

**Review on the future of all forms of United Nations peace operations
UN Department of Peace Operations' open call for contributions
August 2025**

The following insights, proposals, and recommendations have been distilled from the Bahá'í International Community's ongoing series on peacebuilding and peacekeeping titled *The Promise of World Peace*, which has to date engaged more than 300 individual actors across various sectors over the last three years.

1. What are the main challenges confronting peace operations today and what challenges are expected to be faced by peace operations in the future?

Current Challenges Confronting Peace Operations

(a) Evolving Nature of Conflicts

- Conflicts have become more frequent and protracted, often occurring within states rather than between them, involving a growing number of non-state actors and external involvement. This complexity makes traditional UN tools of mediation and peacekeeping less effective.
- There is a growing disregard for international law, with violations becoming routine tactics of war, exacerbated by the international community's inability to hold perpetrators accountable.

(b) Erosion of Trust and Unity

- The liberal global order is facing a crisis of trust and solidarity, with multilateralism seen as unfit, the rules-based order viewed with suspicion, national governments lacking legitimacy, and societies experiencing increased polarization.
- There is far less unity among Member States today making it harder for nations to address global challenges collectively.

(c) Political and Systemic Barriers

- A “paralysis of will” exists among leaders to address global problems, stemming from a deep conviction that humanity is inherently combative. What results is a reluctance to subordinate elements of national self-interest to global institutions.
- The implementation gap between adopted UN resolutions and their actual implementation remains a significant concern.
- International financial institutions, like the Bretton Woods institutions, are no longer suited to contemporary realities and often reinforce inequality. Extreme wealth and poverty fuels fundamental instability in world affairs.
- The UN Security Council faces limitations, including deadlocks and the use of the veto power in ways that contradict the UN Charter's values.

(d) Conceptual barriers

- Ignorance and prejudice are a barrier to peace, as are cultural beliefs and practices that normalize conflict, violence, and exclusion.

- Racism, unbridled nationalism, religious fundamentalism, and the denial of gender equality are significant barriers to peace, perpetuating injustice and harmful attitudes.
- (e) **Resource and Capacity Issues**
 - The defunding of the UN and multilateral systems, including proposed cuts to peacekeeping budgets, destabilizes global action.
 - Local peacebuilders, though active, often need more technical support and funding.
 - The role of civil society is often disrupted, limiting local perspectives in global decision-making.

Future Challenges for Peace Operations

(a) Increasing Complexity of Conflicts

- The rise of armed non-state actors and the intricate nature of modern conflicts will continue to make mediation more difficult.

(b) Climate-Security Nexus

- While currently overlooked in some agreements, the interlinkage between climate and security will likely demand greater attention in future peace operations.

(c) Evolving Global Governance

- As the world becomes increasingly interdependent and the limits of traditional national sovereignty become apparent, reforms to the institutional structures of the multilateral system will become necessary, including changes to the UN General Assembly, Security Council, and international financial architecture.

(d) Crisis of Identity and Purpose

- As long as humanity struggles to define a shared identity and common purpose, competing ideologies and power struggles impacting global stability will continue to evolve.

(e) New Forms of Violence

- Peace operations will need to explore how norms of the UN Charter can be applied to emerging forms of violence, particularly those arising in digital spaces.

2. How could United Nations peace operations adapt in response to current and future challenges (e.g. in terms of political and substantive work, mandates, operational and administrative requirements, and capacities)?

Adapting UN peace operations requires a comprehensive and holistic approach that acknowledges the intricate nature of modern conflicts, fosters trust and unity, reforms outdated structures, empowers diverse actors, and prioritizes prevention and human-centered justice. This process must be continuous, reflecting on lessons learned and evolving to meet new challenges. The following are proposals for consideration:

Political and Substantive Work

(a) Strengthening Prevention

- Prevention must be central and universal, not just limited to conflict-affected states. Early warning systems must translate into prompt and strategic responses. Agenda 2030 and the rule of law should be leveraged as preventative frameworks.

(b) Adapting Mediation

- Traditional UN mediation tools have declined in effectiveness due to an increased frequency and protraction of conflicts, involving more non-state actors and external involvement. The UN's role in peacekeeping and mediation needs to continue evolving, recognizing that it may not be the only body to lead such efforts.

Mandates and Legal Frameworks

(a) Leveraging Existing Tools

- There is a need to maximize existing tools within the UN system that promote peace, for instance, the International Court of Justice.

(b) General Assembly Mandates

- The General Assembly's authority in peace and security should be reinforced with clearer mandates and mechanisms for action in crises, especially when the Security Council is deadlocked.

● Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) Mandate Development

- The PBC should be empowered to ensure coherence across the peace architecture.

(c) New Agenda for Peace

- The New Agenda for Peace needs to be narrowed down to a set of clear, tangible targets for effective implementation.

(d) Applying Charter Norms to New Forms of Violence

- Mandates should evolve to apply the norms of the UN Charter to emerging forms of violence, such as those in digital spaces.

Operational and Administrative Requirements

(a) Security Council Reform

- The relationship between the Security Council and the General Assembly (GA) should be strengthened through predictable and institutionalized mechanisms, such as regular joint briefings and consultations. The Security Council should provide structured and timely responses to GA Resolutions. The Security Council's veto power should not be exercised in ways that contradict UN Charter values; seeking an ICJ advisory opinion on its legal limits could ensure compliance.

(b) General Assembly Revitalization

- General Assembly (GA) revitalization must be rooted in transparency, inclusivity, and accountability. Redundant objectives should be removed from the GA agenda, and a structured mechanism for tracking resolutions and initiatives is needed for measurable outcomes. Strengthening technological capacity within the Secretariat, utilizing digital platforms, AI-driven analytics, and virtual forums can contribute to efficiency.

(c) Sustainable Financing

- There is a critical need for strengthened, sustainable, and flexible financing for peacebuilding, particularly for local actors, as well as the Peacebuilding Commission to focus on transitional justice and security sector reform. Addressing the defunding of the UN and multilateral systems is also vital.

(d) International Justice Mechanisms

- Accountability for illegal use of force is critical to building trust and fostering peace. Reinforcing universal jurisdiction mechanisms through the International Court of Justice can ensure greater accountability for international law violations. Efforts should be made to harmonize the International Criminal Court's jurisdiction over mass atrocity crimes.

(e) Systemic Coherence and Efficiency

- The UN system needs to be more intentional in its operations, with different peacebuilding and peacekeeping entities collaborating more effectively, for instance, strengthening communication between the Peacebuilding Fund, the Peacebuilding Commission, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, and the Human Rights Council.

Capacities

(a) Building Individual and Community Capacity

- Fostering community resilience by strengthening social relations, solidarity, belonging, and inclusion is crucial. Cultivating a spirit of dialogue requiring deep listening, non-judgmental curiosity, and humility is essential to promoting a culture of peace at the grassroots.

(b) Universal Education

- Universal education that harmonizes both technical and moral dimensions is indispensable for diffusing knowledge and combating prejudice. Teaching the concept of world citizenship should be a standard part of every child's education. Prioritizing education for young people is key to supporting their participation in peacebuilding processes.

(c) Cross-Sectoral Collaboration

- Peace operations need to recognize the interdependence of peace, development, and climate action, and address growing disparities and barriers to social cohesion.

3. What could United Nations peace operations be expected and mandated to do in the future? Under what conditions are United Nations peace operations least likely to be effective in achieving their objectives?

Future UN peace operations need to be more proactive, inclusive, and integrated, focusing on a broader understanding of peace and security. This would include:

(a) Addressing Root Causes

- Peace operations must address fundamental drivers of instability, such as economic disparities, racism, unbridled nationalism, religious fundamentalism, and the denial of gender equality.

(b) Preventing Conflict and Fostering Inclusive Societies

- Peacebuilding needs to be ongoing, involving reconciliation and inclusivity. Peace operations should contribute to a transformation at the level of culture, moving away from views and customs that normalize conflict, violence, and exclusion. This includes reconsidering language and cultural elements that center war rather than peace. This requires a combined application of spiritual, moral, and practical approaches, including education that promotes the cultivation of cohesive societies. Efforts should aim to build new patterns of community

life grounded in mutualism and cooperation, rather than competition. Dialogue, as an inclusive mode of communication, is crucial for fostering connection and understanding. To be effective, such dialogue should focus on genuinely exploring truth and understanding one another's perspectives rather than solely producing predetermined "deliverables."

(c) Rebuilding Trust and Unity

- There is an urgent need to invest in rebuilding trust in public institutions and the United Nations itself. This involves revitalizing institutions like the General Assembly through transparency, inclusivity, and accountability. Promoting shared values and common objectives can contribute to developing a common narrative and serve as a constructive baseline for interactions.

(d) Cultivating Political Will and Leadership

- Peace operations are hampered by a "paralysis of will" among leaders. Meaningful reform requires leaders willing to base decisions on moral and ethical principles.

UN peace operations are least likely to achieve their objectives under conditions marked by a lack of political will, inherent structural flaws, and fragmented approaches to peace. This includes:

(a) Political/Will Deficiencies

- Disunity among member states, Security Council deadlock/veto abuse, lack of political will for implementation (indicating intentional disregard rather than oversight), narrow self-interest/competition (fostering competing interests and prioritizing domestic concerns over global well-being), and interventionism concerns that make preventative action difficult are all obstacles to UN peace operations.

(b) Evolving Conflict Characteristics (described on page)

(c) Institutional/Structural Weaknesses

- Proposed budget cuts, particularly to peacekeeping operations, destabilize and hamstring global action.
- The UN's structure as an organization of state parties with supposedly absolute sovereignty does not reflect the realities of today's interconnected world.
- Failure to fully engage women, youth, marginalized groups, and local actors in policy design and assessment, along with shrinking civic space limits the breadth of perspectives and solutions.

(d) Conceptual/Attitudinal Barriers

- Uncritical acceptance of the idea that human beings are incorrigibly selfish and aggressive, along with language and customs that normalize conflict and exclusion, perpetuates cycles of violence.
- A global crisis of identity, where groups narrowly define themselves in contrast to others, as well as the erosion of common ethical principles leads to competing ideologies, power struggles, and a weakening of social cohesion.

4. What could be the role of partnerships, with regional organizations, international financial institutions, or other actors, in future United Nations peace operations? What are the

opportunities and challenges presented by partnerships, and what principles should underpin them?

Partnerships with regional organizations, international financial institutions (IFIs), and other actors are crucial for future United Nations peace operations, offering significant opportunities while also presenting challenges that must be addressed through principled approaches. The role and opportunities of partnerships in peace operations include:

Role of Partnerships in UN Peace Operations

(a) Empowering Civil Society

- Civil society can enhance accountability and transparency, acting as a bridge between Member States and grassroots movements. The insights of civil society are vital, and its role, often diminished, must be preserved. Structured and transparent mechanisms for civil society engagement are essential, including increased access to draft resolutions and expanded consultation forums.

(b) Leveraging Regional Actors

- Assessing the unique contributions of regional actors is key to supplementing the UN's ability to mediate peace. Strengthening connections between the Peacebuilding Commission and regional organizations can help deliver on commitments.

(c) Local Actors

- Local actors, including community leaders, human rights defenders, and civil society organizations, are often the first line of conflict prevention and should be approached as strategic partners, not just implementers. Building grassroots capacity to collaborate with social institutions reinforces shared ownership in community contexts.
- Insight can be derived from communities learning to cultivate enabling conditions for peace, whether through community-building and educational programs, as well as through collaboration with local institutions and leaders. Such communities can serve as models for study around how to foster environments free from prejudice that champion gender equality and engage youth, thereby informing broader peace processes.

(d) Full Inclusion of Women, Youth, and Marginalized Groups

- Peacekeeping and building efforts must actively engage women, youth, and marginalized groups in policy and programming design and assessment. Inclusive intergenerational partnership is vital, with increasing numbers of young people leading dialogues and projects. The Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) and Youth, Peace, and Security (YPS) agendas need to be further developed and serve as central frameworks for wider aims like dismantling patriarchal structures.

(e) International Financial Institutions (IFIs) and Regional Development Banks

- Strengthening and formalizing relationships between the Peacebuilding Commission and IFIs, as well as regional development banks, is crucial. Their engagement can help ensure predictability of funding, which is needed to assist in areas like transitional justice reform and security sector reform.

Opportunities Presented by Partnerships

(a) Enhanced Effectiveness and Inclusivity

- Local actors are in the best position to identify early signs of vulnerability and act as the first line of conflict prevention. Engaging a wide variety of stakeholders strengthens dialogue and increases the diversity of perspectives for assessing challenges.

(b) Resource Mobilization

- Partnerships can facilitate the mobilization of financial resources, especially flexible, multi-year, and pooled funds for peacebuilding efforts.

(c) Knowledge Dissemination and Learning

- Partnerships can be spaces for disseminating knowledge around best practices, for instance, around effective prevention mechanisms and approaches.

(d) Strengthening Norms and Trust

- Participation of diverse populations contributes to greater representation and participation leading to enhanced trust in institutions.

(e) Multisectoral Approaches

- Partnerships allow for a more comprehensive approach to peace, linking it with development, climate action, addressing wealth disparities, and promoting human rights and gender equality.

Principles Underpinning Partnerships

For effective and meaningful partnerships, especially in peace operations, several principles should be upheld:

(a) Inclusivity

- All stakeholders, including marginalized communities, youth, women, and civil society, must have meaningful participation, with their priorities considered and gender imbalances addressed. Intergenerational collaboration should be harnessed.

(b) Transparency and Accountability

- Peacebuilding efforts must be rooted in transparency, inclusivity, and accountability. Structured and transparent mechanisms for civil society engagement through, for instance, increased access to draft resolutions and expanded consultation forums ensures greater transparency and accountability.

(c) Shared Vision, Common Purpose, Trust, and Solidarity

- Peacebuilding efforts are greatly facilitated when participants work shoulder to shoulder toward a genuinely common goal. Building trust and shared solidarity are therefore fundamental prerequisites for peace operations. Such work requires cultivating environments where individuals and communities work to overcome prejudicial tendencies, and direct their energies toward working for the betterment of their societies, through for instance, educational programs that foster from early childhood qualities such as care, compassion, collaboration, and cooperation.