

The Future of UN Peacekeeping:

Reflections on Strengthening the Role of Peacekeeping in Sustaining Peace from a Security Sector Reform Perspective¹

I. Introduction

The fundamental purpose of the United Nations (UN) as outlined in the Charter is “to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war.”² In practice, this emphasis on *future* generations is manifested in what we now refer to as preventive efforts to sustain peace. The prevention and sustaining peace approach, reinvigorated by Secretary General Antonio Guterres, has attempted to leverage the whole UN system towards this goal. Admittedly, though, the approach still fails to gain sufficient traction beyond the policy level, often due to the misperception that it is linked to interventionist policies. However, it has had the merit of challenging the way the UN goes about its daily business.

In the past, peacekeeping operations were primarily associated with post-conflict peacebuilding, but their vital role in preventing violent conflict is now firmly anchored in policy frameworks.³ Peacekeeping operations play an important role in stabilizing countries to provide space for longer-term transformative reforms. When underpinned by a people-centred approach, their support to the extension of state authority through inclusive processes is vital to minimizing the exclusion and injustice that can enflame grievances and spark further violence. Moreover, the civilian components of these operations provide much needed expertise to nationally-led processes and play an important role in laying the groundwork for the development of legitimate public institutions.

¹ This paper was authored by Vincenza Scherrer, Deputy-Head of the Policy and Research Division at DCAF, the Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance, as a contribution to UN DPET’s Future of Peacekeeping initiative. The author is grateful to her DCAF colleagues, Heiner Hänggi, Alba Bescos Pou, Hervé Auffret, and Anne Bennett, for their insightful reviews of the text.

² UN Charter, 1945, Preamble.

³ See Resolutions A/RES/70/262 (UN General Assembly 2016a) and S/RES/2282 (UN Security Council 2016); and Adedeji Ebo, “UN Support to SSR: From Peacekeeping to Sustaining Peace,” in Adedeji Ebo and Heiner Hänggi, *The United Nations and Security Sector Reform: Policy and Practice* (2020).

Prevention requires early engagement, before ‘symptoms’ are evident. Thus, there has been an increasing focus on understanding the root drivers of conflict, such as in the seminal World Bank-UN study *Pathways for Peace*. There is no question that our knowledge base is growing vis-à-vis what contributes to violent conflict, from inequality, exclusion, and a sense of injustice, to the poor governance of public institutions. The challenge often lies in connecting the dots, identifying early enough which institutions are flailing, and assessing whether or not sources of inequity are likely to set a spark alight.

To better see around upcoming curves, we must regard support to security sector reform (SSR) as a crucial element of prevention. Strengthening the provision of security (and justice) at national and local levels is a vital building block for peace, and the key role of SSR in preventing violent conflict is clearly reflected in UN Security Council resolution 2151 (2014), which notes that “an effective, professional and accountable security sector without discrimination and with full respect for human rights and the rule of law is the cornerstone of peace and sustainable development and is important for conflict prevention.”⁴ Indeed, security sector actors have powerful tools at their disposal to sustain peace and prevent violent conflict, or to do the opposite. Public grievance and violence against the state, driven by a politics of exclusion, can result from an unrepresentative or abusive security sector, or from its failure to protect citizens against security threats and human rights abuses. However, security actors can also maintain stability during periods of high tension, build trust with and among communities, and step in to protect people from violence and intimidation.⁵

This paper argues that if peacekeeping operations are to make a difference and contribute to sustaining peace, they need to address SSR in a credible manner. Though it has not always been referred to as such, the UN has been engaged in providing support to SSR processes for over two decades, and the development of the UN’s approach to SSR originated primarily in the peacekeeping domain, gaining traction when Slovakia first put SSR on the agenda of the UN Security Council in 2007.⁶ As the relevance of SSR became apparent, significant strides were made to develop the concept, resulting in two UN Secretary-General Reports on SSR (2008 and 2013) and a coherent guidance framework crafted by a UN Inter-Agency SSR Task Force.⁷ These policies and guidance are now reinforced by a thematic Security Council resolution on SSR (2151), which emphasizes the vital role of SSR in sustaining peace and the fundamental importance of supporting nationally-led SSR processes that are guided by the principles of good governance.

Despite these significant advances, many challenges to SSR support remain in practice, often due to significant capacity gaps and broader organizational constraints including member state sensitivities. First and foremost, UN efforts to support SSR through peacekeeping missions has suffered from difficulties in addressing the political dimension. SSR has often been approached as

⁴ UNSC Resolution S/RES/2151 (2014), Preamble.

⁵ DCAF, *Security Sector Reform and Sustaining Peace: Proceedings of the High-Level Roundtable co-hosted by Slovakia and South Africa on behalf of the UN Group of Friends of SSR on the eve of the High-Level Meeting of the UN General Assembly on Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace*, Conference Report, 2018.

⁶ UNSC, S/2007/72, February 2007.

⁷ Heiner Hänggi, “Conceptualizing UN support to security sector reform,” in Ebo and Hänggi.

a technical endeavour, through activities that are not amenable to bringing about transformative change. Second, UN efforts to support SSR in peacekeeping contexts suffer from the same mandating and resource challenges as other mission components. However, in the area of SSR, these are further compounded by the need for specialized expertise to support a process that is simultaneously highly technical and highly political. Given that numerous actors are often engaged side-by-side in providing support in the field of SSR, but many lack capacities and expertise, partnerships are more important than ever.

Building on empirical research conducted by DCAF, often at the request of the UN Department of Peace Operations' SSR Unit,⁹ this paper sets out three main areas for which the approach of peacekeeping operations should be reimagined in order to better leverage the ability of the UN to play an important role in sustaining peace. This will require: i) strengthening the political dimension of peacekeeping support; ii) better leveraging mandates, capacities, and expertise; and iii) rethinking partnerships for peace. Beyond offering lessons from the perspective of SSR, this text concludes by proposing a set of broad recommendations aimed at generating changes in the UN approach to peacekeeping to ensure it remains fit for purpose.

II. Strengthening the political dimension of peacekeeping support

One of the most significant challenges to the effective provision of SSR support lies in the political dimension. Ultimately, sustaining peace requires brokering political consensus on sensitive issues that touch on the distribution of power. To strengthen the ability of peacekeeping operations to engage at the political level moving forward, they must prioritize: i) better leveraging the good offices role of the Special Representatives of the Secretary-General (SRSGs); ii) improving analysis of and engagement with incentive structures that affect the outcomes of sensitive reforms, and iii) investing in efforts to increase the accountability of the UN regarding its commitment to the primacy of politics.

Leveraging the good offices role of SRSGs in support of a clear vision of the security sector

Engagement in support of national SSR processes helps create conditions in which peace processes can advance and resilient societies can be built. In short, to contribute to sustaining peace, the UN should support security sectors in being both effective (and thus capable of responding to challenges) and accountable (to keep predatory and abusive behavior in check), in line with the principles of good governance. Moreover, efforts should be made to foster inclusive security sectors and to mitigate any role they play in contributing to grievances. Yet, as UN experience over the years

⁹ In particular, this paper builds substantially on the following two studies mandated by DPO OROLSI SSRU: Vincenza Scherrer and Alba Bescos Pou, *Enhancing Multilateral Support for SSR: A Mapping Study* (DCAF, 2018); and Vincenza Scherrer and Alba Bescos Pou, *Input to the Review of the UN Defence Sector Reform Policy: Insights from a Mapping of Security Council Mandates and Reports of the Secretary-General (2006-2016)*, Policy Paper, DCAF, 2020.

has shown, this objective is much easier said than done, as achieving it requires recognizing that SSR is political in many different ways. Indeed, such reform efforts target the core representatives of state sovereignty and can drastically influence which parts of a population may be protected, overlooked, or even mistreated. They also relate to broader questions regarding transformations of power structures and society, requiring a common commitment to “the formal rules of the political game.”⁹ As such, SSR efforts must be incorporated into a broader transformative political strategy if they are to succeed.

This means that the UN cannot provide support to SSR through a purely technical lens, and must engage with and support political leaders. Reports suggest, however, that the UN has not sufficiently capitalized on the good offices function of the SRSs to engage at this level, and raise awareness and commitment to reforms by building on normative frameworks endorsed by UN Member States. For instance, a recent review of over 350 Reports of the Secretary-General on peacekeeping and political missions issued during a ten-year period found that more than 80% of reporting on support to defence sector reform (DSR) was focused on technical activities.¹⁰ While it is likely that some political support is taking place behind the scenes and is not included in reporting, it appears there is significant room for improvement.

The concrete steps that must be taken to strengthen the role of SRSs in their provision of good offices towards broader political objectives must be better understood, as has already been highlighted in numerous policy documents. In the context of SSR, this may require difficult conversations about the need to strengthen good governance of the security sector. A potential starting point for this dialogue could be the more systematic incorporation of hooks for such support in mission mandates. As an illustrative example, the review of UN support to DSR cited above noted that mandates rarely use good governance language. While it is important to retain flexibility in SSR mandates, an opportunity is missed if they do not explicitly refer to the need to provide support in line with the main tenets of UNSCR 2151 (which include good governance and national ownership). This would help provide peacekeeping operations the leverage to advocate for sensitive reforms.

Analyzing and addressing political and economic incentive structures

Effective SSR must identify and bear in mind the political and economic incentive structures that can hinder efforts to improve governance, and which may be partly responsible for sustaining ineffective and unaccountable security institutions. It is essential that good governance originate from, and permeate, the highest levels of political structures; and where political elites are corrupt or use security institutions to maintain and consolidate power, SSR processes are fundamentally

⁹ Eboe Hutchful, “The UN and SSR: Between the primacy of politics and the echoes of context,” in Ebo and Hänggi, 27.

¹⁰ The review looked at reports of the Secretary-General adopted between 2006 and 2016. See Scherrer and Bescos Pou, *Input to the Review of the UN Defence Sector Reform Policy*, 15.

unsustainable. Holding the highest political actors to account is therefore imperative.¹¹ For this reason, it is necessary to carry out comprehensive political analyses which focus specifically on political and economic incentive structures.¹² Indeed, evidence suggests that current international support is rarely grounded in sufficiently rigorous analysis, and that assessments of political economy are often neglected due to challenges in analyzing informal networks and practices in the short time span afforded to international assessment missions.¹³

Further, while considerable support for SSR goes to central government institutions in line with the state-centric nature of peacekeeping, informal structures must also be acknowledged, particularly considering the limits of national security institutions in many fragile and conflict-affected contexts. Hybrid security arrangements may emerge organically and informal structures sometimes enjoy greater legitimacy than formal ones.¹⁴ Still, it can be difficult for an actor such as the UN – made up of member states – to engage with non-state actors, and as a consequence, these alternative sources of resilience within a society are not always considered in relevant assessment exercises. Partnerships with civil society and with organizations that enjoy access to informal networks are thus vital to informing meaningful assessments. The capacity of DSRSG/RCs to engage with civil society networks and local communities could also be more effectively leveraged towards this goal.

Increasing UN accountability to its commitment to the primacy of politics

If peacekeeping missions are to engage increasingly with the primacy of politics, as called for in relevant policy agendas, their progress in this regard should be analyzed and appropriate corrective actions should be identified when support is insufficiently responsive. The country-specific reports of the Secretary-General can serve as an important tool in this effort but are not currently being leveraged to that end. The Secretary-General has committed to providing the Security Council with “a comprehensive analysis” in reports¹⁵ and UNSCR 2151 specifically calls on the Secretary-General to “[h]ighlight... updates on progress of security sector reform, where mandated, in order to improve Security Council oversight of security sector reform activities,”¹⁶ yet the review of reports of the Secretary-General on DSR from 2006 to 2016 revealed that they offer a fragmented narrative of both DSR developments and UN support that is delinked from strategic objectives outlined by the

¹¹ DCAF, *Geneva Thematic Consultations for the 2020 Review of the United Nations Peacebuilding Architecture: Roundtable Discussion on ‘Unpacking Prevention through a Governance-driven Approach to Security’*, Summary Report, 2020.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Scherrer and Bescos Pou, *Enhancing Multilateral Support for SSR*, 64-44.

¹⁴ DCAF, *Geneva Thematic Consultations for the 2020 Review of the United Nations Peacebuilding Architecture*.

¹⁵ In the context of A4P, the Secretary-General has committed to reporting “using a comprehensive analysis with frank and realistic recommendations, to propose parameters for the sequencing and prioritization of mandates, and to enhance measures to share the findings of Secretary-General-commissioned reviews and special investigations, as appropriate.” See: A4P Declaration, para. 6.

¹⁶ UNSC Resolution S/RES/2151 (2014).

Security Council.¹⁷ Reporting that focuses primarily on activities also presents a challenge to assessing whether support is being provided within the broader political and institution-building lens. Additional efforts should be made to ensure that reporting clearly indicates how activities contribute (or not) to the mission's political goals.

Another potential tool of accountability lies in the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) of UN peacekeeping support. While some evaluations do take place and rudimentary tracking occurs through results-based budgeting, this cannot substitute for a culture of M&E in peacekeeping. Yet it has been widely reported that missions struggle to monitor outcomes, let alone ascertain the impact of their support.¹⁸ This is particularly concerning given that these missions often have a long-term presence on the ground. In 2018, the Security Council responded by adopting resolution 2436, calling for the better utilization of data to improve evaluation of the performance of peacekeeping missions based on clear benchmarks for mandate implementation.¹⁹ The recent introduction of the comprehensive performance assessment system (CPAS) represents an important milestone and will likely generate valuable data for planning and decision making. However, relying on measurement against mandates alone to gauge progress is insufficient when one considers their highly political nature and characteristic ambiguity.²⁰ Efforts should go beyond this to better assess in-country peacekeeping support itself, against the principles driving UN support and the benchmarks set in national strategies.

In the absence of a proper culture of M&E, and in complement to the CPAS, independent assessments and evaluations should be encouraged and further leveraged to assess progress regarding the extent to which UN support is building national ownership and advancing political solutions. Considering the experience of other international actors in M&E, this is likely to be a challenging objective to meet. Indeed, a DCAF study of over 110 SSR-related evaluations conducted by multilateral and bilateral actors found that the majority did not articulate or analyze a theory of change and only a handful explicitly used 'ownership' as a criterion for evaluation.²¹ Moreover, the study showed that 70% of evaluations occurred at the end of projects, precluding the potential for mid-project corrective action and the ability to act preventatively. Further efforts should be made to invest in regular real-time monitoring and mid-term evaluations, enabling corrective action and possibly serving as an early warning function that could be vital to prevention. These evaluations

¹⁷ Scherrer and Bescos Pou, *Input to the Review of the UN Defence Sector Reform Policy*, 21.

¹⁸ Charles T. Hunt, "Measuring UN peacekeeping: time to replace auditing with proper evaluation," *The Conversation*, 1 April 2020, <https://theconversation.com/measuring-un-peacekeeping-time-to-replace-auditing-with-proper-evaluation-134929> (accessed 5 November 2020).

¹⁹ UN Security Council Resolution 2436 (2018).

²⁰ Similarly, it has been noted that while CPAS offers significant entry points for M&E, it is currently not designed for M&E at the operational level and therefore cannot provide much needed information on what is working and why. See: Aditi Gorur, *The Need for Monitoring and Evaluation in Advancing Protection of Civilians*, IPI Global Observatory, 2019.

²¹ Vincenza Scherrer and Patrick Dürst, *Improving Support to Security Sector Reform Through Better Evaluations: An Assessment of the Methodological Quality of Evaluation Reports* (DCAF, 2020).

must answer the questions that matter, such as, *is SSR support making a difference in the lives of the population, including marginalized groups?*

III. Leveraging peacekeeping mandates, capacities, and expertise

While not exclusive to the security sector, the challenges facing peacekeeping support to SSR are compounded by the limitations posed by mandates and resources. It is well acknowledged that many UN peacekeeping mandates are incongruent with the capacity of the Organization to deliver, which risks reducing them to a mere wish list. When addressing politically sensitive and quickly evolving areas such as SSR, mandates must therefore provide clear direction to senior leadership on the type of support they should provide, and capacities for support must be available in line with the objectives. For this reason, the UN should focus on: i) ensuring mandates are informed by political strategies in line with national priorities; ii) bringing together all UN actors towards broader peacekeeping objectives; and iii) supporting more flexible approaches to accessing specialized expertise.

Ensure mandates are informed by political strategies in line with national priorities

In light of the phenomenon of ‘Christmas tree mandates’ and the difficulties that arise in funding them, calls have grown to issue narrower mandates that focus on the essentials. It must be understood, however, that while SSR is an important aspect of a mission’s exit strategy, opportunities to engage may not be found again if they are missed early on. Moreover, several of what are often considered as priority mission tasks require engaging with SSR through a political lens, from the integration of ex-combatants into the security sector to the protection of civilians. As an illustrative example, the protection of civilians is essentially a temporary solution until a host government can take over the delivery of security to its population.²² If peacekeeping missions are engaged in SSR support to ensure that populations are protected in the long term, train and equip approaches will be insufficient as long as structures are not in place to ensure accountability on reported abuses for instance.²³ It is of course easier to engage in train and equip activities than to build political commitment to longer-term governance-driven reforms that place the people at the centre of SSR efforts, yet missions must address this issue in one way or another if they seek to engage where it matters. That does not mean to say that peacekeeping missions should be mandated to support all areas of SSR, which is neither desirable nor realistic. But a commitment must be made to ensuring that mandates are informed by broader political strategies in line with national priorities, and this will often require engaging with SSR.

While Security Council mandates have often been seen as the starting point for developing political strategies, there have been strong calls to first develop a strategic vision based on in-country

²² Fairlie Chappuis and Aditi Gorur, “Conflicting means, converging goals: Civilian protection and SSR,” in Ebo and Hänggi, 203.

²³ Ibid., 204.

assessments that would then inform the Council's mandates.²⁴ Currently, mandates tend to be overly vague when it comes to political direction, leaving significant space for mission concepts to articulate or not overarching political objectives. While there is broad consensus that mandates should retain their flexibility, which enables approaches to be adapted in the field, there is nevertheless a need to provide stronger political direction and, in particular, to include hooks for advocating for the more sensitive elements of SSR support.

This limited strategic direction in the political dimension is compounded by a failure of many mandates to properly reflect and respond to changing needs on the ground. As an example, the DCAF review of DSR support highlighted that over 70% of mandates over a ten-year period were repeatedly renewed without any modifications.²⁵ Given that mandates are directly related to resource requirements and ought to guide peacekeeping mission priorities, a prime concern should be ensuring that mandates remain up-to date and context-specific. In this respect, more work is necessary to ensure that mandates, as well as broader political strategies, are systematically informed by independent assessments of the progress made in implementing current mandates and in advancing the implementation of nationally-driven priorities. That said, the mounting volume of information generated through assessments has often not been paired with effective analysis and usage. Additional steps must be taken so that Security Council mandates respond appropriately to national concerns and local needs, and more visibly incorporate the perspectives of countries in question. Indeed, appeals for the more systematic inclusion of national authorities in mandate discussions on SSR remain as relevant today as ever.²⁶

Bringing UN actors together towards broader peacekeeping objectives

Ultimately, the success of international support hinges on the extent to which all contributors, including the UN, work towards nationally defined goals. To that end, more could be done to leverage the whole of the UN, as set out in the sustaining peace resolutions. The UN has a rich network of agencies, funds, and programmes in both mission and non-mission contexts that engage in SSR support through the lens of specializations such as human rights, gender, and transnational organized crime. While most of the capacities available for SSR in the field are positioned in peace operations, more could be done to leverage the engagement of UN country teams. It has been highlighted, for instance, that the support of other entities to the security sector on issues of gender equality or addressing conflict-related sexual violence which may be perceived as less sensitive or be anchored in political commitments, can help build confidence for the missions to engage in more delicate areas of SSR.²⁷ However, this demands that the UN strengthen its internal cooperation mechanisms, notably through the UN Inter-Agency SSR Task Force or its equivalent at the field level.

²⁴ Adam Day, et al. *The Political Practice of Peacekeeping: How Strategies for Peace Operations are Developed and Implemented* (New York: United Nations University, 2020).

²⁵ Scherrer and Bescos Pou, *Input to the Review of the UN Defence Sector Reform Policy*, 13.

²⁶ This has been recommended in the Secretary-General's Report on SSR of 2013, for instance.

²⁷ Scherrer and Bescos Pou, *Enhancing Multilateral Support for SSR*, 78.

Early cooperation between the peacekeeping operation and the country team is also essential for mission transition. It is too late to define roles and responsibilities in the lead-up to the transition, and for this a strong and consistent partnership is needed with the country team. This is particularly crucial in the area of SSR which is one of the tasks which typically cannot be entirely fulfilled during the lifetime of a mission. While the peacekeeping mission should be engaged in supporting the development of an inclusive and nationally-owned vision for SSR and take steps towards supporting initial reforms, the overarching institution-building support is likely to fall to the country team.²⁸ Experience suggests however that there are missed opportunities to build structured relationships. In CAR for instance, members of the country team, with the exception of UNDP, usually did not participate in meetings of the MINUSCA SSR working group.²⁹ The experience in Côte d'Ivoire offers some useful insights whereby the readiness and commitment of the country team to take on SSR-related tasks following the closing of UNOCI was a reflection of early efforts to integrate the country team in discussions. In particular, the mission set up a working group led by two Deputy Special Representatives of the Secretary-General which sought to encourage an integrated approach to addressing the Security Council benchmarks related to SSR, including integrated reporting to the Security Council on progress; and to plan for the successful handover of critical SSR tasks from the mission.³⁰

Support more flexible approaches to accessing specialized expertise

Though field operations increasingly include SSR support capacity, personnel on the ground are often expected to provide support in a wide range of areas, from political facilitation and technical support to strategic planning and reporting. This was identified as a challenge in a 2011 report of the Senior Advisory Group to the Secretary-General on civilian capacities in the aftermath of conflict, which noted that the UN “too often relies on its own personnel to perform all its tasks, particularly in larger Security Council-mandated missions, even when those tasks do not fall within the usual competences of its staff.”³¹

A further complication relates to the typical profile of SSR teams on the ground. While the broader sector-wide SSR capacities often include staff with broad general knowledge and experience in political analysis, team members are often unable to provide advice of a more technical nature in areas like national security policy making, parliamentary oversight, or human resources management, required by national counterparts. Moreover, while there is a growing recognition that “police like to talk to police,” the same can be said for policymakers or the staff of parliamentary

²⁸ Snezana Vukša-Coffman, “Enhancing the inter-agency coordination of UN assistance to SSR”, in Ebo and Hänggi, 304.

²⁹ Adedeji Ebo et al., “UN SSR support to SSR in peacekeeping contexts: A case study of the Central African Republic”, in Ebo and Hänggi, 129.

³⁰ Snezana Vukša-Coffman, “Enhancing the inter-agency coordination of UN assistance to SSR”, in Ebo and Hänggi, 305.

³¹ UNSC-GA, Civilian capacity in the aftermath of conflict, Independent report of the Senior Advisory Group, A/65/747, S/2011/85 (2011).

committees. Hence, the fact that current SSR teams rarely include experts with experience in their own national reform processes is a key challenge.³²

On the other hand, while component-specific capacities (e.g. police, military, justice) may have the experience to perform certain technical functions, they often lack the expertise to provide strategic and policy advice or experience in planning and designing complex institutional reforms and change management strategies. As highlighted in a review of the UN Police, “technical experts are often deployed to post-conflict contexts and expected to automatically become qualified or effective mentors or institution builders.”³³ Most of the staff in the Office of Military Affairs or in offices of the force commander are military secondments who are not hired to provide support for DSR but rather to engage in military planning and force generation.³⁴ The HIPPO Report thus noted that “the UN lacks technical capacity to support defence sector reform,”³⁵ despite receiving an increasing number of mandates in this area.³⁶

The complexities of peacekeeping support mean that the need for expertise varies according to evolving needs. An expert in national security policymaking may be vital early in a mission, while knowledge of parliamentary capacity building may be more important later on. But planning cycles and budget processes make it difficult to source necessary expertise when it is needed. More flexible approaches to accessing specialized expertise should be developed, such as through standing capacities or rosters of experts. One example is the UN pool of justice and police experts in Brindisi, who are deployed on short notice and have provided valuable flexibility in those areas; to date, the equivalent has not been developed for SSR experts in the UN, though this is set to change. Other multilateral organizations have also experimented with the use of civilian secondments to access a larger pool of candidates. For instance, both the EU and the OSCE have filled many SSR-related positions with secondments from member states, which has also enabled more flexible arrangements to short-term exchange of seconded staff between missions.³⁷

An emphasis must be placed on developing more adaptable approaches to how capacities are deployed, so that they can be scaled up and down. A small set of general staff in the field should be complemented by temporary staff possessing the specific expertise needed at various times throughout the SSR process. Additionally, peacekeeping operations have often been constrained in their engagement with external actors due to their assessed budgets. Innovative ways to facilitate mandating external implementing partners in adding expertise as needed should be found, otherwise support may continue to be provided on the basis of available expertise and not in response to needs on the ground.

³² Scherrer and Bescos Pou, *Enhancing Multilateral Support for SSR*, 52.

³³ UN DPKO, “External Review of the Functions, Structure and Capacity of the UN Police Division,” 31 May 2016, vii.

³⁴ Scherrer and Bescos Pou, *Enhancing Multilateral Support for SSR*, 53.

³⁵ UN, *Uniting Our Strengths for Peace: Politics, Partnerships and People*, Report of the High-Level Independent Panel on United Nations Peace Operations (HIPPO Report), 16 June 2015, para. 154.

³⁶ Scherrer and Bescos Pou, *Input to the Review of the UN Defence Sector Reform Policy*.

³⁷ Scherrer and Bescos Pou, *Enhancing Multilateral Support for SSR*, 54.

IV. Rethinking partnerships for peace

Building more effective partnerships among international actors, including bilateral donors and multilateral organizations, as well as with national actors, is an important precondition for sustaining peace. While it is crucial to foster partnerships with national actors, this section focuses on the need to rethink *international* partnerships to better serve national priorities. Here, peacekeeping missions should focus on: i) building on respective comparative advantages; ii) strengthening the ability to leverage their coordination role, as appropriate; and iii) promoting the type of multilateral cooperation that matters.

Building on respective comparative advantages

A mapping of multilateral organizations engaged in SSR support revealed considerable overlap in the broad areas of expertise that exist within the UN, AU, EU, and OSCE (e.g., technical experts on police or justice), as well as gaps (e.g., public administration reform).³⁸ A majority of dedicated SSR-related structures are located in field operations, such as in UN peacekeeping operations and special political missions, and in EU civilian and non-executive military CSDP missions. Field presences like UN country teams and EU delegations, on the other hand, often lack dedicated SSR staff, but can frequently outsource support to implementing partners.

Only the UN and the OSCE possess a broad spectrum of SSR-related structures across their field operations, which can range from police and criminal justice to border security and corrections. EU field operations tend to be dedicated primarily to supporting one or two security sub-sectors (e.g. police or border). By contrast, the AU has very limited capacities, particularly in the field, hampering its ability to provide comprehensive SSR support.

Among the multilateral organizations mapped, the UN is the only one that has systematically established dedicated sector-wide SSR structures in its field operations focused on strengthening the strategic, governance, and architectural framework of the security sector as a whole (and not just focused on specific sub-components). This would suggest that, in mission contexts, the UN has an important role to play in determining strategic priorities for SSR in line with a national vision; and when required, in leading coordination efforts to ensure that the international community supports a comprehensive approach to reform. In this respect, the UN could play a stronger role in leading a discussion on the distribution of roles and responsibilities on the basis of comparative advantages. More could be done, for instance, to build on the comparative advantages of the AU, which include its close partnership to sub-regional organizations and its deeper understanding of realities on the ground across the African continent. As such, the mapping study highlighted that the AU could be

³⁸ Ibid.

supported to play a more important role in leading conflict analysis on the continent and in leveraging south-to-south support.³⁹

Strengthening the UN's ability to leverage its coordination role in respect of national ownership

In accordance with its comparative advantage in the area of SSR, the UN has been given a clear coordination mandate on SSR in several contexts,⁴⁰ but in others, it may play this role de facto within the international community. There is a fine line between seeking to coordinate international support and maintaining deference to the need to build national capacities to lead coordination efforts, and in this respect, more can be done. For example, international coordination meetings do not always foresee a role for national actors to lead these efforts. As a case in point, the draft Terms of Reference (ToR) for a coordination mechanism in Libya stipulated that, “in time, senior Libyan counterparts will be invited to attend, and ultimately to co-chair and then chair the meetings should they wish.”⁴¹ Similarly, a lessons learning exercise pertaining to UNMIL found that the UN had waited too long to build the capacity of national actors in Liberia to support coordination on SSR. There, it was not until the transition was underway from mission to UN country team that it was discovered that a dedicated national coordination mechanism was not in place.⁴² Despite progress in supporting national actors to develop an inclusive national vision for SSR, more must be done to encourage capacity-building efforts that place national actors at the centre of coordination, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation.

Moreover, discussions of coordination often focus only on international coordination meetings. An effort to strengthen coordination must move beyond this. The UN has to step into its role and show the way as far as sharing of information and, more importantly, analysis. One avenue for strengthening the coordination role of the UN in support of nationally-led efforts is the further leveraging of reports of the UN Secretary-General. Indeed, the 2013 report of the Secretary-General on SSR noted that one factor hampering coordination is the reluctance of some international partners to share information on SSR support, which makes the country-specific reports of the Secretary-General an even more important platform for accurately depicting multi-stakeholder contributions to national reform processes. Information contained in these reports can serve as a baseline for coordination among national and international partners, facilitating the alignment of messaging, complementarities, and resource pooling to collectively drive the transformation of a security sector in line with national priorities. To this end, reports should more systematically map support by UN entities and international partners to host nations on SSR, and identify challenges and opportunities related to the implementation of UN coordination mandates.⁴³

³⁹ Ibid., 77–79.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 71.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Scherrer and Bescos Pou, *Input to the Review of the UN Defence Sector Reform Policy*.

Promote the type of multilateral cooperation that matters

In light of the important role that SSR plays in sustaining peace and the narrow window of opportunity in which national actors can be engaged in reform efforts, particularly in the immediate aftermath of conflict, there is a need for greater predictability in multilateral support to SSR. This is particularly crucial in peacekeeping contexts in countries where other peace operations and multiple bilateral donors are often present. Presumably, if all international support is guided by national priorities and goals as stipulated in the sustaining peace resolutions, it should be easy for international actors to come together and determine how they can best contribute on the basis of their own comparative advantages; but it is often true in practice that each organization carries out the same preparatory work, and dialogue on cooperation in the area of SSR does not take place until actors are in situ. As a result, considerable time can be lost while organizations separately assess a conflict, map what others are doing, and agree on a division of labour.⁴⁴ More importantly, it is near impossible to align the strategic and political objectives of international actors once they are already deployed on the ground to implement their own, possibly competing mandates.

While the policy frameworks of multilateral organizations identify concrete avenues for cooperation in SSR, including through joint assessments, joint evaluations, and sharing rosters of experts, these largely remain borne out only on paper. Joint assessments especially appear to be an important precondition for enhanced strategic alignment, and there has been some progress in this area, however these efforts still need to translate into concrete results through a common interpretation of findings and appropriate adaptations of support. A recent study found that joint assessments of SSR undertaken between the AU, UN, and EU were often perceived as a form of capacity building for the AU rather than as a mechanism to develop a common understanding of needs and coordinated approaches. Hence, while joint assessments should be encouraged to the extent that they provide a more cost-effective use of resources, build on the advantages of each organization, and limit demands on national actors, they only really serve their purpose if accompanied by a joint interpretation of findings and a resulting implementation of recommendations. Given the fact that progress in a sector as large as the security sector involves the contributions of so many actors, it makes sense to also invest in joint evaluations of progress in the sector, but to date, these evaluations have been limited to less than a handful of cases.⁴⁵

V. Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper has sought to underline the importance of investing in more effective support to SSR processes so that peacekeeping operations can meet the challenges of sustaining peace. The UN, and in particular its peacekeeping operations, cannot provide all the necessary support in any

⁴⁴ Scherrer and Bescos Pou, *Enhancing Multilateral Support for SSR*, 8.

⁴⁵ The review only focused on SSR-related evaluations which were publicly available. See Scherrer and Dürst, *Improving Support to Security Sector Reform Through Better Evaluations*.

context, and will never have the breadth of expertise required to provide support to every need. This does not mean, however, that it should shy away from engaging on sensitive topics such as SSR. Placing support to SSR on the back burner while waiting for the conditions to be right may result in significant missed opportunities to make a difference when it matters. It must therefore be recognised that the security sector is likely to be at the heart of any transformative political strategy that peacekeeping missions seek to support, and as such should be tackled upfront through this political lens.

The implication of this approach is not that peacekeeping missions need to substantially increase their engagement in SSR support or address all elements of SSR. The type of engagement that is required will depend on what is useful for the peacekeeping context at hand. It does imply, however, that a small SSR capacity should be in place to engage with national counterparts and identify opportunities for reform, in closer coordination with the good offices role of SRSG's. The UN therefore needs to invest strongly in more flexible approaches to scale specialised capacities up and down as needed. It also needs to develop the skill sets required to engage with the political dimension of support, ranging from dialogue facilitation to political economy analysis.

UN peacekeeping missions are often the only actor with a combination of sector-wide SSR capacities and component-specific sections (e.g., police, justice). By virtue of this sector-wide approach, which requires a comprehensive overview of the security sector, the UN can play an important coordination role among the international community as required. In this respect, there is significant scope to leverage the reports of the UN Secretary-General to provide a platform for sharing information among the UN and other international actors on progress in contributing to broader national goals. More broadly, however, these reports can also be used more effectively to assess the extent to which missions are providing support in line with the commitments outlined in their political strategies and to identify corrective action as needed. While not a panacea, investing further in independent assessments and evaluations can also help peacekeeping to maintain its people-centered focus and to continuously learn from and adapt its support in an ever-changing environment.

Drawing on the experience of peacekeeping support to SSR, this paper has highlighted several of the approaches, capacities, and tools of UN peacekeeping that will need to be adapted to ensure peacekeeping remains fit for purpose in an ever-uncertain future. The following recommendations are divided according to the three sections examined in this paper, and are introduced by one overarching recommendation.

Overarching Recommendation

- 1) *If peacekeeping missions are to remain a key tool in contributing to sustaining peace, people-centered approaches need to be at the heart of their engagement.* This means that peacekeeping must engage, one way or another, in the elements of SSR support that can play an important role in mitigating the risk of violent conflict and ensuring that the security sector is able to play its role in protecting the population. Supporting efforts to strengthen good governance, which includes accountability and effectiveness but also participation and

responsiveness among others, must be the guiding principle for any SSR-related intervention by the international community. To that end, SSR must be better understood as a political tool and reflected clearly as such in peacekeeping mandates.

Strengthening the political dimension of peacekeeping support

SSR is a fundamentally political process that requires the brokering of political consensus on sensitive issues touching on the distribution of power. If peacekeeping missions are to step up to the challenge, they will need to invest more in the political dimension of their support. This requires efforts to:

- 2) *Leverage the good offices role of SRSGs.* In line with UNSCR 2151, more efforts should be made to outline the role SRSGs can play in promoting SSR in line with broader political strategies, and the hooks for their engagement should be clearly reflected in mission mandates.
- 3) *Strengthen political economy analysis.* SSR must take into account the political and economic incentive structures that may hinder commitment-building to governance reforms, including at the highest political levels. This requires the proper analytical tools, appropriate to SSR, as well as the necessary skill sets, and the right partnerships to facilitate access to informal networks.
- 4) *Invest in measuring and reporting on progress that matters.* The important developments on measuring progress against mandate delivery should be complemented by increased efforts to assess the extent to which support is in line with the UN's commitment to advance political solutions to conflict and is making a positive difference in the lives of people, and should draw on both internal and independently-led assessments. The country-specific reports of the Secretary-General should also be leveraged towards a more informed analysis of the extent to which mission engagement is contributing to broader political strategy.

Leveraging peacekeeping mandates, capacities, and expertise

Engaging in the political dimension of SSR requires a strong commitment and the flexibility to scale capacities and expertise up and down according to windows of opportunity. This demands efforts to:

- 5) *Ensure mandates provide informed political direction.* While remaining cognizant of the need to retain flexibility, mandates must incorporate stronger political direction and hooks for advocating sensitive reforms such as SSR. Both mandates and broader political strategies should also be more systematically informed by independent assessments of the progress made in implementing current mandates and in advancing the implementation of nationally driven priorities.
- 6) *Better leverage the whole of the UN towards a common goal, as called for in the sustaining peace resolutions.* Cooperation between missions and country teams should be further strengthened to identify entry points for engagement on more sensitive aspects of reforms

linked to good governance, as well as to prepare early on for successful mission transition given that SSR tasks are unlikely to be fulfilled during the lifespan of the mission.

- 7) *Identify flexible arrangements to scale specialized capacities up and down as needed during a peacekeeping cycle.* Peacekeeping missions must have the capacity to deliver concrete support quickly where there is an opening. Efforts could be made to explore how to further capitalise on internal arrangements, such as the UN police and justice and corrections standing capacities or civilian secondments and staff exchange. At the same time, more efficient approaches to disbursing funds to external actors as implementing partners are needed to flexibly bring in necessary expertise on an as needed basis.

Rethinking partnerships for peace

Partnerships have long been recognized as vital to UN efforts to contribute to sustaining peace. Though an important actor, peacekeeping missions are not the only actor engaged in supporting SSR processes. For this reason, partnerships are vital to identifying and filling gaps. However, to be useful, partnerships must move beyond information-sharing to make a difference. In particular, efforts should be made to:

- 8) *Build on the comparative advantages of the UN and other actors.* By virtue of peacekeeping missions' sector-wide approach to SSR, the UN can play an important coordination role among the international community as required. There is also room to explore the extent to which other actors could be encouraged to build on their strengths in a way that helps address some of the limitations of peacekeeping missions in, for instance, developing in-depth analysis on historical patterns of grievances to underpin relevant assessments.
- 9) *Strengthen the UN's efforts to leverage its coordination role in support of national ownership.* The UN should ensure that it focuses early efforts on facilitating the development of a national and inclusive vision for reform priorities and supporting national actors to take over coordination responsibilities. Moreover, the UN should capitalize on reports of the Secretary-General to increase information sharing where it is lacking and to detail the implementation of its coordination mandates where appropriate.
- 10) *Promote the type of multilateral cooperation that matters.* Cooperation in the form of information sharing in international coordination mechanisms is unlikely to make a significant difference on the ground. Instead, early discussions on the division of roles and responsibilities are necessary, as well as the leveraging of resources through joint assessments and evaluations. Still, joint endeavours only make a difference if they are jointly analysed and acted upon.