Global Alliance for Peace Operations

The Future of United Nations Peace Operations

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

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Introduction: In Times of Trouble

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.

The Policy Papers

Recognising the challenges to UN peace operations, this collection of papers analyses requirements and opportunities for current and future peace operations. The need for political primacy and strategic coherence are recurring themes in the analysis, as are success factors of UN peace operations.

Preparing for the Future – Strengthening the Impact of Peace Operations

Current headwinds are forcing the UN system and its Member States to make tough choices. But they also offer opportunities to refocus on strategic political coherence, operationalise modular approaches, integrate and pool resources, expand existing partnerships and engage new partners, and advance the use of technology. Legitimacy and credibility are the two most important factors for the effectiveness of peace operations. This paper recommends entry points for Member States to reimagine peace operations, fortify their capacities and resilience, and hold them accountable. ***Authors**: Lotte Vermeij, Annika S. Hansen, Cedric de Coning, Seba Issa, Annika Hilding-Norberg, Patrick Cammaert, Johanna Hakanen and Jyrki Ruohomäki, and Benoit Pylyser.*

Protection of Civilians in Peace Operations

For a quarter of a century, the Protection of Civilians (POC) has been a defining feature of UN peace operations. Yet as the global security environment shifts, POC faces significant tests. In this paper, authors argue that POC must be reaffirmed not just as a core commitment but as a renewed ambition with bold, forward-looking reforms that respond to evolving protection challenges in today's crises. Concrete proposals aim to reimagine how protection is conceived, resourced, and delivered – anchoring the next generation of peace operations in strategic foresight, field innovation, and inclusive operational design. ***Authors****: Emily Paddon Rhoads and Jennifer Welsh, with Lauren McGowan, Jenna Russo, Maj Gen PK Goswami, Maj Gen (Dr) AK Bardalai, Col (Dr) KK Sharma, Dawit Yohannes, Meressa Kahsu Dessu, Emmaculate Liaga, and Charles Hunt.*

Peacebuilding Meets Peacekeeping: Seeking Sustainability

The inclusion of peacebuilding tasks into peacekeeping mandates since the early 1990s was one of the most significant adaptations peace operations have undergone since their inception. Until today, only the UN has the capacity to deploy peace operations that integrate a broad spectrum of peacebuilding tasks with peacekeeping functions. In an increasingly multipolar world, both, peacekeeping and peacebuilding must remain key elements of the UN collective security system, yet they have to be adapted. Towards this end, authors highlight lessons from the past and priorities for the future. ***Authors****: Cedric de Coning, Wibke Hansen, Andrew Hyde, and Clémentine Lienard.*

Local Politics and Perspectives in UN Peace Operations

Authors highlight the importance of engaging with local political dynamics, building local legitimacy and ownership, and taking into account local perceptions. Providing concrete recommendations, they argue that investment by member states, alongside strong support from UN headquarters, can enable staff to engage more deeply and regularly with local populations. Such investment will in the long run render peacekeeping more successful, cost-effective and sustainable, and reduce risks to personnel. ***Authors****: Professor Sarah von Billerbeck, Maj. Gen. (Dr.) A.K. Bardalai, Maj. Gen. P.K. Goswami, Dr. Jenna Russo, and Col. (Dr.) K.K. Sharma*.

Leadership in UN Peace Operations

Leadership in the field and at headquarters can significantly shape the way UN peace operations achieve their objectives. As the UN face increasingly complex operational environments, the concept of a modular approach has gained prominence, enabling more agile and context-specific missions. The authors of "Leadership in UN Peace Operations" explore the challenges and opportunities of modular approaches for peacekeeping leadership. They provide recommendations on how leadership can be supported to navigate through change and towards a new future for peacekeeping. ***Authors****: Manuel Fröhlich, Catharina Nickel, Adrian Steube, and David Teiner.*

The Importance of Peacekeeping Partnerships

This paper examines the evolving landscape of peacekeeping partnerships, underscoring their growing significance amid operational complexity, political contestation, and shifting security needs. Drawing on concrete case studies, it explores various partnership models and critically assesses their advantages and limitations. The analysis concludes with actionable recommendations to enhance the effectiveness, legitimacy, and sustainability of peace operations in a rapidly changing global context. ***Authors****: Jenna Russo, Andrew Hyde, and Solomon Ayele Dersso.*

The Future of Peacekeeping Needs Everyone: A Path Forward for Women's Meaningful Participation in Peace Operations

Women's participation is essential for effective peacekeeping. Yet, they remain underrepresented in UN peace operations, particularly in leadership and operational roles. The paper is a meta-analysis which synthesises findings from MOWIP assessments conducted across 20 T/PCCs. The analysis identifies four persistent barriers to women's meaningful participation in peace operations and offers targeted recommendations for both the UN Department of Peace Operations (DPO) and T/PCCs to ensure that future peacekeeping models enable women's meaningful participation and more gender-responsive missions. ***Authors****: Sabrina Karim, Inka Lilja, Sarah Rowse, Zinab Attai, and Kathleen Fallon.*

The Future of UN Peacekeeping in a Changing Climate

Efforts to integrate climate considerations into peacekeeping mandates remain insufficient to address the full scope of risks and are facing growing geopolitical challenges. UN peacekeeping could play a transformative role in mitigating climate-security risks. Member States should support innovative approaches to planning, mandate design, resource allocation, partnerships and implementation. ***Authors**: Lukas Rüttinger and Alexandra Steinkraus.*

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 UN 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 15 short policy briefing and 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.

Find out More

For the latest updates on the Alliance's activities and a full overview of the member organisations, please visit https://www.peaceoperations.net

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Preparing for the Future - Strengthening the Impact of Peace Operations

Introduction[1]

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.[2] Recognising the challenges to UN peace operations, this paper analyses requirements and opportunities for current and future peace operations. Scarce funding is a recurrent theme in the analysis, as is the need to focus on the success factors of UN peace operations, namely legitimacy and credibility of missions.

The paper is a collective effort by members of the Global Alliance for Peace Operations. It identifies key trends and developments and explores the changing role, relevance, limitations, and achievements of UN peace operations. The authors undertook an AI-generated meta-analysis of findings of the Effectiveness of Peace Operations Network (EPON) studies, including 14 studies on contemporary peace operations and five thematic studies.[3] It also draws on other relevant publications, including the independent study The Future of Peacekeeping, New Models and Related Capabilities.[4] On the basis of AI analysis, desk research and the collective experience of the authors, this paper proposes a set of recommendations to strengthen impact through enhanced legitimacy, credibility, efficiency and effectiveness.

While recent developments and challenges to peace operations can appear daunting at a time of great turbulence, it is timely to recall that the UN has successfully adapted to different geopolitical realities over the past 77 years, and that it has deployed over 120 peace operations to date.[5] Recognising both successes and failures, the majority of UN peace operations closed with mandates implemented and missions achieved. Research demonstrates that peace operations remain a cost-efficient and effective multilateral tool for preventing armed conflict, managing and resolving threats to international security and sustaining peace, provided it is used according to the principles and doctrine for which it has been designed and is resourced accordingly.

The paper argues that the UN system, its 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. As the current world order transforms, the

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[1] Any views expressed in this publication are those of the authors and should not be interpreted as reflecting the views of the member organizations of the Global Alliance for Peace Operations.

[2] The term peace operations include the full spectrum of UN-authorised Peacekeeping Operations (UNPKO) and Special Political Missions (SPMs). Where the paper touches on similar ventures by regional organisations, they are referred to as peace support operations (AU) and crisis management operations (EU).

[3] Effectiveness of Peace Operations Network. https://www.nupi.no/en/projects-centers/effectiveness-of-peace-operations-network

[4] El-Ghassim Wane, Paul D. Williams and Ai Kihara-Hunt, *The Future of Peacekeeping, New Models, and Related Capabilities* (United Nations, 2024). https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/the_future_of_peacekeeping_new_models_and_related_capabilities_-_nov1.pdf.

[5] 71 UN Peacekeeping Operations (UNPKO) and 50 Special Political Missions (SPM).

authors believe there will be a renewed need for impartial, consent-based, multinational peace operations.

With the consistently high occurrence of armed conflict in recent years,[6] the UN and its Member States need to step up efforts to further develop and improve the collective peace operations toolbox. Paradoxically, just when the need is growing, there is unprecedented political and financial pressure on the UN. The extent of the political and financial crisis is uncertain: at worst, the US defunding of UN peacekeeping and general budget would have a significant disruptive effect on existing peace operations and make new peace operations the exception. It would lead to significant downsizing, mandate adjustment and mission closures and affect posts and initiatives at UN Headquarters and regional service centres. Even if the financial crisis is less severe and the UN continues to deploy many of its existing peace operations, it will do so at a smaller scale. Everywhere on this spectrum, the UN and the peace operations policy, practice and expert community will be under pressure to demonstrate and further enhance the legitimacy, credibility and effectiveness of peace operations.

In the past, UN peace operations' responses to global crises have demonstrated that significant institutional adaptation is possible with sufficient commitment and support. Where there is a will, there is a way. Just as the COVID-19 pandemic catalysed the rapid dismantling of bureaucratic obstacles, the field of peace operations now faces its own inflection point. The upcoming UN Peacekeeping Ministerial 2025 provides its Member States with a strategic opportunity to shape the future of peace operations.

Modular approaches: adaptability and pragmatism

There are diverging views on what peace operations will look like in the future, but wide agreement on one feature: peace operations will need to be even more adaptable in the face of evolving conflict contexts.[7] Modular approaches are one way of meeting demands for adaptability. This involves designing peace operations with distinct, interoperable components that can be assembled, reconfigured, or scaled according to specific needs and changing conflict dynamics. Rather than deploying standardised, fixed models, modular peace operations allow specialised capabilities to be added or adjusted based on strategic priorities and evolving contexts.[8]

At present, the Security Council's political and financial climate does not favour large-scale, resource-intensive peace operations. Smaller, more targeted peace operations also appear to be more amenable to Member States.

As noted, peace operations have continuously adapted to contextual needs. This paper suggests that current modular approaches can be further developed and serve as a framework for enhancing the legitimacy, credibility, efficiency and effectiveness of peace operations. This is a recurring theme throughout our analysis and recommendations, emphasising

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[6] Siri Aas Rustad, "Conflict Trends: A Global Overview, 1946–2023," *PRIO Paper* (2024). https://www.prio.org/publications/14006

[7] Discussions during the Security Council Open Debate on 24 March highlighted the circumstances that might lead peace operations to adapt, including local contexts, financial constraints and available resources as well as renewed threats from transnational organised crime or climate-related conflict drivers. United Nations, "Security Council Examines Ways to Strengthen United Nations Peace Operations against New Threats," *United Nations Meetings Coverage and Press Releases* (24 March 2025). https://press.un.org/en/2025/sc16027.doc.htm

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

opportunities inherent in rapid deployment, use of the full toolbox and stronger accountability. Still, the paper argues that the value of being able to draw on the full range of mandated tasks, including rule of law, security sector reform and other tasks, not least to build local capacity and address root causes will remain critical enablers for peace operations.

The modular approach directly addresses several challenges identified in this paper. In a resource-constrained environment, modularity enables more efficient allocation of limited resources to priority functions. Amid complex conflict landscapes, it unlocks the adaptability necessary to respond to rapidly changing circumstances. When working with multiple stakeholders, modular designs allow each actor—including host countries, UN entities, and regional organisations—to contribute and lead where they add most value, creating room for genuine local ownership.

Modularity facilitates multi-actor peace compacts that reflect both global norms and local realities and thereby strengthens the political foundations of peace operations. It allows for more measurable performance frameworks through discrete components with clear objectives, enhancing accountability for mandated tasks. And importantly, modular approaches help peace operations adapt to financial constraints by allowing strategic adjustments to mission composition rather than across-the-board cuts.

The concept applies throughout the peace operations lifecycle—from initial assessment and mandate design through implementation and eventual transition—and across various dimensions from political strategies to operational capacities. While maintaining the core principles that underpin peace operations, enhanced modular approaches offer a pragmatic pathway to heighten their impact and sustainability in today's challenging environments.

Factors that influence the effectiveness of peace operations

To understand how current shifts will impact future peace operations, it is important to revisit the key factors that render peace operations effective. There is a well-established understanding in policy and academic circles of these factors. Based on studies undertaken by EPON and others, three factors stand out: legitimacy, credibility and local ownership.

First, the degree to which the mandate and deployment are perceived as legitimate and viable are critical for success. Do the parties involved, and other key stakeholders have a shared understanding of what they want to achieve, and how they will go about it? In other words, is there sufficient political will and commitment, as well as public support to make the peace operation a viable mission.

Second, the extent to which the peace operation is perceived to be capable of credibly carrying out the tasks entrusted to it will largely influence both compliance and trust. Does the operation have the leadership, staff, equipment and resources necessary to act assertively to maintain confidence when critical incidents raise emotions and undermine trust? In other words, do the parties to the agreement and other key stakeholders have sufficient confidence in the peace operation to hold up under stress.

Experience - not least in African contexts - has shown that the legitimacy and credibility of peace operations go beyond state consent. Local communities' perceptions of a peace operation, particularly its responsiveness to their protection needs and priorities, are central. Peace operations that meaningfully engage with traditional leaders, civil society, and women and youth networks to address their protection concerns are more likely to build trust and understand the root causes and drivers of conflict from a local perspective. Thus, legitimacy

and credibility are earned and sustained not only through institutional coherence but also through consistent community engagement and the protection of civilians.[9]

An adaptive approach to peace operations requires a shared understanding of the critical elements that need to be in place to ensure success, as well as a degree of pragmatism and flexibility to resolve problems as they arise. The most important ingredient is sustained political will among the parties to the conflict, political decision makers and other key stakeholders, including Troop- and Police-contributing Countries (T/PCCs). Without this unified and sustained backing from Member States, none of what follows is possible.

Strengthening strategic political coherence in peace operations

UN peace operations face rising challenges: geopolitical tensions, fragile consent in complex environments and unreliable political support to mandate implementation. As dynamic, politically driven tools to support peace processes, prevent conflict, and sustain peace, peace operations require proactive, co-owned strategies rooted in mutual accountability and adaptive mission design. To remain credible, legitimate and effective, operations must be politically grounded, strategically coherent, and operationally agile.

Resilient planning, well-calibrated mandates and agreement among a broad range of key stakeholders reflected in a Security Council resolution is a first step that needs to be followed by a second. Peace operations require clear, achievable mandates, backed by continued and coherent Member State support and political clout as well as strategic direction from UN Headquarters. Without this, peace operations are constrained in their ability to manage conflict and contribute meaningfully to peace processes.

Complementarity and a coherent political strategy among various peace and security actors at different levels is crucial. For example, in Africa, coherent political support from Member States in the AU and Regional Economic Communities (RECs)/Regional Mechanisms (RMs) is a critical factor for effective collective and coordinated action on the ground.

It has become increasingly difficult to balance normative frameworks and national perspectives. At mission level, this has been reflected in strained relationships between peace operations and host governments - who may not comply with human rights standards or have different views - and in the most dramatic cases resulted in withdrawal of consent. The UN is doubly challenged: on the one hand, there are those who consider the UN an ineffective or inconsistent guardian of fundamental rights, principles and values. On the other hand, there are those who question the legitimacy of peace operations to take on mandated tasks that are associated with 'liberal peace' and impose 'alien values', especially promoting human rights and the women, peace and security agenda.

The challenge lies in finding the balance between reclaiming the UN's role and doing justice to local and context-specific perspectives. While pragmatic approaches appear inevitable, they must not come at the expense of foundational normative frameworks and principles.[10] Implementation requires a critical assessment of how to translate principles and norms into

[9] For more, see Global Alliance Policy Paper on "Protection of Civilians in Peace Operations."

[10] John Karlsrud, "Pragmatic Peacekeeping in Practice: Exit Liberal Peacekeeping, Enter UN Support Missions?," *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, Vol 17, No. 3 (2023): 258-272.

practice in specific operational contexts. Normative frameworks cannot simply be imposed; they must be integrated through genuine local ownership and contextual sensitivity.[11]

It is important to distinguish between host-state elites who may profit from authoritarian practices and local communities seeking protection, relief for their grievances as well as good governance. Perspectives also vary among specialised UN entities, peace operations, and T/PCCs who bring their own national views and interests to mission areas.

At the same time, issues like transnational crime, counterterrorism, urbanisation, and climate-security issues present convergence points where stakeholder interests might align.[12]

Ensuring that T/PCCs align with overall mission goals and values is pivotal.[13] National objectives directly influence the effectiveness by determining T/PCCs willingness to accept risk, capabilities offered, and the mandate language advocated for.[14] Creating a coherent and transparent incentive framework to generate political will and foster alignment among host-country priorities, peace operation mandates, and T/PCC agendas remains a key challenge.

The *Cairo Roadmap on Enhancing the Performance of UN Peacekeeping Operations* (adopted as a Common African Position in 2021) offers an example of good practice: it proposed *Quadrilateral Consultations* among host countries, the UN Security Council, T/PCCs and the UN Secretariat as well as relevant regional bodies. This process has been essential in enhancing host-country ownership of the political process.

Aligning expectations with reality: mandates, planning, performance and accountability

Translating principles into operational effectiveness also requires aligning expectations with the realities of complex mission environments. As peace operations navigate these tensions, robust performance frameworks and accountability mechanisms are essential tools for maintaining both legitimacy and credibility.

Peace operations face challenges in complex and volatile environments where key principles of peacekeeping are tested by operational realities. In addition to legitimacy, credibility and genuine local ownership, the future effectiveness of peace operations hinges on clear, achievable mandates, rigorous planning and performance standards, and robust accountability mechanisms that address the disconnect between mandated responsibilities and operational capabilities. This requires peace operations to confront risk aversion among T/PCCs while setting realistic expectations and clear indicators for mandate implementation, particularly regarding the protection of civilians.

The future relevance of peace operations depends on establishing a culture of performance excellence and mutual accountability that enables adaptation and resilience despite hostility,

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[11] See e.g. Katariina Mustasilta, Tyyne Karjalainen, Timo R. Stewart and Mathilda Salo, "Finland in Afghanistan 2021-2021: From Stabilization to advancing foreign and security policy relations," *FIIA Report* 73. Finnish Institute of International Affairs (2022).

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

[13] Ibid.

[14] Jyrki Ruohomäki, and Johanna Hakanen, "Three Steps to Evaluating Effectiveness: Learning from Finnish Reports on Afghanistan," *CMC Finland Working Paper*, Vol 11 (2023).

violence, and uncertainty peace operations may navigate. While financial constraints may necessitate smaller footprints and more focused mandates, these limitations should drive innovation rather than diminish effectiveness.

To address these realities, modular peace operations should implement measurable performance frameworks that create incentives for effective implementation while establishing consequences for underperformance. This approach aligns with the paper's emphasis on adaptability and pragmatism, enabling peace operations to establish clear benchmarks for mandated tasks that reflect operational contexts rather than aspirational but unachievable goals.

Today's conflict landscapes present formidable obstacles: well-armed non-state actors, private military and security companies, and stakeholders with competing interests, many of which fuel protection of civilians' issues. In addition to this, when UN personnel themselves become targets, T/PCCs must navigate complex risk calculations that balance mission requirements against national priorities, even with adequate mandates and Rules of Engagement. Effective performance frameworks must address these tensions through clear standards, shared accountability, and appropriate incentives that encourage T/PCCs to accept necessary operational risks.

To address these realities, peace operations must implement performance frameworks that are linked to the strategic compacts. Building on existing tools like the Comprehensive Performance Assessment System (CPAS), unit evaluations by Force and Police HQs, assessments conducted by the Office of Peacekeeping Strategic Partnerships (OPSP), and pre-deployment assessments, these frameworks should focus on measurable indicators and clear lines of accountability between the UN and T/PCCs.

Financing: Averting an existential crisis

Financial pressure on peace operations has been growing for at least 15 years amid calls to provide evidence of impact and 'do more with less.' This despite the fact that peace operations remain a bargain at a mere 0.28% of global military spending (2,443 billion in 2023), including UNPKOs and SPMs.[15]

Recent reports though suggest that the US are considering defunding the UN peacekeeping and general budget altogether. With a 26% share of the peacekeeping budget this threatens to tear a significant hole. The financial pressure is already immense, but if this scenario materialises then peace operations will face a severe financial and political crisis. Peace operations will adapt, as they have always done, but for the short to medium term efforts to ensure performance, efficiency and effectiveness will be undermined.

Liquidity has become a major problem. The fact that some Member States fail to meet their financial obligations on time or in full has exacerbated the strain on the UN's budget and operational capacity. At the end of the third quarter of 2024, the UN was faced with

[15] SIPRI, "Trends in world military expenditure, 2023," *SIPRI Fact Sheet* (April 2024). https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2024-04/2404_fs_milex_2023.pdf; Annika S. Hansen et al., "Five Trends in UN Peace Operations. And Five Calls to Action," *ZIF-Study* (January 2025). https://www.zif-berlin.org/sites/zif-berlin.org/files/2025-02/ZIF-Study_5%20Trends%20in%20UN%20PeaceOperations.pdf

approximately 1.5 billion USD in unpaid regular budget assessments, the highest amount in four years.[16]

Peace operations have been consistently underfunded, impeding mandate implementation. Year-to-year authorisation and budgeting also entails uncertainty and undercuts longer term planning. With shrinking budgets, reliance on bilateral donors has increased, exposing operations and programmes to political influence. The short-term nature of stop-gap funding is in stark contrast to the Pact for the Future's calls for a renewed focus on prevention, on responding to all forms of violence and on re-energising the pursuit of the sustainable development goals.

Even if the worst-case scenario does not materialise, economic downturn and changes in policy will likely increase financial pressure on peace operations, posing fundamental questions as to how to make best use of finite resources and how to rethink existing funding pathways. There are three ways to address these challenges: prioritising and right-sizing peace operations, mobilising resources elsewhere, and/or finding cost-saving, efficiency-gaining opportunities.

Hybrid threats, technology and peace operations

In recent years, the combination of rising hybrid threats and attacks, the internationalisation of conflicts and rapid technological developments have made peace operation environments increasingly challenging. Hybrid threats typically consist of various coordinated measures that systematically target vulnerabilities, usually below a threshold that allows attribution or triggers countermeasures. The legitimacy and credibility of peace operations are their greatest vulnerability. It is not surprising, therefore, that their reputation, their dependence on host-state consent and their relationship with host communities are targeted.

In the context of peace operations, the cyber and information space is a central operational theatre for hybrid actors. The spread of mis-/dis-/malinformation and hate speech (MDMH) is perhaps the most visible example that, amongst other things, directly leads to civilian protection challenges.[17] MDMH feeds off local grievances, elevates and twists them for political purposes – with varying degrees of veracity and harmful intent. While the space for legitimate criticism of the UN presence must be safeguarded, both national and third-party actors including foreign governments employ MDMH as part of strategic efforts to promote and protect national interests in conflict areas.

The shift of interference into cyberspace and the emergence of new technologies open a new arena in which interests are pursued, conflicts are fought, rights must be protected, and peace be kept.

In an internationalised setting, local conflicts become entwined with global and regional dynamics, undermining efforts to pursue a coherent political strategy. In several areas of operation, third-party governments provide military, financial and logistical support, and/or

[16] United Nations, "Lamenting UN's Dire Liquidity Crisis, Fifth Committee Urges Concerned States to Pay Arrears in Making up $1.5 Billion Regular Budget Shortfall," GA/AB/4471, *UN Meetings Coverage and Press Releases* (23 October 2024). https://press.un.org/en/2024/gaab4471.doc.htm

[17] Lotte Vermeij, "The Impact and Response to Misinformation, Disinformation, Malinformation and Hate Speech in the Digital Era," *EPON Report*, (2024). https://www.nupi.no/en/publications/cristin-pub/the-impact-and-response-to-misinformation-disinformation-malinformation-and-hate-speech-in-the-digital-era

deploy troops or proxy actors, like private military and security companies.[18] The presence and interference by third parties who have vested interests and at times fuel conflicts can severely hamper the work of peace operations by limiting their freedom of movement and reducing their access to host governments.[19] This directly undermines the effectiveness and credibility of peace operations, not least when it comes to their ability to protect civilians.

Modern technologies have created new avenues for pursuing national interests and for undermining peace operations. As they become cheaper, they also become more accessible and affordable to conflict parties. The rapid emergence and accessibility of artificial intelligence makes it possible to generate and spread whole MDMH campaigns with increasing complexity, speed and reach. But for peace operations, emerging technologies also offer transformative opportunities for enhancing operational security and enabling the systematic use of data for analysis, planning and decision-making, as well as detecting and countering MDMH and strengthening information integrity.

Recommendations

1. Leveraging leadership

Reinforce leadership for peace

Diplomatic engagement is imperative in today's polarised world. Member States should support and trust the UN Secretary-General in their leadership for peace. Enhancing and reinforcing the SG's voice and leverage and support functions will become even more critical in the future. Leadership at the operational level is equally central. Effective, inclusive, and value-based mission leadership is key to the success of peace operations. Senior mission leadership should be empowered in their responsibilities and decision-making in the field.[20]

Promoting and protecting the normative space

As outlined in the *Secretary-General's Call to Action for Human Rights*, the UN - as their guardian - should consistently stand up for principles, rights, values and norms.[21] Member States have already committed to standing with the UN on this, in line with the *Declaration of Shared Commitments on UN Peacekeeping Operations* and the *Pact for the Future*.[22] This includes promoting and protecting the normative space in areas including human rights, the protection of civilians, climate-related security issues, and WPS, through conflict- and gender-sensitive engagement at local levels. In this way, normative principles can be applied in a context-sensitive manner, and serve as enablers for development and effective peace operations. Regional organisations, particularly the African Union and sub-regional bodies can bring contextual relevance and political legitimacy to peace operations by bridging the gap between international normative frameworks and national perspectives.

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[18] Hansen et al., "Five Trends in UN Peace Operations. And Five Calls to Action," *ZIF-Study* (January 2025).

[19] Dirk Druet, "Knives Out: Evolving Trends in State Interference with UN Peacekeeping Operations,". in *Ethics & International Affairs*, 38, no.4 (2024): 464-478.

[20] For more, see Global Alliance Policy Paper on "Leadership in UN Peace Operations."

[21] United Nations, *Secretary-General's Call to Action for Human Rights* (2020). https://www.un.org/en/content/action-for-human-rights/index.shtml

[22] United Nations, *Action for Peacekeeping. Declaration of Shared Commitments on UN Peacekeeping Operations*, (2018)https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/action-for-peacekeeping-a4p; United Nations, *Summit of the Future Outcome Documents September 2024 Pact for the Future, Global Digital Compact and Declaration on Future Generations* (2024). https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/sotf-pact_for_the_future_adopted.pdf.

Institutionalise strategic compacts

When peace operations are anchored in strategic compacts co-created during mandate negotiation and reviewed annually, they can align political priorities, performance expectations, and consent parameters, and promote mutual accountability among key stakeholders. A co-owned *Mission Accountability Frameworks* with transparent performance tracking is one way to achieve this. Strategic compacts must precisely define protection roles and responsibilities, and establish mutual accountabilities for all parties involved, including host governments, national security forces, parties to the conflict, and peace operations. They could also include provisions regulating the presence of private and/or parallel forces.

2. Developing partnerships

Build broader coalitions to support peace operations

When the UN Security Council works in concert with the Secretariat it can craft coherent political strategies to guide the operational conduct of peace operations. UN peace operations can then act as platforms for *pluralistic cooperation*, undergirded by multi-actor peace compacts. The primary effort to generate and sustain broad political support for a specific peace operation is diplomatic. This diplomatic effort must take place in the UN Security Council and among all stakeholders from the global to the local level, including neighbouring countries and regional bodies. Tailored and composite mandates and modular approaches can provide flexibility for different stakeholders (e.g., AU, UN, civil society) to lead in their areas of strength.

At the level of political decision-making, coalitions of support could be built in the General Assembly, in cases where Security Council action seems unattainable. The *Pact for the Future* also suggests a stronger role and more systematic engagement of the Peacebuilding Commission, especially when Security Council action is stalled.

Re-assess deployments and pool system resources to create efficiency gains

In light of harsh financial realities, the UN Security Council, with advice from the Secretary-General, will have to (re-)assess the deployment and configuration of peace operations. For one, financial pressure is intensifying efforts to configure peace operations using all available resources in the UN-system and to push further on integration to enable more seamless use of tools. Moreover, existing peace operations will need to consider how best to reduce costs, including through reducing footprints, centralising functions at UN Headquarters or regional centres or using alternative technologies such as remote surveillance. Depending on the extent of the POC threat, alternative models such as the deployment of small observer teams rather than large armed units may also be considered.

Building on the experience of the UN as a 'support mission,' such as in Somalia, cost-sharing and pooling may be extended to other international organisations, with a clearer division of labour among parallel operations. As such, the future of peace operations may include a greater reliance on UN regional offices, as well as regional organisations such as the AU or sub-regional bodies, provided these organisations are supported through predictable and sustainable financing mechanisms.

Strengthen partnerships with regional organisations

Member States should support continued implementation of UNSC resolution 2719. In that way, the UN can continue strengthening partnerships by: (1) developing complementary performance standards; (2) clarifying roles and responsibilities where regional organisations

serve as "first responders" (e.g. peace enforcement); (3) establishing mechanisms for smooth transitions when forces are "rehatted"; and (4) ensuring predictable and sustainable financing for regional peace enforcement operations. This approach recognises the comparative advantages of different organisations while maintaining accountability across the peace operations spectrum. Embedding this form of sequencing into planning frameworks enhances the overall adaptability, responsiveness, and contextual relevance of peace operations.

Foster innovation through diverse partnerships

The UN should seek to further develop structured partnerships integrating private sector and civil society alongside Member States and the UN system, with clear governance structures, coordination and accountability mechanisms, and diversified funding instruments to enhance capabilities and sustainability of peace operations. While weighing potential risks of unpredictability and limited accountability, the UN should further explore how to unlock the vast pool of private finance and incentivise funding from more private sector sources.[23] Risk could be mitigated by mixed funding sources, including also crowd-funded initiatives by vetted private actors.

UN reforms call for closer ties with academia, tech companies, and other partners to keep pace with new tools, bridge resource gaps and foster innovation. From AI-driven situational awareness to networked multilateral partnerships, these forward-looking ideas aim to modernize peace operations for an era of complex, fast-evolving threats.[24] At the same time, the UN must be aware of potential risks and dependencies, and ensure fall-back measures to guard against technology companies using resources to tip scales in line with their own interests or withdrawing assets at will.[25]

3. Operationalising modular approaches

Adopt a modular approach

Member States should back the UN to design peace operations with a focus on core mandated tasks while utilising modular mission components that can be assembled, reconfigured, or scaled on a case-by-case basis and according to context-specific needs. This approach unlocks more efficient resource allocation, greater responsiveness to changing conditions, and better alignment with local contexts and host-country priorities, while preserving the capacity to draw on specialised capabilities when needed. This could include light footprint deployments which deliver core functions (e.g., early warning, mediation), or dedicated adaptive rapid deployment mechanisms with pre-positioned resources, standby arrangements, streamlined administrative procedures, and specialised surge teams that can underpin a wide variety of potential operational models.[26]

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[23] While 44% of the world's population (3.6 billion people) live below the World Bank's poverty line, 45% of global wealth is held by 1% of the population. OXFAM. *Takers, not Makers. The unjust poverty and unearned wealth of colonialism* (2025). https://oi-files-d8-prod.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/2025-01/English%20-%20Davos%20Full%20Report%202025.pdf

[24] Challenges Annual Forum 2024, *Shaping the next generation of peace operations: key takeaways* (2024). https://challengesforum.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/KeytakeawaysCAF24Berlin.pdf

[25] See for instance: United Nations, "Aid data critical to crisis response threatened by funding cuts," *UN News* (07 April 2025). https://news.un.org/en/story/2025/04/1161971.

[26] Such a mechanism could be developed drawing on the experience of the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO) having sent its Military Observers to set up new or reinforce 14 UN missions to date. See Annika Hilding Norbert, A K Bardalai, Robert Mood, "UNTSO: Role, Relevance, Function and Utility – Lessons for Future Peace Operations," *EPON Study*, NUPI (May 2024).

Conduct a review of comparative advantages

Modular approaches are based on the realisation that no one organisation or actor can fully deliver on the demands of complex conflict settings including multiple sets of grievances and root causes. A step-change for modular approaches and adaptability must therefore unlock more seamless and easy access to all resources at the UN system's disposal in accordance with their respective comparative strengths and extend to non-UN actors, in particular regional partners. Learning from good practices and past lessons as well as a review of comparative advantages of all actors and functions are essential steps towards creating a system that makes optimal use of available resources and incentivises collaboration.[27]

Link planning, adaptability and performance

Tailored performance indicators should reflect the unique challenges of each operational environment. The UN should deploy integrated, well-trained performance evaluators to assess overall effectiveness and develop clear accountability frameworks. Enhanced planning capabilities would draw on these lessons to continuously adapt mission design and implementation, supporting the system-wide approach to peace operations advocated here.[28]

Make funding more flexible

Increased permeability between peace operations and UN Country Team funding streams would better backstop the pooling of resources.[29] More flexible budget lines and delegated decision-making to peace operations, which would enable mission leadership to react more easily and quickly to emerging priorities. The UN and Member States should embrace greater risk tolerance to enhance the flexibility and efficiency of peace operations.

4. Strengthening analysis

Strengthen analysis as a basis for planning, strategic direction and collaborative political support

Peace operation mandates should be informed by gender-sensitive and context-specific analysis that feed into planning and decision making on strategic direction and foster collaborative political support. Assessments, analysis and reviews should more systematically draw on the knowledge held by host countries, local communities and civil society, as well as regional partners and organisations. Beyond consultation, it is vital to ensure strategic co-leadership in mission design, mandate development, and review. Local ownership must be institutionalised from the outset and inform transition plans and exit strategies, ensuring that peace operations are time-bound and support the gradual handover of responsibilities to the host government.

Integrate foresight and scenarios into planning

UN DPO has identified the need for routine use of foresight and scenario planning to anticipate crises and shape mandates proactively. Strengthening these capacities and greater emphasis on early warning and foresight processes are a precondition for making effective use of modular approaches. Enhanced adaptive and integrated forward planning capabilities

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[27] Hansen et al., "Five Trends in UN Peace Operations. And Five Calls to Action," *ZIF-Study* (January 2025).

[28] Cedric de Coning, "Adaptive Peace Operations: Navigating the Complexity of Influencing Societal Change Without Causing Harm," *International Peacekeeping*, 27(5), (2020): 836–858. https://doi.org/10.1080/13533312.2020.1797500

[29] See f.ex. Eugene Chen, "A New Vision for Peace Operations," *NYU-CIC Report* (2024). https://cic.nyu.edu/resources/a-new-vision-for-peace-operations/.

within the UN Secretariat should incorporate lessons learned from performance data to continuously improve mission design and implementation. Given complex and localised conflict dynamics, analyses must draw on a wide range of information sources and have established feedback loops to decision-making processes. As a tool for early action, this could be backed by an adaptive standby, rapidly deployable integrated headquarters (staffed within existing resources) that can develop actionable plans and accountability frameworks.

Integrate hybrid threats into situational awareness

Understanding the fundamental, context-specific impact of hybrid threats in mission areas is critical for peace operations' ability to maintain legitimacy, credibility and effectiveness. This also entails mapping the vulnerabilities – of both the peace operation and host communities - and identifying windows of risk where the impact of hybrid threats, including MDMH and cyber-attacks, may be especially impactful and proactively plan whole-of-mission preparedness and response and proactively plan whole-of-mission preparedness and response.

Strengthening analysis to protect civilians

Member States could support peace operations to strengthen POC analysis and prevention efforts. Mainstreaming climate, peace and security assessments allows peace operations to identify and address how environmental stressors fuel conflict dynamics. Better analysis enables targeted interventions that strengthen conflict prevention while building resilience and adaptive governance in climate-vulnerable fragile states. By supporting national and local actors and connecting (AI-assisted) planning with early warning tools, operations can proactively build trust and strengthen local conflict prevention capabilities.

5. Strengthening capacities, capabilities and resilience

Focus on measurable performance indicators and accountability frameworks

The UN Secretariat should recognise outstanding performance and thereby incentivise T/PCCs to deploy required capabilities, including well-trained male and female personnel. Simultaneously, the UN should follow through on recommended remedial action for underperforming T/PCCs, including inaction. Using regular performance assessments, the UN should be capacitated to extend their support to underperforming T/PCCs, including through partnerships. By moving toward flexible, performance-driven mission architectures with robust accountability mechanisms, the UN can better respond to specific conflict dynamics while managing risk and resource constraints.

Revisit rapid deployable models

Creating performance-oriented, nimble deployment capabilities is essential. A standardised framework with pre-selected personnel, equipment readiness standards, and streamlined procedures - and backed by dedicated planning capacity - could reduce deployment times while ensuring operational effectiveness. Lessons from models like the Standby High-Readiness Brigade (SHIRBRIG) might be useful in this regard.

Reform the human resource system for adaptability and efficiency

A real opportunity to reduce costs and improve effectiveness lies in a more flexible human resource system. The UN should work with Member States to unlock this potential and revise current regulations in order to (1) place the right people with the right skills in the right positions at the right time; (2) adjust staffing levels and expertise in response to changing mandates and conflict dynamics; and (3) invest in staff development, particularly in digital

literacy and technological expertise. This enhanced flexibility supports both the financial sustainability and the operational adaptability essential to modular peace operations.

Make peace operations and communities more resilient

Building on good practice to date, peace operations should extend their preventive and proactive measures to build both mission and community resilience, ranging from strengthening data security to developing media literacy, engaging with local influencers and addressing MDMH. With MDMH challenging mandate implementation and the safety and security of peacekeepers, Member States should deploy dedicated, trained personnel and support the full implementation of the *UN DPO Policy on Information Integrity in Peacekeeping Settings*, which provides guidance on analysing the information environment, understanding mission vulnerabilities and proactively engaging in narratives.[30]

The continued implementation of the *Strategy for the Digital Transformation of UN Peacekeeping* also requires additional resources, including analytical, technical and communications capacities in peace operations and change management skills at UN HQ. Plus, skilled personnel are essential for unlocking the potential of AI and advanced analytics, including for countering MDMH.

Develop guidance for peace operations on navigating presence of third-party/parallel forces

The UN should draft comprehensive guidance for peace operations on how to navigate environments with private military and security companies and other parallel forces. This guidance should address: (1) provisions for addressing these actors in host country compacts; (2) protocols for deconfliction and coordination; (3) strategies for mitigating negative impacts on civilian protection; and (4) mechanisms for monitoring and reporting interference with mandate implementation.

6. Harnessing new technologies and innovation

Leverage existing strategic frameworks

The digital transformation of UN peacekeeping is a critical vector for fostering adaptability and needs to be driven forward. To draw on the full UN system toolbox, Member States should encourage frameworks like the UN 2.0 agenda that can drive innovation and help overcome structural divisions, foster a commitment to institutional development and establish reliable and interoperable systems for information storage and sharing.

Foster technology-enabled transformation of peace operations

Member State investment in digital tools can support effective and efficient mandate implementation. Integrated technology solutions for remote monitoring, data analytics and digital communications can reduce physical footprints while improving operational effectiveness. Technology-enabled transformation requires robust data management processes and structures that standardise data collection, analysis and information management across peace operations.[31] Responsible use of technologies and data is critical to ensuring that new technologies, including AI, strengthen legitimacy, credibility and effectiveness of peace operations, rather than undermine them.

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[30] United Nations, *UN DPO Policy on Information Integrity in Peacekeeping Settings*, (2024).

[31] Hansen et al., "Five Trends in UN Peace Operations. And Five Calls to Action," *ZIF-Study* (January 2025).

Consider new configurations and mandated tasks for peace operations

The EU Partnership Mission in the Republic of Moldova exemplifies the beginning of new types of mandates that specifically aim at countering hybrid threats. UN DPO should engage with the EU to learn from those experiences and launch early thinking around how peace operations might support cyber resilience and keep peace in cyberspace, e.g. by monitoring cease-fire agreements that include provisions on cyber attacks.[32]

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[32] As for instance discussed in the UN Security Council on 07 April 2025: "Ceasefire Monitoring 'Can No Longer Be Just about Being Present', Senior Official Tells Security Council, Noting New Capabilities for Real-Time Observation," *UN Meetings Coverage and Press Releases* (07 April 2025). https://press.un.org/en/2025/sc16039.doc.htm.

Protection of Civilians in Peace Operations

Introduction

For a quarter of a century, the Protection of Civilians (POC) has been a defining feature of United Nations (UN) peace operations. Yet as the global security environment shifts—with increasingly fragmented and asymmetric conflicts, limited host-state cooperation, waning political will (especially among great powers), and growing resource constraints—the role and relevance of POC face significant tests. Addressing these challenges requires more than incremental adjustments; it calls for a bold, forward-looking approach that anticipates emerging risks, adapts to evolving political and operational dynamics, and strategically allocates resources to sustain and enhance the impact of efforts to protect civilians in contemporary conflict. It also requires a response to intensifying demands for a major shift in the global and regional architecture for peace operations.

The urgency of this moment is underscored by the scale and severity of protection crises globally. If the 25th anniversary of the first Security Council resolution on POC was meant to mark progress, it instead highlighted the steep deterioration of the protection landscape. From Gaza to Sudan, Ukraine to the DRC, civilian casualties, displacement, and violations of international humanitarian law have surged. In 2023, civilian deaths rose by 72%—the sharpest increase since 2015—and the number of active conflicts reached its highest point since 1946. These grim markers reflect both the intensification of violence and the erosion of long-standing norms. In this context, ensuring that POC remains central and responsive to evolving threats to civilians is not just timely—it is imperative.

This briefing paper critically examines the trajectory of POC in UN peacekeeping[1] and highlights opportunities for more agile, integrated, and context-sensitive protection strategies. These reflections come ahead of the strategic review of peace operations as called for by the *Pact for the Future*—a key moment to rethink how the UN can effectively respond to complex crises with POC remaining a central tenet of that response.

The paper is structured in three parts. Section II traces the evolution and distinctiveness of POC in peacekeeping, highlighting its achievements but also enduring challenges. Section III draws on cutting-edge research and field lessons to identify five forward-looking priorities—deployment and intelligence, local engagement, policing, strategic communications, and partnerships—critical to maintaining POC effectiveness amid growing operational constraints. The final section distils key insights and offers targeted recommendations to all peacekeeping stakeholders to strengthen POC's future impact.

Background: 25 Years of POC Practice

The Distinctiveness of POC in Peacekeeping

The UN's POC agenda has become one of the most defining and distinctive features of contemporary peacekeeping. While other actors may engage in protection-related activities, UN peace operations are uniquely positioned to integrate military, police, and civilian

[1] This paper draws on "Twenty-Five Years of Protecting Civilians Through UN Peacekeeping: Taking Stock and Looking Forward," written by Emily Paddon Rhoads and Jennifer Welsh in collaboration with the Policy, Evaluation and Training Division (DPET), UN Department of Peace Operations, 2024. See also, Emily Paddon Rhoads, "The Future of Protection in UN Operations," *Ethics & International Affairs,* 38, no. 4 (2024).

capacities within a coherent, mandate-based framework. Today, the UN pursues a multi-tiered approach to POC through peacekeeping, consisting of: 1) protection through dialogue and engagement (through national and local conflict resolution and mediation, the use of good offices, reporting and advocacy); 2) provision of physical protection (through protective presence, inter-positioning, and the threat or use of force); and 3) establishment of a protective environment (for example, through capacity building and support for the rule of law).[2] This integrated architecture enables missions to pursue protection not just as a reaction to particular threats to civilians, but as a strategic, mission-wide objective embedded in multi-level political and community engagement.

Three features in particular set POC in peacekeeping apart. First, UN missions can offer *direct physical protection* to civilians through the presence and, when necessary, use of force by uniformed personnel. Recent analysis of multiple missions indicates that it is not so much the overall quantity of peacekeepers that matters for protection, but rather the troop-to-population ratio in a given area and the way in which perpetrators of violence are confronted. The protection impact is greatest when the type of force used by peacekeepers is tailored to the threat and responsive to perpetrators' motivations.[3] At the same time, however, the UN's capacity for force is bounded by host-state consent, mission capabilities, and the need to preserve legitimacy and impartiality, making the civilian dimension all the more critical. Civilian staff identify threats, monitor and identify patterns in human rights violations, mobilize early warning systems, mediate disputes, and reinforce local resilience. Protection through peacekeeping is not only about stopping violence; it is about shaping the conditions that prevent it from recurring.

Second, and related, POC is operationalized through an integrated, *multi-tiered approach*, with each component's activities mutually reinforcing. While uniformed personnel create a security umbrella, civilian actors expand humanitarian access, foster community dialogue, and help rebuild trust in public institutions. Effective protection depends not only on individual actions, but on how military, police, and civilian components operate together, adaptively and in close coordination, across all three tiers.

Third, UN peacekeeping offers a degree of *multilateral legitimacy and impartiality* that few other actors can replicate. Security Council mandates, combined with multinational deployments and adherence to the principle of impartiality, help build trust among host populations and create space for political solutions. While regional or ad hoc coalitions may field comparable military capacities, few possess the sustained civilian expertise, mandate authority, or institutional structure that define POC in UN peacekeeping.

Track Record of Effectiveness

Understanding what makes POC in peacekeeping distinctive also helps explain *why* it has achieved measurable impact—even in some of the world's most volatile settings. Across a wide body of research, the presence of peacekeepers correlates with reductions in civilian

[2] United Nations, Department of Peace Operations, *The Protection of Civilians in United Nations Peacekeeping Policy* (New York: United Nations, 2023), 9.
[3] Stian Kjeksrud, *Using Force to Protect Civilians: Successes and Failures of UN Peace Operations in Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023). This study is based on a dataset of 200 military protection operations across 10 missions, between 1999 and 2017.

casualties, containment of violence, and increased access to basic services.[4] These impacts stem not only from visible deterrence but also from quieter—yet no less consequential—forms of engagement: sustained political pressure, community outreach, and operational flexibility.

More than two decades on from the first protection mandates, POC has in some ways become a victim of its own success. Its effectiveness is now often taken for granted, even as the political commitment underpinning it has waned. To ensure that POC remains central in the reimagining of peace operations under the Pact for the Future, Member States must be reminded of what has worked—and why renewed support is essential to carry those gains forward.

Effectiveness rests on three interlinked factors. First, presence. Peacekeepers often deter violence simply by being proximate to vulnerable populations. Second, posture. Missions have become more mobile and responsive, using tools like temporary bases, long-range patrols, and rapid deployments. But posture also requires mindset, leadership, and risk tolerance. Third, integration. Where civilian, police, and military actors coordinate—especially in conflict analysis, operational planning and local engagement—protection is stronger and more durable.

The civilian dimension is especially vital. Civilian personnel sustain local relationships, gather information, support early warning, assist with thematic protection training (e.g., in areas like child protection), and help navigate complex local dynamics—roles uniformed components cannot fulfill alone. Without these efforts, military presence risks becoming static or misaligned with evolving threats and sources of civilian resilience.

Protection strategies must also reflect diverse vulnerabilities. Certain groups—including internally displaced persons (IDPs), women, children, persons with disabilities, and ethnic or religious minorities—are disproportionately affected by violence and insecurity. Women and girls face heightened risks of sexual and gender-based violence; children are especially vulnerable to recruitment and trafficking. IDPs often reside in underserved areas with limited access to protection. At the same time, strong self-protection capacities among some groups may offset certain vulnerabilities, meaning that those who appear most vulnerable may not always face the highest protection risks. These intersecting and variable risks demand tailored strategies that move beyond one-size-fits-all approaches—grounded in inclusive analysis, targeted engagement, and sustained partnerships with affected communities. Recognizing this heterogeneity is not enough; every tier of the UN's protection approach must reflect it in both strategy and practice.

Still, gaps remain. Peacekeepers are generally more effective in deterring non-state armed groups than in addressing violence by host-state forces—a pattern shaped by the constraints of consent-based operations, which can erode impartiality. Although missions have, at times, responded to state-led violence, these interventions tend to be less systematic and effective. [5] In contexts like IDP camps or counterterrorism operations, the blurred lines between combatants and civilians complicate the use of force and expose missions to reputational risk

[4] Lisa Hultman, Jacob Kathman and Megan Shannon, "United Nations Peacekeeping and Civilian Protection in Civil War," *American Journal of Political Science* 57, no.4 (2013): 875–91; Lisa Hultman, Jacob Kathman and Megan Shannon, "Beyond Keeping Peace: United Nations Effectiveness in the Midst of Fighting," *American Political Science Review* 108, no.9 (2014): 737-753; Hanne Fjelde, Lisa Hultman and Desirée Nilsson, "Protection Through Presence: UN Peacekeeping and the Costs of Targeting Civilians," *International Organization* 73, no.1 (2019): 103-131.

[5] Lisa Hultman and Ornella Corsant-Colat, "Being Present Where It Counts: POC Responsiveness to Violence against Civilians," *Issue Brief,* International Peace Institute, forthcoming.

and accusations of indiscriminate action.[6] POC efforts also frequently falter when government's view mission mandates as misaligned with their priorities—or when state actors themselves pose threats to civilians.

Protection outcomes also vary across missions, shaped by factors such as force posture, mandate clarity, and local context. And although missions have adapted to the challenge of geographic scale, experience shows that finding the right mix of presence and projection—and of civilian, police, and military assets—remains a work in progress.[7] In short, mission coordination of all personnel and tiers of action is both the linchpin of effective protection and a recurring challenge.

Finally, willingness to act remains a concern. In some cases, peacekeepers have prioritized force protection over civilian protection, undermining mandate delivery and mission credibility. Clear rules of engagement, accountable leadership, and political backing have all been identified as important ingredients to ensuring that missions act decisively in the face of civilian harm.

POC in a Changing Landscape for Peace Operations

Looking ahead, the future of POC in peacekeeping will be shaped by how the UN navigates a set of strategic and operational challenges.

First, missions must find more effective ways to balance presence and projection—ensuring protective capacity (both uniformed and civilian) reaches dispersed or high-risk populations, while maintaining mobility to respond to emerging threats and sustained local engagement.

Second, protection strategies must be both more integrated and anticipatory, addressing not only conventional armed violence but also emerging risks such as digital incitement, organized crime, and climate-related insecurity.

Third, these strategies must be more attuned to the potential unintended negative consequences of different kinds of protective action—including decisions to use force robustly, to create 'safe areas' for particular civilian populations, or to shift geographical focus—and incorporate plans to proactively mitigate those effects.[8]

Fourth, as mission models diversify and the number of large-footprint multidimensional operations declines, there is a need to reassess whether—and how—the core tenets of POC as developed in peacekeeping should be adapted to other forms of UN engagement, including Special Political Missions and the on-going work of UN Country Teams. Not all mission types may be suited to the same protection approach, but all UN entities—as stipulated by the organization's *Agenda for Protection*[9]—are responsible for prioritizing protection, raising

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[6] Civilian harm mitigation is a growing area of practice within peace operations. While POC encompasses protection from all threats, CHM specifically refers to preventing and responding to unintended civilian harm caused by mission personnel or operations and is essential to maintaining trust and effectiveness.

[7] See the in-depth studies of MINUSCA, MINUSMA, MONUSCO and UNMISS by the Effectiveness of Peace Operations Network (EPON). https://www.nupi.no/en/projects-centers/effectiveness-of-peace-operations-network. See also Lotte Vermeij et. al., "UN Peacekeeping Operations at a Crossroads: The Implementation of Protection Mandates in Contested and Congested Spaces," *Norwegian Institute of International Affairs* (2022). https://www.nrc.no/resources/reports/un-peacekeeping-operations-at-a-crossroads

[8] Adam Day and Charles T. Hunt, "Distractions, Distortions and Dilemmas: The Externalities of Protecting Civilians in United Nations Peacekeeping," *Civil Wars*, 24, no.1 (2021): 97-116; Jennifer Welsh, Emily Paddon Rhoads and Juan Masullo, "Risky Business: The Dilemma of International Support for Civilian Self-Protection," *Perspectives on Politics* (in press).

[9] United Nations, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, *A UN Agenda for Protection: Strengthening the ability of the United Nations system to protect people through their human rights* (18 March 2024). https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/tools-and-resources/united-nations-agenda-protection-strengthening-ability-united-nations

important questions about mandate scope, capabilities, and accountability for protection outcomes.

Fifth, UN peacekeeping is experiencing a period of contraction: recent drawdowns, reconfigurations, and withdrawals have highlighted the real risk of intensifying protection threats—for instance, by creating security vacuums that can be exploited by armed groups. Given that peacekeeping missions also serve as key enablers for the essential work of other protection actors, including humanitarian workers and human rights staff, the drawdown or departure of missions raises significant concerns about the sustainability of broader protection initiatives.

Finally, as regional actors and new coalitions take on greater security roles, questions of interoperability, transparency, legitimacy, and responsibility for protection will become more pressing: how protection mandates are framed and adopted—and by whom—will shape the credibility and effectiveness of future efforts to protect populations.

These challenges are not abstract. They require strategic choices about resource allocation, operational models, and institutional priorities. The following section explores these issues in greater depth, focusing on underexamined but critical areas that will determine the relevance and effectiveness of POC in an evolving global landscape for peace operations.

Core Thematic Areas for the Future

1. Planning, Deployment, Mobility, and Intelligence for Effective POC

Effective POC begins with presence. Yet the presence of a mission alone is insufficient—what matters is *where* peacekeepers are, *when* they arrive, and *how* they operate. Recent research by Hultman and Corsant-Colat confirms that the spatial and temporal responsiveness of UN deployments is central to their protective impact. As peacekeeping adapts to more fluid, fast-evolving conflict environments, stronger planning capacity is essential. This 'Planning for POC' will increasingly depend on the strategic alignment of deployment patterns, mobility, and actionable intelligence.

UN mandates authorize peacekeepers to use force to protect civilians under imminent threat—*within their areas of deployment*. The implication is clear: peacekeepers must be present where violence is occurring or likely to occur. A growing body of evidence confirms this. Subnational analyses across African POC-mandated missions from 2000 to 2011 show that deployments tend to follow patterns of violence by non-state armed groups, and that military presence significantly reduces the risk of further attacks in those areas.[10] Recent analysis of the 2012 to 2022 period reinforces these findings and adds a new layer: peacekeeping missions do respond to escalating threats by reinforcing or redeploying troops, particularly in response to violence by non-state actors.[11]

However, responsiveness remains uneven. While missions have shown some willingness to reinforce deployments in areas where state forces have attacked civilians, the level of response is weaker. Political constraints continue to limit operational flexibility in confronting state-sponsored violence—an enduring structural challenge for POC mandates.

Terrain, infrastructure, and risk to peacekeepers themselves also shape deployment decisions. Non-state actors frequently exploit difficult terrain and seasonal weather to conduct attacks in areas where UN mobility is hampered. During the rainy season, for example, armed groups increase attacks as peacekeepers' ability to reach affected populations declines.[12]

[10] Hultman, Kathman and Shannon, (2013).
[11] Hultman and Corsant-Colat, forthcoming.
[12] Hultman and Corsant-Colat, forthcoming.

Recent data from the Geo-PKO dataset underscores these dynamics. While new base deployments or troop reinforcements often follow prior patterns of violence, many high-risk areas remain uncovered. In the Central African Republic, MINUSCA adjusted its deployment posture in response to shifting violence from 2014 to 2022, strengthening presence in areas like the central-south where non-state actors intensified attacks. Yet large portions of the country remain effectively ungoverned and beyond peacekeeping reach, limiting the UN's ability to prevent armed group consolidation or offer credible deterrence.

Planning for more effective POC must therefore address not only *where* uniformed personnel are deployed, but also *how quickly* and *how flexibly* they can be reoriented. Mobility is key. Temporary Operating Bases (TOBs), long-range patrols, and rapid deployment mechanisms can extend reach and demonstrate presence in volatile zones without requiring permanent infrastructure. These tools have become increasingly important in missions like MONUSCO and MINUSCA, but they remain underutilized or insufficiently resourced, often shaped by the security concerns of T/PCCs, and frequently driven by military logistics rather than POC priorities. Their protective impact is also diminished when civilian and police components are not co-located or operationally integrated, in part due to resource and safety constraints, reducing early warning, local engagement, and responsiveness to community concerns.[13]

This underscores the importance of intelligence—both technical and relational. While UN missions have made progress on Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities, many still struggle to integrate this data with insights from civilian staff and local networks. Without integrated and dynamic analysis, mission planners risk deploying to the wrong areas or failing to anticipate shifts in violence. The use of spatial grid analysis, as demonstrated by recent research, offers a promising model for evaluating risk and adjusting deployments over time. But real-time responsiveness will require mandates, resourcing models and a mission leadership posture that prioritize anticipatory action, not just reaction.

In short, strategic deployment is not just a logistical function—it is a political act. It signals who is seen, whose lives matter, and where the UN is willing to project power. Enhancing responsiveness means developing more agile operational tools and reinforcing political commitment—within missions, at Headquarters, and in the Security Council—to support deployment decisions that prioritize the protection of populations, even when "politically difficult."

As the UN, its partners, and other peacekeeping stakeholders consider future mission models and force configurations, embedding POC into the earliest stages of planning—and resourcing for mobility and responsiveness—must become the norm. Civilian-military integration, mobility-enhancing tools like TOBs, and intelligence-informed planning are not optional add-ons. They are prerequisites for credible, effective protection in today's volatile environments.

Recommendations

For Member States and peace operations stakeholders

- Revive and prioritize regular inter-departmental scenario and contingency planning, focused on protection considerations and outcomes, to better advise and inform the Security Council and other UN bodies of options to enhance the protection of civilians.

[13] Lauren Spink, "Moving Toward Mobility. Providing Protection to Civilians Through Static Presence and Mobile Peacekeeping in South Sudan," *Center for Civilians in Armed Conflict* (March 2019). https://civiliansinconflict.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/MovingTowardMobility.pdf.

- Embed POC considerations into the earliest stages of mission planning and mandate design.
- Equip missions with the right resources, policies, and training to utilize multi-dimensional mobile deployments—including TOBs, long-range patrols, and rapid response units—and ensure decisions on where and when to deploy them are grounded in POC threat analysis.
- Support UN leadership at HQ and mission level to prioritize POC-related deployment and resource allocation decisions.

For peace operations personnel at headquarters and in the field

- Improve coordination between civilian, military, and police components to enhance situational awareness, early warning, and rapid response.
- Institutionalize dynamic, real-time conflict analysis by integrating tools such as spatial grid risk mapping and regular monitoring of key risk factors for violence against civilians into existing systems like SAGE.
- Accelerate adoption of technologies such as aerial surveillance, predictive analytics, and decentralized alert systems.

2. Local Engagement and Civilian Perceptions of Peace Operations

Alongside the development of POC doctrine and guidance at UN headquarters, field-level innovation has played a critical role in advancing protection through peacekeeping. A central element in this evolution has been strengthening connections between peacekeepers and local communities—not only to improve situational awareness and threat identification, but to build trust and local ownership of protection.[14] This has led to initiatives such as the creation of community liaison assistants (CLAs), first piloted in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)—national staff hired to support communication between the mission and local communities—as well as community alert networks (CANs), which enhance early warning capacities. In addition, missions have invested in local conflict management processes, engaging communities to address violence stemming from locally rooted grievances and mediating disputes overlooked by national peace processes. In the Central African Republic, for example, MINUSCA facilitated Local Peace Committees (LPCs) that helped monitor security, foster intercommunal dialogue, and provide early conflict warnings. Military engagement tools have also evolved, including the use of engagement platoons and female engagement teams to build rapport, gather information, and expand access in otherwise hard-to-reach areas.[15]

As the footprint of peace operations evolves, continuous community engagement and sustained local responsiveness must be central to mandate implementation in today's conflict environments. While local engagement is often shaped—and sometimes constrained—by broader national dynamics, including stalled political transitions and contested authority structures, a community-based approach can make a difference. Recent research shows that even when host-state consent is partial or compromised, missions can still deliver meaningful

[14] Emily Paddon Rhoads and Aditi Gorur, "UN Peacekeeping, Community Engagement and Civilian Protective Agency," in *Civilian Protective Agency in Violent Settings: A Comparative Perspective,* ed. Jana Krause, Juan Masullo, Emily Paddon Rhoads and Jennifer Welsh (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023): 227–243.
[15] United Nations, *UN Engagement Platoon Handbook* (October 2022). https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/2022_11_un_engagement_platoon_handbook_october_2022.pdf.

protection through localized engagement, community dialogue, and support for bottom-up peace initiatives.[16]

In contexts where national state capacity is weak or the commitment to protection is uneven, the protection focus of peace operations should pivot to local actors, empowering communities and administrations to take decisions that tangibly reduce civilian vulnerability. This 'community-first' approach should inform strategic, operational, and tactical dimensions of mission planning. Simultaneously, mission components working at the local level should regularly conduct civilian perception studies to assess the effectiveness and credibility of their protection strategies—and to course correct as needed. Too often, insights from community engagement fail to meaningfully shape operational decisions or mission priorities. Strengthening feedback loops is therefore essential. Above all, missions' community-focused strategies should be grounded in a clear understanding of how civilians act to protect themselves, so as not to inadvertently undermine or displace local coping mechanisms.

All three tiers of POC—protection through dialogue and engagement, protection from physical violence, and the establishment of a protective environment—can and should be applied where civilian vulnerabilities are most acute. Prioritizing local engagement and community-based protection requires not only clear policy frameworks, but operational approaches that foster social cohesion, support local governance, and invest in local conflict resolution. This is particularly critical for remote or underserved areas, where integrating protection with humanitarian and development efforts—as seen in emerging nexus approaches in contexts like the DRC—can enhance responsiveness and sustainability. When communities are actively involved in early warning and response systems, their capacity for self-protection increases, strengthening both local resilience and the mission's legitimacy.[17]

In sum, sustained and meaningful community engagement is not a supplemental peacekeeping activity—it is a cornerstone of effective protection. As missions recalibrate and adapt, placing local voices and perceptions at the heart of POC will be essential for building resilient, trusted, and inclusive approaches to civilian security.

Recommendations

For Member States and peace operations stakeholders

- Expand investment in community-based protection mechanisms, including Community Alert Networks and Local Protection Committees, while also strengthening initiatives that support sustained communication and trust-building with local populations—such as increasing the number and geographic reach of Community Liaison Assistants and, where feasible, deploying engagement platoons with integrated language and interpretation support.
- Invest in a better understanding of what makes community-engagement effective and support key enablers of that engagement in mission contexts.

For peace operations personnel at headquarters and in the field

- Integrate civilian perception studies into mission-level planning and decision-making processes to inform responses and adapt approaches.
- Systematically assess existing civilian self-protection strategies and mechanisms, and ensure that these are safely and effectively supported as a central aspect of protection activities by peace operations.

[16] Allard Duursma, Sara Lindberg Bromley and Aditi Gorur, "The Impact of Host-State Consent on the Protection of Civilians in UN Peacekeeping," *Civil Wars* 26, no.1 (2024): 16–40.
[17] Paddon Rhoads and Gorur, "UN Peacekeeping, Community Engagement," 227–243.

- Where consent is fragile, prioritize decentralized protection activities that engage local actors and support community mediation.
- Strengthen local protection actors to act as a frontline against threats during and after missions withdraw—while proactively assessing and mitigating potential risks.
- Leverage digital tools to sustain community engagement in remote or high-mobility settings.

3. Policing as an Underleveraged Asset in POC

UNPOL has been a crucial element in peace operations with POC mandates. In contexts as varied as Haiti, Central African Republic (CAR), DRC, Abyei, and South Sudan, police units have proven effective in reducing violence, engaging communities, and supporting host-state law enforcement.

UNPOL have worked to serve these objectives in five key ways.[18] First, in environments where threats are non-military—such as IDP camp protection, anti-gang operations, and urban patrols—Formed Police Units (FPUs) offer a flexible security presence and are often more effective than military forces. Second, UNPOL's mobility and adaptability can in some cases allow for quick deployment in response to outbreaks of violence and security threats, making them more adaptable than military and civilian counterparts. Third, UNPOL collaborates with national law enforcement to promote protection-focused policing and reinforce local protection systems. Fourth, close engagement with local populations helps UNPOL build trust, improve intelligence-sharing, and enhances efforts to prevent threats to civilians. This includes support for local self-protection mechanisms, such as community watch groups and customary courts. Finally, UNPOL supports other mission components—escorting civilian personnel, reinforcing early warning mechanisms, and contributing to integrated protection responses.

In the context of peace operations transitions—where security tasks being performed by UN actors shift back to national authorities—UNPOL has become increasingly central. Police units can help bridge critical protection gaps as military components draw down, offering continuity and reducing the risks of security vacuums. In Liberia, for example, UNMIL temporarily increased police deployments to deter attacks on civilians during drawdown. UNPOL has also played key roles in successor settings such as Haiti (MINUJUSTH) and Sudan (UNITAMS), where it provided security, capacity-building, and advisory support to follow-on SPMs and other partners in UN Country Teams (e.g. UNDP).

Yet many transitions have underutilized UNPOL's potential, failing to define or support its POC role and leaving gaps in protection. The abrupt closure of MINUSMA in Mali illustrates how constrained political conditions—not just inadequate planning—can jeopardize protection continuity and police presence.

Despite its potential to serve protection goals, UNPOL faces several operational and structural challenges. Chief among them is the growing militarization of UNPOL deployments: nearly 70% of UNPOL personnel serve in FPUs, which function more as paramilitary units than as community-oriented police. While FPUs can offer a politically acceptable alternative to military deployments in some contexts, their prominence risks crowding out investment in police with specialized skills—such as community engagement, support to state institutions, and GBV response. This can undermine UN efforts to promote democratic, rights-based policing and may weaken public trust. In addition, language and

[18] Charles Hunt, "Protection of Civilians by Police in UN Peace Operations," *Issue Brief,* International Peace Institute, forthcoming.

cultural barriers continue to hamper meaningful police engagement with local communities, with reliance on interpreters limiting effective communication and reducing opportunities for intelligence gathering.

Political and institutional constraints compound these issues. Host-state sovereignty concerns, bureaucratic inertia, and overlapping (sometimes competing) mandates among UN entities constrain UNPOL operations and coordination. Past experiences, such as with MINUJUSTH in Haiti, underscore how these challenges can hamper effective transitions: underutilized UNPOL roles during drawdown left critical gaps in protection and eroded earlier gains. Data-related limitations—including inadequate assessment tools, weak integration with UN monitoring systems, and poor data-sharing practices—also undermine efforts to evaluate and enhance police contributions to POC.

UNPOL remains an essential but underutilized tool for POC in UN peace operations. In line with the *Pact for the Future*'s call for more flexible and adaptive mission models, peacekeeping stakeholders should focus on leveraging police capacity more strategically for protection. UNPOL can expand its preventive role by addressing growing threats such as urban violence, organized crime, and cyber insecurity. It can also support (sub-)regional security initiatives—as seen in Sudan and Somalia—by providing training and advisory support to parallel missions as part of multi-actor peace operations. There is growing scope for UNPOL in hybrid and/or sequenced deployments, including through the use of Specialized Police Teams (SPTs) as a bridge between UN field presences. And because policing is inherently community-facing, UNPOL is well-placed to contribute to long-term civilian protection by strengthening community mechanisms—such as customary courts, community watch groups, and local protection committees—which are critical in fragile security environments.

Recommendations

For Member States and peace operations stakeholders

- Further leverage the role of UNPOL in the implementation of POC mandates. This should be accompanied by greater inclusion of UNPOL in high-level policy processes—including Security Council deliberations, C-34 discussions, and broader reform dialogues on the future of peace operations.
- Clarify and strengthen UNPOL's role and capabilities in mission transition planning and in bridging to successor missions or SPMs.

For peace operations personnel at headquarters and in the field

- Ensure the skills of UNPOL officers deployed to missions match the environment in which they are deployed and the priority tasks that they will perform. Avoid excessive militarization and prioritize police units with community-policing, engagement, gender, and rule of law expertise.
- Expand training for all UNPOL personnel on POC, community engagement and gender sensitivity.
- Improve data collection and performance monitoring to better assess and communicate UNPOL's contributions to POC mandate implementation.

4. Strategic Communications as a Tool for Protection

Strategic communications have become an increasingly vital component of protection through peacekeeping.[19] In environments where misinformation, disinformation, malinformation, and hate speech (MDMH) restrict communities' access to credible information, UN messaging can (re)build trust, shape the actions of civilians, and deter violence. Recent studies confirm this impact: UN radio broadcasts have been shown to reduce violence against civilians both in proximity to troop deployments and—critically—even in areas beyond peacekeepers' reach.[20]

Research points to multiple ways in which strategic communications support POC. They can reassure communities of UN protection, counter incitement to violence, promote behavioral change among civilians and armed actors, and publicize accountability mechanisms related to civilian harm —such as information about how to report incidents, the role of human rights monitoring, and efforts to pursue justice or redress for violence committed by armed groups or state actors. In Mali, for instance, UN radio helped mitigate communal violence by promoting reconciliation messages. In Côte d'Ivoire, broadcasts helped to deter militia attacks, particularly where peacekeepers were co-located. Importantly, these effects did not require extensive physical presence, demonstrating how strategic communications can act as a force multiplier—especially when mobility is constrained or troop coverage is limited.

However, these benefits depend on trust, credibility, and local resonance. In short, the source and quality of communications matter. Messaging is most effective when it is perceived as impartial, culturally grounded, and relevant to the particular conflict context. In settings where anti-UN sentiment is low and access to alternative sources of information are limited, UN communications are more likely to shift attitudes and behavior.

Timeliness is also critical. Delays in launching mission communications—often due to capacity or mandate gaps—can blunt their impact. Early, proactive messaging not only shapes expectations but also inoculates communities against disinformation. While decentralized communication allows for tailored local messaging, a lack of policy-level guidance can lead to fragmented narratives. Mixed signals—such as calls for dialogue from public information officers alongside more forceful messaging from a mission's military leadership—can erode the credibility of both. Strategic communications must be tightly aligned with overall POC strategies, with strong coordination between political, military, police, and civilian actors.

At the policy level, strategic communications remain under-resourced and insufficiently prioritized. Despite their recognized value, few missions are equipped to scale these efforts to meet the magnitude of protection challenges. Media assistance remains absent from most peacekeeping mandates. Supporting independent, professional successor media outlets—particularly during mission drawdown—can sustain the protective effects of UN communications but doing so requires early planning, donor commitment, and safeguards for editorial independence. At the same time, building state capacity to communicate with local populations can help foster trust between governments, civilians, and peace operations.

Strategic communications will never replace the need for physical protection—but they significantly extend the reach, responsiveness and legitimacy of peace operations. In volatile, information-scarce environments, the ability to shape narratives and respond to misinformation is not a secondary function—it is central to the success of POC. To leave it

[19] This section is based on Hannah Smidt and Marc Werner, "UN Strategic Communications and the Protection of Civilians," *Issue Brief,* International Peace Institute, forthcoming.
[20] Ibid.

underfunded or secondary is to risk ceding the narrative terrain to those who incite or distort violence.

Strategic communications must also operate at the global level. In addition to engaging local audiences, the UN must do more to communicate the positive impact of peace operations to Member States and to reinforce POC as a 'core business' of peacekeeping. Too often, the message that peacekeeping protects civilians and reduces harm is lost amid broader critiques of UN effectiveness. This weakens the political will necessary to sustain peacekeeping as a core conflict management tool and undermines support for particular mission mandates. Articulating the successes of POC—backed by evidence—is essential to maintaining Member State engagement.

Recommendations

For Member States and peace operations stakeholders

- Make strategic communications a core pillar of protection mandates through adequate resourcing, staffing and closer integration into protection strategies.
- Support independent, context-sensitive media initiatives—particularly during mission transitions—to help sustain accurate, protective messaging and trusted information-sharing beyond mission exit, in coordination with local actors and within national media landscapes.

For peace operations personnel at headquarters and in the field

- Ensure strategic communications are culturally grounded and built around a stronger understanding of the local media and social media environment, including through partnerships with civil society actors who are well-placed to understand the information context.
- Coordinate efforts to identify and prevent the spread of harmful MDMH through strategic communications as a whole-of-mission endeavor.
- Invest early in scalable platforms—radio, SMS, social media—to counter disinformation and build civilian confidence.

5. Partnerships, Regional Approaches, and Emerging Models

"Partnership peacekeeping" has become the norm rather than the exception in today's global peace and security landscape.[21] One notable trend is the rise of non-UN missions, many of them regional, operating alongside or in place of UN deployments. This reflects a shift endorsed in the Secretary-General's *New Agenda for Peace*[22] and reinforced by Security Council Resolution 2719 (2023), which opens the door to sustainable financing for AU-led Peace Support Operations (PSOs).[23]

A strong UN-AU partnership will be essential to the future of peace operations in Africa—particularly in anchoring POC mandates. Over the past two decades, the two organizations have developed shared frameworks, such as the 2017 Joint Framework for an Enhanced Partnership in Peace and Security, and now embed POC into mission planning. Both institutions have also formalized POC policies.[24] The UN's policy applies to all UN missions

[21] Maurice Schumann and Corinne Bara, "A New Era: Power in Partnership Peacekeeping," *International Studies Quarterly*, 67, no. 3 (2023).
[22] *A New Agenda for Peace,* 12.
[23] United Nations Security Council*, Resolution 2719*, S/RES/2719 (2023).
[24] United Nations Department of Peace Operations, *Policy on the Protection of Civilians in United Nations Peacekeeping* (New York: United Nations, 2023); African Union, *African Union Policy on Protection of Civilians in Peace Support Operations* (Addis Ababa: African Union, 2023).

with a POC mandate; the AU's policy applies to AU-led PSOs and serves as a guide for PSOs led by regional economic communities (RECs) and ad-hoc security initiatives (ASIs).

Operational distinctions, however, remain significant.[25] The UN typically deploys multidimensional peacekeeping operations to support host states and all conflict parties in maintaining peace. As a result, UN missions prioritize protecting civilians from both non-state armed groups and state actors that pose a threat to populations. Military, police, and civilian components are jointly tasked with proactive protection, including through political engagement. In contrast, many African-led operations[26] are deployed to fight alongside host-state forces in counterinsurgency campaigns. Their protection strategies often focus on mitigating harm caused by the actions of their own forces, rather than proactively deterring threats to civilians.[27]

Going forward, more effective alignment of UN and AU protection policies requires a broader redefinition of the strategic roles of each institution in peace operations and PSOs. This is especially important for addressing current and emerging civilian protection challenges—particularly in counterterrorism and other highly kinetic contexts. A critical piece of this reset is the re-establishment of political support for peace efforts in the policy organs of both institutions. Dwindling political will and lack of consensus increasingly constrain the core objectives and functions of peace operations, including POC. In 2024 alone, the UN Security Council vetoed ceasefire resolutions for two major conflicts, prolonging crises and worsening civilian suffering.

But the different configurations of "partnership peacekeeping" also need to be assessed according to their protection outcomes. For example, one recent study found that non-UN missions alone have not significantly reduced violence by non-state armed groups—and in some cases, parallel deployments have undermined the effectiveness of UN missions.[28] What is more, scholars warn that the UN's support for regional and ad hoc coalitions has eroded the principle of impartiality, making the organization appear complicit in regime defense and counterterrorism campaigns that in some cases have led to human rights abuses.[29]

These critiques underscore the urgent need to revisit when, how, and under what conditions the UN supports operations led by partners. Protection mandates must not be subordinated to political expediency. At minimum, support to non-UN missions should be contingent on clear protection safeguards, human rights vetting, and operational transparency.

As partnership peacekeeping moves forward, three core priorities should guide efforts to strengthen POC effectiveness in Africa—for both the UN and regional actors.

1. *Comparative advantages*: Different actors bring different strengths. Investing in region-specific, scenario-based planning—especially in the Sahel, Horn, and Central Africa—is key to strengthening and aligning early warning systems for timely, effective responses.
2. *Non-kinetic protection*: Political engagement, human rights monitoring, and trust-building should be foundational, not peripheral. Addressing gaps in policing and rule of law capacities—particularly in AU and REC-led missions—should be a shared priority, with UNPOL playing a greater support role where appropriate.

[25] This section draws on Andrew E. Yaw Tchie and Lauren McGowan, *The United Nations–African Union Partnership and the Protection of Civilians*, International Peace Institute (March 2025).
[26] The term "African-led PSOs" is used here to refer to all operations led by the AU, RECs, and ASIs.
[27] Not all UN peacekeeping operations and African-led PSOs fit neatly into these categories.
[28] Corinne Bara, "Protection of Civilians in Partnership Peacekeeping," *Issue Brief*, International Peace Institute, forthcoming.
[29] John Karlsrud, "UN Peacekeeping and Impartiality: A Fading Relationship," *Ethics & International Affairs*, 38, no.4 (2024): 433-443.

3. *Community engagement:* Empowering local actors through institutionalized networks, civil society partnerships, and scenario-based training is essential—especially for regional missions—to navigate asymmetric threats and blurred civilian-combatant lines.

Partnerships will define the future of peacekeeping. But to protect civilians effectively, they must be grounded in shared principles, clear mandates, and the will and capacity to both confront imminent threats to civilians and invest in building a broader protective environment.

Recommendations

For all peace operations stakeholders

- Follow through on requirements for robust protection safeguards—including accountability mechanisms and human rights vetting—for any UN support to regional or partner operations.
- Clarify respective POC responsibilities in hybrid, sequential, or joint deployments between the UN, AU, RECs, and others.
- Avoid sacrificing core peacekeeping principles—such as consent, impartiality, and legitimacy—in pursuit of short-term operational gains, as doing so risks undermining long-term protection efforts and broader mission credibility.
- Support capacity-building across regional organizations and national security institutions in T/PCCs to institutionalize protection from HQ to field level.
- Strengthen early warning systems and communications between the UN and partner organization deployments in volatile contexts.
- Establish a UN–AU POC technology and innovation platform to help scale up adaptive protection technologies—ranging from early warning systems to AI-enabled communications—and promote interoperability and skills exchange across institutions.
- Promote modular partnerships that pair complementary capabilities—for example, matching regional troop deployments with UN-provided air assets, medical teams, interpreters, and other technology support—to address operational gaps and maximize collective impact.

Conclusion: Reaffirming and Reimagining POC – Priorities for the Future

As the UN embarks on a strategic review of peace operations, the Protection of Civilians must be reaffirmed not just as a core commitment but as a renewed ambition. The current moment demands more than marginal adjustments—it calls for bold, forward-looking reforms that respond to evolving protection challenges and the complex realities of today's operational environments. In an era of shrinking missions, contested consent, and evolving threats, the future of POC lies in more flexible, community-driven, and civilian-led approaches —supported, in some contexts, by uniformed components. These efforts must also reinforce the host state's primary responsibility to protect civilians. UN support should enable, not replace, national efforts—and must be designed with exit in mind, to avoid creating dependencies or delaying local accountability.

The proposals below aim to reimagine how protection is conceived, resourced, and delivered—anchoring the next generation of peace operations in strategic foresight, field innovation, and inclusive operational design.

Recommit to POC as a Cross-cutting Responsibility
These recommendations apply not only to Member States but also to the UN Secretariat—particularly DPO, DPPA, and EOSG—as well as UN Resident Coordinators and key external stakeholders.

- **Reaffirm member state commitment to POC as a political priority.** Establish a renewed group of champions—formal or informal—to drive coordinated diplomacy, resource mobilization, and policy alignment around protection goals. Member States should reflect POC priorities not only in multilateral diplomacy but also through bilateral engagement. Embassies in mission settings can play a pivotal role by advocating for protection goals, coordinating closely with peace operations, and reinforcing messaging to host-state actors. Similarly, embedding POC in national foreign policy frameworks can institutionalize sustained support for civilian protection across diplomatic, development, and security domains.
- **Reconsider the role and relevance of POC within the "Future of Peacekeeping, New Models, and Related Capabilities" study**. Elaborate how each model can contribute to the protection of civilians—even where models do not have an explicit protection mandate—and identify what would be required to deliver protection.[30]
- **Create a cross-institutional network for POC analysis and learning.** Regularly convene policymakers, researchers, practitioners, and civil society in a 'Global POC Network' to bridge policy and practice, build evidence, and support timely, context-sensitive protection strategies.
- **Break down silos across the UN system.** In an era of scarce resources, integrated approaches to building a collective responsibility for protection, rather than institutional divisions of labor, are paramount. In line with the *Agenda for Protection* and the *New Agenda for Peace*, ensure that DPO and DPPA collaborate meaningfully on protection mandates and practice. Civilians do not distinguish between peacekeeping and political missions—and the peace operations of the future should reflect that reality.
- **Integrate protection into broader policy conversations.** Ensure that POC is not treated as a niche issue, but as integral to discussions around sustaining peace, climate and conflict, atrocity prevention, and humanitarian response. Make specific efforts to link protection to the ongoing review of the UN's peacebuilding architecture.

Elevate Civilian Expertise and Improve Protection Strategy Design

- **Strengthen civilian capabilities.** Protection is not solely a military function. Member States should support more agile, mobile, and civilian-focused mission configurations—especially during transitions or in settings where large-scale uniformed deployments are not feasible. Police units will also be a critical resource in future configurations depending on context and mandate.
- **Embed civilian expertise in operational decision-making**. Ensure that senior civilian protection staff are consistently integrated into planning, threat analysis, and

[30] Lisa Sharland, "Future 'Models' of Peace Operations and Protection of Civilian Considerations," Stimson Center, DRAFT (March 2025).

deployment decisions, including in joint strategic planning units and operations centers, as well as in liaison functions in Force and Police planning cells.

- **Enhance surge capacity for civilian protection roles**. Expand and better coordinate existing rosters and standby arrangements to ensure rapid deployment of civilian protection experts to support missions and SPMs in emerging or deteriorating contexts. This will also require addressing HR and logistical constraints that limit mobility, including restrictions on remote deployments and how civilian staff are equipped and supported in the field.
- **Ensure that protection strategies are both coherent and responsive to different civilian vulnerabilities and capacities.** Improve joint analysis and develop integrated strategies to address the particular protection risks facing different segments of the civilian population (e.g., IDPs in camps or local communities; women and girls; those with disabilities). Design strategies in close coordination with non-mission protection actors, including host government institutions as appropriate.
- **Invest in analytical capacity to anticipate unintended impacts**. Missions and external actors should strengthen their ability to analyze the impact of POC mandates on local conflict dynamics and civilian vulnerabilities—supporting more adaptive, conflict-sensitive protection strategies.

Protect Beyond the Mission

- **Deepen the implementation of community-based protection approaches.** Make community engagement not only a guiding principle but a consistently resourced and operationalized practice across all phases of mission planning and execution. This includes supporting and scaling community-based protection initiatives—particularly in hard-to-reach areas and in contexts with limited or contested host-state consent.
- **Launch a Global Protection Fund or Financing Window for National-Local Partnerships.** Initiate a new multilateral funding stream— either as a standalone initiative or a dedicated window within the Peacebuilding Fund or other pooled funding arrangements—that focuses specifically on POC. This stream would prioritize flexible, frontline investments in locally driven protection initiatives in mission and post-mission contexts. It would also support civil society actors, municipalities, and UN components in building protection infrastructure (e.g., alert systems, safe spaces, community mediation platforms), especially in volatile or under-resourced environments. Key to this funding would be its ability to link short-term protection to longer-term resilience.
- **Create a Civilian Protection Contingency Mechanism (CPCM).** Establish a contingency response mechanism triggered when protection indicators decline post mission withdrawal, ensuring a minimal re-engagement threshold through SPMs, civilian teams, or regional policing support.
- **Demand implementation of the UN's *Agenda for Protection***: Support the UN protection mechanisms outlined in the *Agenda for Protection*, including the establishment of a Protection Support Hub and holding the UN accountable for protection work. Emphasize the goal of delivering 'full protection' that goes beyond legal compliance to include preventive and proactive protection.

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Peacebuilding Meets Peacekeeping: Seeking Sustainability

Introduction

Peacekeeping missions – and peace operations[1] overall – have always contributed to building and sustaining peace. Even in the early days of peacekeeping, elements of what was later termed "peacebuilding" were part of mandates and activities, the United Nations Operation in the Congo in the 1960s being one example. However, the increased and systematic **inclusion of peacebuilding tasks and goals into the mandates of "multidimensional missions" since the 1980s was one of the most significant adaptations peacekeeping operations underwent since their inception.**

Though the precise interface between peacekeeping and peacebuilding continued to be discussed and refined,[2] multidimensional peacekeeping operations, explicitly combining peacekeeping and peacebuilding elements and functions – often under a robust mandate – became the preferred model for stabilizing post-conflict and fragile states in the post-cold war era. The aim was to consolidate peace gains and prevent relapses into violent conflict even after a peacekeeping mission withdraws by addressing underlying causes of conflict, especially in the political, governance, security and rule of law spheres.

Table 1: Examples of Peacebuilding mandates and activities in current and past UN Peacekeeping Operations	
Security & Rule of Law	Reform and build capacity for policing, including community policing
	Reform and build capacity in the corrections sector
	Reform and build capacity in the justice sector
	Support Security Sector Reform (SSR)
	Support Disarmament, Demobilization & Reintegration (DDR)
	Support Mine Action
	Support transitional justice mechanisms, including truth commissions
	Conduct community violence reduction initiatives
Political & Governance	Support the peace process and/or the political transition, including support for inclusive constitution-making or legal reform processes
	Support political participation, national dialogue & reconciliation
	Reform and build capacity in electoral sector; electoral assistance
	Build capacity of state and government institutions, public administration & civil service
	Support local governance capacity/ decentralize processes, including supporting the restoration/extension of state authority
	Build local conflict management capacity
	Stabilize territories liberated from armed groups

[1] While this paper is focused specifically on UN peacekeeping missions we use the term peace operations where we refer to the full spectrum of UN operations from multidimensional peacekeeping missions to special political missions.

[2] See for example Supplement to Agenda for Peace (A/50/60, S/1995/1), 1995, para 53; Report of the Panel on the United Nations Peace Operations (S/2000/809), 2000; Report of the High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change (A/59/565, A/59/565/Corr.2), United Nations Peacekeeping Operations Principles and Guidelines ("Capstone Doctrine"), March 2008, UN DPKO, DFS, Peacekeeping and Peacebuilding, Clarifying the Nexus, 2010; UN DPKO/ DFS: The Contributions of United Nations Peacekeeping to Early Peacebuilding. A DPKO/DFS Strategy for Peacekeepers. New York 2011, Security Council Resolution S/RES/2086, 21 January 2013.

Socio-economic Recovery	Develop physical infrastructure: roads, ports, airports; electricity; telecommunications, starting in conflict-sensitive locations
	Support social services: health, education, social welfare, population registration
	Stimulate and facilitate economic growth and employment
	Strengthen civil society, including civic education
Human Rights and Social Cohesion	Protect and promote Human Rights Human rights education, advocacy and monitoring
	Monitor and address hate speech or misinformation
	Support youth reintegration and vocational training initiatives
	Support de-radicalization and reintegration initiatives
	Support state-society and community trust-building, including through supporting state-civil society dialogue

Policies on peacebuilding have evolved significantly since the term "post conflict peacebuilding" was first introduced in the 1992 Agenda for Peace.[3] The Integrated Mission concept, the creation of the UN Peacebuilding Architecture and the concept of "Sustaining Peace" were further milestones (see Box 1). In this evolution, the peacekeeping-peacebuilding-interface – understood as critical from the outset – has grown stronger, leading to a deeper understanding of peacekeeping and peacebuilding as synergetic, mutually reinforcing contributions towards the UN's broader goal of maintaining international peace and security. The Department of Peace Operations (DPO) today describes peacekeeping as "one of the most effective tools available to the UN to assist host countries navigate the difficult path from conflict to peace" with UN peacekeepers providing "security and the political and peacebuilding support to help countries make the difficult, early transition from conflict to peace".[4]

Over time, the UN developed an advanced capacity to mount – at scale – multidimensional civil-military operations. **Only the UN has the capacity at present or in the foreseeable future to deploy peace operations that integrate a broad spectrum of peacekeeping and peacebuilding elements as well as the work of military, police and civilian components.**

Despite evidence that these operations have made critical contributions to keeping, building and sustaining peace, geopolitical tensions and related financial re-prioritization mean that multidimensional operations could be the exception, rather than the rule in the near future. However, with conflict and needs are once more on the rise, it will be important that the UN system retains the knowledge, tools and capabilities to deploy such missions in the future.

Peacebuilding is a process consisting of a broad set of tasks undertaken by multiple stakeholders, across many dimensions (politics, security, economics, justice, reconciliation, etc.) that can scale (local to global) to support a peace process or political transition. These are often a series of medium-to-long-term efforts aimed at transforming conflict dynamics and building sustainable peace by tackling the root causes of violent conflict. Typically, some form of peacebuilding has already occurred before the deployment of a UN peacekeeping operation and continues after its exit.

[3] See An Agenda for Peace, Report of the Secretary-General, 1992. The concept of post-conflict peacebuilding was soon broadened to encompass all phases of the conflict cycle, see Supplement to An Agenda for Peace: Position Paper of the Secretary-General on the occasion of the Fiftieth Anniversary of the United Nations (A/50/60, S/1995/1), 1995, as well as SC Presidential Statement S/PRST/ 2001/15.

[4] United Nations Peacekeeping helps countries torn by conflict create conditions for lasting peace, available at https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/what-is-peacekeeping#:~:text=What%20is%20peacekeeping%20%C2%BB-,What%20is%20peacekeeping,path%20from%20conflict%20to%20peace.

Box 1: Policy Developments
In 1992, **An Agenda for Peace,** first coined the term "post-conflict peacebuilding" defined as action to identify and support structures which will tend to strengthen and solidify peace in order to avoid a relapse into conflict. It argued that for peacekeeping to be truly successful, it must include comprehensive efforts aimed at consolidating peace. The 1995 **Supplement to An Agenda for Peace** broadened the concept of peacebuilding to span the entire conflict cycle and highlighted the linkages between UN Agencies, Funds and Programs (AFPs) and a peacekeeping mission in implementing peacebuilding.[5]
In 2000, the **"Brahimi Report"** stressed that peacekeepers and peacebuilders are inseparable partners not least as peacebuilding was indispensable to a mission's exit strategy. The report recommended various structural and policy changes to strengthening peacebuilding including the creation of a permanent peacebuilding structure in the secretariat. [6] The 2004 Report of the High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change specifically recommended the establishment of the peacebuilding architecture.[7] Following the 2005 World Summit, **the UN's Peacebuilding Architecture** (Peacebuilding Commission, Peacebuilding Support Office, Peacebuilding Fund) was established.[8]
A decade later, the **2016 GA and SR resolutions on "Sustaining Peace"[9]** offered a new way of looking at peacebuilding processes effectively enabling a policy shift built on four insights: first, that sustaining peace is a goal and a process, second, that it is profoundly political, third, that it requires a renewed focus on prevention and fourth, that it needs a comprehensive approach, integration and partnerships.[10]
Mission integration and coordination of peacebuilding tasks between different actors and over different phases of a conflict cycle was a critical topic since the early 1990s. Throughout, the important role of UN AFPs in taking forward most of the longer-term institution building, capacity building and peacebuilding has been stressed.[11] Over the past decade, structural changes have been made to advance integration between mission and UN country teams. The double or triple hatting of the DSRSG as also RC/HC and a new support structure under the RC including the Integrated Offices have been impactful in that regard. The **UN Policy on Integrated Assessment and Planning**, developed in 2013 and updated in 2023, provides concrete guidance for advancing integration through assessment and planning.[12]

In contrast, peacekeeping is a more time-bound tool undertaken by one entity, e.g. a UN peacekeeping operation mandated by the UNSC, and deployed by the UN Secretariat, to perform specific mandated tasks. While a peace operation may undertake some peacebuilding tasks, it will never be the only peacebuilding actor: The host government, other international and regional organizations, donors and (I)NGOs will also be involved in any context where a peace operation is deployed.

The most important implication for any UN peacekeeping operation is to stay involved with the various peacebuilding actions underway so that it can coordinate with relevant stakeholders and partners - within and outside the UN system - to complement and support their actions and avoid duplication.

[5] See An Agenda for Peace, Report of the Secretary-General, 1992. The concept of post-conflict peacebuilding was soon broadened to encompass all phases of the conflict cycle, see the 1995 Supplement to Agenda for Peace (A/50/60, S/1995/1), 1995, as well as SC Presidential Statement S/PRST/ 2001/15.
[6] See Report of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations (A/55/305–S/2000/809) paras 28 and 243.
[7] See Report of the High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change (A/59/565, A/59/565/Corr.2).
[8] See twin resolutions S/RES/1645 and A/RES/60/180 as well as Resolution A/RES/60/287).
[9] See twin resolutions on Sustaining Peace S/RES/2282 and A/RES/70/262.
[10] See Cedric de Coning, Adaptive Peacebuilding, International Affairs 94: 2 (2018) pp.301-317 on ways this enabled a view of peacebuilding as a dynamic and open-ended process rather than one tied to a pre-determined end-state as well as options for implementing this in practice.
[11] See both, the 1995 Supplement to the Agenda for Peace, and United Nations Peacekeeping Operations Principles and Guidelines ("Capstone Doctrine"), March 2008.
[12] See Policy on Integrated Assessment and Planning, 2023.

Peace requires a holistic transformation of society, meaning **peacekeeping operations must be complemented by or even embedded in a larger peacebuilding process** where a variety of actors and entities work towards this transformation across multiple dimensions and scales. This makes coordination between a UN peacekeeping operation and other actors in the peacebuilding space a critical success factor for both mandate implementation and broader processes of sustaining peace.

Reforms and structural changes over the past two decades have aimed to facilitate coordination, integration and coherence. Significantly, the UN developed the Integrated Mission model[13] that, inter alia, provides for two DSRSGs, with one typically focused on the political realm and the other one "triple hatted" and responsible for coordinating the development and humanitarian sector, as the DSRSG RC/HC. The Integrated Mission model, currently used by three Peacekeeping and five Special Political Missions,[14] also facilitates coordination, joint analysis and reporting and, in some contexts, pooled funding across the UN presence. In missions which do not follow this model, other mechanisms are used to coordinate peacebuilding and related initiatives across the UN system and with other international and national partners and the host government. **Over the past decades, missions globally have developed various ways of maximizing synergies and integrating peacekeeping and peacebuilding functions and there is a wealth of lessons from these efforts.**

Whilst the integrated mission model is still being used in eight contemporary missions, modular models have increasingly been discussed not least in light of political polarization and financial constraints. **In exploring such new models, it will be important to build on the lessons from the past, integrate a strong peacekeeping-peacebuilding interface while remaining adaptive and flexible** in the way we combine peacekeeping and peacebuilding roles and functions. Partnerships with peacebuilding actors, both UN and non-UN, will be essential towards this end.

New Opportunities, Renewed Commitments: The New Agenda for Peace and the Pact for the Future

The *New Agenda for Peace and* the *Pact for the Future* together with the 2025 *Review of the UN Peacebuilding Architecture* and the *Comprehensive Review of all Forms of Peace Operations* **provide unique opportunities for strengthening the interface between peace operations and peacebuilding**. The Secretary-General's *New Agenda for Peace* highlights the changing nature of armed conflict and the persistence of violence outside of armed conflict settings. Both require new national and multilateral responses. For both, approaches that can flexibly draw upon peacekeeping and peacebuilding tasks and outcomes will be key. Notably, the Secretary-General calls for a shift in the prevention and sustaining peace paradigm, which prioritizes national prevention agendas. Here, too, peace operations, anchored in a broader peacebuilding agenda could be pillars of support in countries where they are deployed.

[13] The UN's 2023 Policy on Integrated Assessment and Planning defines integration as "bringing together the United Nations entities across pillars to enhance the individual and collective impact of the United Nations response, concentrating on those activities required for sustaining peace.", See *Policy on Integrated Assessment and Planning 2023*, para 11.

[14] These eight are the missions in Afghanistan, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Haiti, Iraq, Libya, Somalia and South Sudan.

The *Pact for the Future*, in its segment on international peace and security, builds on the recommendations of the *New Agenda for Peace*. **As member states move towards realizing their collective commitments, effective and impactful peacebuilding, including through peace operations, will have to be an enabler and driver** for peace sustainment, supporting national prevention agendas (Action 18) and continuous adaptation (Action 21). Concrete commitments that can also be tackled through strategic integration of peacekeeping and peacebuilding include redoubling efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls (Action 18), advancing the WPS and YPS agenda (inter alia Actions 19,20 and 34-37), ensuring early transition planning and ensuring that peacekeeping operations are accompanied by an inclusive political strategy and addressing the root causes of conflict (Action 21). Action 44 additionally highlights the critical role the Peacebuilding Commission can play in support of countries during and after the transition of a peace operation, in coordination with the Security Council and the UNCT. Overall, it contains Member States' broader commitment to strengthen the Peacebuilding Commission as a platform for building and sustaining peace as well as the need to mobilize requisite financing.

The upcoming *Comprehensive Review of all Forms of Peace Operations*, together with the 2025 *Peacebuilding Architecture Review (PBAR)* will be a critical window of opportunity for discussing concrete ideas to further strengthen structures and tools, drawing on decades of lessons in peacekeeping and peacebuilding while recognizing the changing global context.

Lessons Learned and Implications for a New Context

In an increasingly multipolar world, peacekeeping and peacebuilding will have to remain key pillars of the UN collective security system. Yet, they have to be adapted, taking into consideration new geopolitical realities and lessons of the past.[15] Based on the experiences with peacekeeping operations and related peacebuilding efforts over the past decades, the following lessons stand out.

Context-specific

The actions taken by peacekeeping operations or peacebuilding actors are more effective and sustainable when they are context-specific and based on assessments and planning that have been informed by the local context, history, culture and lived experience of the affected communities. While it is important to consider lessons and best practices from other settings, specific interventions need to be adapted to the local context through a process that includes the expertise, views and needs of local actors.

Future peace operations must actively involve local actors in defining peace conditions and shaping interventions. This means ensuring that from the outset, national and local stakeholders are consulted and included to determine priorities and strategies.

Participatory and Localized

Within the UN, successive reviews have highlighted that peacekeeping and peacebuilding need to be local and locally anchored to be effective and sustainable and that active

[15] For greater detail see Annika S. Hansen et al., "Five Trends in UN Peace Operations. And Five Calls to Action," *ZIF-Study* (January 2025) https://www.zif-berlin.org/sites/zif-berlin.org/files/2025-02/ZIF-Study_5%20Trends%20in%20UN%20PeaceOperations.pdf

engagement with local communities is core to mission success.[16] Missions have often focused on national level actors, institutions and structures as well as capital elites[17] and have often failed to sufficiently take local context and agency into account, and to cede sufficient "space for local ownership and self-organization to emerge."[18] However, awareness about the importance of local level engagement has grown and there are increasing examples of effective engagement.[19] Critically, peacekeeping missions, particularly those with a sizeable peacebuilding dimension, must be given the capacity that would enable detailed knowledge of local level dynamics, an understanding of vertical and horizontal social cohesion rifts and connectors and consistent community engagement.

The actions by peacekeeping operations and peacebuilding actors are more effective and sustainable when undertaken in support of local and national stakeholders, instead of for them. In the past, external actors have often assumed that they have the expertise to make assessments and plans on behalf of local and national actors. It is now well established that in order for activities to become self-sustainable, they need to be developed together with local and national stakeholders. For example, if local communities are expected to protect themselves when peacekeepers deploy elsewhere, it is desirable to support communities in doing so from the very beginning.

This implies that peacekeeping operations and peacebuilding actions need to become more people-centered, in other words, the effectiveness of the operation needs to be assessed against the impact it is generating for the affected people. For example, if the operation is training police officers to improve law and order, then effectiveness should be determined by whether the people the police serve feel that law and order is improving or not.

For peacekeeping operations and peacebuilding actions to become more participatory and people-centered they need to engage more with affected communities: in assessments and evaluations, analysis and planning and in co-managing projects that are meant to benefit them.

This is especially the case for those segments of society that are often excluded in peace processes. Women, youth, and marginalized groups remain underrepresented in peace agreements and peace and security efforts. Studies indicate that only 6 percent of signatories to peace agreements over the past 30 years have been women, despite evidence showing that inclusive peace processes last longer and are more effective.[20] Similarly, while youth is the more prominent demographic group in many conflict-affected settings, they are often perceived as a security challenge rather than contributing to a peace dividend. As the *Pact for the Future* highlights in Action 36*,* when young people are sidelined from political settlements and peacebuilding processes, the risk of instability increases while chances for

[16] See for example the 2015 Report of the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations on uniting our strengths for peace: politics, partnership and people **(**"Hippo Report") or, on community engagement in particular, the Secretary-General's 2018 report on peacebuilding and sustaining peace as well as the 2020 PBSO published system-wide agreed community engagement guidelines.

[17] Interpeace, "Rethinking Stability: Key Findings and Actionable Recommendations," *Interpeace*. (2022). https://www.interpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/2022-Rethinking-Stability-Recommendations-Paper-Web-spread.pdf

[18] Cedric de Coning and Linnéa Gelot, "Placing People at the Centre of UN Peace Operations," *IPI Global Observatory* (May 2020). https://theglobalobservatory.org/2020/05/placing-people-center-un-peace-operations/

[19] For a detailed analysis see Allard Duursma and Jenna Russo, "The Primacy of Politics at the Local Level in UN Peace Operations," *International Peace Institute* (February 2025).

[20] Interpeace, "Rethinking Stability: Key Findings and Actionable Recommendations," *Interpeace*. (2022).

sustainability decrease.[21] Including women, youth and other marginalized groups is thus a critical investment which can significantly increase the likelihood that a peace process or political transition will be peaceful and self-sustainable.

Adaptive

Both peacekeeping operations and peacebuilding actions need to be agile and adaptive. This means that instead of blindly executing pre-determined actions according to predetermined timetables, plans and budgets, they need to become more open to considering changing circumstances and needs and be prepared to adapt their actions accordingly. Making, keeping and building peace is not like building a bridge or fixing a machine. People have free will and this agency results in complex social behavior that is constantly dynamic and thus uncertain and unpredictable. One can pre-plan building a bridge or a road, and barring some natural disaster or outbreak of conflict, one can with a certain predictability plan for the bridge being completed as originally designed. This is different for making, keeping or building peace: one cannot, e.g., begin a community security project in a particular country and predict with certainty what the outcome will be a few months from now. That is why peacekeeping and peacebuilding require the capacity to be adaptive.

Adaptive capacity is determined by several attributes. Firstly, it is having the mindset or awareness that one needs to be adaptive. This implies, for example, that the UN, at all levels, starting with member state bodies such as the General Assembly and Security Council, encourage and empower peace operations to be adaptive. The Secretary-General should encourage managers and staff in peace operations to report on how they have adjusted to setbacks, as opposed to them having to explain why they have deviated from a plan or a budget, as if that is somehow wrong or a mistake. Secondly, effective adaptation requires clear goals. So, plans, expectations and theories of change need to be explicit. Thirdly, in order to adapt one needs to be able to assess whether specific operational tasks have achieved their desired effects, or not, and why not. This means that taking action needs to be accompanied by a process for collecting, assessing and analyzing data. In UN peacekeeping operations one of the primary tools for this assessment process is the Comprehensive Planning and Performance Assessment System (CPAS). Lastly, there needs to be a decision-making cycle where the information and analysis are regularly presented to management and leadership at all relevant levels so that they can consider changes needed to ensure effectiveness. This means they need to be presented with evidence of effectiveness including challenges and gaps. And they need to be presented with evidence-based options regarding what they can do about it. Mission leadership, managers and commanders at all levels can then take an informed decision about what changes to make and how to (re)allocate resources.

The adaptive capacity of peace operations is also enhanced by the strategic guidance and direction they receive from member state bodies like the UN Security Council, the 5th Committee of the General Assembly and the UN Peacebuilding Commission. Missions need to be encouraged by the UN Security Council to be adaptive to changing conditions, and the 5th Committee needs to provide the requisite financial flexibility. The Peacebuilding Commission can be a hub for learning and adaptation by convening sessions on specific

[21] United Nations Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, *Youth: Still Largely Excluded from Decision-Making Despite Key Role in Building Sustainable Peace*, United Nations (2020); see also the specific commitments in the Pact for the Future, Chapter IV, related to meaningful youth participation. https://dppa.medium.com/youth-still-largely-excluded-from-decision-making-despite-key-role-in-building-sustainable-peace-231d9dd62de9

contexts where experts from host states and civil society, as well as from the UN system, regional organization, IFIs and others, discuss progress achieved, remaining gaps and lessons learned.[22]

Coordinated and Integrated

Coordination between a UN peacekeeping operation and those in the peacebuilding space can help the peacekeeping operation implement its mandate with greater effectiveness and efficiency, as it will help to avoid duplication, to leverage burden sharing and complementarity and thus contribute to generating a more compounding and holistic transformative effect. At the same time, it can lay the foundations for sustainable peacebuilding outcomes.

A critical step for both, effective peacekeeping and sustainable peacebuilding is thus awareness that stabilizing conflict affected areas is only the beginning of a much longer-term endeavour to build or rebuild institutions that are able to govern inclusively. Therefore, **achieving sustainable peace and security will require integrating peacekeeping and peacebuilding in a way that builds long-term resilience.** Key enablers are: a shared strategic framework, integrating conflict sensitivity and enhanced civil-military cooperation to jointly address the root causes of conflicts.

Integration, coordination and cooperation needs to happen at different levels and between different entities within an operational environment, at the strategic/ Headquarters level. It can and should be supported by member states, including through a strengthened PBC. At all of these levels, coordination can be enhanced by having a shared understanding of the needs and challenges, by undertaking a joint assessment and by sharing analysis. This can then lead to joint planning and in some cases joined programmes and pooled funding. Similarly, shared monitoring and evaluation can support a common understanding of what progress has been achieved, where the challenges lie, and how activities need to be adapted.

Based on a Wider Partnership

While reforms have naturally focused on the integration between the mission and a UN Country Team (UNCT), **coherent peacebuilding demands integration with a wider set of actors:** between the UN integrated presence and the government (national and subnational/regional), with civil society and local peacebuilders, the wider peacebuilding community as well as with donors.

Current conflicts and their regional ramifications are symptomatic of a complex reality where conflicts intersect with transversal global challenges, such as the erosion of global norms, digital revolution, large-scale migrations, climate and environmental degradation, proliferation of armed groups, fragmentation of security actors, and societal polarization. The peacekeeping sector alone cannot address these rapidly evolving dynamics. Therefore, the adaptation of mandates and better integration with other peace actors will be crucial for complementary partnerships advancing stabilization, ensuring the protection of civilians, and building peace.

[22] Cedric de Coning, Ingvild Brox Brodtkorb, Thor Olav Iversen, and Jenny Lorentzen, Improving the impact of the UN Peacebuilding Commission and enhancing the synergy of the Peacebuilding Architecture: Input Paper for the 2025 (Twenty-year) Review of the UN Peacebuilding Architecture, Report 10/2024, Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI): Oslo.

The question at hand is not merely about how to expand the scope of future peace operations to address these evolving threats, but rather of ensuring that these missions are equipped to analyze and prioritize actions to handle the new realities and complexities of conflicts. **To achieve such goals, peacekeepers will need to forge stronger partnerships, in particular with host communities and the peacebuilding sector at large**, to jointly coordinate efforts, as well as to appropriately distribute funding resources between peacekeeping and peacebuilding activities. This can only be achieved when peace operations are empowered to do so by the Security Council and General Assembly.

Sustainable through Transitions

Transitions are a litmus test for integration (and for adaptability). Successful transitions are also critical to sustainable peace once the mission has left. Transitions will rarely happen along pre-planned timelines. In the past years, the combination of political, financial and operational challenges and pressures has led to rather rushed transitions or exits. For any transition, but particularly in those cases, success factors – including for transitioning peacebuilding tasks – are **an early and clear joint vision for the transition that is shared by the relevant peacekeeping and peacebuilding actors, a realistic assessment of remaining capacities as a mission withdraws, and a joint funding strategy.**

A well-planned transition strategy should begin at the onset of the mission. It must be framed around the progressive attainment of clearly defined peace conditions. **The exit of peacekeepers should be formulated based on measurable progress toward sustainable peace and conditions that ensure long-term stability and resilience rather than political imperatives and fixed timelines.**[23] And, critically, exit strategies must account for the likelihood of future shocks and ensure that local institutions can manage them. This means fostering collaboration among peacekeeping forces, development actors, civil society organizations, and the private sector to build self-sustaining economic and governance structures. The role of humanitarian-development-peace actors is crucial in this phase, as they can support post-mission efforts and help mitigate the risks of relapse into violence.

Recommendations

Peacebuilding as a UN System-wide Goal and Responsibility

The General Assembly, Security Council, Peacebuilding Commission and Secretary-General should **approach peacebuilding – preventing conflict by addressing its underlying drivers and causes – as an overarching UN responsibility**.

In this paper, the focus has been on the responsibility of peacekeeping operations, both in terms of being accountable for certain specific peacebuilding tasks, as per the mission's mandate, as well as being responsible for coordinating with others, including the host state and society, the wider UN system and other international partners. The 2025 Peacebuilding Architecture Review provides a unique opportunity to further develop processes and structures, because it is only if the UN system as a whole works together with host states and society, and international partners, that the UN can achieve its core task of maintaining international peace and security.

[23] Interpeace, "Rethinking Stability: Key Findings and Actionable Recommendations," *Interpeace*. (2022).

Strong leadership, from Member States and the Secretary-General, will be needed to direct and guide a whole-of-UN approach to peacebuilding. In terms of institutional structures and processes, increased cooperation and complementarity between the UN Security Council and the Peacebuilding Commission – with the PBC focusing on medium to long-term actions that prevent future conflict by addressing underlying drivers and causes – will be a key factor in driving both a UN system-wide approach to peacebuilding, as well as strengthening the peacekeeping and peacebuilding nexus.

In practical terms, both the *Peacebuilding Architecture Review (PBAR)* and the *Comprehensive Review of all Forms of Peace Operations* should call for a strengthening of the relationship between the UNSC and the PBC. This should include more clarity on the complementary and mutually reinforcing division of labour, and a more institutionalized role for the PBC to provide advice to the UNSC on the countries and themes on its agenda in the area of peacebuilding including during mandate creation as well as transitions, to ensure better managed transitions and more sustainable outcomes. Crucially, implementing previous commitments, including those made in previous PBARs, the 2016 twin resolutions on sustaining peace, Presidential Statement S/PRST/2018/20 on the PBC's advisory role vis-a-vis the Security Council as well as, specifically on transitions, Resolution SCR 2594 (2021) should be at the centre of such renewed efforts.

Strategic and Operational Coherence

All peace operations should be tasked with ensuring that there is strategic and operational coherence with other parts of the UN system, and agreed international strategic frameworks, including in the area of peacebuilding. Peacekeeping operations and Special Political Missions should be understood as instruments to support broad peace and transition processes. As part of a larger peacebuilding effort, they have a special role to coordinate and ensure broad coherence across a range of actors. In integrated settings in particular, operations will be tasked, through the SRSG, to play a leading role in coordinating the overall effort.

Such coordination includes working towards a shared understanding of the problem and shared vision for solving it, a strategic plan for achieving the vision, as well as various enabling instruments that facilitate information sharing, monitoring, evaluation and learning, as well as pooled or shared funding facilities.

Practitioners from the field have stressed that **a common strategic vision and a leadership in the missions and the UNCT agencies that promotes this vision is the most critical driving factor for integration at the field level.** Structural adjustments will not automatically bring integration. Leaderships in integrated settings - the SRSG, the DSRSGs and the Reps/Deputy Reps of AFPs - need to be champions of integration and invest in a strategic vision shared by the UN presence in the country.

Should peacekeeping and peacebuilding efforts in the future become more agile, adaptable and modular, this will heighten the need for strong **leadership driving a better division of labour on the one hand and stronger integration on the other** – between peace operations, AFPs and other local and international actors.

During transitions, such leadership is key to ensure the requisite capacity, joint vision and funding for a transition of peacebuilding tasks as a basis for sustainability of efforts.

Localized and Locally-owned Processes

To ensure more sustainable peace and security gains, **peace operations should become more people-centered and engage with locally and nationally-owned peacebuilding frameworks by working jointly with local and national stakeholders, while providing technical, financial, and security support as needed**. This includes strengthening partnerships between peacekeeping missions and peacebuilding actors outside and beyond the UN system, including local authorities, communities and civil society organizations.

Because peace operations are temporary, it is important to ensure that the peacebuilding initiatives they engage in are designed from the outset with self-sustainability as a goal and are therefore aimed at supporting local and national efforts and capacities, including national prevention and peacebuilding strategies and national infrastructures for peace.

Exploring Future Opportunities

Adapting peace operations to new realities offers opportunities for strengthening peacekeeping and its contribution to a broader peacebuilding agenda. **Discussions about new models and modus operandi for peace operations should thus place the peacekeeping-peacebuilding-interface at their centre.**

Upcoming reviews and reforms should include **exploring future opportunities for and synergies with peace operations as part of a broad prevention and peacebuilding agenda**. This includes exploring whether and how peace operations can, in their area of deployment, align with and support national prevention priorities and national prevention strategies by creating synergies with the efforts by the UNCT, the PBF and the PBC to support such strategies. Regional prevention strategies, as suggested by the Secretary-General in his November 2024 report on peacebuilding and sustaining peace, could be bolstered through synergies between peace operations and the UN's regional offices as well as subregional organizations.

Where peace operations have a protection mandate, the implementation of protection and peacebuilding tasks could be more closely linked. This is relevant for activities related to tier I (protection through dialogue and engagement), tier II (provision of physical protection) and tier III (establishing a protective environment) and for activities implemented at the community level. For example, community engagement could focus on peacebuilding tasks that can have a protection impact. Similarly, investments in community security at the interface of peacekeeping and peacebuilding could be scaled up.

With national and international actors, there is a need to look into **innovative ways of funding peacebuilding, especially during and after transitions** to ensure capacity and sustainability including for locally-led peacebuilding efforts. During transitions there should be an increased share of funding from the peacekeeping budget for strengthening the peacebuilding capacity of national actors, as well as a country-level system-wide joint funding strategy for supporting such initiatives after the mission has left.

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Local Politics and Perspectives in UN Peace Operations

Introduction

In 2022-24, there were violent protests against the UN peacekeeping operation in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), MONUSCO, in which several dozen people were killed, including a number of UN peacekeepers. Though the mission has delivered multiple successes during its 26 years in the country, the persistence of violence in the East and a perceived reluctance to protect civilians have led to popular discontent with its presence among some parts of the population. Similar protests against the peacekeeping operations in the Central African Republic and Mali also turned violent – in the case of Mali, anti-UN sentiment was shared by the government, which withdrew its consent to the mission, MINUSMA, in 2023, forcing it to depart completely. This was followed by the withdrawal of government consent for the UN Integrated Transitional Assistance Mission in Sudan (UNITAMS) in 2023 and its withdrawal the following year.

While violent protests are not necessarily representative of the broader population, these episodes nevertheless represent an expansion of such sentiments to larger numbers of people; a serious escalation in the way they are expressed; and a new willingness on the part of host governments to withdraw consent and eject the UN – and in the worst cases, to turn to private military contractors instead, as in Mali. In the most extreme cases, these outcomes increase insecurity for civilians, impunity, and humanitarian crises, risks that can spread rapidly beyond the borders of the host state and have repercussions for entire regions and beyond. **In this regard, these events demonstrate in the starkest terms the importance of engaging with local political dynamics, building local legitimacy and ownership, and taking into account local perceptions in making UN peacekeeping both successful and cost-effective.** As the 2024 *Future of Peacekeeping* report noted, local populations are one of the "critical parties" whose consent and cooperation are essential to peacekeeping.[1]

Indeed, UN peacekeeping missions operate in contested environments where legitimacy, local perceptions, and effective communication with local populations can significantly influence their success or failure. Where the UN engages with local and sub-national politics, conflicts, and peacebuilding efforts, rather than simply the national level, it is more likely to ensure a solid basis for long-lasting peace and to prevent a turn towards authoritarianism and exclusionary politics.[2] Moreover, where local populations feel a sense of ownership of the process of building peace in their country and feel that the UN understands and responds to their concerns, then both the legitimacy and sustainability of UN peacekeeping will increase, encouraging local actors to work with the UN and ensuring that they have the capacity to continue processes of reconciliation and reconstruction over the longer term.[3] In this way, **engaging with local populations can enhance UN efforts, which over the long-term can help to save costs and improve mandate implementation**.

Importantly, local perceptions of the conflict(s), national political dynamics, local peacebuilding efforts, and the UN's presence can vary dramatically within host country

[1] El-Ghassim Wane, Paul D. Williams and Ai Kihara-Hunt, *The Future of Peacekeeping, New Models and Related Capabilities* (United Nations, 2024), 10.
[2] Sarah von Billerbeck, Birte Julia Gippert, Kseniya Oksamytna, and Oisín Tansey. *United Nations Peacekeeping and the Politics of Authoritarianism* (Oxford University Press, 2025).
[3] Sarah von Billerbeck, *Whose Peace? Local Ownership and United Nations Peacekeeping* (Oxford University Press, 2016).

populations – among ethno-linguistic or religious groups, across regions, and among youth, women, and displaced peoples, among others. Yet an accurate understanding of these differing local concerns and perspectives is critical to effective planning, and UN peacekeeping personnel therefore need to find ways to engage with a wide variety of constituencies.

Missions have made large strides in this regard, and both civilian staff and uniformed personnel dedicate significant time and resources to engaging with local populations and local politics. Yet, despite a strong emphasis on local engagement and local ownership in numerous UN policy documents and reports,[4] missions still struggle to effectively empower the local population to contribute to peacebuilding and communicate what UN peacekeeping operations can (and cannot) do. The 2015 High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (HIPPO) report stated that "peace operations have some way to go to create strong channels of communication with local populations"[5] and the Future of Peacekeeping report warns that unachievable mandates and unrealistic expectations can fuel popular discontent with missions.[6] **Without feasible mandates, adequate resources, and clear expectations management, discontent with UN missions is likely to persist.**

This paper explores some of the most prominent issues in ensuring adequate consideration of local politics and perspectives in UN peacekeeping:

- First, engagement with **local political dynamics and local peacebuilding efforts** is critical to making UN peacekeeping acceptable and effective. Indeed, while peacekeeping processes tend to focus on the national level, conflict is often situated at the sub-national and local level, driven by local considerations and impacting local communities most severely. Failure to work with local partners and adequately connect the national and local levels will increase risks for the mission and lead to inefficiencies and ineffective use of resources.
- Second, **local legitimacy** yields important operational benefits but relies heavily on the comportment and proximity of UN peacekeepers, impartiality and engagement with a range of constituencies, and the delivery of tangible results for the population.
- Third, effective peacekeeping relies on having high-quality and nuanced **local knowledge and local perceptions data**. However, due to resourcing and access issues, missions may struggle to incorporate local knowledge and information into their planning, may exclude or dismiss certain voices, or may fail to recognize important variations between constituencies and across different contexts.[7] Equally, high-quality longitudinal public opinion data in host countries is limited, making it difficult for missions to engage in outreach and planning accordingly.[8]
- Fourth, effective peacekeeping relies not only on gathering information on local perspectives, but also on communicating information back to local populations and demonstrating concrete results on the ground. Where mandates are unachievable or

[4] See, for example, United Nations, *United Nations Peacekeeping Operations: Principles and Guidelines* (United Nations, 2008) (hereafter "Capstone Doctrine"); United Nations, *High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations*, A/70/95-S/2015/446 (United Nations, 2015) (hereafter "HIPPO report"); and individual mission mandates.
[5] United Nations, *HIPPO report*.
[6] Wane et al., *The Future of Peacekeeping, New Models and Related Capabilities* (United Nations, 2024).
[7] Sarah von Billerbeck, Katharina P. Coleman, Steffen Eckhard, and Benjamin Zyla, "Local Knowledges in International Peacebuilding: Acquisition, Filtering, and Systematic Bias," *International Studies Review* 26, no. 4 (2024): 1-28.
[8] Albert Trithart, "Local Perceptions of UN Peacekeeping: A Look at the Data," *International Peace Institute* (2023).

where results are not forthcoming, not visible, or not well communicated, there is likely to be a gap between expectations and capabilities that can quickly turn perceptions against the UN. In this regard, it is critical for missions to engage proactively in **managing expectations and strategic communication** with local populations, including through the use of new technologies.

To overcome these challenges, UN peace operations require **sustained resources for engaging with local actors and processes, support and training from New York, and member state backing**. The final section of this paper provides a list of concrete recommendations in this regard.

Engaging with Local Political Dynamics and Local Peace Processes

Over the past decade, the **"primacy of politics"** has become a central tenet of UN peace operations.[9] The idea that peacekeeping should be designed and deployed to support political processes was articulated in the 2015 HIPPO report and subsequently re-emphasized in the UN's Action for Peacekeeping and Action for Peacekeeping Plus (A4P/A4P+) frameworks. The primacy of politics is often conceived of as applying to formal political processes at the national level, but it is just as relevant to local peace processes, which are critical to consolidating peace.

Indeed, there are often strong linkages between national and sub-national violence, and failing to address local violence can undermine the success of national level processes. Even in cases where a national process does not exist, local peace processes can serve as building blocks toward a national agreement.[10] Moreover, in some contexts, many fatalities in contemporary contexts occur as a result of local conflicts.[11] Focusing only on national level processes may therefore not address some of the most egregious and intractable drivers of violence.

A recognition of the **interrelation between local and national processes** and the importance of local dynamics to national ones has meant that UN peacekeeping operations have long been involved in supporting local peace processes, and this practice has increased over time, becoming a common feature of contemporary peacekeeping mandates. Local engagement is often undertaken by the **Civil Affairs components** of missions, though they work closely with other components to implement tasks such as supporting the implementation of political agreements, holding elections, extending and restoring state authority, and protecting civilians. Indeed, this intra-mission coordination is critical in order to ensure that national and local approaches are complementary and contribute to shared objectives.

Similarly, mission work at the local level also requires strong **civil-military coordination**. Like their civilian components, military and UN police formed units have increasingly become involved in addressing local conflict and working to prevent new flare-ups at the local level. However, uniformed contingents operate on short rotation cycles, while civilian staff are often present at the community level for longer periods of time and thus may develop a deeper understanding of local conflict fault lines as well as partnerships with local peacebuilding organizations and peace constituencies. It is therefore essential that these

[9] United Nations, *HIPPO report*, 78.
[10] Allard Duursma and Jenna Russo, "The Primacy of Politics at the Local Level in UN Peace Operations," *International Peace Institute* (2025).
[11] Allard Duursma, "Non-State Conflicts, Peacekeeping, and the Conclusion of Local Agreements," *Peacebuilding* 10, no. 2 (2022).

different units communicate, share knowledge, and coordinate their efforts to ensure that they are mutually reinforcing.

An excellent example of this sort of engagement involves **Community Liaison Assistants** (CLAs) – national staff that deploy with uniformed contingents to serve as a bridge between troops and communities. Ensuring that troops are fully aware of the role of CLAs, and that they are willing and able to receive guidance from national civilian staff is important to troops' ability to engage effectively with communities. At the same time, CLAs require proper resourcing and support in order to be effective and it is important that missions do not displace all responsibility for liaison to these personnel.

UN efforts to address local conflict also require a focus on addressing drivers of conflict, which are often related to **local political economies**. While peacekeeping missions have usually focused on governance issues, PoC, the rule of law, and human rights and have steered away from local economic issues, it is important to recognize that sustainable and secure livelihoods, land use rights, and regional trading systems are often key drivers of continued violence. Demonstrating concrete improvements in this area can bring divided communities together and help to overcome points of disagreement.

In such cases, the use of **Quick Impact Projects (QIPs)** can be effective, in that they can help facilitate access to resources and serve as catalysts for livelihood opportunities, thus addressing drivers of conflict, while also bolstering trust in the mission. QIPs can also usefully contribute to operational effectiveness, for example through the construction of infrastructure that will be used by UN peacekeepers, such as roads, bridges, and air transport facilities. Missions should also form **partnerships** with actors who may be better situated to address the root causes of conflict, including development actors, the UN country team, local leaders, and others who are more embedded within local communities (please see the policy paper on "The Importance of Peacekeeping Partnerships").

In one example of this kind of engagement, in 2017, the peacekeeping operation in the Central African Republic, MINUSCA, facilitated a local peace process to end violent reprisals over cattle raids between anti-Balaka and ex-Séléka factions in Nana-Bakassa and Kouki. The mission used shuttle diplomacy to engage local authorities, spiritual leaders, and parliamentarians to mediate tensions. This resulted in an agreement that addressed key grievances such as freedom of movement and the cessation of armed activity, fostering improved security and economic interaction. The parties remained committed to the agreement in large part because of the way it divided revenues generated from taxing cattle traders between the anti-Balaka and the ex-Séléka.[12]

More broadly, to ensure the sustainability of local efforts, missions must empower local stakeholders and act as facilitators, rather than as owners, of processes to build peace. Indeed, **local ownership** was recognized in the 2008 Capstone Doctrine as "critical to the successful implementation of a peace process,"[13] first because it can help to ensure that peacekeeping efforts are not externally imposed and second because it can facilitate mandate implementation, build local capacity, and thus help ensure sustainability beyond the UN's withdrawal.[14]

Unfortunately, efforts to promote local ownership often remain primarily rhetorical or are limited to a narrow set of elites or dominant groups, thus leaving out smaller or more marginalized communities. In this regard, the UN could helpfully support local outreach and

[12] Duursma and Russo, "The Primacy of Politics at the Local Level in UN Peace Operations."
[13] United Nations, *Capstone Doctrine*, 39.
[14] von Billerbeck, *Whose Peace? Local Ownership and United Nations Peacekeeping.*

listening efforts to ensure that different communities are involved (e.g. through the provision of neutral spaces and transport) and provide guidance and technical expertise for locally-led peace initiatives. At the same time, these activities must be accompanied by efforts to connect the local and national levels of security and political engagement in order to avoid a piecemeal approach to peacekeeping and different mission components working at cross-purposes.

Building Local Legitimacy

UN peacekeeping is widely acknowledged to enjoy considerable international legitimacy due to its multilateral nature. However, these views are not always shared in host countries and there can be significant variation in legitimacy perceptions within local populations. **Local legitimacy entails the acceptance of a UN peace operation by the local population**, and the 2008 Capstone Doctrine identified local legitimacy as a key success factor for UN peacekeeping.[15] Local legitimacy can increase cooperation with the mission and can help to reduce hostility towards it, thereby lowering security risks to peacekeepers and enhancing effectiveness.

Local legitimacy has many sources. Most importantly, it derives from a mission's effectiveness in protecting civilians and maintaining security (please see policy paper on "Protection of Civilians in Peace Operations"), but it is also directly related to numerous other factors:

- **Protection of civilians and maintenance of security**
- The **conduct and behavior** of military, police, and civilian peacekeepers
- **Respect for local customs, institutions, and laws**
- **Responsiveness to the population's changing concerns and needs**
- Perceived ability to **deliver concrete benefits** to the population

Research has shown that local perceptions of a mission's legitimacy are likely to decline over time, and it is thus critical for missions to **actively and continuously engage in efforts to enhance legitimacy and build trust across a range of population groups**. This includes remaining unbiased and interacting impartially with all stakeholders, responding without delay to threats against civilians, enforcing a zero-tolerance policy towards misconduct (e.g. sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA)), and reacting quickly, decisively, and transparently to any reported incidents.

Most importantly, to achieve these goals and maintain legitimacy over time, UN personnel must **interact with a full range of local actors**, including various ethno-linguistic groups, religious groups, women, youth, displaced peoples, remote communities, and other marginalized or disenfranchised communities. Indeed, public sentiment towards the UN is often related to the proximity of the mission and the degree of interaction people have with peacekeepers.[16] Local governance structures and traditional leaders play important roles in enhancing legitimacy for peacekeeping personnel, and it is therefore also important that they interact with these leaders through both formal or informal consultations in order to understand any growing distrust and work to enhance mission relations with the population.

Unfortunately, as noted above, though some mission components (like Civil Affairs) work closely with local populations, the UN Security Council and mission leadership tend to rely heavily on host governments and often relegate minor or remote groups and communities to the background. Missions are of course required to work closely with host governments for a

[15] United Nations, *Capstone Doctrine*, 36-40.
[16] Trithart, "Local Perceptions of UN Peacekeeping: A Look at the Data."

range of important reasons, relating not least to issues surrounding sovereignty and legal agreements that detail the respective obligations of the mission and the government (such as access to facilities and areas and the status of UN personnel in the country). However, too much of a focus on the government risks excessive attention to the national level at the expense of local dimensions of conflict and peace, and can thus cause resentment towards the UN to develop in some sections of the population or among opposition groups. Indeed, it is increasingly acknowledged that formal government consent to missions alone is insufficient and that consent from the population is also important.[17] Similarly, as a 2013 report noted, "inclusivity increases the domestic legitimacy and thereby sustainability of political settlements,"[18] and reaching out to a wide range of constituents is an important part of making the UN's commitment to impartiality a reality.

Finally, missions can generate local legitimacy by **delivering concrete, visible results** in the short-term.[19] As noted above, **QIPs** are an effective tool in this regard, as they can bring immediate improvements to health, education, commercial, and transportation infrastructure, which can also benefit the mission through facilitated troop, personnel, and equipment movements. They can also enable different UN military contingents to contribute to skills development in a range of relevant areas, which can help to build rapport with the local population in their immediate areas of responsibility and showcase the UN's prioritization of the population's well-being. Indian troops, for example, have successfully undertaken relationship-building activities in Lebanon, Somalia, DRC, and South Sudan, Bangladeshi troops and Chinese medical teams have done so in South Sudan, and Pakistani troops have done so in DRC.[20]

At the same time, it is important that efforts are coordinated across the mission as well as with other international and national partners to avoid overlaps, gaps, or inappropriate projects and to ensure that they benefit as large and diverse a number of people as possible while also contributing to security and stability in general. In this regard, it is important that funding is allocated centrally within missions, and it would be helpful for peacekeeping personnel to receive training prior to deployment on how to engage in relationship-building in the communities where they are based, how to identify local needs and feasible projects, and how to align projects with broader mission goals.

Local Knowledge and Gauging Local Perceptions

High-quality knowledge of the host country, the conflict, and key stakeholders as well as data on public opinions of the mission, security conditions, and local governance are key to effective peacekeeping. Local knowledge and perceptions data feed into planning, strategy, and resource management by enabling missions to **accurately assess risks and opportunities** on an ongoing basis and to more effectively adapt to changes in their operational and political environment.

Missions dedicate a lot of effort to gathering local knowledge – indeed, for uniformed personnel and civilian staff based in field offices, this constitutes a large part of their day-to-day activities. Knowledge acquisition relies on access, both physical and to the correct people; language skills; trust; and the analytical capacity to accurately interpret cues and

[17] Ibid., 2.
[18] United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations and Field Support, *Understanding and Integrating Local Perceptions in Multi-Dimensional UN Peacekeeping* (United Nations, 2013).
[19] Sarah von Billerbeck, "UN Peace Operations and Conflicting Legitimacies," *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding* 11, no. 3 (2017): 286-305.
[20] K.K. Sharma, "Local Community First: India's Enduring Peacekeeping Ethos," *United Service Institute of India Journal* CLIV, no. 636 (2024).

language.[21] Missions have come up with creative ways to do this, for example by using the CLAs mentioned above.

However, resource limitations, such as the costs involved in traveling to certain locations (especially remote ones), staff time constraints, institutional restrictions on contacting certain people, groups, or places, or blocking of access by certain belligerent groups can hinder efforts to gain comprehensive and nuanced local knowledge.[22] Knowledge gathering is therefore sometimes done in an ad hoc, reactive, or uncoordinated way, with different mission components working independently of each other and with insufficient communication between military and civilian personnel. In addition, a tendency to rely on the same interlocutors again and again, while important for building relationships of trust with them, can mean that certain viewpoints are systematically overemphasized while others are systematically excluded, in particular those that may be hostile to or critical of the UN. In the worst cases, mission personnel can be targeted with disinformation or misinformation, both about the peacekeeping operation and the broader political and security situation in the country, and they may be unable to protect against this or accurately and quickly sort out reliable from unreliable information due to resource limitations.

Equally, **systematic opinion polls on local perceptions** of a mission or the broader political and security situation have not been conducted regularly in most missions and therefore little high-quality large-scale or longitudinal data exist. Instead, missions rely primarily on interviews, focus groups, public meetings, or media monitoring,[23] but this necessarily limits coverage and means that data on local perceptions are sometimes based on the views of a sub-section of the population and/or only represent a snapshot at a particular moment, without tracing change over time. This in turn can lead to blind spots or bias in missions' local knowledge, ultimately hindering effective decision-making and the mission's ability to adapt, to seize unexpected opportunities, and to adjust policies and programs to changing circumstances.

It is therefore important that peacekeeping missions have **resources to gather local knowledge**, including staff time, travel to different locations on a regular basis, and the tools to accurately analyze information. In addition, personnel should be given training in impartial knowledge gathering and missions should regularly self-assess their efforts in this regard to ensure that no important viewpoints are being missed. Finally, missions need the resources to undertake larger perception surveys or to sub-contract this to reliable third parties – indeed, significant expertise exists in this kind of work among academics and analysts who study peace operations. Across all of these activities, **advancements in information technology and the use of AI** could helpfully enhance peacekeepers' ability to gather and interpret perceptions data cost-effectively and at scale.

Managing Expectations and Strategic Communications

While gathering information on the local context and conflict and on local perceptions is critical for peacekeepers, communication must be a two-way street. It is therefore equally important for peacekeepers to **communicate with the local population** about their goals, activities, and roles, to share clear, impartial, and up-to-date information about the political and security situation, to provide updates on mission progress, and to create regular

[21] von Billerbeck et al., "Local Knowledges in International Peacebuilding: Acquisition, Filtering, and Systematic Bias."
[22] Ibid.
[23] United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations and Field Support, *Understanding and Integrating Local Perceptions*.

opportunities for the population to respond to and question the mission. Doing so is key to ensuring that local expectations of what the mission can and cannot do are realistic and that local actors view the UN as a reliable partner for peace in their country. As the Future of Peacekeeping report has noted, "a serious **'capability-expectations gap'** emerges when peacekeepers are insufficiently resourced to deliver fully on their mandates or expectations are unrealistically high."[24] Avoiding this kind of misunderstanding through careful **expectations management and strategic communications** will enhance the safety of UN peacekeepers and allow them to focus on mandate implementation.

Of course, with so many diverse stakeholders, managing expectations in UN peacekeeping is a complex task, since what different groups expect and want from a UN presence in their country will vary. In addition, inadequate resources, insufficient personnel and/or peacekeepers deployed thinly over large areas, vague or unrealistic mandates, security challenges, logistical constraints, and resistant political leaders all add to the challenges of managing expectations.

More specifically, mandates sometimes call for broad objectives like nation-building, but peacekeepers are often not trained or equipped to undertake such tasks, provided with little guidance on how to fulfil them, and are not given sufficient resources to complete them, meaning that expectations cannot be met. Equally, local populations often expect peacekeepers to act as an army or government substitute, providing security, governance, and economic aid, but again, these are usually beyond the mandate and are certainly beyond the available resources. Finally, the media can create unrealistic expectations by oversimplifying the role of peacekeepers or portraying failures without acknowledging constraints. Social media in particular spreads both accurate and misleading narratives, influencing public opinion and political pressure, but peacekeeping personnel often lack the resources to counter or balance these effects.

Successfully managing expectations in these conditions involves two sets of actions: first, collecting data on local views, as discussed above, and second, strategic communications. As described, there is a lack of **primary data on local perceptions**, but such data are crucial for understanding the needs, concerns, and trust in the UN of local populations. At the same time, language barriers can pose a challenge, and some areas may be too dangerous for direct surveys. In addition, respondents may be afraid of retaliation from belligerents and refrain from providing honest answers or from responding at all.

Despite these challenges, numerous missions have managed to collect data on public perceptions. The peacekeeping missions in Mali (MINUSMA) and the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUSCO) used perception surveys to assess local attitudes toward peacekeepers. Perception survey data in Lebanon (UNIFIL) were used to assess the effectiveness of the mission.[25] Direct engagement with community leaders, youth groups, and women's associations was undertaken in Somalia, Sierra Leone, and Eastern Congo by Indian troops.[26] UNMISS in South Sudan regularly conducts dialogues with displaced persons in PoC sites. Such efforts can be supplemented by monitoring social media platforms, radio, and newspapers to track public opinion trends and analyze local perceptions based on digital conversations. In both of these sets of activities, new technologies and AI-supported tools as well as engagement with external experts can help missions to undertake these efforts without heavy investments of UN personnel's time.

[24] Wane et al., *The Future of Peacekeeping, New Models and Related Capabilities* (United Nations, 2024), 10.
[25] A.K. Bardalai, *Keeping the Peace: UN Peace Operations and their Effectiveness – An Assessment* (Pentagon Press, 2022), 120-177.
[26] Sharma, "Local Community First: India's Enduring Peacekeeping Ethos."

Strategic communications entails the use of coordinated messaging to keep all mission components aligned, engagement activities aimed at shaping public perceptions and reinforcing the mission's legitimacy, and efforts to disseminate accurate and timely information about the mission and the political and security situation in the country. Strategic communications can include public information campaigns, media outreach to stakeholders, and communication strategies for crisis management.

In particular, in a conflict-ridden and/or remote areas, populations often rely on radio as their primary source of information. **UN-supported radio stations** provide neutral, fact-based news about peacekeeping efforts, and also serve to build local capacity for disseminating reliable, accurate, and factual information – examples include Radio Miraya in South Sudan, Radio Okapi in DRC, and Guira FM in Central African Republic. These stations broadcast UN and local news, provide fact-based information, and bring in local artists and speakers to highlight culture, common concerns, and community activities, and are often widely viewed as the most reliable news source in a host country.

At the same time, the expansion of **social media** constitutes an additional challenge to expectations management, since **mis- and disinformation** often circulate more – and more quickly – on these platforms. Here, the UN needs to adopt a proactive, multi-layered strategy that includes real-time monitoring, strategic engagement, and community outreach. Again, AI-driven analysis tools could be deployed to identify any false narratives at their early stages and detect viral disinformation trends. The UN mission can also use trusted local voices including religious leaders, village elders, community figures, and respected journalists to counter mis- and disinformation. In Lebanon, UNIFIL has successfully used social media videos to clarify its neutral role amid regional tensions.[27] The UN can also employ CLAs to refute rumors in face-to-face engagements at the community level. Similarly, townhall meetings conducted by a contingent commander in Kailahun, Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) during crises afforded opportunities to directly address misinformation.

Importantly, these sorts of events also give community members the opportunity to respond to the UN, share grievances, and ask questions, which can help to build trust in and legitimacy for the mission. By investing in community engagement, data-driven decision-making, and proactive messaging, peacekeeping operations can manage expectations, counter mis- and disinformation, enhance popular trust in the UN, and thereby improve their effectiveness.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Improving local perceptions of UN peacekeeping is only possible if UN personnel:

- Engage with local conflict dynamics and local peace initiatives
- Enjoy legitimacy at the local level
- Have adequate, accurate, and deep knowledge of the local context and of the concerns of local populations
- Regularly work to manage expectations and engage in strategic communications

Unfortunately, unrealistic or vague mandates, resource constraints, security restrictions, a lack of training, a lack of access to advanced technologies, and institutional incentives frequently leave mission personnel unable to fully engage in these activities.

[27] United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon, "Social Media," https://unifil.unmissions.org/social-media (accessed on 16 April 2025).

However, **investment by member states, alongside strong support from UN headquarters**, can enable staff to engage more deeply, regularly, and widely with local populations. This investment will in the long run render peacekeeping more successful and cost-effective, leading to sustainable results and reducing risks to personnel. This in turn can prevent conflict spillover into neighboring states, forestall conflict recidivism, alleviate humanitarian crises, and reduce refugee outflows.

Specifically, we have the following recommendations:

- Member states should adequately **resource the work of missions at the local level**, including regular engagement activities with the local population through **joint programs, listening sessions, and feedback opportunities for the population**, as well as travel allowances, the provision of neutral spaces, the provision of technical expertise and mediation support, and the continued engagement of and adequate support to CLAs.
- Member states should provide **continued funding for QIPs**, and missions should coordinate funding for local-level projects across civilian and military components to both maximize benefits for the local population and ensure that they align with overall mission objectives.
- Mission leaders and member states should promote **civil-military coordination frameworks** that ensure a shared understanding of objectives, including regular **joint planning sessions** at mission headquarters and in field offices and **integrated training programs**.
- Missions should form **partnerships with actors who are able to address longer-term drivers of conflict**. This includes national and local actors, the UN country team, and other development teams that can implement sustainable solutions.
- Missions should provide **training for military and civilian personnel about how to gather local knowledge** in a comprehensive way that avoids blind spots and bias and invest in tools that enable missions to **self-assess** these efforts.
- Member states should invest in **new technologies and AI-assisted tools to monitor public opinion and combat mis- and disinformation** and in **larger public perceptions** surveys, potentially through external experts and academics.
- Member states should provide **resources for enhanced strategic communications** by missions that highlight UN support to the local population, local ownership of the peacebuilding process, ensure cultural sensitivity, and highlight the benefits and limits of what UN peace operations can do. This includes funding for **UN radio stations, social media campaigns, and other media engagement**.

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Leadership in UN Peace Operations

Leadership in UN PK Doctrine

Leadership in the field as well as at headquarters can significantly shape the way UN peace operations work and how they can achieve their objectives.[1] A number of doctrinal documents and reports on reform as well as lessons learned from the past 25 years repeatedly emphasized this nexus. Most recently, the study on the future of peacekeeping by Wane, Williams, and Kihara-Hunt markedly stated that "[l]eadership can make or break a peace operation" (p. 40).

The leadership aspect of UN peace operations is centred on, but not limited to the figure at the helm of the mission (usually a Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG)). It also includes other key appointments in the mission, most notably Deputy SRSGs, Force Commanders, Police Commissioners or Chiefs of Staff. Together, they share the task of giving life to the mandates and directives of the Security Council and Member States. The importance of facilitating this task was already highlighted in the Brahimi Report of 2000 (A/55/305 – S/2000/809), which underlined the „necessity to provide field missions with high-quality leaders and managers who are granted greater flexibility and autonomy by Headquarters, within clear mandate parameters." (para. 6(i)).

This was echoed in the Capstone Doctrine of 2008, which argued that "[e]ffective leadership and strong managerial skills are at a premium during start-up" (p. 68). It also echoes the call that SRSGs should be „given significant delegated authority to set the direction of the mission and to lead its engagement with the political process on the ground" (p. 68). This assessment was reinforced by the 2015 HIPPO report (A/70/95–S/2015/446) and its emphasis on the need for "strengthening leadership and management, removing compartmentalized mindsets at Headquarters and ensuring stronger and more effective field-oriented support to United Nations peace operations." (para. 34(a)).

The focus on leadership does not only imply broadening the scope of action of leaders but also strengthening accountability of mission leaders. In that context, the 2017 Cruz report urged that "leadership from the SRSG to the rank and file will default to action, and not inaction when faced with security-related decisions." (p. V) The most recent initiatives under Secretary-General Guterres, Action for Peacekeeping, Action for Peacekeeping+ and the New Agenda for Peace, also return to the question of leadership and accountability in peace operations (e.g. with regard to compliance with the UN's zero-tolerance policy on sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA)). A4P+ argues for targeted use of outreach campaigns (e.g. the Global Call) to increase the number of women leaders, while the Leadership Partnership Initiative is a leadership support tool for currently serving leaders. It also outlined deliverables where heads of mission should take the lead, including empowering Chiefs of Staff, incorporating gender data and expertise for strategic planning, as well as strengthening cooperation with UN Country Teams (p. 7-8).

[1] The following considerations are based upon a diverse set of publications in an ongoing research project on SRSG leadership at Trier University, including a forthcoming edited volume on "Leaders and Leadership in UN Peace Operations". Part of the ongoing research effort is the development of a SRSG database. Academic research on leadership of individual actors in an international context has increased over the last years. For a short list of titles for further reference see the bibliography at the end. The text is based on the authors' own publications and research.

Roles and Arenas of Leadership

Leading UN peace operations is a complex field of engagement with a multitude of dynamics. Research differentiates at least three roles that SRSGs (used here as a shortcut to include not only SRGSs but also Envoys, Advisers, Representatives and the management team at large) are tasked to fulfil: They serve as *managers of conflict* (leading the mediation between different conflict parties and mission stakeholders), *managers of administration* (leading the administration and structure of the mission) as well as *managers of ideas* (leading the peace operation by introducing new concepts and tools in operationalizing the mission mandate). This already implies that SRSGs face different tasks, principals and followers in different arenas – such as vis-à-vis the Security Council and Headquarters in New York, the host government or troop-contributing countries from around the world as well as diverse conflict parties or mission staff on the ground. Not all leaders in peace operations will succeed in all of these roles and arenas to the same extent. Any understanding of the selection of leaders and leadership teams will also have to acknowledge that this selection is a genuinely political undertaking where different rationales have to be reconciled. But the experiences and skills, the management and leadership styles of senior mission leadership personnel do offer a resource that should not only be used productively in the mission but can also be taken into account already when selecting personnel. SRSGs will have to take decisions under the conditions of scarce information, time and resources. They will also have to regularly face different types of crises in which individual traits and resources will come to the fore. Trying to systematically assess the qualities of leadership personnel is an endeavour that the UN is already engaged in with various work streams in the Leadership Support Section at DPO-DPPA. For example, there has been a shift in recruitment patterns: today, approximately half of senior leaders are selected from outside the UN system, reflecting growing appreciation for external professional experience in addition to UN tenure. The upcoming review of all peace operations thus presents an important opportunity to continuously optimize leadership structures – fostered through dialogue and exchange with Member States, the Secretariat, representatives from civil society, academia, and stakeholders on the ground.

However, while leadership emerges as a critical factor, an overreliance on a single leadership figure carries the risk of overestimating individual influence while underestimating structural and institutional challenges. In fact, managers below the SRSG level, represented in the Mission Leadership Team, bear important responsibility. They not only influence the practical aspects of mandate implementation but also are at the forefront of managing teams and creating an enabling workplace culture. Consequently, the 2024 C34 report (A/78/19, para. 44) reaffirms that fostering a respectful and misconduct-free work environment is a shared responsibility that should be integrated in the performance objectives of senior leaders. In this context, the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) has pointed to gaps in performance management at the senior level below the SRSG, including insufficient accountability and oversight in staff supervision (A/75/803 (2021), paras. 20–21; 35–39), highlighting the need to strengthen both leadership and management practices.

More broadly, there is a pressing need to review and strengthen performance management systems. In some instances, mission leadership has remained unchanged despite underperformance, which negatively affects staff morale and mission outcomes. Establishing robust and timely performance evaluation mechanisms is thus critical to ensuring leadership accountability.

A Modular Approach to Peacekeeping

As the UN faces increasingly complex operational environments, the concept of a modular approach to peacekeeping missions has gained prominence, enabling more agile and context-specific missions. According to Wane, Williams, and Kihara-Hunt, a modular approach to peacekeeping missions "would entail designing flexible missions tailored for particular contexts by combining different models, packages of capabilities, and modalities, and working closely with a range of partners (from inside and beyond the UN system)." The report adds: "The initial design and partnership arrangements would then be adapted as the context evolves" (p. 18). This approach alters how peace missions operate and therefore has implications on the concept and practice of leadership within these operations. The report i.a. states that "the UN needs to consider shifting towards skills-based, rather than experience-based, recruitment, prioritizing specialized capabilities, and encouraging younger candidates with fresh perspectives for whom the absence of prior UN experience is not seen as a shortcoming" (p. 40).

In this context, a number of relevant questions emerge that warrant further exploration: SRSGs (and their teams) responsible for building up a mission may require different qualities than those needed when winding down a mission. The skills and attributes of an SRSG can be balanced and complemented by those of their staff to enable a productive division of labour, particularly in managing the interplay between civilian and military leadership. Close attention should also be paid to the need for mission leadership to regularly adapt to evolving circumstances, including escalating conflict, changes in government or shifts in available resources, which has been a focus of the debate leading up to the 2025 Peacekeeping Ministerial in Berlin.

The Link Between Leadership and a Modular Approach to Peace Operations

Thinking about leadership within modular approaches implies highlighting the specific challenges faced by existing missions. SRSGs often operate in an environment shaped by competing expectations from host governments, UN headquarters, troop- and police-contributing countries (TCCs/PCCs), and Member States. These challenges are further compounded by geopolitical rivalries, and a lack of consensus within the Security Council. Although SRSGs hold comparatively significant authority, their actual power remains limited. For example, previous initiatives that aimed at strengthening mission leadership autonomy (such as the Delegation of Authority reform) have been viewed as promising enablers of more flexible and efficient mission planning. However, their overall success has been partly constrained by inconsistent implementation (cf. Jacquand, 2020).

Moreover, as repeatedly emphasized by the Secretary-General, there is a "persistent mismatch between mandates and available resources" (Statement by António Guterres, United Nations Security Council, 2025). To remain successful despite these constraints, peacekeeping missions and their leadership need to become more adaptable, and a modular approach could purposefully contribute to enhancing the capacities of SRSGs and central mission components.

At the same time, a risk-averse culture within the UN Secretariat – often shaped by anticipated reactions from the Security Council – continues to hinder proactive planning and action. To enable more forward-looking and adaptive responses under uncertain political conditions, it is essential to reinvigorate a culture of planning and scenario-building within the

Secretariat (cf. statement by Jenna Russo, United Nations Security Council, 2025; Chen, 2024, p. 27). This requires a cultural shift that supports measured risk-taking, backed by strong leadership and the engagement of Member States.

Moreover, public opinion in the host country can significantly affect a mission's legitimacy, and mission leadership must sensitively navigate these dynamics. In this context, a modular approach requires early and sustained engagement with national actors to build trust from the outset and reduce the risk of political tensions.

Modular approaches could help to use limited resources more effectively, but they must not serve as a justification for underfunding or lowering the ambitions of peacekeeping missions. A modular approach is intended to enhance the impact of peace operations – not to diminish their objectives.

Despite these challenges, modularity offers concrete opportunities for leadership:

- **Strategic realignment**: A greater delegation of long-term development tasks to UN country teams and partners could allow SRSGs to focus more intensively on high-level diplomacy, mediation, and political engagement.
- **Real-time adaptability**: Modularity enables swift responses to political shifts or crises. However, core responsibilities – particularly the protection of civilians – must not be diluted into optional or non-binding modules (cf. statement by Jenna Russo, United Nations Security Council, 2025).
- **Proactive transition planning**: Modular missions should integrate exit strategies and handover plans from the outset. As emphasized in the Pact for the Future (A/RES/79/1, Action 21 (c)), early transition planning allows for the gradual delegation of responsibilities and helps to ensure the sustainability of mission achievements.

UN peacekeeping missions are increasingly experiencing drawdowns and transitions. Transitions are strategic processes that should begin early to promote sustainable peace and strengthen national ownership (cf. resolution 2594 (S/RES/2594), and SRSGs play a central role in this context: they balance competing interests and ensure that mission drawdowns align with the host countries' peace and development strategies. In doing so, they work to overcome existing silos between missions and other UN entities. SRSGs must guide mission staff through the uncertainties that come with transitions, ensuring that morale and operational effectiveness are maintained. Past experiences show that a lack of coordination particularly in these areas can significantly hinder transition processes. Low staff morale also negatively affects the successful implementation of transitions (A/75/787, paras. 58-59).

Another challenge that SRSGs will have to face is to anticipate the “funding cliff,” i.e. the sudden drop in financial resources. To cope with this challenge, they should proactively mobilize support early on by building relationships with donors, collaborating with international financial institutions, and securing resources from the Peacebuilding Fund (S/2022/522, paras. 30-33). A modular approach can help in dealing with these challenges by pursuing an overarching leadership effort while at the same time compartmentalizing certain problems and tasks as management challenges. In addition, modular configurations—if sequenced and framed accordingly—could enable more predictable and staged opportunities for performance assessment and strategic adjustment. This may help identify appropriate moments for leadership transitions or course corrections, including exit options where needed, thereby reinforcing accountability while preserving operational flexibility.

Still, there should not be the illusion that all these modular tasks will easily align themselves to a coherent mission effort. While modularity can, for example, facilitate alignment with

donor interests, it also carries risks of fragmentation. Trying the uphold the unity of purpose, dealing with a diversity of actors and interests as well as making decisions on priorities and posteriorities will continue to bring about serious ethical dilemmas (cf. JIU/REP/2004/9; Labuda, 2020). Steering a modular mission will therefore present some old and some new opportunities as well as challenges for individual leadership on the ground and at Headquarters. In this context, it is worth further exploring what shared leadership structures, such as co-leadership models or clearly delineated functional leadership roles, would require in terms of coordination, support structures, and evaluation frameworks. Such models may offer more resilience in volatile environments if backed by appropriate guidance and oversight.

Policy Recommendations

- **Matching skills and competencies with modular tasks**: In a modular approach, SRSGs and other civilian leaders should be selected based on demonstrated competencies, including the ability to build trust, empower teams, and navigate complex interpersonal and institutional dynamics. They shape mission culture through decision-making and by leading by example. Effective SRSGs already cultivate partnerships with regional organizations, international financial institutions, NGOs, and bilateral actors and. In several past missions, they have also established „support groups" of Member States. A modular approach builds on these capabilities and positions SRSGs more prominently as diplomatic facilitators. Structured and tailored training programs could help prepare leaders specifically for these tasks, highlighting that leadership selection and development must be a continuous process. However, leadership development does not end with recruitment. Continuous support mechanisms such as mentoring, team-building initiatives, and psychosocial services are essential to sustaining leadership effectiveness throughout deployment. Despite evidence of high returns, such programs remain underfunded and under-prioritized. Increased commitment is needed to strengthen these leadership support systems across the mission lifecycle.
- **Structuring leaders' initial deployment phase**: New SRSGs and other senior leaders in UN peace operations already undergo various pre-deployment briefings and training – depending on the context of their tasks. However, since joining an existing team can still be challenging, the initial phase of deployment could be formalized in such a way that SRSGs and other members of the Mission Leadership Team overlap with each other without the successor having to make far-reaching decisions and be briefed for an initial phase. Observations of past overlapping deployment phases suggest that this has had beneficial effects. Member States may take the initiative to facilitate such a procedure, which is currently inhibited by budgetary and timing constraints. Still, practical limitations—such as budgetary constraints (including the issue of double-pay), logistical delays, and interpersonal dynamics—can inhibit meaningful overlap. These challenges should be taken into account and proactively addressed to operationalize handover mechanisms more consistently.
- **Using data to assess leadership fit**: To better explore which leadership type is required for a certain situation, the employment of quantitative and qualitative research approaches could help facilitate further understanding within the UN system. UN institutions already make use of self-reflective tools and assessments such as the „Leadership and Motivation Questionnaire." Complementary, academic research that systematically assesses personality in the context of personnel from the international

civil service at mission and headquarters levels offers further opportunities to support senior leadership selection. Apart from research underway e.g. on the SRSG database, techniques and tools from foreign policy analysis and political psychology also could offer synergies (especially „at-a-distance"-tools like Leadership Trait Analysis, Operational Code Approach, as well as case studies on crisis management). Since such tools are based on gathering open-source data (speeches, interviews etc.), they can be used without compromising confidentiality of active personnel and potential candidates. Data from prosopographical research (e.g. the SRSG database) could be linked with insights that new analytical tools and approaches could distil from material thus far underexplored (e.g. "End of Mission Reports").

- **"Back to the future" of leadership-driven adaptation and innovation**: Looking back at the origins of the often heavily improvised first peace operations and missions, the present situation may point to some the lessons learned from the early days of peacekeeping. The first missions were in fact all heavily moulded by the hands of dedicated individuals that tried to give life to often vague mandates. One of the creators of peacekeeping, Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld, liked to speak of all the different missions that could compromise a small team or a large military contingent simply as „UN presence" in a given country or situation. Member States did not engage in micro-management of a mission but rather kept an eye on balancing their support and trust with achievables and results from the leadership team. This constellation opened up a maximum amount of flexibility and space to focus on, prioritize or sequence certain aspects of a mission's work and impact. As the early examples also show, this highly flexible and sometimes innovative approach does first and foremost put an emphasis on strategic communication. Leaders in missions are inevitably the personification of the UN presence on the ground and in UN fora. The imperative for sound internal and external communication will be even more important in a new media environment. Member States should, in their own best interest, acknowledge the necessary time, resources and divisions of labour that would allow leadership teams to make the most of a modular approach.

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The Importance of Peacekeeping Partnerships

Introduction

For the last three decades, partnerships in peacekeeping have been prevalent, with the UN conducting operations in partnership with regional and sub-regional organizations, ad-hoc coalitions, and individual member states.[1] More recently, the idea of partnered peacekeeping has grown in prominence due to a range of factors, including an increased demand for peace enforcement and counterterrorism, which is beyond the remit of UN peace operations, the desire to promote subsidiarity, the UN's waning legitimacy in some contexts, and financial constraints.[2]

Partnerships in peacekeeping as collective enterprises rooted in shared responsibilities, offer several benefits, in particular, the ability to draw on the political and operational comparative advantages of a range of actors. For example, in some contexts, regional or sub-regional organizations may possess greater political leverage than the UN (though this is not always the case). These organizations may also be able to deploy more rapidly than the UN, which may require six to twelve months to set up a mission. Conversely, the UN is better able to backstop large missions, given its greater institutional capacity. At the same time, working in partnership can create complications in cases where actors are not working towards a unified goal, where there is a lack of trust and information-sharing, or when they vary in their approach to objectives like the protection of civilians and human rights.[3]

Nevertheless, in the words of former Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, it is clear that the UN has "entered an era of 'partnership peacekeeping,'"[4] and thus it is critical to understand how to leverage the added value of partnerships while mitigating potential challenges. The purpose of this paper is to provide an overview of the following: 1) how the UN works with partners in peacekeeping contexts; 2) who its key partners are; 3) instruments of partnership, such as funding, logistics support, and training; and 4) how changing global dynamics are affecting partnerships. The paper concludes with a series of recommendations for policymakers.

Peacekeeping partnership arrangements

While the UN's partnerships within peacekeeping contexts can take a variety of forms, in general, they may fall under one of the following categories:[5]

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[1] Corinne Bara and Maurice P. Schumann, "Partnership Peacekeeping Works: What Does this Mean in a Divided World?" *IPI Global Observatory* (October 17, 2023).

[2] UN peacekeeping also partners with a range of other actors, including the host state, local communities, and civil society organizations, among others, however the scope of this paper is focused primarily on partnerships at the operational level.

[3] Alexandra Novosseloff and Lisa Sharland, "Partners and Competitors: Forces Operating in Parallel to UN Peace Operations," *International Peace institute* (2019).

[4] United Nations, Report of the Secretary-General, *Partnering for Peace: Moving Towards Partnership Peacekeeping*, S/2015/229 (1 April 2015).

[5] Bara and Schumann, "Partnership Peacekeeping Works," (2023).

Parallel deployments are cases where the UN is deployed alongside one or more actors undertaking related security tasks, such as peacekeeping, peace enforcement, or counterterrorism. While deploying alongside other actors can create complications, research indicates that parallel deployments can be more effective than when the UN deploys alone.[6] This is because parallel deployments can allow for complementarities, for example if a peace enforcement mission carries out offensive operations against belligerents while the UN implements broader peacekeeping or peacebuilding tasks such as institution building or facilitating the delivery of humanitarian aid. Nevertheless, challenges often emerge due to lack of a coordinated approach among actors. Further, previous lessons have highlighted the difficulty of UN peacekeepers operating alongside counterterrorism actors, particularly in the case of Mali, where it was difficult to clearly delineate the work of blue helmets from that of counterterrorism actors.[7]

Examples of current and recent parallel deployments include the UN mission in the DRC (MONUSCO), which operates alongside the SADC force (SAMIDRC); the UN mission in CAR (MINUSCA), which previously operated alongside the French *Sangaris* force; and the UN mission in Mali (MINUSMA), which previously operated alongside several other forces, including French counterterrorism operations *Serval* and *Barkhane*, the G5 Sahel Joint Force, and the EU Training Mission, among others. In addition to parallel peacekeeping deployments, there are several contexts where the UN has deployed special political missions alongside other actors, including in Afghanistan, Somalia, Iraq, and Haiti, among others.

Sequential deployments occur when the UN deploys before or, more commonly, after another peace operation. Because regional and sub-regional forces can often deploy more rapidly than the UN, they may act as first responders in crisis situations, while the UN may support a broader, medium-term presence. This was the case in Mali and CAR, for example, where the AU first deployed missions (AFISMA and MISCA, respectively), followed by UN missions (MINUSMA and MINUSCA). UN peacekeeping missions have followed deployments by sub-regional organizations in several contexts, for example in Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Côte d'Ivoire, among others. In several of these cases, regional and sub-regional forces were re-hatted as part of the UN presence, though this can create complications related to command and control and capability gaps. The case of Darfur represents a unique case, where the AU presence was succeeded by a hybrid UN-AU mission (UNAMID).

Support packages may be provided by the UN to other deployments, with the clearest example being Somalia, where the UN mission (UNSOS) provides logistical and other support to the AU mission (AUSSOM, formerly AMISOM/ATMIS). The Secretary-General also recently proposed the establishment of a UN support office—funded by UN peacekeeping assessed contributions—to support the Multinational Security Support (MSS) mission in Haiti. Support packages aim to be a critical enabler of other actors, including for the task of carrying out robust enforcement missions that are beyond the remit of UN peacekeeping. Lessons from Somalia, however, also highlight challenges that arise when military operations and logistics are led by different institutions. This is compounded by the fact that UN systems were not designed to support kinetic war-fighting efforts, in some cases hampering efforts to achieve military objectives.[8] There are also potential negative consequences to the UN acting as a service provider if not taken alongside a broader political and strategic role.

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[6] Ibid.

[7] Novosseloff and Sharland, "Partners and Competitors," (2019).

[8] Paul D. Williams, "The United Nations Support Office Model: Lessons from Somalia," *International Peace Institute* (2024).

Key partners in UN peacekeeping

At the operational level, the UN partners with a range of actors in peacekeeping contexts, including regional and sub-regional organizations, ad-hoc coalitions, and individual member states. This section is not exhaustive but provides an overview of some key UN peacekeeping partners.

African Union: Over the last two decades, the UN-AU partnership has become highly institutionalized. Under the 2017 Joint Framework for Enhanced Partnership in Peace and Security, the UN and AU strengthened their partnership in preventing and responding to crises, including in planning and managing peace operations. More recently, UN Security Council resolution 2719 (2023) was adopted to provide a framework for financing AU-led peace support operations through UN assessed contributions on a case-by-case basis. As noted above, the UN has partnered with the AU in contexts including Somalia, CAR, Mali, and Darfur, among others. While recent policy dialogues on the UN-AU partnership have centered on the AU's ability to conduct peace enforcement, the AU has led a diverse range of missions that include not only enforcement but a broad set of peacekeeping and peacebuilding tasks. It also plays a critical political role in prevention and mediation. Thus, the UN-AU partnership should be understood as strategic and political, rather than primarily military-based.[9]

African sub-regional organizations: Sub-regional organizations, including regional economic communities (RECs), are prominent in peace operations settings, particularly on the African continent. In some cases, RECs may lead missions under the authority of the AU, while in other cases they may deploy independently or become endorsed or recognized by the AU post-hoc. Similar to AU-led missions, REC-led missions possess a comparative advantage over the UN in their ability to deploy rapidly and undertake enforcement or counterterrorism operations. Depending on the context, there may also be advantages in having states from the region lead the conflict response, though involving neighboring countries in the response can exacerbate political tensions. REC-led missions may undertake a wide range of tasks, including enforcement and counterterrorism operations, election support, observer missions, and health or pandemic response.[10] REC-led missions have operated in partnership with the UN in contexts like Sierra Leone, Côte d'Ivoire, CAR, and the DRC, among others.

While RECs can play an important political and operational role in peace operations settings, there are also limitations, as recently illustrated in contexts like the DRC and Mozambique, where deployments by sub-regional organizations struggled to contain the threat posed by insurgency groups. As events in Cabo Delgado demonstrated, military gains by regional forces are susceptible to reversals in the absence of multidimensional stabilization activities and capacity of national forces to hold liberated territories. Further, because missions led by sub-regional organizations are military-based, they are not able to undertake critical tasks like community engagement or policing. As in Mozambique and DRC, their deployment is without a collectively agreed upon strong political strategy. As a result, in Eastern DRC, while Kinshasa forced the East African Community force to withdraw, charging it for failure to fight against the M23, the Southern Africa Development Community Mission to DRC

[9] Paul D. Williams and Solomon A. Dersso, "Saving Strangers and Neighbours: Advancing UN-AU Cooperation in Peace Operations," *International Peace Institute* (2015).
[10] Nate D.F. Allen, "African-Led Peace Operations: A Crucial Tool for Peace and Security," *African Center for Strategic Studies* (2023).

(SAMIDRC) was forced out as territorial gains by the M23 made its continued operation untenable.

European Union: The EU and UN established a Strategic Partnership on Peace Operations and Crisis Management in 2003 that seeks to improve the coordination, coherence, and effectiveness of their respective peace operations. The EU's civilian and military missions operate in a variety of regions, some in parallel to UN peace operations. They tend to be smaller and more targeted than large UN peacekeeping missions, focusing on tasks such as training and equipping national forces, security sector reform, and specialized tasks such as counter-IED. The EU also leads maritime operations, including to counter piracy in the Horn of Africa and western Indian Ocean.

Ad-hoc arrangements: With the AU and UN failing or unable to respond timely to changing security needs and the resultant vacuum, the use of ad-hoc arrangements has grown. These are preferred in some cases due to their flexibility and ability to operate outside of the cumbersome processes and structures of formal multilateral institutions. They are often used for quick reaction for targeted purposes, including counterterrorism and acute security threats. They can also respond to cross-border or regional threats, for example in the cases of the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) to counter Boko Haram and the G5 Sahel Joint Force. However, because they do not operate under the auspices of the UN or AU, there can be challenges related to mandates, transparency, accountability, identifiable and sustainable financing, and broader coordination with other actors. These shortcomings particularly those relating to political oversight, robust human rights frameworks and the normative priorities of the ad-hoc arrangements that are often driven by counterterrorism imperatives risk militarizing peace operations and undermining civilian trust.

Bilateral financial and capacity-building initiatives: Bilateral financial and capacity-building initiatives represent another significant instrument of partnership in UN peacekeeping. A prime example is the United States' Global Peace Operations Initiative (GPOI). Since 2005, the US has invested over $1.5 billion through GPOI, supporting 55 partner troop- and police-contributing countries around the globe.[11] Other member states have also developed TCC-support programs in specific areas.

Partnerships with local organizations and NGOs: Local actors, including formal and informal governing institutions, as well as non-governmental organizations (NGOs), both local and international, serve as crucial partners in UN peacekeeping, contributing local knowledge, community trust, and specialized skills gained from their direct engagement in conflict-affected areas. NGOs often act as vital links with local populations, facilitating communication, building trust, and providing insights into the needs and concerns of communities. They also play a significant role in delivering humanitarian aid and development assistance, complementing the efforts of peacekeepers.

Instruments of partnerships

As the task of conflict prevention and reduction grows more complex and multidimensional, UN peacekeeping partners can engage in conflict-reduction activities beyond the scope of UN peacekeeping mandates or the allocated capabilities of UN peace operations, such as counterterrorism. Other, more aligned mandates, however, might involve such crucial efforts

[11] US Department of State, *Strengthening UN Peacekeeping Through the Global Peace Operations Initiative* (2021). https://2021-2025.state.gov/dipnote-u-s-department-of-state-official-blog/strengthening-un-peacekeeping-through-the-global-peace-operations-initiative/

as the protection of civilians, support for political processes, security sector reform, and post-conflict reconstruction. Collaboration in these areas can involve the use of various instruments, including financial resources, skills and expertise, logistical support, and efforts to enhance the credibility and legitimacy of peacekeeping endeavors.

Separated lines of effort: Some of the most visible activities undertaken by partners are taken on independently, in coordination with, or parallel to UN peacekeeping operations. These can involve a range of tasks, from presenting a more aggressive posture that includes combat or offensive operations to conflict-adjacent work such as counternarcotics or counterterrorism efforts that are not included in the mandate of the UN peace operation. While these are often seen as complementary to the work and activities of UN peace operations, there are some cases where partners do not coordinate or even share these activities with the UN, thereby complicating their work and reputation.

Financing: Financing for UN peace operations comes from member state contributions to the UN's peacekeeping budget, both assessed and voluntary, as well as the personnel from troop- and police-contributing countries. While the average age of UN peacekeeping missions is a little under three years,[12] most mandates and financing are agreed to on an annual basis, leading to doubts about long-term commitments and sustainability. Therefore, the financial resources of UN peacekeeping partners can be an important way to magnify the impact, both from a direct increase in capability and long-term sustainability as well as in some cases the perception of greater legitimacy. Using their own resources, partners can enhance the skills and capacity of troop and police contributing countries through equipment donations, training and logistics.

A model example is the UN's Triangular Partnership Program (TPP), which "aims to enhance peacekeepers' capacity in engineering, medical and C4ISR & camp security through the provision of training and operational support. Once trained, these troops are better equipped to deliver high value and priority requirements, improving the ability of UN missions to operate more effectively on the ground."[13] Since its inception in 2018, TPP projects have covered training and operational support.

The flow of financing can also go the other way: from the UN to support partner activities, which can extend the reach and impact of a joint peacekeeping operation, especially if the partner is uniquely suited to perform a given task or can do so more skillfully or economically. Africa has been the epicenter of these kinds of arrangements, where the AU and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) have led alternatives to traditional UN peace operations. Together, they lead ten operations across seventeen countries, comprising more than seventy thousand personnel. The largest are the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS) and the Lake Chad Basin Commission Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF).[14] In many of these missions, the UN has established a support mission to finance and enable these regional efforts.

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[12] Vision of Humanity, *UN Peacekeeping: 8 Facts about UN Peacekeeping Today*. https://www.visionofhumanity.org/eight-facts-about-united-nations-peacekeeping-in-todays-world/

[13] Triangular Partnership Project, UN Department of Operational Support https://operationalsupport.un.org/en/triangular-partnership-programme-tpp

[14] Claire Klobucista and Mariel Ferragamo, "The Role of Peacekeeping in Africa," *CFR Backgrounder* (12 December, 2023). https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/role-peacekeeping-africa

UNSCR 2719 - UN Assessed Contributions to AU Peace Operations

The framework established under UN Security Council resolution 2719 is intended to provide more predictable and sustainable financing to AU–led peace support operations.[15] The culmination of more than a decade of negotiations, the resolution paved the way for AU peace operations to receive up to three-quarters of their expenses from the UN, based on assessment scales, standardizing what is currently done on an ad hoc basis. The intended result was better synchronization of mandate generation, joint planning and operations, and shared financing.

While Resolution 2719 envisages that the quarter of the costs for AU led peace support operations will be mobilized jointly by the AU and the UN, the source and the modalities for securing this balance remains unclear. Despite agreeing to the Resolution, the AU views the UN Security Council as responsible for fully resourcing the peace operations it mandates, given its primary responsibility for international peace and security.[16] As part of the commitment under 2719 for the UN and the AU to jointly mobilize the 25%, the AU has several financial options it could exercise, including the possibility of drawing from the AU Peace Fund, but given the limited funds available in the Peace Fund and the lack of consensus regarding its use to cover the 25% share, other options include in-kind contributions from AU member states as well as relying on possible international donor support not just from traditional funding providers like the EU but also others such as the Gulf states. If all "viable options" have been exhausted, 2719 leaves the door open to the UN providing the remaining 25% of funding for an AU peace support operation.[17] Other outstanding questions include how to apply UN procurement and budget regulations and rules to AU missions, the extent and amount of reimbursement to AU T/PCCs, and the process for formulating and managing the budgets of AU-led peace support operations financed under the resolution.[18]

Partnerships in changing global context

The need for UN peacekeeping to benefit from flexible and agile partnership arrangements has grown in recent years as awareness of the limits of the current UN peacekeeping approach has become more apparent. At the same time, intensifying geopolitical competition and the resulting polarization among P5 members has narrowed the opportunities for consensus, forcing a reconsideration of how partnerships are formed and function. This has increased the appetite for some types of partnerships to reduce the burden or ambition of UN peace operations, yet it has also sown distrust of some potential partners and narrowed what member states are willing to consider.

An example is the current stalemate over whether the UN can replace the current ad hoc but faltering support arrangements for the Kenyan-led security force in Haiti with a more formalized peacekeeping support partnership. Some UNSC members have argued it would bring economies of scale and operational standards to improve the force's effectiveness,

[15] Amani Africa, *Seizing the New Momentum for UNSC resolution on UN Funding of AU Peace Operations*, Special Research Report No 15 (May 2023). https://amaniafrica-et.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Seizing-the-new-momentum-for-UNSC-Resolution-on-UN-funding-of-AU-Peace-Operations-_Final.pdf

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

[17] UN Doc. S/RES/2719, para. 6.

[18] Tadesse and Russo, "UN Support to African Union–Led Peace Support Operations."

while others are opposed for cost and political reasons. Configuring the best tools to build and sustain peace is apparently secondary to political considerations within the Council. This is indicative of the necessity of rethinking peacekeeping as a political endeavor that responds to local priorities and not merely a technical exercise of imposing stabilization models.

Conclusions

Partnerships with a diverse array of external actors are not merely beneficial but are absolutely critical to the success and legitimacy of UN peacekeeping operations in an increasingly complex global landscape. The examples of successful partnerships highlight the tangible benefits of these collaborations in addressing specific challenges and achieving positive outcomes on the ground. The future effectiveness and applicability of UN peacekeeping will depend in part on the agility, to which it can adapt to the strengths and limitations of potential partners. Improved trust and operational collaboration will be essential for UN peacekeeping to continue to be one of the best tools in the international peace and security toolkit.

Recommendations

- The UN should undertake **joint assessments** with relevant partners to develop a common understanding of the context and facilitate integrated responses.
- The UN needs to emphasize the imperative of the **primacy of politics** as a pre-requisite for successful peace operations. The design and implementation of such operations should be anchored on the articulation of a coherent political strategy.
- Establishing **clear norms on accountability**, doctrine, and pre-deployment training would allow to align expectations and enhance operational coherence of peace operations, particularly where such operations are undertaken by sub-regional organizations or ad hoc coalitions.
- Partnerships in peace operations should be based on **mutually-accepted mandates** and explicit goals. Adding new requirements, without a consensus, can become a distraction or a source of disagreement, undermining the intentions and outcome of the mission.
- Where a parallel force is engaged in peace enforcement or counterterrorism operations, it should work with the UN peace operation to **clearly delineate their responsibilities** and areas of operations.
- Parallel deployments should also employ **shared strategic communication strategies** to communicate with local populations about respective mandates and responsibilities.
- The UN General Assembly, through the Fifth Committee and the Advisory Body on Administrative and Budgetary Questions, in coordination with the Department of Operational Support, should consider how to **adapt UN regulations and rules** to fit the needs of partner-led operations receiving support from the UN. This includes AU-led missions financed through the resolution 2719 framework and other support models whose oversight and operational structures for ensuring compliance with IHL, human rights and conduct and discipline need to be bolstered to enhance closer alignment with UN guidelines.

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The Future of Peacekeeping Needs Everyone: A Path Forward for Women's Meaningful Participation in Peace Operations

Executive Summary

Women's participation is essential for effective peacekeeping. Despite commitments under the UN Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda, women remain underrepresented in UN peace operations, particularly in leadership and operational roles. The Measuring Opportunities for Women in Peace Operations (MOWIP) assessment[1] has been completed in 20 Troop- and Police- Contributing Countries (TPCCs) and reveals continued barriers to women's meaningful participation.

A meta-analysis of these MOWIPs reveals four persistent key barriers:

1. **Noticeable underrepresentation of women in security institutions in leadership and operational, tactical, and leadership roles,** despite some promising exceptions among TPCCs.
2. **Patriarchal values, gender stereotypes, and beliefs within security personnel** about what men and women "can" do are deeply ingrained. The data demonstrate that personnel often reinforce these gender divisions within missions. These same norms also influence deployment decisions.
3. **Perceived favoritism:** Data indicate that a proportion of personnel believe gender inclusion efforts disadvantage men. This signals that parity initiatives may face resistance when perceived to stem from gendered favoritism.
4. **A lack of systematic policies and understanding of women's needs** (e.g. care responsibilities, facilities and equipment) continues to hinder the creation of an enabling environment for women's meaningful participation across TPCCs' security institutions.

These key findings are applied to the "Future of Peacekeeping" study to inform future UN missions. With 30 models coupled with key capabilities, we argue that by ensuring that the above barriers do not hinder women´s participation in any of the models, we can **make peacekeeping better – more effective, more efficient, and more fit for purpose**.

Models which might lead to reinforcing women's exclusion 1) do not mention gender-responsiveness as a particular capability, and/or 2) emphasize combat, rapid deployment, and high-security and operations-related skills.

We also classify the models into three categories in terms of how much institutional change, pre-deployment effort, and intervention — including political will — is needed to ensure women's meaningful participation. Both the UN and TPCCs have an important role to play in ensuring that future peacekeeping models will enable women's meaningful participation and more gender-responsive missions. We encourage more TPCCs to complete a MOWIP assessment to identify and thereafter address the specific barriers in their security institutions.

[1] See: Sabrina Karim, *MOWIP Methodology* (01 October 2020). https://www.dcaf.ch/mowip-methodology

Finally, **we provide recommendations for TPCCs and the UN to mitigate barriers across mission models. First and foremost, all mission mandates should include specific reference to gender responsiveness.**

Recommended interventions for TPCCs

- Promotion of women to leadership positions based on a diverse set of skills.
- Recruitment campaigns targeting women for all model types of missions.
- Sensitization campaigns and training on gender stereotypes to all personnel.
- Needs assessments of both men and women for all mission models.
- Adequate facilities, policies, and institutions that allow men and women to deploy rapidly (e.g. childcare centers).
- Adequate infrastructure for women and men in all different types of mission settings in line with the Elsie Initiative for Field Missions Guidance.
- Implementation of policies that enable sharing household obligations (e.g. parental leave policies).
- Adequate provision of services for women and men to have access to mental health, reproductive health, and to ensure their physical wellbeing in all types of mission settings.
- Joint training for civilian and uniformed personnel to create ready-to-deploy mixed (civilian/uniformed) units.
- Training all personnel, especially those in more militarized units, on skills required to succeed in current and future security contexts – such as interpersonal communication, trust-building, de-escalation, and negotiation.

Recommended interventions for the UN Department of Peace Operations (DPO)

- Work with TPCCs to track women's inclusion in military and police forces over time, especially across different roles.
- Develop goals for TPCCs that move beyond parity to indicators of gender-responsiveness.
- Document and develop criteria for skills required to succeed in current and future security contexts, such as interpersonal communication, trust building, and negotiation.

Recommended interventions for both UN DPO and TPCCs

- Create rosters of women who have the skill sets needed to deploy for all models.
- Provide specialized training to women on different skill sets to ensure women have the capabilities needed for all mission models.
- Provide training on gender protection norms, gender stereotypes, and gender backlash for personnel of all ranks, including senior leadership.
- Screen for personnel who have any misconduct violations.

- Reconceptualize pre-deployment training so that it integrates different skill sets (use of force and protection-oriented, and skills such as interpersonal communication, trust-building, de-escalation and negotiation).
- Circulate sensitization campaigns which clarify that men and women should prioritize different skill sets, including skills required to succeed in current and future security contexts – such as interpersonal communication, trust-building, de-escalation, and negotiation.

The Pledging Guide for the 2025 Berlin United Nations Peacekeeping Ministerial highlights the importance of Women, Peace, and Security through recommendations for member states' support for women's meaningful participation (pg. 14). Many of the proposed pledges align with the above proposed recommendations.

The Policy Brief is available at: Global Alliance for Peace Operations and The Future of Peacekeeping Needs Everyone | DCAF – Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance

Mission models, benefits of gender-responsiveness and level of support needed to ensure women's meaningful participation and gender responsiveness more broadly

Mission Model	How women's meaningful participation — and gender-responsiveness more broadly — strengthens the model	Level of Effort
1. Preventative Deployments	Early warning systems that include women and women's knowledge networks via communication with peacekeepers have improved knowledge about violence escalation and can better prevent conflict.	High
2. Atrocity Prevention	Atrocities affect men and women in different ways, with men more likely to die and women more likely to experience SGBV. Women's meaningful participation in the mission and gender-responsiveness ensures different protection strategies.	High
3. Protection of Civilians	Women's meaningful participation in the mission and gender-responsiveness enables better detection of violence and a wider range of strategies for the protection of different populations.	Lower
4. Ceasefire Monitoring and Observation	Women's meaningful participation in the mission and gender-responsiveness ensure that more intelligence is gathered about violations of ceasefires.	Medium
5. Monitoring, Observation, and Reporting	Women's meaningful participation in the mission and gender-responsiveness enables a full monitoring of the range of provisions in a peace agreement. Supporting and ensuring women's participation in peace agreements.	Medium
6. Verification	Women's meaningful participation in the mission and gender-responsiveness create more opportunities to gather intelligence on violations to arms control agreements.	High
7. Support of Peace Agreements	Peace agreements vary in provisions; women's meaningful participation in the mission and gender-responsiveness ensures that all parts of a peace agreement receive support from the mission. It also ensures that implementation benefits all parts of the population. Support for women's participation in the peace agreements.	Lower
8. New State Support	The creation of new institutions is an opportunity to structure them in equitable ways. Women's meaningful participation in the mission and gender-responsiveness ensures that new institutions in states are equitable.	Lower

9. Transition Assistance	Transitions provide opportunities to create new government institutions in more equitable ways. Women's meaningful participation in the mission and gender-responsiveness ensures that new institutions in states are equitable.	Medium
10. Transitional Administration	When missions assume governance responsibilities, they set an example for future state leaders. Women's meaningful participation in the mission and gender-responsiveness in the mission sets an example for state governance going forward.	Medium
11. Election Security and Assistance	Female candidates often face more harassment (including online) than male candidates. Election security thus means understanding the gendered ways that different candidates experience violence and intimidation. Women's meaningful participation in the mission and gender-responsiveness also ensures that civic education and knowledge sharing include women.	Medium
12. Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration	Female combatants are often left out of DDR processes and gender is often a recruitment tool for insurgents (e.g. whether promises of marriage or references to masculinity). Without a gendered understanding of these dynamics, comprehensive DDR is not possible.	Medium
13. Security Sector Reform and Governance	Creating security forces that serve all people means that specialized knowledge about gender inclusiveness is required. Women's meaningful participation in the mission and gender-responsiveness ensures that expertise is included in security sector reform.	Lower
14. Rule of Law/Law Enforcement Support	Laws pertaining to women's rights are often less likely to be enforced. Women's meaningful participation in the mission and gender-responsive peacekeeping help ensure that women's rights are enforced.	Lower
15. Police Assistance	Professionalized police forces that ensure civilian protection require gender-responsiveness in domestic security sectors as security needs are gendered. Women's meaningful participation in the mission helps motivate local women to become involved in police forces and encourages reporting.	Medium
16. Support to Accountability Mechanisms	Transitional justice mechanisms must ensure that all crimes are investigated, including ones related to SGBV. Additionally, the rape of men is often coded as torture and not SGBV. As such, gendered	Medium

	understanding of war crimes are necessary for full accountability.	
17. Counter Organized Crime	Criminal organizations often include women in their operations, and many criminal groups operate human trafficking rings. Expertise on how criminal groups use gender is necessary to counter organized crime.	High
18. Mine Action and Explosive Ordinance Removal	Women often have different knowledge networks about the locations of mines. Without fully engaging all parts of the population, successful mine clearing is not possible.	High
19. Emergency Humanitarian Response	Women and men experience displacement in different ways, especially when considering female-headed households. Humanitarian and refugee response is not possible without understanding these differential needs.	Medium
20. Public Health Support	Containing disease requires trust in medical authorities, which means strong community outreach and diversity in healthcare providers. Women's meaningful participation in the mission and gender-responsiveness is necessary for understanding how best to approach different populations for immunizations and healthcare.	Lower
21. Natural Disaster Response	Women are more likely to be affected by climate change and also more likely to take active steps towards minimizing harms from climate change, suggesting that they must be incorporated into disaster prevention and response.	Medium
22. Humanitarian Accompaniment/ Protection	Civilian protection, including accompaniment, requires understanding the different ways that men and women are impacted by war.	High
23. Cultural Heritage Protection	Caretaking responsibility of cultural heritage sites are often gendered, which means that women have insight into how best to protect such sites and which sites are sacred.	High
24. Natural Resource Protection	Natural resource extraction often employs male labor, creating disproportionate numbers of men in certain spaces and are thus sometimes accompanied by human trafficking or increases in sex work. A complete understanding of natural resource economies would include these factors and is not possible without gender analysis. Furthermore, women are actively involved in the protection of natural resources and should be included in protection efforts given their knowledge and networks.	High

25. Border Management	SGBV can be pervasive at border crossings, especially as illicit trafficking occurs. Women's meaningful participation in peace operations and gender-responsiveness ensures that protection of all civilians is incorporated into border management.	High
26. Infrastructure Security	Key infrastructure is often understood to be military targets, however women's meaningful participation in peace operations and gender-responsiveness ensures that key infrastructure that is crucial for survival such as farmlands, markets, etc., are also protected.	High
27. Cybersecurity	Different groups of people might be more susceptible to data breaches, disinformation, and (phishing) scams, meaning that public awareness and education campaigns are necessary, especially among women who may have less information.	High
28. Regional Security	There are existing networks of transnational cooperation and partnerships. Women's meaningful participation in peace operations and gender-responsive approach could help tap into existing regional networks.	High
29. City Security	Women and men navigate city spaces in different ways, and cities are often designed to privilege men. Women's perspectives in city security would look vastly different than men's perspectives.	High
30. Maritime Security	Piracy, and other maritime security threats, depend on women, who sometimes help service illicit trade and are involved in recruitment activities. Maritime security is heavily male dominated, which means that there are gendered consequences related to sex economies and human trafficking that must be taken into consideration.	High

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The Future of UN Peacekeeping in a Changing Climate

Summary

Climate change creates significant challenges for UN peacekeeping operations and increases the urgency and complexity of maintaining peace and security in fragile settings. The links between climate change, conflict, and peace are becoming increasingly evident, as climate impacts exacerbate resource competition, destabilise communities, and fuel tensions. While efforts to integrate climate considerations into peacekeeping mandates have begun, they remain insufficient to address the full scope of these risks and are facing growing geopolitical challenges. UN peacekeeping has the potential to play a transformative role in mitigating climate-security risks, particularly when combined with innovative approaches to strategic planning, mandate design, resource allocation, partnerships and implementation.

Background and aim of the policy paper

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 to address complex threats, like climate security considerations, remains incomplete. Though climate and environmental factors have been incorporated into mandated tasks nine times[1] and are referenced in four of the eleven current peacekeeping operations, 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 paper has three key aims.

Aim 1: Show how climate change impacts peace, specifically in the context of peacekeeping operations;

Aim 2: Reflect on the challenges peacekeeping operations are facing in light of a new global context and increasing climate security risks;

Aim 3: Provide concrete recommendations on how climate change considerations can be integrated into UN peacekeeping missions.

It builds upon existing recommendations, in particular the 2024 report on The Future of Peacekeeping, New Models, and Related Capabilities, and explores innovative approaches to fully integrate climate change and environmental considerations into peacekeeping.

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

Climate change significantly impacts conflict risks and peacekeeping efforts

A better understanding of the relationship between climate and environmental stressors and peace and security risks can help identify context-specific responses and actions to build resilience and long-term stability. The following section outlines the key ways climate change exacerbates security risks in conflict settings and functions as a complicating factor in peacekeeping missions.

Natural resource management, conflict and competition

Climate change affects the availability of, access to and quality of land, water, soil, plants and livestock. Increasing competition over these resources exacerbates conflict dynamics. This is particularly the case in regions where livelihoods and food security depend on natural resources. Additional drivers of natural resource conflicts that make it more likely for competition to escalate into violence include the availability of small arms, histories of conflict, social and ethnic cleavages, dysfunctional resource management systems and the marginalisation of certain groups.[2] These dynamics can be a significant source of local instability. At least 40 percent of internal conflicts over the last 60 years can be linked to exploiting natural resources according to UNEP.[3] While a lot of attention is on the well-documented cases of farmer-herder conflicts, the reality of resources conflicts is more complex. They often involve different natural resources and groups like fishers or miners.[4] For example, in Mali, fisherfolk and farmers face environmental challenges including soil infertility, silting of rivers and depleted fish variety and numbers.[5] Pastoralists also see changes in water bodies, reduction in quality and quantity of pasture and disappearance of grass species. Due to these dynamics, competition between but also within livelihood groups has eroded social cohesion and increased hostility, oftentimes resulting in violent clashes over access and control of natural resources.[6]

Non-state armed groups

Climate-related security risks are providing a fertile breeding ground for non-state armed groups, such as militia, terrorist and criminal groups, which significantly affects the operational environment of peacekeeping operations. For example, climate impacts shape decisions made by armed groups on when, where and how to operate. While wetter conditions can help camouflage armed groups, drier weather conditions can make movement easier.[7] At the same time, non-state armed groups actively exploit climate security risks and governance issues. In particular in contexts where state institutions are weakened and corrupt, non-state armed groups try to fill these gaps and offer services, increasing their legitimacy and decreasing regional stability. For example, in Somalia, Al-Shabaab is providing drought

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[2] Chitra Nagarajan et al., *Weathering Risk Climate, peace and security assessment: Mali* (Berlin: adelphi , 2022). https://weatheringrisk.org/en/publication/climate-peace-and-security-assessment-mali

[3] *In Sudan, conflict and environment decline go hand in hand, UNEP* (4 November, 2022). https://www.unep.org/news-and-stories/story/sudan-conflict-and-environmental-decline-go-hand-hand

[4] Lukas Rüttinger et al., *Weathering Risk Africa Climate Security Risk Assessment* (Berlin: adelphi, 2024). https://weatheringrisk.org/sites/default/files/document/240924_ACRA_Full_Report.pdf

[5] Chitra Nagarajan et al., *Weathering Risk Climate, peace and security assessment: Mali* (Berlin: adelphi , 2022). https://weatheringrisk.org/en/publication/climate-peace-and-security-assessment-mali

[6] Ibid.

[7] Sebastian van Baalen and Malin Mobjörk, "Climate Change and Violent Conflict in East Africa: Integrating Qualitative and Quantitative Research to Probe the Mechanisms," *International Studies Review* 20 (2018): 547–575 as cited in Lukas Rüttinger et al., *Weathering Risk Africa Climate Security Risk Assessment* (Berlin: adelphi, 2024).

relief (i.e. cash and humanitarian aid) to communities that are affected by drought and consequent lack of employment opportunities and poverty.[8] In Mali, armed groups have exploited these risks to increase legitimacy in the absence of effective formal governance through providing conflict resolution mechanisms and access to justice for disputes over natural resources.[9]

Negative coping strategies

Climate change also increases livelihood insecurity. This is especially true for population groups that directly depend on natural resources. Without viable alternatives and perspectives, communities and individuals, especially youth, are pushed to pursue unsafe coping strategies out of necessity- like joining armed groups, illegal agriculture (i.e. poppy farming for opium production or illegal coca production) and illegal logging and mining. These activities often further degrade the environment and strengthen criminal networks and other non-state armed groups, which increases instability. For example, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the extraction and control of mineral resources provides important financing for armed groups, often turns violent and reduces biodiversity through pollution, deforestation and soil erosion.[10] Armed groups increasingly rely on mining revenues, and many miners are former combatants. This increases the risk of re-mobilisation and increasing armed group activity[11]. In Colombia, insecurity is driving economic activities like coca crop production for illicit uses and furthering deforestation. In areas that lack infrastructure and public goods, coca cultivation represents a livelihood alternative for peasants and one of the only viable sources of income. Although coca offers higher income than other crops, most profits still go to middlemen and drug traffickers. Coca cultivation increases drug trafficking and has caused further conflict through disputes between illegal armed groups and criminal actors over control of the area where coca is cultivated and trafficking routes.[12]

Disasters

Weather-induced disasters, like heatwaves, wildfires, drought and floods, are increasing as climate change worsens. They can cause loss of life, destroy infrastructure and drive displacement and humanitarian crises and exacerbate political instability and the risk of violence.[13] Both rapid- and slow-onset disasters amplify existing migration patterns, in particular disaster displacement and rural-urban migration.

While mobility is an important adaptation and coping mechanism, sudden, large-scale and unmanaged movements to already fragile areas can intensify socio-political tensions, increase

[8] Jean-François Maystadt, Margherita Calderone and Liangzhi You, "Local Warming and Violent Conflict in North and South Sudan," *Journal of Economic Geography* 15 (2014): 649–671

[9] Anca-Elena Ursu, *Under the Gun: Resource Conflicts and Embattled Traditional Authorities in Central Mali* (The Hague: Clingendael Institute, July 2018). https://www.clingendael.org/sites/default/files/2018-07/under-the-gun.pdf

[10] Lukas Rüttinger et al., *Weathering Risk Africa Climate Security Risk Assessment* (Berlin: adelphi, 2024).

[11] Ken Matthysen and Erik Gobbers, "Armed conflict, insecurity, and mining in eastern DRC: Reflections on the nexus between natural resources and armed conflict," *International Peace Information Service* (Antwerp, 2022), 40. https://ipisresearch.be/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/202010_IPIS_Armed-conflict-insecurity-and-mining-in-eastern-DRC_Accessible-PDF.pdf

[12] FIP and adelphi, *A Dangerous Climate: Deforestation, Climate Change and Violence Against Environmental Defenders* (Berlin: WWF Germany, 2021). https://climate-diplomacy.org/magazine/conflict/dangerous-climate-deforestation-climate-change-and-violence-against-environmental

[13] Lukas Rüttinger et al., *Weathering Risk Africa Climate Security Risk Assessment* (Berlin: adelphi, 2024).

economic inequality and further strain resources and government services, especially among marginalised populations.[14]

Disasters can also directly affect peace operations and their ability to operate, particularly if they fail to anticipate extreme weather events. For example, in South Sudan, unprecedented floods have hindered aid delivery and civilian protection, and the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) has needed to increase capacities and adapt to anticipate these kinds of extreme weather events.[15] Natural disasters can also strain the capacity of peacekeepers and divert resources from primary mandates, as responding to these emergencies can require shifting focus to provide humanitarian aid. More long-term, disasters create budgetary pressures and can contribute to public debts and diverting resources. This can impede economic development and provide another obstacle for creating stability.

Environmental impacts of military operations

Environmental impacts from conflict can change land use patterns and disrupt local habitats and biodiversity, driving deforestation and soil erosion.[16] Non-state armed groups are estimated to receive almost 40% of their financing from environmental crimes like wildlife trade and illegal extraction of oil, minerals and timber.[17] The environment can also be a target of conflict. Growing natural resource scarcity is increasingly weaponised by non-state armed groups in conflict settings through attacks on the supply of natural resources and destruction of infrastructure like water treatment centres, sanitation plants, agricultural sites and irrigation systems.[18]

At the same time, military operations, including peacekeeping, also lead to significant environmental impacts and affect local communities. Missions can strain the capacity of local infrastructure and increase waste production as well as the demand for already scarce resources like water and wood. For example, the UN-African Union Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) and humanitarian actors significantly increased the demand for these resources, which led to deforestation and became a source of tension within communities. Within these communities, resources were already scarce, and the presence of UN peace operations further exacerbated this scarcity and unequal access.[19] Missions also account for more than half of greenhouse gas emissions within the UN system.[20] In Mali, the peacekeeping mission of 15,000 people produced approximately three times the amount of waste than a Malian per capita. Bases and camps are also have high energy usage and water consumption. In the

[14] Alexandra Steinkraus et al., *Strengthening peace and resilience in a changing climate: Nine global trends and opportunities* (Berlin: adelphi, 2024). https://weatheringrisk.org/sites/default/files/document/Weathering_Risk_Synthesis_Report_1.pdf
[15] Lukas Rüttinger et al., *Weathering Risk Africa Climate Security Risk Assessment* (Berlin: adelphi, 2024).
[16] "Understanding the Environmental Impact of Military Operations." *Total Military Insight* (10 July 2024). https://totalmilitaryinsight.com/military-operations-and-environmental-impact/
[17] Mark Shaw, Christian Nellemann and Jürgen Stock, "The World Atlas of Illicit Flows," *Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime* (Geneva: 2018), accessed 23 April 2025. https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/world-atlas-of-illicit-flows/
[18] Chiara Scissa, "The Weaponization of Natural Resources and Disasters During Conflict: The Refugee Convention's Relevance for Syria and Yemen," Baker Institute for Public Policy (Houston, 2024). https://www.bakerinstitute.org/sites/default/files/2024-05/BIPP-Brief-CME-2-Weaponization%20of%20Natural%20Resources.pdf
[19] Lucile Maertens and Malkit Shoshan, "Greening Peacekeeping: The Environmental Impact of UN Peace Operations," *International Peace Institute* (New York City, 2018). https://www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/1804_Greening-Peacekeeping.pdf
[20] Ibid.

summer in Camp Castor energy usage was almost 8,500 megawatt-hours per year, of which over 95 percent was produced by gas and oil generators.[21]

Peacekeeping in a changing climate

There are more active conflicts today than any time since World War II. Despite this, the number of peace operations being deployed is decreasing and some missions are being scaled down or shut down. At the same time, climate change is a complicating factor in peace operations and increases the likelihood of violence in conflict-affected areas. In January 2025, the Center for International Peace Operations (ZIF) identified five key trends[22] in UN peace operations and called for climate security considerations to be integrated into all relevant strategic and policy frameworks. Climate change both impacts key trends being seen in UN peace operations and is also being impacted by similar trends reflecting the increasing complexity and interconnectedness of the challenges peacekeeping is facing. Understanding the relationship between these dynamics is key for peacekeeping operations to better respond to these interconnected threats and trends.

Changing geopolitical interests and gridlock

The world is shifting to a more multipolar global order and the sense of unity in having a common purpose and trust is decreasing. Geopolitical tensions and the growing lack of consensus on what constitutes a threat to international peace and security, and therefore requires action from the UNSC, increasingly impedes action. Within the Council, this has made it more difficult to both deploy new peacekeeping missions (e.g. Haiti, despite bad and worsening security conditions) and agree on mission adjustments.[23] There have also been similar trends on UNSC engagement around climate change. Since the Russian veto of the December 2021 draft thematic resolution, which aimed to ensure peacekeeping operations and special political missions consider climate risks in their mandates, similar divisions have continued (with several UNSC members, and Russia in particular, opposing linking climate change to peace and security). Under the new Trump administration, the US may align itself more closely with Russia and China on this question, making it more difficult to include climate risks in mandates in the future. At the same time, changing geopolitical interests will likely decrease action on mitigating climate change. In the future, this will further increase climate risks and undermine security, especially in fragile settings.

Financial resource constraints

While military spending by individual UN member states is increasing as conflicts intensify and increase, global financial pressures, economic downturn, shifting donor priorities, an increasing demand for protection of civilians, peacebuilding activities and humanitarian assistance are straining resources for multilateral peace operations. Resourcing patterns have fluctuated significantly throughout the past decade and have made it increasingly unpredictable whether peace operations will be mandated and sustained, especially when it comes to new large operations.[24] The first few months of the new Trump administration in the United States has been marked by a variety of budget cuts. An April 2025 memo on State

[21] Ibid.
[22] The following section provides an overview of these key trends identified by ZIF in the report Annika S. Hansen et al., "Five Trends in UN Peace Operations. And Five Calls to Action," *ZIF-Study* (January 2025). https://www.zif-berlin.org/sites/zif-berlin.org/files/2025-02/ZIF-Study_5%20Trends%20in%20UN%20PeaceOperations.pdf
[23] Hansen et al., "Five Trends in UN Peace Operations. And Five Calls to Action," *ZIF-Study* (January 2025).
[24] Ibid.

Department spending proposes completely eliminating contributions to UN Peacekeeping from $1.2 billion (27% of mission costs) to zero.[25] If this were to make it into the final version of the White House budget request and be approved by Congress, this would detrimentally affect all existing missions.

More broadly, Official Development Assistance and humanitarian aid are currently cratering, with the US, the UK, Switzerland, Germany, France, the Netherlands and Belgium all cutting these budgets in early 2025.[26] At the same time, climate finance is still falling short. The new collective quantified goal on climate finance (NCQG), agreed on at COP29, falls below developing country needs. While there has been momentum on ensuring climate finance is conflict sensitive and is accessible by conflict affected countries through declarations and calls at COP28 and COP29, this progress is fragile. With shifting geopolitical priorities, there are risks that these commitments won't be fulfilled. These financial constraints impact peace operations directly and indirectly by affecting broader stabilisation, resilience building and development efforts.

Increasing fragmentation and internationalisation of the conflict landscape

As the number of conflicts worldwide has been increasing over the last decade, so has the number of conflicts where third-party governments, including major powers, are getting involved by supporting conflict parties with military equipment, deploying troops or providing other forms of military, financial or logistical support. Russia's war of aggression in Ukraine marked a return to open inter-state war. Elsewhere, increasingly complex and fragmented actor networks of governments, civilians, insurgent groups, criminal gangs and private security providers increase the difficulty of navigating conflict settings. Some of these actors – such as private military contractors and proxy forces – also operate outside traditional accountability frameworks. This often means that conflicts become increasingly protracted, and that finding entry points for mediation, conflict prevention and violence reduction is becoming more challenging. These protracted crises regularly trap local population groups in cycles of increasing vulnerability by eroding governance structures, social cohesion, and economic opportunities. This implies that, in addition to navigating this complexity, peacekeeping operations have to address compounding vulnerabilities of populations caught in persistent conflict environments, often with insufficient resources and complex mandates that struggle to adapt to evolving conflict dynamics.

The growing role of regional organisations

Regional operations are increasingly being viewed as potentially more legitimate alternatives that offer greater flexibility. This renewed interest in regional actors as first responders can be attributed to gridlock within the UNSC as well as the withdrawal of host government consent and resistance from local communities. The European Union has thus been able to rely on invitations by host governments to set up new missions in Ukraine, Armenia and Moldova. At the same time, the African Union and African subregional organisations have emerged as key partners that can best identify the kind of support needed and respond[27]. This development is echoed on the climate security side of things. Regional organisations have been increasingly active in addressing climate-related security risks. For example, IGAD has established a regional Climate Security Coordination Mechanism that aims to anticipate, prevent and

[25] Mark Leon Goldberg, "If the U.S. Defunds UN Peacekeeping, Then Get Ready for More War" *UN Dispatch* (15 April 2025). https://www.globaldispatches.org/p/if-the-us-defunds-un-peacekeeping

[26] Indrabati Lahiri, "From Finland to the UK, European countries are slashing aid. What does it mean for climate funds?" *euro news* (30 March 2025). https://www.euronews.com/green/2025/03/30/from-finland-to-the-uk-european-countries-are-slashing-aid-what-does-it-mean-for-climate-f

[27] Hansen et al., "Five Trends in UN Peace Operations. And Five Calls to Action," *ZIF-Study* (January 2025).

mitigate the outset of climate-induced conflict and displacement.[28] Similarly, in Western Africa, ECOWAS has established the ECOWAS-UNOWAS Working Group on Climate Change and Security to enhance collaboration with the UN, government and civil society.[29] The OSCE has also used climate-related security risks to increase cross-border cooperation in post-conflict and cross-border regions in Central Asia, the South Caucasus and South-Eastern Europe.[30] And the African Union has made strides in developing a Common African Position on Climate Change, Peace and Security to strengthen its own role in this area on the continent and on the international level.

Lacking trust and increasing dis- and misinformation

Hybrid threats like disinformation and misinformation, including regarding climate-related information, are increasingly becoming a challenge for peace operations. The number of disinformation campaigns has increased. In Africa alone, the number of disinformation campaigns has increased from 30 (2022) to 189 (2024), with 40 percent originating from Russia.[31] This leads to hostile narratives, decreases trust and perceived legitimacy, fuels existing tensions and makes it more difficult to implement peace operations and maintain the safety of UN peacekeepers. Developments in (generative) artificial intelligence and its accessibility are further enhancing disinformation and being used as a weapon of conflict (i.e. deepfakes). In 2023, the top three topics subject to disinformation were the war in Ukraine, Covid 19 and climate change, and in 2022 the IPCC Sixth Assessment Report emphasized the relevance of climate-related disinformation and key misinformation claiming that the impact of climate change is not that bad, and the science is unreliable.[32] Climate and environment-related disinformation can also be used to affect conflict settings. For example, in relation to the war on Ukraine, Russian disinformation campaigns were launched in 2022 in the context of the attack on the Dnipro-Mykolaiv water pipeline. In order to undermine confidence in authorities and foster distrust, disinformation campaigns spread the narrative that responsible authorities had left the city in the wake of no drinking water and humanitarian assistance was not being provided to children, the elderly or the handicapped.[33]

Conclusions and 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

[28] Lukas Rüttinger et al., *Weathering Risk Africa Climate Security Risk Assessment* (Berlin: adelphi, 2024).
[29] Ibid.
[30] *Strengthening Responses to Security Risks from Climate Change in South-Eastern Europe, Eastern Europe, the South Caucasus and Central Asia*, OSCE. https://www.osce.org/node/521965
[31] Hansen et al., "Five Trends in UN Peace Operations. And Five Calls to Action," *ZIF-Study* (January 2025).
[32] Ruža Marie Groffmann and Hans Lampalzer, *Climate change, security and disinformation* (Vienna: IFK Monitor International, 2024). https://www.bmlv.gv.at/pdf_pool/publikationen/ifk_monitor_78_int_rmg_hl_climate_change_sep_24_web.pdf
[33] Ibid.

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 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.

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