

Contribution of Croatia to the review on the future of all forms of United Nations peace operations

Please find below contribution by Croatia guided by questions provided by the Secretariat:

It is essential to reaffirm that UN peace operations remain a unique instrument for preventing, managing and limiting armed conflict, combining broad experience, legitimacy, and cost-effectiveness, while allowing for effective multilateral burden-sharing.

Nevertheless, current peace operations often suffer from:

- lack of clear political solution which contributes to protraction of conflicts,
- mismatch between mandates and resources,
- security threats such as terrorism and organized crime,
- weaponization of technology, mis- and dis-information,
- climate as threat amplifier
- geopolitical divisions, which often hinder unified support and clarity by the Security Council causing lack of trust between host communities and governments toward peace operations.

The experiences of Croatian members in UNMOGIP show that even in so-called "frozen conflicts", tensions remain high, and the presence of peacekeeping military observers is crucial to preventing escalation. Lack of political will is another hinderance. Croatian observers in Kashmir note challenges in maintaining impartiality in an environment where political actors often question the mission's legitimacy.

Limited resources, including financial constraints and reduced engagement by major donors to the missions is also an obstacle. For example, UNMOGIP is operating with only 35% of its expected budget in 2025.

Security risks for UN personnel that operate in border areas with intermittent ceasefires are exposed to risks of stray projectiles. Extra caution is recommended due to the possible presence of minefields and unexploded ordnance (UXO). Peace operation participants often operate in extreme weather conditions, which further strain operational capacities.

Future peace operations will be impacted by the rise of asymmetric warfare including non-state actors and digital threats including disinformation campaigns that can undermine trust in peace operations, while often operating in volatile environments. Therefore, focus needs to be on:

- flexible and contextual, clear, realistic, prioritized, sequenced and demand-driven mandates with achievable goals;
- political solutions prioritizing mediation, dialogue and inclusive governance;
- long-term peace and successful transitions that rely on finding sustainable political solutions based on people-centered and situation-specific political strategies supported by political will;
- development of early-warning, conflict analysis and horizon-scanning capacities within the Secretariat to better anticipate and prevent conflict escalation and expand deployment of envoys and mediation experts to areas at risk;

- strengthening coordination between political, military and humanitarian component ensuring efforts are directed to sustaining peace after mission withdrawal;
- advanced technologies such as AI, satellite surveillance, data analytics and digital communication tools to prevent threats, and improve decision-making;
- enhancement of pre-deployment training and securing adequate equipment, especially for emerging threats like cyber warfare including terrorism and climate-driven conflicts;
- inclusion of full, equal, safe and meaningful participation of women in all phases of peace negotiations, preparation and implementation of peace operations as without their engagement there can be no sustainable peace;
- promotion of full, equal, safe and meaningful participation of youth in peace operations and leadership roles;
- rapid deployment to contain conflict;
- increasing operational mobility for quick response to incidents along the Line of Control (LoC).

Future peace operations should:

- protect civilians, especially safeguarding vulnerable populations and earning trust of local communities;
- support democratic transitions through assisting in elections, institution-building and good governance, rule of law, sustainable development, justice reform and reconciliation;
- include environmental drivers of conflict such as climate-sensitive peacebuilding and monitoring and countering digital threats to peace;
- support diffusion of climate and humanitarian crises.

To make peace operations effective, there is a need for:

- a clear political strategy and the support with sufficient funds and political mobilization/leverage at all levels, including the regional and community levels;
- establishment of trust with host governments and local population;
- avoidance of unclear and unrealistic mandates especially if they are not supported by sufficient resources or lack local buy-in or the missions are deployed in active war zone without ceasefire or political frameworks;
- avoidance of fragmented coordination with poor alignment among UN components and also with external actors on the ground;
- strengthening collaboration with regional organizations and empowering civil society, academia and local communities will ensure peacekeeping efforts align with cultural and political realities and are informed by ground-level insights. Additionally, cooperation with international financial institutions could support peacebuilding and sustaining peace efforts.

This could result in more effective operations through:

- pooling capabilities,
- increased legitimacy among local population,
- better tailored responses including through hybrid missions.

However, coordination is important:

- to avoid overlapping mandates;
- to reinforce complementarity leveraging each actor's strengths;

- to ensure predictable and equitable financing across partners;
- to reinforce accountability, transparency and upholding of human rights, impartiality and consent-based operations.

It is also important for the UN Secretariat to strengthen its planning capacity, as well as more effective integrated planning between UNHQ and the field.

For Troop- and Police-Contributing Countries

Croatia supports the existing consultation mechanisms for Troop- and Police-Contributing Countries (T/PCCs), but believes that participation of T/PCCs should be more systematic and meaningful, especially in the early stages of mandate formulation and mission planning. The operational insights and field experience of T/PCCs are valuable and should be more consistently integrated into strategic and operational decisions. Strengthening this dialogue would improve mission effectiveness and strengthen mutual trust.

Experiences from the field show:

- limited involvement in planning and reviewing mandates causes that operational observations often do not reach the strategic level, which creates a gap between real capabilities and expectations;
- regular field reports from military observers have a limited impact on adjusting tactics and rules of engagement, despite their importance if they are not sufficiently valorized;
- the dialogue between the tactical and strategic levels is still not sufficiently two-way or timely, especially in the context of sensitive areas of operations.

As a participant in the UN missions in Western Sahara (MINURSO), on the India-Pakistan border (UNMOGIP) and Lebanon (UNIFIL), Croatia notes that one of the most important challenges is the limited political space in which these missions operate. Long-standing stalemates and the lack of active peace processes limit the ability of the missions to develop or make significant contributions beyond observing and reporting activities. In addition, the static nature of these mandates poses challenges for staff engagement, motivation and operational innovation. Ensuring the continued relevance, security and discipline of the mission in such environments requires attention, high professionalism and strong support from the UN and participating countries.

The challenges are:

- complex political environment that the missions operate in the context of divided local actors and the lack of uniform political support for the mission, which makes it difficult to implement the mandate;
- restrictive mandates in some missions, reduce the ability of personnel to respond adequately to escalations and limit their power;
- peacekeeping forces are often the target of disinformation and hostile narratives by local or regional actors, which affects the perception of the mission by the local population;
- security risks to personnel - for example, UNMOGIP observers work in zones of occasional conflict and armed incidents along the India-Pakistan border, which requires constant vigilance and adaptation of security procedures;
- the lack of adequate logistical support and resources, protective equipment and medical evacuation (MEDEVAC) can threaten the operational efficiency and safety of members.

Future peacekeeping operations will require more agile, interoperable and multidisciplinary units. Capabilities in the areas of cyber defense, civil protection, medical response and strategic communications are increasingly important. There is also a need for comprehensive pre-deployment training and preparation of peacekeeping troops, cultural awareness and strong leadership development, with a continued emphasis on respecting discipline and enforcing standards of conduct.

To continue effective contribution to future peace operations, it is necessary to:

- improve training and preparation with an emphasis on the protection of personnel, operations in dense urban environments, cultural sensitivity and management of complex humanitarian situations;
- provide specialized equipment and unified clothing adequate for the mission environment;
- strengthen logistical and medical support to enable rapid response in emergencies, including capacities for medical evacuation from remote areas;
- provide psychological and family support through systematic assistance to peacekeepers and their families to alleviate the stress associated with long-term engagement in demanding security conditions.