v=pdf.

[6] Dan Morrison, ''Sobering SAMIM assessment reflects mission's inadequacies and the insurgency's evolution,'' *Zitmar News*, January 28, 2022 https://www.zitamar.com/sobering-samim-assessment-reflects-missions-inadequacies-and-the-insurgencys-evolution/.

The Future of UN Peacekeeping in a Changing Climate

Lukas Rüttinger and Alexandra Steinkraus[1]

Introduction and Background

In a world spiralling toward greater instability – marked by a rising number of violent conflicts, increasingly dramatic climate impacts, and heightened geopolitical tensions – effective multilateral mechanisms for peace and security have never been more crucial. UN peacekeeping operations have served as a cornerstone of international conflict management since 1948. They now face unprecedented challenges at the intersection of traditional security threats and emerging climate-related risks.

While UN peacekeeping has evolved significantly over seven decades, adapting its mandates and tasks to address complex threats, like climate security considerations, these efforts fall short of addressing the full scope of climate-related security challenges. The reshuffling of the geopolitical order combined with scepticism among key permanent UN Security Council members, institutional gridlock and financial constraints pose additional challenges for peacekeeping operations.

This policy brief[2] provides concrete recommendations on how climate change considerations can be integrated into UN peacekeeping models. It builds upon existing recommendations, in particular the 2024 report on The Future of Peacekeeping, New Models, and Related Capabilities, and explores how to fully integrate climate change and environmental considerations into peacekeeping to better respond to these interconnected threats and trends.

Recommendations

UN peacekeeping has made significant progress in addressing climate-related security risks, including structurally with a more systematic integration of Climate, Peace and Security (CPS) Advisors into missions. This has translated into better operational understanding and analysis, enabling more proactive addressing of climate-related security risks like conflicts over natural resources, reducing their environmental impact and supporting the green energy transition. But there is more to be done.

In order to address the full scope of climate-related security challenges, member states and UN peace operations should build on these efforts to ensure that present and growing threats from direct and indirect impacts of the climate emergency are integrated into mandate design and mission planning, operational capabilities, field implementation, partnerships, strategic leadership, monitoring, evaluation and resource allocation. Whereas the political context in New York is clearly difficult, some of the recommendations outlined below might be possible to implement as practical and

[1] adelphi research.

[2] This policy brief is based on a policy paper, which is also titled *The future of peacekeeping in a changing climate.*

pragmatic improvements for closing capability gaps and adapting peace operations to ensure missions are fit for purpose.

Recommendations are comprehensive. Those that are of specific high relevance to the UN Peacekeeping Ministerial agenda and the pledging guide are marked with an asterisk (*):

Strategic Integration and Mandate Design

1. **Climate-Security Risk Assessment Framework:** Use a standardised climate-security risk assessment framework for all mission planning processes. This should inform mandate design and be regularly updated throughout mission lifecycles.
2. **Increase Expertise in Missions:** Mobilise funds to include CPS Advisors across missions, in addition to UNMISS, and enhance knowledge exchange.
3. **Modular Climate Components*:** Design deployable climate-security modules that can be flexibly integrated into different peacekeeping models, for example:
    - **Climate-Resilient DDR:** Incorporate climate resilience into Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration strategies and programmes (i.e. through climate-resilient livelihood options).
    - **Natural Resource Governance Support:** Enhance mission capabilities to support inclusive renewable natural resource governance mechanisms (i.e. water and land) at local and national levels.
    - **Climate-Sensitive Protection of Civilians:** Update civilian protection strategies to account for how climate impacts (i.e. flooding and drought) alter civilian vulnerability and safety of IDP camps.

Operational Capabilities and Field Implementation

4. Community-Based Climate Adaptation: Authorise Quick Impact Projects specifically targeting community-level climate adaptation, focusing on conflict-sensitive interventions that reduce resource competition and build trust with local populations. Projects should be identified and developed based on community dialogue.

5. Climate Adaptation Training*: Integrate climate-security modules into in-mission training for all peacekeeping personnel, with specialised tracks for relevant sections (political affairs, civil affairs) and personnel (military, , police, civilian), ensuring environmental peacebuilding skills are part of the training Ensure continued integration of climate-security modules in pre-deployment trainings.

6. Climate Adaptation Workshops*: Integrate climate-security modules in TCC-hosted initiatives on experiences working in climate-impacted environments and lessons learnt to increase understanding of the pathways between conflict and climate impacts and how to address them.

7. Disaster-Ready Equipment and Response Capabilities*: Equip missions with climate-appropriate gear (including all-terrain vehicles, watercraft, temporary shelters) and specialised rapid response teams trained in disaster management, enabling effective support

to humanitarian actors during climate-related emergencies and strengthening mission credibility with local populations.

8. Sustainable Infrastructure*: Ensure all mission infrastructure projects adhere to climate-resilient standards and can serve as models for sustainable development after mission departure.

Institutional Coordination and External Partnerships

9. Enhanced UN System Coordination: Strengthen coordination mechanisms between peacekeeping operations and UN entities with climate expertise (UNEP, WMO, UNDP).

10. Host State Climate Partnerships: Develop formalised partnerships with host state institutions, for example environmental and meteorological institutions to improve local data collection and analysis.

11. Regular reporting: Enhance regular reporting from the SG to the UNSC on climate-related security risks across all missions in addition to UNMISS.

Leadership and Strategic Direction

12. Enhanced Political Strategies: Ensure climate considerations are central to mission political strategies to make sure mission are implemented as part of a comprehensive framework that addresses the root causes of conflict and insecurity.

13. Leadership Guidance: Develop specific guidance for SRSGs and mission leadership on integrating climate considerations into strategic decision-making.

Monitoring, Evaluation and Resource Allocation

14. Flexible Funding Mechanisms: Establish dedicated funding windows within peacekeeping budgets for climate-security programming.

15. Climate-Security Performance Metrics*: Develop specific indicators to measure mission effectiveness in addressing climate-security risks.

Peacekeeping Renewable Energy Can Help Achieve the Goals of UN Peace Operations and Enhance Resilience

Andrew Hyde[1]

Introduction

Fragile and conflict-affected countries are often those the most affected by climate change, with both political and economic impacts. They also tend to be among the least electrified countries in the world. A positive trend is the ongoing shift to renewable energy, which carries the potential to augment efforts to promote peace and stability. Besides its positive environmental impact, renewable energy, especially solar PV, can be easily deployed in smaller distributed systems, potentially reducing single points of failure and enhancing local ownership and responsibility. This also means renewable energy systems are easier to scale as economic capacity and demand rise.

The increased use of renewable energy by UN peace operations has demonstrated the potential to strengthen their operations and further their mission to advance prospects for peace. These operations currently depend primarily on diesel generators for power, and often generate consume a significant share of electricity in the countries where they are deployed. Greater reliance on renewable energy can improve the resiliency and security of peace operations. Reducing the need for a costly and vulnerable supply chain for diesel fuel, which can often be a tempting target for armed groups and corrupt officials, is a direct and tangible benefit. Handing over mission facilities to local partners at the conclusion of a peace operation can be all the more helpful if it includes working renewable energy systems, making for a valuable legacy asset. An existing portfolio of renewable energy demonstration projects at a number of peace operation sites provides some promising models on how this works. These include donor-T/PCC partnerships, Mission-led initiatives and externally provided commercial options. However, achieving significant impact depends on a more systematic approach and commitment by the UN, T/PCCs, UN member states and host countries. Sustained and scaled use of renewables will ultimately rely on purchasing it from external providers and help spur electricity supply to surrounding communities.

Main Policy Recommendations

Build a **common base of evidence** from existing range of pilot projects – Five years ago the UN Secretariat's Climate Action Plan (UNSCAP) pledged a rapid adoption of renewable energy over the ensuing decade, with peace operations as a major focal point. Many UN peace operations now have real-world experience with acquiring, developing and operating renewable energy systems. The experience of these systems should be captured, assessed and utilized as best practices and lessons learned to fast-track the process of scaling up of renewable energy across the UN. Institutionalized knowledge sharing among TCCs and the Secretariat would ensure maximum transparency.

[1] Director and Senior Fellow, Stimson Center; David Mozersky, President, Energy Peace Partners.

As potentially large-scale electricity consumers, UN peace operations can also lead the way within the **larger UN country team**. Humanitarian agencies, for example, are also interested in exploring different models of how renewable energy can enhance the agility and resilience of their operations.

A range of stakeholders, ranging from development actors, private sector investors and host country governments, are actively involved in seeking to increase renewable energy capacity, however practical experience and dependable starting points are often lacking. UN peace operations can provide a **focal point or platform** for other partners seeking solutions on technical and operational challenges, establishing a workable market and how best to regulate and tax power production.

Legacy and **transition planning** for UN peace operations should explicitly factor in the opportunity renewable energy resources could provide in sustaining and building upon peaceful outcomes as missions close or reduce their footprints. Mission assets and resources transitioning to local or host-government control could be significantly more attractive if they include autonomous energy production equipment.

Developing a common framework and understanding for how expanding renewable energy resources can contribute to **peacebuilding** is also an urgent need. Making use renewable energy opportunities an explicit element of a Mission's partnership with local mediation and peacebuilding organizations will help in understanding and addressing the impact of the energy sector on conflict dynamics.

Missions should explore opportunities for reliable **renewable energy by external providers**. Power Purchase Agreements are one model with proven success that can enable greater access to electricity by surrounding populations. Greater electricity access contributes to economic development and can help reduce conflict. It also reduces the need for the mission to operate in an area where they do not possess a comparative advantage. It will be important to establish benchmarks and expectations which are clear, realistic and consistent.

The need for peace operations to have **resilient and reliable power** is critical. Reduced dependence on an extended and vulnerable diesel fuel supply network can help. Renewable energy, especially solar and wind, often locate power production close to the user and have the advantage of being diversified and redundant sources and distribution.

Visionary and sustained leadership from the highest levels of the UN Secretariat and individual peace operations will be required for continued progress on adopting renewable energy. This underscores the need for continued attention from and pressure by UN member states. As the UN reconsiders the long-term goals, achievements and realities of today's model of UN peacekeeping, the resilience, scalability and sustainability of renewable energy provides considerable promise.

Other Issues

Integrating Ad Hoc Coalitions in International Conflict Management

John Karlsrud[1] and Yf Reykers[2]

Introduction

International conflict management is undergoing profound transformation.[3] Since 2014, traditional UN peace operations have declined, while the demand for swift crisis responses has increased dramatically. With the UN, AU, and EU often slow to act, ad hoc coalitions – flexible, temporary arrangements among like-minded states – have gained traction as a tool for rapid deployment in conflict zones. This shift to what we call *conflict management à la carte* reflects both opportunities and risks. While ad hoc coalitions offer speed and flexibility, they also raise concerns about legitimacy, accountability, and the erosion of institutional memory. Integrating these coalitions with established UN and regional mechanisms is critical for maintaining effective and legitimate conflict management.

Advantages and Challenges of Ad Hoc Coalitions

Ad hoc coalitions are rapid, targeted and flexible, and can be very useful in situations of sequential deployments. They provide states with solutions that have lower creation, operation and exit burdens compared to traditional modes of crisis management, particularly when rapid action is required. They enable likeminded states to come together to achieve shared political objectives when institutional frameworks are too rigid or in stasis due to geopolitical or regional rivalries.

However, ad hoc coalitions only provide quick-fix solutions, which are often of little value unless integrated into longer-term strategies. Most of the time, they are only weakly anchored in a larger political-diplomatic strategy and they can undermine humanitarian and developmental objectives. Ad hoc coalitions also tend to draw resources away from established institutions like the UN and the AU, with substitution and deinstitutionalization as a long-term result, i.e. in the form of a gradual degradation of bureaucratic capacity and capabilities.

Relying too heavily on ad hoc coalitions furthermore risks eroding institutional memory. The UN has gradually developed a strong capacity for organizational learning, enabling the development of a comprehensive set of norms, prescriptions and guidelines for UN peace operations, in close cooperation with member states and civil society. Similar observations about a gradually emerging learning culture have been made for other regional organizations and alliances involved in international conflict management, most notably the AU, the EU and NATO. For ad hoc coalitions,

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[2] Assistant Professor at Maastricht University.

[3] This input paper is drawing from Karlsrud, John and Reykers, Yf (forthcoming). Integrating Ad Hoc Coalitions in International Conflict Management. [under review], as part of the ADHOCISM project, funded by the Research Council of Norway (project number 314967).

this is not the case. Lessons are rarely noted down, and even more rarely taken into account when the next operation is being fielded.

Although often challenged on their lack of accountability vis-à-vis various stakeholders, UN peace operations are also embedded in a complex web of accountability relationships. First, they are tasked and report to the UN Security Council. Second, they depend on an often difficult, but close relationship with the host state. Third, troop and police contributors, as well as donors, global and regional powers and international and local civil society all have a say and are engaged in various manners. Fourth, and perhaps most importantly, local populations also demand their voice to be heard and the operations to be responsive to their security and governance needs. Ad hoc coalitions, on the other hand, have considerably less accountability measures in place – in fact, ad hoc coalitions are often chosen exactly because of their lack of a clear accountability structure.

Scenarios of Ad Hoc Coalition Integration

Building on a comprehensive mapping of ad hoc coalitions in international conflict management since the 1950s, we identify four different scenarios of their use in international conflict management:

Type of ad hoc coalitions	Description	Examples
Stand-Alone Deployment	Deployed in absence of regional/UN initiatives. May lack oversight and strategy.	MSS in Haiti (2024), Task Force Sentinel (Gulf)
Sequential Deployment	Temporary force until a UN/regional mission takes over.	AMIB to ONUB in Burundi (2003–04), INTERFET to UNTAET in Timor-Leste
Parallel Deployment	Operates alongside UN/regional missions. Can vary from loose to full integration.	MINUSMA & Barkhane (Mali), G5S Joint Force, ISAF & Operation Enduring Freedom
Fully Integrated Operations	Embedded into multilateral strategy with shared governance.	Potential re-hatting of MSS Haiti into UN operation

Recommendations

To maximize effectiveness and mitigate risks, it is important for the UN and regional organizations to find ways to integrate with ad hoc coalitions. We therefore recommend the UN and regional organizations to:

- Institutionalize partnerships by coordinating mandates and operations with ad hoc coalitions following a clear vision on divisions of labor, with ad hoc coalitions serving as early response mechanisms and/or taking on enforcement tasks.
- Develop modular support systems by making available institutional expertise and accountability mechanisms to ad hoc coalitions.

- Promote strategic embedding by ensuring integration in broader political-diplomatic plans.

For donors and participating states, we recommend to:

- Prioritize coordination by clarifying mandates (and divisions of labor) in multi-actor settings.
- Condition funding on accountability by linking financial support to human rights compliance based on regular reporting.
- Incentivize knowledge sharing by fostering the development of inter-institutional platforms for learning exchange.

Stick or Twist:
Is Peace Enforcement part of the UN's Future?

Jordan Street[1], Abigail Watson[2] and Kirsten Hartmann[3]

Introduction

The United Nations (UN) Peacekeeping Ministerial in May 2025 will serve as a high-level political forum for Member States to discuss the future of peacekeeping. This comes at a difficult time for the UN and UN peace operations. Multiple peacekeeping missions have been asked to leave by host countries in recent years, the UN Security Council (UNSC) has failed to mandate any new missions, and the UN Secretary-General is not championing blue helmets in the same manner as his predecessors.[4] A potentially rapidly declining UN budget and dwindling faith – and even outright disdain – towards multilateralism among major donors and troop contributors to UN peacekeeping is adding to growing pressure.

At some point really soon,[5] the UN probably has choices to make about its future peace and security offering. It can accept that it will need to do less with inevitably fewer resources, or it can attempt to rebrand itself to cozy up to certain political forces in a bid to stay relevant. Against this background, the future evolution of UN-led and UN-authorized peace operations is unclear. For some, a shift towards peace enforcement is a potential answer to some of these pressures. For others, this would be a recipe for disaster for the UN. This briefing outlines the arguments for and against, as a contribution to the Global Alliance for Peace Operations issue papers. It is the position of the authors that UNSC Members and the broader C34 members should continue to ensure that the UN offering on peace operations should maintain a clear line between peacekeeping and peace enforcement approaches.

What is peace enforcement and where does it fit in UN peace operations?

'Peace enforcement' is a form of intervention – that can be mandated by Chapter VII – which involves the use of force against combatants and usually includes heavy counter-terrorism elements.[6] The Capstone Doctrine defines it as:

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[1] Head of US/UN Program at Saferworld USA

[2] Research fellow at the Global Public Policy Institute (GPPi) in Berlin

[3] Project Officer European and International Politics, Bundeskanzler Helmut Schmidt Stiftung

[4] Boutellis, Arthur. 2023. "The New Agenda and Peace Operations: Don't Bet Against the Future." *IPI Global Observatory*, September 7. Accessed April 11, 2025. https://theglobalobservatory.org/2023/09/the-new-agenda-and-peace-operations-dont-bet-against-the-future/.

[5] United Nations. 2025. "Guterres prioritizes reform at 'UN80 Initiative' launch." March 13. Accessed April 17, 2025. https://www.un.org/en/delegate/guterres-prioritizes-reform-un80-initiative-launch.

[6] Street, Jordan. 2023. "Counterterrorism in Disguise? Does A Shift Toward `Peace Enforcement' Spell a Death Knell for UN Peacekeeping?" *Just Security*, December 15. Accessed April 11, 2025. https://www.justsecurity.org/90688/counterterrorism-in-disguise-does-a-shift-towards-peace-enforcement-spell-a-death-knell-for-un-peacekeeping/.

> "the application, with the authorization of the Security Council, of a range of coercive measures, including the use of military force. Such actions are authorized to restore international peace and security in situations where the Security Council has determined the existence of a threat to the peace, breach of the peace or act of aggression. The Security Council may utilize, where appropriate, regional organizations and agencies for enforcement action under its authority".[7]

It has been used by several states and regional organizations, like the African Union (AU), but is distinctly different to post-cold war UN peacekeeping missions, which: (1) are intended to preserve an existing peace or support nascent peace processes; (2) depend on host state consent for a deployment; and (3) limit military action, including the use of force, primarily for protection purposes (for example, self-defense of the mission, as well as to protect civilians and deter actors that undermine peace processes). Although there have been UN-mandated peace operations with peace enforcement elements, the UN has not deployed a mission where peace enforcement is the sole task under blue helmets.

The UN has previously, in limited circumstances, been mandated to perform peace enforcement-type tasks – for example, through the Force Intervention Brigade component (discussed below) of the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO). However, the doctrine has never been embraced as a core operating concept, given the unwillingness of troop-contributing countries to put their forces in harm's way and a lack of political agreement among UNSC members.[8] Yet, in recent years, the concept of peace enforcement has been elevated by UN leadership and others in discussions around UN peace operations. In *A New Agenda for Peace* policy brief from July 2023, the UN Secretary-General stated that "The increasing fragmentation of many conflicts, and the proliferation of non-State armed groups that operate across borders and use violence against civilians, has increased the need for multinational peace enforcement and counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency operations." This included a recommendation for the UNSC to authorize peace enforcement action by multinational forces or (sub-)regional organizations where appropriate, and a recommendation for the UN to offer support to other peace enforcement operations when implementing countries or regional organizations lack the required capabilities.[9]

Further, when the UNSC passed Resolution 2719 in December 2023, which provides the framework to support AU-led peace support operations – including potential peace enforcement mandates – through UN-assessed contributions, many thought this could usher in a new era of peace operations.[10] While regional ownership and leadership in peace operations are undoubtedly crucial, the

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[7] United Nations. 2008. "United Nations Peacekeeping Operations. Principles and Guidelines." Accessed April 11, 2025. https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/capstone_eng_0.pdf.

[8] International Crisis Group. 2024."Ten Challenges for the UN in 2024-2025." *Crisis Group Special Briefing N°12*, September 10. Accessed April 15, 2025. https://www.crisisgroup.org/global/sb12-ten-challenges-un-2024-2025.

[9] United Nations. 2023. "A New Agenda for Peace." Accessed April 11, 2025. https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/default/files/document/files/2024/08/our-common-agenda-policy-brief-new-agenda-peace-en.pdf.

[10] Tadesse, Bitania, and Jenna Russo. 2024. "UN Support to African Union–Led Peace Support Operations: What Next for Resolution 2719?" *International Peace Institute*. Accessed April 11, 2025. https://www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/2409_What-Next-for-Resolution-2719-web.pdf.

operationalization of the resolution entails several risks.[11] In the *Pact for the Future* from September 2024, Member States underlined the importance of this UN-AU collaboration and requested the Secretary-General to review all forms of UN peace operations and provide recommendations on how they can be adapted to meet evolving needs.[12]

With the unravelling of many assumptions related to global peace and security policy in 2025, are the concepts of peacekeeping and peace enforcement heading for a collision course at the UN?

The case for peace enforcement

The argument in favour of the UN to embrace peace enforcement appears to rest on three issues: 1) the perceived irrelevance of traditional peacekeeping models, combined with 2) the desire for the UN to re-establish its role as a critical global actor for peace and security challenges, and 3) the predicted need to adapt to a changing funding environment.

1. **Relevance:** Violent conflict and global security policies have changed significantly since the heyday of contemporary/post-Cold War UN peacekeeping. No large-scale multidimensional UN peacekeeping mission has been authorized since 2014. Recent missions have been dogged by claims of ineffectiveness.[13] This has raised serious questions about the relevance of the mandates of many current UN peacekeeping missions. Faced with these difficulties, UN leadership might seek to redefine its peace operations doctrine to remain relevant to perceived future peace and security challenges. Proponents might draw upon examples where peace enforcement mandates have been important tools used by multilateral organizations to protect civilians and de-escalate conflict. The Force Intervention Brigade component of MONUSCO is most often cited as an example of short-term success – given the mission's initial role in neutralizing the M23 armed group in 2013.[14] Similarly, although not a multilateral example, the French mission Operation Serval did have a modicum of success in preventing advances and protecting civilian populations when violent non-state armed groups quickly advanced through northern Mali.[15] Saferworld research also points to some examples where the limited use of force was an important component to support a political strategy and find a way out of violent conflict in Iraq, Colombia and Northern Ireland.[16]
2. **Reputation:** In recent years, frustration with the limits and impact of peace operations has led to peacekeeping missions being drawn down, asked to leave, or unceremoniously booted out.

[11] Street, Jordan. 2023. "Counterterrorism in Disguise? Does A Shift Toward `Peace Enforcement' Spell a Death Knell for UN Peacekeeping?" *Just Security*, December 15.

[12] United Nations. 2024. "Pact for the Future, Global Digital Compact and Declaration on Future Generations." Accessed April 11, 2025. https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/sotf-pact_for_the_future_adopted.pdf.

[13] De Coning, Cedric. 2023. "How Not to Do UN Peacekeeping." *IPI Global Observatory*, May 17. Accessed April 11, 2025. https://www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/2409_What-Next-for-Resolution-2719-web.pdf.

[14] Novosselof, Alexandra, Adriana Erthal Abdenur, Thomas Mandrup, and Aaron Pangburn. 2019. "Assessing the Effectiveness of the UN Missions in the DRC (MONUC-MONUSCO)." *Norwegian Institute of International Affairs*, Report 3/2019. Accessed April 15, 2025. https://www.nupi.no/content/pdf_preview/28321/file/EPON-MONUSCO-LowRes.pdf.

[15] Powell, Nathaniel. 2022, "Why France failed in Mali." *War on the Rocks*, February 21. Accessed April 11, 2025. https://warontherocks.com/2022/02/why-france-failed-in-mali/.

[16] Attree, Larry, and Abigail Watson. 2022."How guns fall silent. Analysing examples of relative success in integrated stabilisation." *Saferworld*. Accessed April 11, 2025. https://www.saferworld-global.org/resources/publications/1390-how-guns-fall-silent-analysing-examples-of-relative-success-in-integrated-stabilisation.

Hostility has been directed at UN peacekeepers by host governments and populations alike in Haiti, South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and elsewhere. Faced with this perceived crisis of reputation, UN leadership might seek to cater to some demands for UN peacekeeping to morph into a new posture. This might lead the UN to look to outsource a greater proportion of current UN peace operations to regional organizations such as the AU – even if significant questions remain about the ability of these same regional institutions to apply policy guidance related to peace operations and peacekeeping, for instance, regarding transparency, human rights and protection of civilian approaches.

3. **Resources:** In recent years, UN peace operations have been expected to do more with fewer resources – the peacekeeping budget has been reduced from around USD$8.3 billion in 2015/16[17] to $5.59 billion in 2024/2025.[18] With a series of cuts to foreign assistance and aid budgets by a number of the largest donors, the UN is in the midst of a full-blown funding crisis. Bellicose rhetoric from the second Trump Administration has many concerned that the assessed contributions from the US – in their entirety[19] – might not be forthcoming. For peace operations, the loss of around $1.2 billion per year (in addition to outstanding US arrears) will present significant liquidity challenges.[20] While the most dramatic turn has certainly come from the US, these cuts to support peace and security programming are by no means isolated. The UK, Germany, France, the Netherlands and the EU are all cutting or repurposing portions of their foreign aid spending.[21] Outsourcing peace operations, including peace enforcement missions, to other regional actors such as the AU could be seen as a way of maintaining some budget contributions in austerity times.[22]

The case against peace enforcement

The resolute case against the UN's embrace of peace enforcement relies on 1) the mass of evidence pointing to limited success at best, and outright failure at worst, of previous peace enforcement missions; 2) the poor long-term prospects for peace such missions produce; and 3) the clear

[17] United Nations. 2015. "General Assembly Authorizes $8.3 billion for 15 Peacekeeping Operations in 2015/16 as It Adopts 25 Resolutions, 1 Decision in Reports of Fifth Committee." June 25. Accessed April 11, 2025. https://press.un.org/en/2015/ga11657.doc.htm.

[18] United Nations. 2024. "Fifth Committee Approves $5.59 Billion Budget for 14 Peacekeeping Operations, Service Centres, Headquarters Support Staff, Concluding Resumed Session." June 21. Accessed April 11, 2025. https://press.un.org/en/2024/gaab4463.doc.htm.

[19] Taylor, Adam, and John Hudson. 2025. "Trump plan would slash State Dept. funding by nearly half, memo says." *The Washington Post*, April 14. Accessed April 15, 2025. https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2025/04/14/state-department-budget-cuts-trump-rubio/.

[20] Better World Campaign. 2025. "Lower U.S. Payments to the UN: 2025 Assessments Explained." January 17. Accessed April 11, 2025. https://betterworldcampaign.org/funding/lower-u-s-payments-to-the-un-2025-assessments-explained#:~:text=For%20peacekeeping%2C%20the%20U.S.%20will,for%20American%20taxpayers%20each%20year.

[21] Rotmann, Philipp, and Abi Watson. 2025. "Europe in the Turtle Trap: Defense Spending Alone Will Not Protect Us." *Global Public Policy Institute*, March 14. Accessed April 11, 2025. https://gppi.net/2025/03/14/europe-in-the-turtle-trap-defense-spending-alone-will-not-protect-us.

[22] Although current political dynamics and wider funding constraints make the implementation of UNSC Resolution 2719 seem unlikely, it would represent a savings for the overall UN budget if missions were rehatted as AU Peace Operations and UN budget contribution drops to seventy-five percent of the total cost.

incompatibility with current doctrine and potential damage to the UN's reputation as an impartial actor.

1. **Poor track record on human rights and civilian harm:** The proactive use of force inherent within peace enforcement mandates creates significant risks that missions will negatively impact human rights, increase sexual and gender-based violence, and harm civilians during operations. This is not to suggest that the UNSC and UN should do nothing in contexts where civilians need protection from armed groups, but to highlight the risks if mandates shift towards more use of force postures. The AU's experience in Somalia with peace enforcement mandates, through the AU Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) and the AU Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS), illustrates this clearly.[23] While AMISOM/ATMIS have provided limited security for some regions of the country, multiple organizations have documented how "the AU's near-two-decade-long intervention in Somalia has been mired in controversy. Some of its forces have been accused of abuse – including execution-style killings, rape, and indiscriminate airstrikes."[24] Clear evidence[25] has also shown that interventions by peace enforcement components of stabilisation interventions regularly cause increased violence against civilians and have provided no shortcuts to security.[26]
2. **Ineffectiveness and future quagmires:** Many of the contexts where peace enforcement style mandates have been considered are marked by the existence of violent groups using terror tactics.[27] The UN offering is not designed or equipped for counter-terrorism operations, which are usually military-led efforts requiring intelligence, targeted operations and offensive capabilities. There is significant evidence that peace enforcement as an approach has been particularly ineffective in the context of counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency operations (often targeting 'proscribed groups' in Afghanistan, the Sahel, Somalia and other regions).[28] Peace enforcement tasks in these contexts have generated blowback and have ended up reinforcing, rather than reducing, conflict drivers – particularly human rights abuses, corruption and exclusion. Getting trapped in the "self-reinforcing system' of 'regime protection

[23] Crouch, Joanne. 2018. "Counter-terror and the logic of violence in Somalia's civil war. Time for a new approach." *Saferworld*. Accessed April 11, 2025. https://www.saferworld-global.org/resources/publications/1191-counter-terror-and-the-logic-of-violence-in-somaliaas-civil-war-time-for-a-new-approach.

[24] Gabobe, Mohamed. 2025. "African Union peacekeepers in Somalia accused of widespread abuse." *The New Humanitarian*, March 12. Accessed April 11, 2025. https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/analysis/2025/03/12/african-union-peacekeepers-somalia-accused-widespread-abuse.

[25] Interpeace. 2022. "Rethinking Stability. Key Findings and Actionable Recommendations." Accessed April 11, 2025. https://www.interpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/2022-Rethinking-Stability-Recommendations-Paper-Web-spread.pdf.

[26] Attree, Larry, and Jordan Street. 2022. "No shortcuts to security. Learning from responses to armed conflicts involving proscribed groups." *Saferworld*. Accessed April 11, 2025. https://www.saferworld-global.org/resources/publications/1389-no-shortcuts-to-security.

[27] Here – and throughout the piece – we use the terminology 'violent groups using terror tactics'. This is to ensure a focus on the act of terror, rather than the labelling of a group. This is consistent with all Saferworld's writing on counter-terrorism.

[28] Attree, Larry, Jordan Street, and Luca Venchiarutti. 2018. "United Nations peace operations in complex environments. Charting the right course." *Saferworld*. Accessed April 11, 2025. https://www.saferworld-global.org/resources/publications/1183-united-nations-peace-operations-in-complex-environments-charting-the-right-course; Interpeace. 2022. "Rethinking Stability. Key Findings and Actionable Recommendations."; Karlsrud, John. 2024. "UN Peacekeeping and Impartiality: A Fading Relationship." *Ethics & International Affairs* 38, no. 4: 433–43.

operations'"[29] – which have, in many contexts, led to further protracted conflict and continued resilience of proscribed groups – would be a disaster for the UN. These dangers are especially pertinent in many of the areas where peace operations are deployed, like Mali[30] or the Democratic Republic of the Congo,[31] where there has been evidence of regimes violently repressing civilians. In such cases, there is a serious risk that external additional military support from the UN or other regional forces can be used to protect regimes that pose a risk to civilians that is comparable to the non-state violent groups they are targeting. As argued previously, these sorts of mandates will change the UN's aspirations in conflict zones away from the promotion of peace and human security "to an agenda that facilitates the management of violence in support of the national security of embattled member states."[32]

3. **Compromising impartiality and credibility:** UN peace operations policy documents have never wavered from the core principle of impartiality.[33] Many concerns have been raised with the unavoidable impact to impartiality if the UNSC uses a Chapter VII mandate for peace operations to engage in peace enforcement tasks against violent groups using terror tactics. While UN peace operations have operated in complex conflict environments,[34] they have so far avoided directly engaging in counter-terrorism operations. If UN peace operations become directly involved in counter-terrorism, they risk undermining other peacekeeping and peacebuilding models in which the UN still has a modicum of success. Further, supporting military counter-terrorism operations could damage the UN's reputation, making it harder to act as an impartial peace and security actor. This was most clearly seen in the case of the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), which had close links to the heavily militarised French Operation Barkhane counter-terrorism mission. MINUSMA faced an array of challenges out of its control, including Russian-led disinformation campaigns,[35] blowback from disastrous regional counter-

[29] Attree, Larry, and Jordan Street. 2020. "Redefining a UN peace doctrine to avoid regime protection operations," *Saferworld*. Accessed April 11, 2025. https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/saferworld_-_redefining_un_peace_doctrine_to_avoid_regime_protection_operations_-_september_2020.pdf.

[30] Raineri, Luca. 2018. "If victims become perpetrators: Factors contributing to vulnerability and resilience to violent extremism in the central Sahel." *International Alert*. Accessed April 15, 2025. https://www.international-alert.org/publications/if-victims-become-perpetrators-violent-extremism-sahel/.

[31] Amnesty International. "Democratic Republic of the Congo 2023." Accessed April 15, 2025. https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/africa/east-africa-the-horn-and-great-lakes/democratic-republic-of-the-congo/report-democratic-republic-of-the-congo/; Center for Civilians in Conflict. 2020. "Enabling Support by Mitigating Risk. MONUSCO's Implementation of the Human Rights Due Diligence Policy in the Democratic Republic of Congo." Accessed April 15, 2025. https://civiliansinconflict.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/CIVIC_HRDDP_Report_Final-Web-1.pdf.

[32] Attree, Larry, and Jordan Street. 2020. "Redefining a UN peace doctrine to avoid regime protection operations." *Saferworld.*

[33] United Nations. 2008. "United Nations Peacekeeping Operations. Principles and Guidelines."

[34] Complex conflict environments are defined as combining the presence of armed groups using 'terror' tactics, transnational organized crime and the regional/international nature of civil war.

[35] Peruchon, Léa. 2024. "Propaganda Machine: Russia's information offensive in the Sahel." *forbidden stories*, November 21. Accessed April 11, 2025. https://forbiddenstories.org/propaganda-machine-russias-information-offensive-in-the-sahel/.

terrorism policies[36] and constantly changing authorities through multiple military coups.[37] Nonetheless, there is ample evidence that MINUSMA's closeness with counter-terrorism missions had a negative impact on its reputation, effectiveness and the ability of the UN system to operate within Mali and the sub-region.[38] Similar sentiments have been noted in Somalia with AMISOM/ATMIS.[39]

Embracing peace enforcement: a quick fix?

Questions about the evolution of peace operations need to be informed by past evidence, future needs, and present realities. Too often, the answer to such policy debates is made to satiate short-term challenges (such as dramatic budget decreases), and both the past evidence and long-term implications are ignored. However, when we take into consideration what works, an embrace of peace enforcement is not in the interests of the UN, its donors, or civilians impacted by violent conflict.

Evidence shows that peace enforcement missions have been predominantly unsuccessful, do not fit with current UN operational structures, and are not compatible with UN peacekeeping doctrine. If the UN shifts towards peace enforcement – through blue helmets or by outsourcing to other regional organizations – it is liable to contribute to the growing list of failed peace enforcement interventions. It could continue to erode the norms of peacekeeping, undermine the models in which peace operations are successful, and further diminish faith in the UN institution. The budget difficulties of today might make some previously inconceivable options seem compelling, but short-term sacrifices to maintain relevance are likely to have serious long-term consequences for UN principles. Therefore, shifting further towards peace enforcement seems like a bad bet to make, and will pave the UN's way into – not out of – crisis. Budgets come and go, but norms do not.

Nor is it hard to envisage effective UN peacekeeping operations without peace enforcement. *The Future of Peacekeeping, New Models, and Related Capabilities*,[40] commissioned by the UN Department of Peace Operations, lays out 30 'models' or roles for peacekeeping, including deploying peacekeepers to stem a looming conflict, supporting the organization of free and fair elections, and protecting shipments and convoys of humanitarian aid. The authors described the models as a 'menu of options' for UN member countries to choose from as potential solutions to future problems. Importantly, none of these options are securitized, regime protection-style peace enforcement.

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[36] Doxsee, Catrina, Jared Thompson, and Marielle Harris. 2022. "The End of Operation Barkhane and the Future of Counterterrorism in Mali." *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, March 2. Accessed April 11, 2025. https://www.csis.org/analysis/end-operation-barkhane-and-future-counterterrorism-mali.

[37] Kaledzi, Isaac. 2023. "Sahel region: Are military juntas hindering stability?" *Deutsche Welle*, December 9. Accessed April 11, 2025. https://www.dw.com/en/sahel-region-are-military-juntas-hindering-stability/a-66787767.

[38] International Peace Institute, Stimson Center, and Security Council Report. 2024. "Emerging Lessons from MINUSMA's Experience in Mali." Accessed April 11, 2025. https://www.stimson.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/EmergingLessonsfromMINUSMAsExperienceinMali.pdf.

[39] Crouch, Joanne. 2018. "Counter-terror and the logic of violence in Somalia's civil war. Time for a new approach." *Saferworld*. Accessed April 11, 2025. https://www.saferworld-global.org/resources/publications/1191-counter-terror-and-the-logic-of-violence-in-somaliaas-civil-war-time-for-a-new-approach.

[40] Wane, El-Ghassim, Paul D. Williams, and Ai Kihara-Hunt. 2024. "The Future of Peacekeeping, New Models, and Related Capabilities." *United Nations*. Accessed April 11, 2025. https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/future_of_peacekeeping_report_rev30jan_1.pdf.

UN Peacekeeping in Ukraine: Is it a Possibility?

Major Gen (Dr) AK Bardalai (retd)[1]

Introduction

The latest initiative by the USA to bring an end to the Ukraine war has brought for some observer some movement into potential peace negotiations. Presuming Russia and Ukraine may be amenable and truly committed to a role for UN peacekeeping in the supervision of the ceasefire, there are then several scenarios that could be explored. Various authors have already explored the technical elements of a ceasefire and who should monitor the ceasefire.[2] In addition, wider questions of feasibility of peacekeeping as a conflict management tool in Ukraine had been explored even earlier.[3] This issue brief proceeds under the assumption that there will be a ceasefire and UN peacekeeping will be an acceptable option for supervising the agreement.

The Context

Adhering to the principles of peacekeeping is one of the primary conditions for a UN peace operation to succeed.[4] However, strictly adhering to the principles is not always easy because of their inherent ambiguity in interpretation. Even if Russia and Ukraine agree to the UN to monitor a ceasefire, the consent may not be absolute but conditional. Some of the conditions can even be implied. This will be a challenge. Conditional consent would imply the host state agreeing to the deployment of the peacekeepers, applying different conditions for the mandate, Status of Force Agreement (SOFA) and use of force, etc. For example, before the deployment of UNOSOM (Somalia), the rebel leaders remained sceptical of the international organisation's likely hidden agenda. At the same time, the main fighting factions desperately needed the UN to obtain economic aid. Ali Mahdi consented. But Aideed had to be persuaded by Mohamed Sahnoun, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG), to accept the deployment of 500 peacekeepers for the protection of humanitarian convoys. Aideed's consent was conditional. He withdrew his consent when Secretary-General Butros Butros-Ghali recommended to the Security Council to deploy 3,000 peacekeepers without consulting either Sahnoun or Aideed. This enraged Aideed, who considered this a breach of faith. What followed immediately was an escalation of violence.[5] Most of the time, the conditions will not be reduced to writing but will be conveyed verbally during negotiations. Similarly, in the case of Ukraine, the UN

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[1] Director - Centre for UN Doctrine & Policy, The United Service Institution of India, Rao Tula Ram Marg, New Delhi – 110 057.

[2] Cedric de Coning, "What Would It Take for a Ceasefire between Russia and Ukraine to Hold?" *IPI Global Observatory,* March 18, 2025, https://theglobalobservatory.org/2025/03/what-would-it-take-for-a-ceasefire-between-russia-and-ukraine-to-hold/#more-25612.

[3] Richard Gowan, "A Tentative First Look at Options for Peace Operations in Ukraine," *Crisis Group*, March 24, 2022, https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/eastern-europe/ukraine/tentative-first-look-options-peace-operations-ukraine

[4] United Nations Peacekeeping Operations: Principles and Guidelines (New York: UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations, 2008), 31-40.

[5] Lise Morje Howard, *UN Peacekeeping in Civil Wars*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 25-27.

focal point must have explicit trust of Russia and Ukraine and understand how best to satisfy both sides. Essentially, for the sake of peace, some strategic compromises will have to be made by the parties to the conflict and the international community.

As regards the use of force, the biggest challenge will come from the non-state actors who are fighting on both sides. Arguably also regular troops (including foreign troops, e.g. North Korea, international volunteers on both side) will have to be handled appropriately. State and non-state actors and their forces may even continue to operate with tacit support from the main parties to the conflict. Another challenge is finding the TCCs that would be willing to participate in such a mission and would be acceptable to both parties. The member states from the West may neither be inclined nor acceptable to Russia. For instance, the idea of "Coalition of the Willing" is floating around for some time. Such a force, however, is meant for the security of Europe and Ukraine, either in the form of a deterrent force in the absence of a ceasefire agreement or a proper peacekeeping mission.[6] While such an arrangement is most likely to be okay for Ukraine for peacekeeping, for the very reason of the Russian invasion, it is not going to be acceptable to Russia. At the same time, it might be quite possible to find some neutral European nations (even if smaller in size) to volunteer to contribute their soldiers, depending on the overall framework of the mission and the mandate. At best, their contributions can only be very small in number. Even the capable nations from the global South may not be inclined to make political and military sacrifices by getting caught in the hostile space, including the mercenaries. These being political challenges, the UN and those who are taking the lead in brokering a ceasefire, hopefully, will be able to find some kind of acceptable solution. Nations contribute to peacekeeping based on their national and strategic interest. Therefore, even listing the likely and willing contenders for peacekeeping will be difficult.

Force Structure of the Mission

Considering the likelihood of a permanent ceasefire, and there is a consensus for UN peacekeeping in the UN Security Council, the following options can be studied:

a. **Armed contingents comprising well-equipped and well-trained peacekeepers.** Armed contingents will be expected to enforce the ceasefire violations. The consequences of enforcing peace between Russia and Ukraine might not only trigger another conflict but will bring fatality to the peacekeepers. Enough resources would be required to cover 400 km of land front, as well as the naval areas of the Black Sea. Besides the geography or complexities of the terrain, the structure of a peacekeeping force will depend on other factors such as the aim and mandate of the mission, etc. This can be commented on only after a field visit by the technical team of the UN. Nevertheless, going by the experience of past missions, an armed peacekeeping mission for Ukraine will have to be much bigger than what UNPROFOR was.

b. **Lightly armed peacekeeping mission**. In case of a lightly armed mission, the weapon is expected to be used only for self-defence. Should there be a recurrence of violence, lightly armed missions can at best defend themselves against small arms fire, but only for a limited period. To put it differently, it is to provide only the bare minimum staying power until the peacekeepers can be extricated to a safe zone.

[6] John Karlsrud and Yf Reykers, "Coalitions for Ukraine: Moving Beyond Stop-gap Measures ", *IPI Global Observatory,* 2 May 2025, https://theglobalobservatory.org/2025/05/coalitions-for-ukraine-moving-beyond-stop-gap-measures/.

c. **Unarmed Military Observer Mission**. An unarmed military observer verification mission comprising peacekeepers from neutral countries supported by a liaison and coordination mechanism is likely to be more suitable to facilitate a ceasefire. Reporting by unarmed observers drawn from neutral countries will be more impartial.

d. **Civilian peacekeeping**. If acceptable to the main parties to the conflict, even a UN civilian observer mission in line with the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe's Special Monitoring Mission (OSCE SMM) is another option worth considering. So far, these observers have performed well in various missions.[7]

e. **Multi-Dimensional observer mission**. An unarmed observer mission comprising military, civilian and police peacekeepers can also be more effective and provide credibility to the ceasefire verification mechanism. Military peacekeepers would find it easy to deal with foreign militaries in a hostile environment because of their familiarity with the basic military culture. There is potential for civilians to participate in UN observer missions either independently or better, by complementing the military peacekeepers in an integrated UN observer mission. Civilians can also bring with them certain nuances of peacekeeping that may go unnoticed by the military peacekeepers in the normal course.[8] Apart, police are equipped with special investigative skills. There can be situations when there are allegations and counter-allegations, police investigation skills come rather handy. The best combination can be found when forensic experts can be built into each team or kept centrally within easy reach.

Recommended option

Under Chapter VI, peacekeepers, when armed, can use force in self-defence and the defence of the mandate. Use of force, perhaps, is the most controversial of the three principles. The inherent ambiguity in its interpretation, at times created by the scholarly debates and legal experts, is used by some unwilling TCCs not to use force, even while it is justifiable. Besides, the interpretation of how much the minimum is varies. For example, Gen Rupert Smith, who was the commander of the UN force in Bosnia, the application of force should be able to alter the mind of the decision maker (he meant against whom the force has been applied).[9]

In Ukraine, a peacekeeping mission with armed contingents, unless stronger than both the Russian and Ukrainian armed forces, will not be able to defend itself. For example, despite being armed with heavy arms, including main battle tanks and howitzers, which is rare in UN peacekeeping, UNIFIL was not able to prevent an all-out conflict between the IDF and Hezbollah. As for self-defence, UNIFIL peacekeepers were forced into bunkers by the IDF and moving outside the bunkers was possible only when permitted by the IDF. Therefore, there was no utility for armed contingents in South Lebanon, even for self-defence. If one were to pinpoint the reasons for the success of UNIFIL

[7] André Härtel, Anton Pisarenko, and Andreas Umland, "*The OSCE's Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine: The SMM's Work in the Donbas and Its Ukrainian Critique in 2014–2019,"* June 7, 2021.

[8] Personal experience of the author.

[9] Rupert Smith, "Bosnia, Using Force Amongst the People," *The Utility of Force: The Art of War in the Modern World* (England: Penguin, 2005), pp. 332-379.

until the recent conflict, it was more because of an effective liaison and coordination mechanism of UNIFIL and less of the robust structure of the mission. Such a mechanism essentially comprises arresting the potential triggers of a major conflict at the tactical level (communicating, collaborating and cooperating).

There will always be a threat to peacekeepers, regardless of the mandate, structure of the force and how capable they are. Before the IDF invasion of South Lebanon on 1 October 2024, the author was under the impression that a robust force like UNIFIL was a political deterrence to both the IDF and Hezbollah. But the recent conflict proved him wrong. Deterrence relies on the perceived ability and willingness to follow through on threats or consequences. If the credibility of follow-through is lacking, deterrence may fail. For this, besides the peacekeepers willing to make sacrifices, it needs political and military support from the TCCs. If such support does not come through because of political compulsions, arming peacekeepers to their teeth is meaningless. Would a peacekeeping mission in Ukraine be any different?

Besides, armed contingents, depending on their attitude to peacekeeping, could be seen as intrusive and offensive. Therefore, deploying unarmed observers to supervise the ceasefire agreement will be more cost-effective. In all peacekeeping missions, there is a section of Public and Civil Affairs, generally headed by a senior and seasoned civilian staff member. This section coordinates and supports military peacekeepers with the political content of the conflict. Time is of paramount importance. Hence, integrating them at the tactical level will help diffuse a situation and produce better results.

Though not the primary role of peacekeeping, another challenge will be how best peacekeepers can adapt to peacebuilding-related activities. Post the ceasefire agreement, several international agencies would be working around the clock on reconstruction activities. However, the local populations who have lost lives of their near and dear ones and property, will look up to the peacekeeping missions to chip in, especially in the fields of reconstruction and health care, in their respective area of operations. When a multi-dimensional observer mission is combined with substantive capabilities for infrastructure development (such as a force engineering company), demining and medical care (Level III hospital), the mission will get local legitimacy and will be more acceptable to either side, thereby adding to the credibility of the UN. Given the current challenges and looking at the likely advantages over other options, a Multi-Dimensional Observer Mission combined with force assets (as explained above) seems to be more suitable for ceasefire verification in the Ukraine War.

Conclusion

The success of a peacekeeping mission in Ukraine hinges on several crucial factors. Firstly, the mission should only be deployed after a ceasefire agreement has been reached, and there is a genuine chance of achieving partial success. Without a reasonable prospect of success, investing in a peacekeeping mission would be futile.

Like true for all missions, even in Ukraine, a peacekeeping mission, more specifically a mission with formed contingents (armed), will face several strategic and operational challenges. Among many, ambiguity in the UN peacekeeping norms, especially adherence to the principles of peacekeeping, will be a big challenge. Apart, interpretation of the mandate, operational interoperability among the

contingents; finding well-equipped and well-trained peacekeepers; presence of non-state actors; interference by the TCCs (in terms of issuing national caveats); restriction of freedom of movement by the parties to the conflicts, including the non-state conflicts; difficulty in removing UXOs from the operational areas; likelihood of ceasefire violations and difficulty to verify the violations, are some of the main challenges that are likely to come in the way of mandate implementations. Such challenges, however, are not insurmountable. The centre of gravity of the success of a peacekeeping mission in Ukraine at the strategic level is the continuous presence of consent from Russia and Ukraine. Considering that the UN Security Council and the member states would have risen to fully support a peacekeeping mission in Ukraine (if accepted by both sides) and ensure presence of the consent, if the willing member states, instead of issuing caveats, encourage their peacekeepers to make it their obligation to implement the mandate, UN peacekeeping in Ukraine is a doable.

Another important success factor is the need for effective leadership. A leader who can think and act from both a political and military perspective - a rare combination of skills. In the context of Ukraine, the leader heading the peacekeeping mission must be able to navigate the delicate balance between Russia and Ukraine, where a single misstep could light the short fuse and reignite the conflict. A military practitioner with diplomatic skills, adequate mastery over the language, who can think and make quick decisions, factoring both political and military dimensions, would be ideal for this role. While with adequate training, a military leader will be able to wear the common hat of a political and military leader, the opposite is not true. Furthermore, the Ukraine conflict has highlighted the renewed possibility of large inter-state conflicts, making it essential to explore alternative models for conflict resolution.

Balancing National Objectives and Local Needs

Jyrki Ruohomäki[1] and Johanna Hakanen[2]

Introduction

There is an ongoing and broad understanding that improving the effectiveness of peace operations of UN and other international organisations is paramount for their success and future.[3] It has also been established that local buy-in and ownership[4], political commitment and coordination of the efforts and needs of the international community[5] need to be addressed in order to increase the effectiveness of any peace operation. Finally, it has also been argued that measurable objectives or a clear theory of change should be established to observe the effectiveness, or the lack of it, and to allow for more knowledge-based decision-making.[6]

Less research and discussion exist on the relationship between the local needs and the objectives of the troop or police contributing countries (T/PCC). Participating in peace operations isa tool for implementing foreign and security policy. Thus, T/PCCs invariably operate with strategic objectives for their participation, whether explicitly stated or implicit. These objectives can be pursued e.g. via offering certain capabilities to a peace operation or advocating for the inclusion of normative principles.[7] For instance, Finland emphasizes highly specialized police contributions to UN operations, and has also championed inclusion of normative principles, especially the Women, Peace and Security agenda, emphasising their role in mandates and overall implementation of peace operations. Other contributing countries will have different strategic focus areas, but all have some.

When aligned with local needs these national agendas can be useful, and even necessary, as setting clear national objectives can improve the commitment of T/PCCs to peace operations by highlighting the tangible benefits of participation on a national level. These benefits can be, for instance, improvement of the T/PCCs capabilities, gaining access to relevant knowledge/information or fostering relations with other contributing countries. Specialized Police Teams (SPTs) are a good example of aligning objectives, as a PCCs can benefit by gaining more experienced police capabilities

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[3] See e.g. Day, A. 2022. States of Disorder. Ecosystems of Governance. Complexity Theory

Applied to UN Statebuilding in the DRC and South Sudan. Oxford University Press; Tykkyläinen, S.,Karjalainen, A., Brusset E., Hario, P. 2023. Systems Approach to Peace Operations. CMC Finland Working Papers, Vol 11: No. 1/2023

[4] See e.g. Leonardsson, H., & G. Rudd. 2015. The 'local turn' in peacebuilding: A literature review of effective and emancipatory local peacebuilding. Third World Quarterly, 36(5), 825-839; Paffenholz, T. 2015. Unpacking the local turn in peacebuilding: A critical assessment towards an agenda for future research. Third World Quarterly, 36(5), 857-874.; Mac Ginty, R. 2015. Where is the local? Critical localism and peacebuilding. Third World Quarterly, 36(5), 840-856.

[5] Brunk, D. 2015. "Whole-of-society" peacebuilding: A new approach for forgotten stakeholders. International Journal, 71(1), 62-87.

[6] See e.g. Ruohomäki J. & J. Hakanen. 2023. Three Steps to Evaluating Effectiveness: Learning from Finnish Reports on Afghanistan. CMC Working Paper, Vol. 11.

[7] Hunt, C. 2024. Spezialized Police Teams in UN Operations: A Survey of Progress and Challenges. International Peace Institute. Specialized Police Teams in UN Peace Operations: A Survey of Progress and Challenges.

for themselves, while also providing necessary capabilities for the peace operation so that it can continue supporting the host nation. Additionally, the impact of an SPT is easier to report and justify at the capital, helping to ensure donor commitment.[8]

However, national objectives become problematic when they go against the local needs or hamper the effectiveness of the operation. For example, it will be harmful, if a T/PCC insists on deploying capabilities disconnected with local contexts or advocates the implementation of a normative principle in a way, which does not have the adequate host-state buy-in. [9] Emphasizing short term gains from the T/PCC perspective while risking the long-term success of the operation can lead to decrease in effectiveness. Therefore, the interests of a T/PCC need to be aligned with the mandate of the peace operation reflecting the needs of the host-state and local populations. Different stakeholder interests may be aligned interests, for instance, within countering global issues, such as climate change and transnational organised crime.[10]

Communicating the national strategic objectives improves transparency domestically. Failing to disclose any national objectives, or communicating unclear motives, can lead to a backlash, if the local constituency sees that the participation does not deliver enough in comparison to the costs. However, this applies to politico-strategic objectives while, for example, the development of capabilities related to national security can remain disclosed. As simply setting objectives does not guarantee they are achieved, monitoring and evaluation is required. The evaluations should not be viewed as a source of criticism, but as a tool for improvement and knowledge-based decision-making, leading to increasing the effectiveness of T/PCC participation in peace operations, and ultimately delivering desired results on a local level.[11]

Main Policy Recommendations

- **Alignment of T/PCC objectives with Local Priorities:** T/PCC's should set national objectives for participation in peace operations that align with local needs and contexts. This includes understanding the differences time frames, and emphasis on short term T/PCC objectives should not override the long term, local/host nation, objectives. Contributing countries should also be required to demonstrate how their objectives and capabilities address local needs, establishing accountability mechanisms to prevent misalignment that could undermine operational success.
- **Enhancing strategic transparency and knowledge-based decision-making:** Public articulation of politico-strategic objectives set by T/PCCs should be encouraged to strengthen political commitment, enhance mission legitimacy, and build sustainable

[8] Ibid.

[9] See e.g. Mustasilta, K., Karjalainen T., Stewart T., & M. Salo. 2022. "Finland in Afghanistan 2021-2021: From Stabilization to advancing foreign and security policy relations" FIIA Report 73.

[10] See "Ideas Notes 2030: Strategic Reflections on the Future of UN Policing", *Geneva Centre for Security Policy,* May 2024, ideas-notes-2030, and Hunt, Charles, T. 2024. "Specialized Police Teams in UN Operations: A Survey of Progress and Challenges." *International Peace Institute.* https://www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/2403_SPTs-in-UN-Peace-Operationsweb.pdf.

[11] See e.g. Ruohomäki J. & J. Hakanen. 2023. Three Steps to Evaluating Effectiveness: Learning from Finnish Reports on Afghanistan. CMC Working Paper, Vol. 11.

domestic support. To be credible and effective, objectives should be realistic, and systematic evaluations should be conducted.

Funding Peace Operations in a Changing Geopolitical Environment: Insights from the Discussion on Applying UNSC Resolution 2719 to AUSSOM

Dawit Yohannes, Meressa Kahsu, Emmaculate A Liaga,

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Introduction

Ensuring sustainable financing is a challenge cutting across many African-led peace support operations (PSOs). From the Organisation of African Unity's earliest efforts to deploy its first mission in Chad in the 1980s to today's African Union Support and Stabilisation Mission in Somalia (AUSSOM), inadequate resources have hampered the successful delivery of mission mandates. Coupled with other factors shaping mission dynamics, financing remains key to PSOs' effectiveness, with diverse strategic, political, operational, and tactical implications, including the ability for impactful long-term mission planning.

The United Nations Security Council's December 2023 adoption of Resolution 2719 (UNSCR 2719) marks a groundbreaking step in reimagining African-led PSO financing. The adoption saw immediate efforts to implement the resolution and identify possible test cases for its application. Implementation efforts largely centred on the Joint AU-UN Roadmap for the Operationalisation of UNSCR 2719, which identifies specific deliverables, lead entities, and timelines along four strategic objectives: joint planning, decision-making, and reporting; mission support; financing and budgeting; and civilian compliance and protection.

The AU's engagement in Somalia emerged as the most likely candidate given the financing challenges that successive missions had encountered since 2007. The UNSC authorised AUSSOM's deployment through Resolution 2767, which indicated the possibility of using the UNSCR 2719 framework to fund the mission from July 2025.

Due to shifts in international contexts and limited progress in attaining the roadmap's essential milestones, implementing this framework is at a crossroads. Nevertheless, discussion around its implementation for AUSSOM offers critical insights for policy discussion regarding UN financing of AU-led PSOs.

Putting the current state of the AU–UN Partnership on display

Considerations for applying the UNSCR 2719 financing framework to AUSSOM both reaffirm the evolving nature of the UN-AU partnership in peace operations and reveal its limitations. The partnership embodies the spirit of Chapter VIII of the UN Charter. It spans strategic, political, and operational dimensions, offering a framework for sequenced, parallel, and hybrid mission deployments.

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UNSCR 2719 solidified consensus around support structures and financing pathways for UN-authorised AU-led missions, showing deepening institutional collaboration. Discussions around applying UNSCR 2719 to AUSSOM and other AU-led PSOs also reaffirmed the partnership's asymmetric nature and the imperative for redressing this aspect.

According to the roadmap's timeline, the activities on aligning and adapting guidelines, modalities and processes should have been finalised between July 2024 and June 2025. Its slow progress underscores the misalignment between the UN and AU's institutional and policy frameworks and approaches for gender mainstreaming, civilian protection, compliance, accountability, logistical and operational service models, joint strategic and operational planning, and monitoring and reporting. The discussions on UNSCR 2719 and AUSSOM also indicated a lack of shared appreciation of specific crises and their resolution between the two organisations.

The UN and AU should embark on a frank assessment of their partnership to explore opportunities for greater alignment of policies, strategies and approaches in addressing crises and conflicts in Africa. Both organisations should prioritise applying UNSCR 2719 to AUSSOM. They should consolidate their partnership, preserving the hard-won gains of the past decade and supporting the Somali government in assuming full responsibility for security and governance and establishing sustainable peace.

Navigating evolving geopolitical realities and political interests

Another key insight from the adoption of UNSCR 2719 and subsequent consideration of applying it to AUSSOM revolves around how a rapidly changing global geopolitical situation could affect its implementation. A prerequisite to deploying an AU mission under the resolution is UNSC authorisation, making its application subject to permanent members' political interests and positions.

This was evident during UNSCR 2767 negotiations and subsequent efforts to garner political support to apply UNSCR 2719 to AUSSOM. AUSSOM is in financial limbo, as the United States (US) has repeatedly indicated that Somalia is not the right context for UNSCR 2719's first application. While the US has not stated whether it would veto a possible measure to apply 2719 to AUSSOM in May, the current US administration's trajectory, which is considering stopping UN peacekeeping funding, citing previous operations' failures, offers little room for optimism.

This experience highlights the need for the UN and AU to increase their diplomatic engagement to garner international support through various platforms, including the UNSC. High-level African diplomacy, backed by the UN, should aspire to forge a financing coalition that brings together countries with a vested interest in Somalia. This coalition should target traditional donors such as the European Union and emerging and regional powers of the Middle East, AU member states, and economic superpowers such as China. The UN and AU should also engage the current US administration about continued engagement in Somalia to avert the looming security threats that may prevail should AUSSOM fail.

African commitment and ownership of PSO financing

The prevailing uncertainties in activating the UNSCR 2719 financing framework for AUSSOM are a reminder of the need for African ownership of the financing of its peace efforts. Calls for Africa to take more responsibility for funding its peace efforts are not new, but remain urgent. The AU has committed to funding 25% of PSOs within the UNSCR 2719 arrangement, yet progress remains

sluggish. Fulfilling this pledge is not just a financial obligation – it's a political statement about Africa's capacity to lead on its peace and security priorities.

The AU's position paper on the UN Secretary-General's report on financing AU PSOs argues for a dual approach focusing on predictable and sustainable funding, including through UN-assessed contributions and Africa strengthening internal mechanisms like the AU Peace Fund, which remains underutilised.

So far, the AU has mobilised US$16.7 million to AUSSOM from its Peace Fund and partners. This is encouraging, but insufficient to address AUSSOM's financial woes. As the prospect of applying 2719 to AUSSOM lies in limbo, the imperative for alternative financing avenues that mitigate Africa's overreliance on donor funds and advance its ownership of peace efforts is growing. As prior analysis indicates, other avenues must be pursued, and the AU Peace Fund is an obvious option. Enhancing member states' commitment to the fund will require tough discussions within the continental body.

Embedding Sustainability in Peacekeeping: Insights from Security Sector Governance and Reform

Vincenza Scherrer[1] *and Jenna Russo*[2]

Introduction and Analysis

Peacekeeping has played a crucial role in reducing civilian casualties, shortening the duration of conflicts, and increasing the likelihood that peace agreements endure.[3] However, too often, its impact has not been sustained, with stability and protection eroding once missions withdraw.[4] This points to a recurring challenge: when sustainability is not embedded from the outset, peacekeeping efforts risk leaving behind security vacuums, weak institutions, and unresolved drivers of violence.

A key factor in achieving sustainable peacekeeping outcomes is supporting efforts to transform the country's security sector to ensure that it is not only technically competent, but also politically legitimate and accountable.[5] Security sector governance and reform (SSG/R) can help address institutional and state-society drivers of conflict, facilitate the protection of civilians, and strengthen national institutions – laying the groundwork for lasting peace once missions exit.

While UN peacekeeping is meant to be guided by the "primacy of politics," political strategies often prioritize securing a formal peace agreement, which may not fully address the root causes of violence. As highlighted in an AU-UN report on Darfur and observed in other settings, key drivers of conflict often remain unresolved at the time of transition.[6] Tackling these issues requires deeper political engagement to address core grievances. For example, SSG/R is frequently treated as a technical matter in peace agreements, often relegated to the implementation phase.[7] Although political engagement on unresolved security issues is crucial, mandates rarely position SSG/R as a strategic tool for advancing broader political and peace processes.[8] This underscores the need for Special Representatives of the Secretary-General (SRSGs) to use their good offices to promote a collective vision for security sector governance.

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[2] Director of Research, Head of the Brian Urquhart Center for Peace Operations, *IPI –International Peace Institute.*

[3] UN News, *Does UN Peacekeeping Work? Here's What the Data Says*, 10 December 2022.

[4] Gains made during a peacekeeping presence have often proved fragile, as seen for instance in Mali or Darfur, where security deteriorated following the departure of the missions. Africa Defence Forum, *'We Cannot Describe the Horror': Violence in Mali Surges as MINUSMA Withdraws*, October 2023; Center for Civilians in Conflict, *Prioritizing the Protection of Civilians During Peacekeeping Transitions: Lessons Learned from MONUSCO*, November 2022, p.1.

[5] DCAF, *Review of SSR Language in the Mandates of UN Peace Operations*, (Geneva: DCAF, 2025), p. 2

[6] United Nations Security Council, *Special report of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission and the Secretary-General of the United Nations on the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur and a follow-on presence,* UN Doc. S/2022/202, 12 March 2020, para. 54.

[7] UN Secretary-General, *Report on Security Sector Reform* (2022), para. 16.

[8] DCAF, *Review of SSR Language in the Mandates of UN Peace Operations*.

This challenge is further compounded by the limited progress in building functional institutions capable of delivering security services effectively, accountably, and inclusively. For instance, strengthening the good governance of the security sector is crucial to improving state-society relations and ensuring that civilians remain protected once peacekeepers depart. This requires both operational effectiveness—to deploy where security vacuums exist – and accountability mechanisms to prevent abuses and uphold human rights. However, UN investments in protection of civilians (PoC) tend to prioritize the UN's direct role rather than building the capacity of national security institutions to assume this responsibility over time.[9]

More broadly, the requirements for peacekeeping transitions are often planned too late when they should be central to the mission strategy from the outset. Mission activities should be guided by local political, economic, and social contexts and economies and designed to build lasting institutional capacity. A DCAF study found that while several mandates recognized the need to transfer leadership and strengthen national capacities on SSG/R, this was typically only addressed to a limited extent and often not until the final stages of the mission.[10]

In sum, for peacekeeping missions to be more sustainable, they must address the underlying drivers of violence to help ensure that instability and conflict does not resurface once the UN is no longer present as a security guarantor. This demands stronger political engagement and the willingness to tackle sensitive yet critical issues, such as SSG/R. Finally, failing to plan for transitions from the outset risks setting missions up for failure, leaving behind institutions too fragile for country teams to support with limited resources.

Policy Recommendations

- **Anchor peacekeeping strategies in comprehensive risk analysis.** Mandates should be context-specific and grounded in robust assessments of conflict dynamics and drivers of violence. Host countries should consider developing a national prevention strategy to guide long-term efforts to address risk factors for violence – providing a basis for mandate design and adaptation. Strengthened cooperation between the UN Security Council with the Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO) and the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) can further support this approach.
- **Prioritize transformative issues vital to sustainable peace, such as SSG/R.** Often viewed as a long-term goal, SSG/R is also critical for immediate stability and can contribute to core mission priorities – including stabilization, restoration of state authority, and protection of civilians. To deliver on these outcomes, SSG/R requires sustained political engagement by senior leadership – not only technical support – which should be more consistently reflected in mission mandates.

[9] For instance, a DCAF study found that SSR was not systematically included in the priority tasking on PoC in mission mandates (see *Review of SSR Language in the Mandates of UN Peace Operations*). See also: Jenna Russo, *Militarised peacekeeping: lessons from the Democratic Republic of the Congo*, Third World Quarterly (2021).

[10] For instance, a lessons learned review in Liberia found that only after the mission transitioned to the UN country team did the absence of a dedicated national coordination mechanism became apparent. DCAF, *Review of SSR Language in the Mandates of UN Peace Operations*.

- **Embed transition planning from the outset**. Planning should start early and focus on strengthening national capacity – particularly in the security sector – to perform core functions effectively and accountably. This also requires investing early on in sustainable national finance models for the security sector to reduce risks during transition periods.[11] Equally important is strengthening the ability of government authorities to lead, coordinate, and sustain reform efforts beyond the mission's presence. As emphasized in the UN Secretary-General's third report on SSR (2022), placing national counterparts at the center of reform design, implementation, and evaluation is essential to achieving lasting and nationally owned outcomes.

[11] DCAF and UN Inter-Agency SSR Task Force, *"Security Sector Reform & Governance and Sustaining Peace"*, Input to the Thematic Consultations for the UN Peacebuilding Architecture Review, Policy Note, October 2024.

An Ingredient for Sustainable Peace: Planning Safe-exit Strategies for Peace Operations

Interpeace[1]

Although Peace Operations are, by design, temporary, subject to annual mandate renewals by the UN Security Council, they often last ten to fifteen years, without enabling coherent multi-year strategic planning. Yet the absence of a coherent exit strategy at the design stage of any missions has often led to abrupt withdrawals that risk undermining the peace gains achieved over years of presence. The withdrawals of MINUSMA from Mali at the end of 2023, and the progressive transition of MONUSCO from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) until the end of 2025, have exposed significant shortcomings in UN peacekeeping transitions in recent years. These cases highlight the necessity for context-sensitive exit strategies rooted in local realities and agreed with national authorities. Such strategies should not be dictated solely by international agendas or external political pressures, but rather by the achievement of tangible peace outcomes on the ground.

Because building sustainable peace and resilience requires long-term commitment, strategically planning safe and impactful exit strategies for Peace Operations to ensure that the mission does not leave behind an environment that is likely to relapse into conflict must include:

- **Establishing a clear exit strategy from the outset of the mission, aligned with the objectives of the mandate.** Clarity regarding the conditions necessary for a safe and successful withdrawal is crucial from the beginning. This supports adoption of a mandate that is fit for purpose and achievable, and ensures the missions are allocated the resources needed to fulfil their tasks.
- **Defining clear Peace Conditions aligned with the local context to guide transition.** These conditions must be grounded in a deep understanding of the conflict's local dynamics and the drivers of violence. The mere absence of violence or the provision of security are insufficient conditions for sustainable peace. Peace conditions are inherently political, rooted in the construction of transformative and inclusive political processes that address the root causes of violence. This for instance requires institution-building, inclusive governance, and sustainable security structures that allow international forces to progressively devolve responsibilities to national and local actors.
- **Integrating local actors and the civil society in defining Peace Conditions.** For Peace Operations to succeed and exit responsibly, they must be grounded in locally defined peace conditions, reflecting what affected populations themselves consider as necessary for peace. Local perspectives must be included through inclusive dialogue with national and community stakeholders. This requires partially decentralizing strategic planning from UN Headquarters level to draw on the expertise of local and national stakeholders, institutions, and civil society actors. Peace Operations must therefore conduct a dual analysis of community-level drivers of conflict and the governance capacity of the state.

[1] This short input paper is based on the findings and recommendations of Interpeace's work on *Rethinking Stability*, conducted with the support of the German Federal Foreign Office.

Inclusion of affected communities fosters local ownership of both the process and the outcomes, a key component for legitimacy.

- **Developing Peace Operations' adaptive capacities.** Ensuring safe exits missions to conduct systematic in-depth and continuous assessments of local political and socioeconomic dynamics. Peace Operations must be flexible enough to adapt strategies and actions to an evolving context while maintaining a firm focus on the mission's core objectives of peace and stability. This calls for mandates that allow for re-orientation of the mission in adequation with the changing environment and for investing in improved Learning and Adaptation capacities and systems that can track progress against Peace Conditions and against objectives set at the design stage of missions.
- **Working with other peace actors to prevent conflict relapse after transitions.** Exit strategies must anticipate the likelihood of future shocks and ensure that national and local institutions are well-prepared to manage them. This requires fostering collaboration among peacekeeping forces, peacebuilding actors, development actors, as well as civil society organisations and the private sector. These partnerships are essential to build resilient, self-sustaining political, judicial, economic and governance structures. Humanitarian-Development-Peace actors play a critical role in this phase by identifying and measuring peacebuilding needs. Their role is also to support post-mission efforts to help mitigate the risks of relapse into violence.

By anchoring withdrawal conditions in the achievement of tangible, locally defined Peace Conditions rather than responding to external political constraints, Peace Operations can support safer and sustainable transitions that help to prevent relapse into conflict. This approach enhances local ownership as it aligns strategies with community needs and political realities and increases the likelihood that international forces leave behind resilient, self-sustaining peace infrastructures rather than a power vacuum. Ultimately, the credibility and long-term success of peace operations depend on their ability to exit in a responsible manner, based on the completion of peacekeeping and peacebuilding milestones – when national and local actors are ready, institutions are trusted, and peace can structurally be maintained from within.

This requires a rethinking of how decisions are made around Peace Operations at the UN level: as long as missions remain subject to short-term political negotiations through annual mandate renewals, they will be structurally constrained from adopting the multi-year strategies needed to deliver sustainable peace.

Enhancing the Role of UNPOL in Peacekeeping Operations

Charles T. Hunt[1] and Ekkehard Strauss[2]

Introduction

The United Nations (UN) faces new threats to peace and security, including increasing armed conflicts, technological armament, organized crime, the climate crisis and pandemics. Armed conflicts occur in particular as territorial disputes, urban violence and recurring civil wars. These developments are blurring the boundaries between internal and external security for states.

At the same time, the UN is confronted with geopolitical tensions, loss of confidence and financial challenges with regard to its core task of peacekeeping. As a result, it is less likely that future peace operations will reflect the large multidimensional stabilisation mission operating under robust Chapter VII mandates. Instead, there is growing support for the use of international police capacities (UNPOL) in peacekeeping missions, not least as they can respond more effectively than the military to new challenges such as urban violence and organized crime.

The New Agenda for Peace called for "more versatile, nimble and adaptable" mission models, while the Pact for Future initiated a review of "all forms" of UN peace operations with recommendations for adapting the UN's toolbox for more agile and tailored responses to evolving challenges. A study commissioned by Germany for the Peacekeeping Ministerial proposes 30 modular UN deployment models that can respond flexibly to various threats. A UN police component is envisaged in 20 of these models. According to the study, a lack of necessary expertise within the UN and the member states remains a problem for providing police officers with special skills required in different mandate areas.

Various studies on past contribution of UNPOL to the implementation of substantial mandate priorities, e.g. POC, as well as the effectiveness of UNPOL in certain peace operations indicated the need to address systemic challenges in a targeted manner for UNPOL to reliably fulfil its role in future modular approaches.

Main policy recommendations

1. UNPOL's role in POC should feature more prominently in ongoing policy discussions on adapting peace operations, particularly in three areas: (1) encouraging concrete pledges from PCCs at the 2025 Peacekeeping Ministerial in Berlin and future ministerials; (2) increasing the visibility of policing in the work of the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations (C34) and relevant working groups of the Security Council; and (3) considering

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the role of police during the ongoing review of all forms of peace operations, the 2025 Peacebuilding Architecture Review, and other relevant processes.

2. While UNPOL offers distinct advantages, it must not be treated as a substitute for military components - especially in contexts requiring credible deterrence. The success of many UN police missions depends on the timely deployment of international police forces to close the security gap after conflict. Military is required to provide security until international police can deploy and during a process of police reform against particular threats. The development of operational concepts for the transfer of responsibility and continuing cooperation between the military and UNPOL is essential to avoid creating unrealistic expectations that could undermine the credibility of individual missions and UN peace operations writ large.

3. In order to strengthen the case for police within different deployment models, further research is needed on the effectiveness of police interventions in different operational contexts. While the success of UNPOL to temporarily maintain public order is widely recognized, the effectiveness of UNPOL to build and train local police structures remains politically controversial and difficult to assess. There is a need for the development of standardized evaluation criteria for police work in UN peace missions that take into account the political and security context of the recipient country and can be used for the initial needs analysis and the subsequent agreement on indicators to measure success. UN missions should further develop and harmonize data-gathering and analysis tools like SAGE and CPAS and find ways to feed this data into cross-mission analysis at the Secretariat level. The development of a standardized evaluation framework for police missions is also necessary in order to be able to respond to new requirements through training and guidelines, regardless of mission-specific factors.

4. International police officers increasingly require specialized skills, e.g. related to POC or the prevention of mass atrocities, which first need to be defined nationally and integrated into national capacity building. As these specialized capacities are also only available to a very limited extent within national police authorities, member states need to focus on increased international cooperation for deployment. The UN should also encourage novel deployment models/configurations, including cooperation within regional organisations (e.g. EU, AU) for joint training and deployment of specialist capabilities but should also look to establish new partnerships for coordinated or co- deployments to UN peace missions. Individual countries with experience of conflict should be invited to participate with different PCCs contributing their respective comparative strengths. At the same time, a structured transfer of experience within an active network of PCCs needs to be facilitated.

5. There is a disconnect between the time it takes to prepare UNPOL for effective contributions in the field (selection process, preparation, familiarizing with social, cultural and historic environment, colleagues and new procedures) and the duration of their tours of duty (typically 6-12months). Given the growing need for specialized capabilities, Member States should consider options to facilitate recruitment, including revisiting (regional/partnership) standby arrangement concepts as well as implementing specialist international career tracks within their national police organizations.

6. In any mission context, the success of police reform depends largely on its meaningful integration into a comprehensive approach to security and justice sector reform. Member

States need to coordinate their bi-lateral rule of law reform support packages to (i) align with other bilaterals and regional organizations, and (ii) bolster rather than compete with UNPOL in peace operations.

7. For more effective UNPOL participation in peace operations, there is a need to move from the current predominantly technical approach to a political-strategic model. This would benefit from cooperation with academia and experts in political analysis and police research from interested member states.

Transnational Organized Crime and Peacekeeping

Summer Walker[1] and Catharina Nickel[2]

Introduction: Transnational organized crime's impact on peace operations

Transnational organized crime (TOC) is a major driver of conflict and instability worldwide, and its scale is immense: TOC generates billions of dollars annually through the trafficking of drugs, weapons, fuel, chemicals and other illicit goods.[3] In conflict-affected areas, criminal economies not only inflict local harm and exacerbate violence but also contribute to regional destabilization and transnational trafficking flows. Moreover, the intricate relationship between TOC, corruption and insecurity exacerbates these effects, particularly when high-level corruption enables illicit networks to operate with impunity. As conflicts persist, illicit markets often diversify, attract new actors and become increasingly predatory towards local populations.[4]

The GI-TOC's Global Organized Crime Index[5] shows a strong correlation between areas affected by organized crime and conflict. The implications are particularly severe for peace operations, as it undermines security efforts, increases violence, destabilizes economies and erodes governance, creating conditions in which peacekeeping becomes increasingly difficult. Recognizing this, the UN Security Council has increasingly addressed the issue, holding thematic discussions and referencing TOC in the mandates of peace operations. In 2024, GI-TOC research found that 52 per cent of Security Council resolutions mentioned at least one illicit market, most often in connection with its impact on conflict.[6]

Despite being identified as a priority in many mission settings, TOC is often treated as a technical responsibility. It is delegated to police components or subsumed under broader counterterrorism strategies, and rarely integrated into broader political strategies.[7] In one of the more recent examples, UNU-CPR's 2024 case study on the UN's approach to TOC in Mali during MINUSMA finds that, while the mission's mandate prioritized countering TOC as of 2018, its approach focused on terrorist financing, rather than engaging with the broader political economy that sustains criminal networks.[8]

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[1] Summer Walker, Head, Security and Rights Initiatives, Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (GI-TOC).

[2] Catharina Nickel, Research Officer Conflict Prevention and Sustaining Peace Programme United Nations University – Centre for Policy Research (UNU-CPR).

[3] Global Financial Integrity, 2025, Transnational Organized Crime, https://gfintegrity.org/issue/transnational-crime/.

[4] Summer Walker and Mariana Botero, Illicit economies and armed conflict: Ten dynamics that drive instability, GI-TOC, January 2022, https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/illicit-economies-armed-conflict/.

[5] GI-TOC, Global Organized Crime Index 2023, https://ocindex.net/.

[6] GI-TOC, 2000–2024: Charting organized crime on the UN Security Council agenda, GI-TOC, https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/scresolutions/.

[7] Erica Gaston and Fiona Mangan, Multilateral responses to transnational organized crime and conflict: Global policy considerations and future directions, UNU-CPR, 2024, p. 1, 3.

[8] Erica Gaston, Catharina Nickel, Imane Karimou and Marc Werner, Peacekeeping responses to transnational organized crime and trafficking: A case study of MINUSMA, UNU-CPR, 2024, p. 11.

While specialized tools – such as joint intelligence structures like the Joint Mission Analysis Centre and the All Sources Information Fusion Unit, police components and judicial units – were deployed, and collaboration with UNODC was enhanced, efforts remained fragmented.[9] As UNU-CPR research shows, a similar pattern has emerged in the Central African Republic: while MINUSCA's mandate acknowledged illicit trafficking, the mission considered TOC outside its core functions.[10]

Over the past 15 to 20 years, the UN and regional organizations have implemented various approaches to address the problem, including law enforcement initiatives, judicial responses and sanctions regimes. Some of the key obstacles to these efforts include a lack of coordination and coherence, political roadblocks or insufficient political will, and a siloing of agendas and programming.[11] The Security Council-sanctioned Multinational Security Support mission in Haiti is the newest configuration of a peace mission that has faced operational, personnel, capacity and financial challenges from the onset.[12] Without integrated strategies, adequate resources and meaningful political engagement, international efforts to address TOC will remain reactive and insufficient, even when technical capacities are theoretically in place.[13]

Core policy recommendations

The UN Peacekeeping Ministerial is a critical moment to reexamine how peace operations address TOC. Towards this, we offer the following recommendations for consideration by policymakers at the Ministerial:

Mission-wide coordination and knowledge

- **Establish a TOC focal point to ensure mission-wide TOC coordination:** Effectively addressing TOC requires embedding analysis and policy options across missions. A designated TOC focal point can coordinate internal efforts, provide ongoing threat assessments and support strategic coherence—especially during mission transitions when knowledge continuity is critical. This could be a team, such as in the modular approach envisioned in recent proposals for future peacekeeping models,[14] or it could be a specific role with the goal of policy and program integration. Given the dynamic nature of illicit markets and their impact on peace, stability and state legitimacy, TOC should not be treated as a siloed issue, but as a cross-cutting priority in mission mandates.
- **Apply a political economy lens through threat assessments**: Comprehensive organized crime threat assessments should help missions address the crime–conflict nexus in a more

[9] Ibid., pp. 13, 20.

[10] Gaston and Mangan, 2024, p. 3.

[11] Walter Kemp, Mark Shaw and Arthur Boutellis, The elephant in the room: How can peace operations deal with organized crime?, IPI, June 2013, https://www.ipinst.org/2013/06/the-elephant-in-the-room-how-can-peace-operations-deal-with-organized-crime.

[12] For more information, see Romain Le-Cour Grandmaison, Ana Paula Oliveira and Matt Herbert, A critical moment: Haiti's gang crisis and international responses, GI-TOC, February 2024, https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/haiti-gang-crisis-and-international-responses/.

[13] Gaston et al., 2024, p. 23; Gaston and Mangan, 2024, p. 3.

[14] El-Ghassim Wane, Paul D. Williams and Ai Kihara-Hunt, *The future of peacekeeping: New models and related capabilities*, United Nations, October 2024, https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/future_of_peacekeeping_report_rev30jan_1.pdf.

strategic way, understanding the wider ecosystem of illicit economies and the links to political transition, humanitarian efforts and regional impacts. These threat assessments should be used strategically and be considered at each phase of a mission—from planning to exit.

- **Integrate TOC into mission mandates**: Mandates should realistically reflect the impact of TOC on peace and security, embedding it as a core element from the outset.

Partnerships for greater expertise and operational capacity

- **Strengthen partnerships with local and regional actors**: Future versions of peacekeeping operations are likely to come less from the UN alone but in partnership between UN organizations, regional bodies and local actors. For example, supporting financial intelligence units, civil society watchdogs and communities engaged in resisting criminal networks can create longer-lasting impacts and foundations for post-conflict peace.[15]

Strengthen existing components

- **Align sanctions and diplomatic tools more effectively**: Missions should explore ways to strategically leverage mediation, judicial mechanisms, and sanctions regimes and their panels of experts. These tools should operate as part of a coordinated political strategy to ensure alignment between peace negotiations, legal measures, sanctions and peacebuilding efforts.[16] Missions could, for example, help create an independent judicial process to prosecute TOC on the guidance of a panel of experts.
- **Maintain a focus on the rule of law**: Justice sector reform, accountability and rule of law are critical components of peace operations and would help to implement SDG 16. They are also critical for combating criminal networks and corruption. Downplaying these components would signal a retreat from holistic responses to crime and conflict.
- **Scale up police and border capacities:** This includes expanding components such as the UN Standing Police Capacity and the Justice and Corrections Standing Capacity, as well as establishing specialized units with expertise in financial crime, border security and the dismantling of transnational networks. Strengthening these areas is key to ensure peace operations have the operational support and technical expertise required to address TOC effectively.

[15] See Frank Haberstroh and Simon Zaugg, How financial intelligence units can support the more effective implementation of sanctions regimes, UNU-CPR, 2023; Catharina Nickel, Countering transnational crime to secure peace, UNU-CPR, 2024.

[16] Gaston et al., 2024, p. 28.

Civilian peacekeeping: Lessons from Civilian-Led Ceasefire Monitoring in the Philippines

Nonviolent Peaceforce[1]

Introduction

In the absence of a UN peacekeeping mission, civilians in Mindanao, southern Philippines, built one of the most structured and effective civilian-led protection systems in a conflict zone. Their experience offers perhaps one of the clearest evidence base that unarmed civilians can lead on core elements traditionally mandated to international peace operations, namely monitoring ceasefires, deterring violence, and directly protecting communities from the threat of violence.

This short issue paper argues that the Mindanao case offers a compelling rationale for recalibrating global peacekeeping mandates. Civilian-led protection is not a niche supplement to military peacekeeping – it is a core strategy, especially in complex, protracted, or hybrid conflicts where armed presence may be limited, mistrusted, or politically constrained. Yet despite mounting evidence, local civilian capacities remain systematically undervalued and under-supported in the architecture of UN peace operations. The lessons from Mindanao call for a rethinking of what protection looks like, who can lead it, and how international actors can best support it.

Civilian-led Protection in Practice: The Mindanao Model

The conflict in Mindanao between the government of the Philippines and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) spanned decades, displacing hundreds of thousands of civilians and leaving entire communities vulnerable to repeated cycles of violence. Prior to 2009, ceasefire monitoring mechanisms were primarily military-to-military arrangements, relying on joint field monitoring by GPH and MILF representatives. These structures lacked the trust of civilian populations and were ineffective at preventing abuses or anticipating localized escalations. Their failure became starkly evident during the 2008 resurgence of hostilities, which triggered mass displacement and underscored the absence of mechanisms focused on civilian safety. In response, civil society actors, most notably the Bantay Ceasefire, a grassroots network founded in 2002, pioneered a model of civilian-led monitoring rooted in local presence, relationships, and accountability. Recognising the limits of armed-only frameworks, the government of the Philippines and MILF formally created the Civilian Protection Component (CPC) in 2009 as part of the International Monitoring Team (IMT), a multi-

[1] This paper draws on internal learning from project evaluations, impact assessments, and independent research commissioned by Nonviolent Peaceforce, reflecting on its 2009 experience supporting civilian-led ceasefire monitoring in the Philippines. For more on this topic and additional case studies, see: Rachel Julian (2024) Civilians Creating Safe Space: The Role of Unarmed Civilian Peacekeeping in Protection of Civilians, Civil Wars, 26:1, 187-212; Schweitzer, C. (Ed.). (2010). Civilian peacekeeping: a barely tapped resource. Belm: SozioPubl. https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-332229; Jana Krause, Erin Kamler, Ceasefires and Civilian Protection Monitoring in Myanmar, *Global Studies Quarterly*, Volume 2, Issue 1, January 2022, ksac005, https://academic.oup.com/isagsq/article/2/1/ksac005/6524934.

layered body overseeing ceasefire compliance. The IMT included international military observers, police, and humanitarian representatives. The CPC specifically comprised local NGOs.[2]

Civilian peacekeepers carried out a range of operational tasks that directly contributed to ceasefire compliance, protection, and broader peace process legitimacy:

- Monitoring, Verification, and Reporting: Local monitors conducted daily patrols in high-risk areas, documented potential and actual ceasefire violations, and submitted reports that fed into IMT decision-making. In one case, a local monitor in a marketplace in Maguindanao intercepted military plans to conduct a raid in a densely populated area suspected of harboring insurgents. Drawing on a longstanding personal relationship with local commanders, the monitor persuaded them to delay action, coordinated with community leaders to evacuate civilians, and then reported the incident to the IMT, which initiated formal mediation. What this incident demonstrates is that de-escalation depends on trust, rapid information flow, and credibility, one that is enhanced precisely when monitors are unarmed and seen as part of the community fabric.
- Community-led early warning and early response (EWER): With NP support, over 80 barangays (the smallest administrative unit in the Philippines, similar to a village or ward) established EWER systems tailored to their specific risk profiles. These local systems addressed everything from political violence and clan feuds (rido) to climate-related displacement. Because they were community-owned/led and context-specific, many continued to operate even after external funding ended which is strong evidence of sustainability of local initiative.
- Protection by presence and accompaniment: Civilian field teams provided protective presence in communities facing threats, including at-risk individuals such as displaced persons attempting to return home. Their visible, nonpartisan presence deterred violence and reassured civilians. Importantly, they could access hard-to-reach areas where military actors or international agencies were distrusted or denied entry, closing a major operational gap.
- Training and capacity-building: At the request of local communities, NP trained hundreds of civilians, including women, youth, local leaders and members of both the MILF and the national army in civilian protection strategies, ceasefire mechanisms, international humanitarian law, and how to document and report violations. This training not only increased local capabilities but also created a shared understanding across conflict-affected communities about what protection meant and how it could and should function in their own context.
- Referral and humanitarian coordination: Civilian monitors frequently identified internally displaced persons in remote areas and responded quickly. They truly became essential to humanitarian assessments and referrals, often in areas where humanitarians could not

[2] Nonviolent Peaceforce, at that time, became the only international NGO formally invited into this structure. It was tasked with ensuring that civilian protection became an explicit part of the ceasefire monitoring mandate. NP's role in the CPC was not improvised. By 2009, the organisation had already spent several years in Mindanao, building local trust, training civil society partners, and supporting community-led protection. Its model of unarmed civilian protection (UCP) provided the foundation for a credible, embedded civilian presence in conflict-affected areas.

operate safely. They helped identify the most vulnerable, connect them to services, and, when necessary, mobilise creative community-based solutions in the absence of formal aid. In one instance, civilian monitors negotiated with church leaders in a rural barangay to shelter displaced families who had fled overnight from renewed fighting, families who would have faced direct violence had they been forced to sleep outside.

These activities were not peripheral – they were central to how protection functioned on the ground. They filled the operational gaps left by military actors and formal institutional agencies and provided real-time, vital intelligence, trust-building (leveraging that for relationship-based problem solving), and de-escalation capacity.

The Mindanao model also carries important implications for international actors. A first one is that local protection capacity ideally would not be built reactively. NP's success was predicated on its long-term investment in relationships, training, and contextual understanding – foundations that international interventions often overlook. Second, support rather than supplant local actors. NP played a supporting role, helping scale and structure protection mechanisms that already had roots in the community. International presence worked best when it amplified, rather than replaced local agency. Third and last, flexibility. The CPC-IMT model worked because it recognised the importance of inclusivity in terms of range of actors and flexibility in terms of models and structures – thereby linking top-down and bottom-up peace efforts in ways that made the overall process more responsive, grounded, legitimate and ultimately, sustainable.

Civilian-Led, Mission-Supported: Lessons for Future Peace Operations

The Mindanao case offers several evidence-based insights for rethinking peacekeeping and the protection of civilians:

- Civilian-led mechanisms enhance ceasefire compliance. Civilian monitors functioned as real-time alert systems. Their reports helped trigger preemptive interventions by military and civilian actors, preventing escalation and strengthening the legitimacy of the ceasefire process.
- Relationships and legitimacy are core protection assets. Civilian protection actors derived their deterrence not from force, but from legitimacy, neutrality, and long-standing relationships with communities and armed actors alike. These relational assets enabled informal yet effective problem-solving during high-risk moments. They also increased the situational awareness of the broader peace mediation efforts, as their granular understanding of local dynamics allowed for timely responses that larger, more bureaucratic operations struggle to achieve.
- Civilian peacekeeping is sustainable. Local monitors and EWER networks often continued their work beyond the lifecycle of external funding. This longevity stemmed from community ownership, contextual relevance, and the embedding of knowledge and networks in local institutions.
- Protection is broader than armed security. Civilians in the Philippines, reflecting on their experiences in the IMT, defined security as the freedom to farm, return home, resolve disputes peacefully, and live without fear. Civilian-led actors addressed these multidimensional needs in ways military forces could not. Such an expanded approach to POC, grounded in local priorities, built long-term resilience and trust.

As the UN Peacekeeping Ministerial in Berlin considers future directions for peace operations, civilian-led ceasefire monitoring offers a tested, effective, and replicable model. It proves that civilians can not only participate or be consulted in protection efforts – they can lead them. Their work connects the (horizontal) grassroots legitimacy of community engagement with the (more vertical) institutional authority of formal peace processes.

Learning From What Works: Lessons for Responding to Digital Threats to Peacekeeping

Abigail Watson[1]

Introduction

In 2021, UN Secretary-General António Guterres launched the Strategy for the Digital Transformation of UN Peacekeeping, stating that digital technology "represents one of the greatest opportunities, but also one of the greatest challenges, of our time." Among these challenges, disinformation has emerged as particularly urgent, with peacekeepers increasingly confronting a seemingly unstoppable flood of false or harmful content circulating through social media, WhatsApp, radio, and local newspapers – and many citing it as a central factor in "the calls for MINUSMA to leave" Mali. But digital threats do not stop at disinformation. Cyberattacks can expose sensitive data, endanger peacekeepers, and put local communities at risk. Internet shutdowns can block access to banking, emergency information, and public services. And (often state sponsored) surveillance of journalists and human rights defenders can quickly shrink civic space and enable evermore authoritarian practices. For local, national, or international actors trying to respond, the feat can seem overwhelming; however, there are some successful efforts they can learn from. Over the past year, our team conducted interviews, workshops, and foresight scenario exercises with over 100 experts and practitioners across African civil society, donor states, and international organizations. We identified four "building blocks" common to effective programming on digital threats. While these insights are drawn from the electoral context, they can help peacekeeping missions build more robust, flexible, and context-specific responses.

Varied Actors for Varied Digital Threats:

Despite the wide-ranging nature of digital threats, there's often a lack of coordination between the many actors trying to address them. Groups working on disinformation, hate speech, cybersecurity, and media literacy are frequently isolated from one another. With limited funding and overstretched staff, organizations may duplicate efforts—or worse, unintentionally undermine each other. Stronger responses come from collaboration. The MAPEMA coalition, for instance, created dashboards and "situation rooms" that brought together online monitors, fact-checkers, radio producers, and local officials to coordinate messaging. Initiatives like the Freedom Online Coalition (FOC)—a group of 42 governments promoting internet freedom— also demonstrate how diplomatic coalitions can shape digital norms at the global level. Peacekeepers have begun forging greater partnerships as well. One example is Radio Okapi in the Democratic Republic of Congo, a collaboration between MONUSCO and Fondation Hirondelle. Broadcasting in four local languages and French, the station delivers accurate information that reaches across the country. This kind of partnership is a promising start, but our research shows more can be done.

[1] Global Public Policy Institute, Berlin.

Taking an Institutional Approach to Digital Threats:

A common shortcoming of many digital threat responses is their narrow focus on short-term or one-off interventions. These approaches may deliver some impact in the moment, but they rarely strengthen the institutions needed for long-term resilience. Local civil society organizations—particularly those embedded in the communities peacekeeping missions serve—are often best placed to identify how and where digital harms occur. Yet these organizations typically face barriers to accessing international funding, and when they do, it rarely supports long-term institutional growth. In contrast, more effective initiatives invest in the organizational capacity of local partners. For example, BBC Media Action and the Digital Defenders Partnership recognized that traditional training often failed when organizations lacked the structures to absorb new skills. In response, they began embedding experts in local institutions for three to six months to identify systemic weaknesses and co-developed solutions, leaving behind stronger institutions—not just trained individuals. Peacekeeping missions should follow suit. As Miyashita argues, all peacekeepers—not just a handful of tech specialists—must be trained to understand and respond to digital threats. Building institutional awareness and capacity within missions is as important as building it externally. Without organization-wide digital competence, even the best strategies are unlikely to succeed.

Hybrid Solutions for Hybrid Problems:

Digital threats are deeply entangled with offline dynamics. Online harassment of human rights defenders by corrupt state elites, for example, tends to be accompanied by them being threatened in person. Disinformation about peacekeepers often spreads effectively because it draws on real-life grievances or past misconduct. In this context, purely digital interventions fall short – and yet are the first many international donors tend to reach for. Successful programs assess where technology adds value – and where traditional methods may be more effective. For instance, the Digital Defenders Partnership and CIPESA both begin digital security projects with assessments of their partners' tech literacy and existing systems to ensure solutions are tailored to actual need. Similarly, many staff of peacekeeping missions reported that essential digital tools were underused or unavailable – highlighting the need for those developing tools to understand mission needs. Offline engagement remains indispensable. Organizations like Media Focus on Africa Uganda and Deutsche Welle Akademie all emphasize in-person discussions to build media literacy and counter hate speech often prove more effective than digital campaigns alone. Peacekeepers, too, must "meet people where they are" both online and offline.

Digital threats to peacekeeping missions are growing – but we're not starting from scratch. This research highlights four effective strategies: investing in local research, building diverse coalitions, supporting institutional capacity, and integrating digital with offline approaches. The temptation to treat digital threats as entirely new challenges must be resisted. While technologies evolve, the core threats – disinformation, state-sponsored manipulation, repression – are familiar. By applying lessons from elections and civil society work, peacekeeping missions can respond more strategically and effectively. With the right mix of innovation and established best practice, the UN can strengthen its peacekeeping toolkit for a world increasingly shaped by digital force.

For a full list of Member Organisations and additional Resources, visit
www.peaceoperations.net