

Institute for Security Studies' written contribution to the review of all forms of UN Peace Operations

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

- **Lack of strategic political support:** UN peace operations frequently struggle with a lack of strong political backing from the UN Security Council, regional intergovernmental organisations, neighbouring countries, and host nations. Rising geopolitical tensions and rivalry hinder the UNSC's unified decisions and take decisive action on peace operations. Regional organisations such as the AU and neighbouring countries also offer inconsistent support, leading to limited ownership and the perception of the missions as external impositions. The declining political support, combined with performance-related challenges, often undermines the credibility and legitimacy of UN peace operations.
- **Supply-driven and over-ambitious mandates:** Mandates are the most central aspect of peace operations, as they define their scope and capacity. Most mandates are 'supply-driven' rather than 'demand-driven', shaped by political compromise among Member States rather than designed according to what is required by the conflict environment. Most missions have ambitious mandates and a wide range of activities, but are endowed with limited and mismatched resources (human, logistics, and finance). They are often overloaded with multiple tasks without sufficient prioritisation or sequencing. They have been designed without sufficient consultation with key stakeholders, including regional organisations and host country actors, resulting in a lack of ownership.
- **Lack of clarity regarding the UN peace operation's role in peace enforcement and counter-terrorism contexts:** The global conflict landscape has been evolving from interstate conventional conflict to intra-state and to a complex mix of insurgencies, violent extremism, and terrorism. UN peace operations, especially peacekeeping with its founding principles of non-use of force and impartiality, have not sufficiently adapted to match the current conflict landscape despite the growing imperative for a new generation of peace enforcement, stabilisation, and counter-terrorism operations. As a result, the role of regional actors, including ad hoc coalitions, has grown over recent decades, mainly acting as first responders. This has led to increasing demands to clarify the UN peace operations, especially as they operate in parallel with operations by regional actors, especially in counter-terrorism and stabilisation contexts. The absence of a strategic coordination mechanism among these various actors contributes to the complexity of peace operations.
- **Rigid and bureaucratic approach:** UN peace operations have gone through a wide range of efforts to standardise operational structures, policies, personnel deployments, and equipment in peace operations. At the same time, this approach has not been well-suited for every context; it tends to be rigid and often fails to adapt effectively to the evolving conditions and needs in the field. This challenge has been compounded by the limited flexibility given to mission leaders to implement their mandate by adjusting their approach to the context on the ground.

- **Absence of a sound exit strategy:** Most peace operations have been established without a sound exit strategy. Instead, they have often been created with a mandate for a short period, a year or less, which gets renewed for another brief period. This cycle of renewal creates uncertainty in the mission's overall strategic posture, realistic timeline to attain its strategic end states and ultimately for exit by transferring responsibilities to the host country.
- **Primacy of politics:** Despite wide recognition for anchoring peace operations in sound political strategies, militarised and securitised responses are prioritised in most mission settings. The primacy of politics as a key principle, which has been endorsed by the HIPPO report and other successive policy discussions, has been relegated to rhetoric rather than being institutionalised in mandate design, planning, deployment, and implementation.
- **High public expectations:** UN peace operations are often deployed in fragile settings where host nations have limited capacity to deliver a range of public goods and services. The host nation and local population often expect the UN peace operations to provide various services, including governance, education, and health provisions. These high expectations gradually lead to frustration and distrust of the peace missions.
- **Compromised independence of Peace Operations:** UN peace operations are often expected to balance operating independently and maintaining a sound working relationship with host nations. This notwithstanding, peace operations are facing increasing interference from host nations. This interference includes movement restrictions, using traditional diplomatic measures such as *persona non grata*, and, in some extreme cases, calling for the untimely closure of missions. Often, mission leaders do not receive the required political protection and support from UN headquarters. Such interference undermines the operational independence of UN peace operations.

2. How could UN 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)?

Reestablishing political support for UN peace operations

- A genuine and impactful attempt to adapt UN peace operations must confront the declining political support for these mechanisms. The starting point for any meaningful adaptation is to re-anchor UN peace operations in a shared political vision of international peace and security through frank discussions within the UNSC and leveraging the untapped potential of the General Assembly to build coalitions of support, which could, in cases where Security Council action seems unattainable¹.

¹ Vermeij, L., Hansen, A.S., de Coning, C., Issa, S., Hilding-Norberg, A., Cammaert, P., Hakanen, J., Ruohomäki, J. & Pylyser, B., 2025. *Preparing for the Future – Strengthening the Impact of Peace Operations*. In: *The Future of UN Peace Operations: 8 Policy Papers for the 2025 Ministerial*. Brussels/Berlin: Global Alliance for Peace Operations (GAPO). [Accessed August 2025]. Available at: <https://www.peaceoperations.net/publications>.

Forging regional support for UN peace operations is critical through leveraging and strengthening the strategic dialogue and interactions among key political organs such as the UNSC and the AU PSC to foster shared ownership of missions.

- The discussion on adapting peace operations must be crucially linked to addressing the power imbalance within the UNSC, which undercuts the legitimacy of missions in the eyes of host nations, local populations, and regional actors. A more representative, inclusive, transparent, efficient, effective, democratic and accountable UNSC could be a critical enabler of the ongoing effort to adopt peace operations, including addressing their operational and political legitimacy. The UN must consider implementing the Pact for the Future's proposal to reform the UNSC.
- The current review of UN peace operations should also broaden its engagement with regional actors, especially the AU and RECs, which offer essential political perspectives and operational experience.
- The review must affirm the complementarity between UN peacekeeping and African-led Peace Support Operations to enhance the political support for these mechanisms and create space for African voices to help shape the future architecture of multilateral responses.² Clear lines of communication should be institutionalised between the UN peace operations and regional actors to foster more regional ownership of these missions, address operational bottlenecks and create a conducive political environment for the missions to operate.

Enhancing the relation between host nations and UN peace operations

- Adapting UN peace operations requires properly interrogating and addressing the increasingly complex relationship between missions and host nations.
- Bridging the expectations-mandate gaps is a crucial missing link to addressing the downturn in host nations' political appetite for peace operations. Consultations with host national authorities have to be genuine and regular rather than performative and inconsistent. In addition, beyond elite-level discussion, missions need to find creative ways of engaging with marginalised groups and the local population
- Close monitoring of shifting host government attitudes and behaviours is also essential, underlying the need for an agile and flexible communication strategy capable of tackling misinformation and disinformation campaigns.

² Wane's paper Wane, E.-G., Williams, P.D. & Kihara-Hunt, A., 2025. *The Future of Peacekeeping: Africa's Potential Key Messages for the Berlin Ministerial*. Special Research Report 1. Addis Ababa: Amani Africa – Media and Research Services, 8 May. [Accessed 15 August 2025]. Available at: <https://amani-africa-et.org/the-future-of-united-nations-african-union-peacekeeping-partnership-practical-considerations-for-the-berlin-ministerial-conference/>

- Striking a delicate balance between addressing the host nation's needs and concerns and allowing the host nation to dictate mission operations is key. This proposal considers the growing tendency of some host nations to have greater say in various missions, including the development of CONOPS, composition of TCCs/PCCs, and designation of the Area of Operations.

Clarifying the UN's role in counter-terrorism and peace enforcement contexts

- UN peace operations are increasingly required to be deployed in or at least operate in parallel with operations by regional actors in counter-terrorism and peace enforcement contexts. This calls for the UN to clarify the role of UN peace operations with defined roles and responsibilities.
- Clarifying the role of UN peace operations also entails the policy choice to leverage the potential contributions of regional actors, especially in the African context. The New Agenda for Peace underscores this imperative, including proposing a recommendation to the UNSC to authorise peace enforcement action by multinational forces or (sub-)regional organisations where appropriate, and a recommendation for the UN to offer support to other peace enforcement operations when implementing countries or regional organisations lack the required capabilities.
- The existing partnership frameworks between the UN and the regional actors should be leveraged for an open, frank, and continuous discussion geared towards a clear understanding of the roles of the UN and other regional actors and ad hoc coalitions. This entails the need to institutionalise partnerships, align mandates and operations to leverage the comparative advantage of regional actors and ad hoc coalitions as early response mechanisms, and/or take on robust tasks.³

Mandate: Revisiting the processes, content and implementation

- Adapting UN peace operations requires dealing with the limitations of current mandating practices, content, and implementations. The UNSC's role in the mandating process needs to be redefined to focus more on strategic objectives instead of mandating individual tasks to avoid specifying too many prioritised tasks.⁴ Mandating processes must avoid overly ambitious mandates and instead adopt graduated mission planning—tiering priorities and outcomes sequentially that match the evolving conflict environment, with proper linkages to better transition planning. Without locally grounded exit strategies, peacekeeping missions risk overstaying or withdrawing prematurely.

³ Karlsrud, J. & Reykers, Y., 2025. *Integrating Ad Hoc Coalitions in International Conflict Management*. In *The Future of UN Peace Operations: 19 Issue Papers for the 2025 Ministerial*. Brussels/Berlin: Global Alliance for Peace Operations (GAPO). [Accessed August 2025]. Available at: <https://www.peaceoperations.net/publications> and <https://www.peaceoperations.net/publications>

⁴ Yohannes, D., Dessu, M. K., Liaga, E., Belay, T., and Chen, E., 2024. *A New Approach to United Nations Peace Operations: Pathways for Demand-Driven Interventions*. Policy Brief, New York: NYU Center on International Cooperation and Institute for Security Studies, 8 February. [Accessed August 2025]. Available at: <https://issafrica.org/research/books-and-other-publications/a-new-approach-to-united-nations-peace-operations-pathways-for-demand-driven-interventions>

- The mandates should be specific and tailored to the prioritised objectives, and deliberate effort should be made not to set unrealistic expectations.
- Conducting thorough consultations with regional organisations and, to the extent possible, host countries and local communities is key to ensuring mandates are supply-driven rather than demand-driven. Furthermore, mandates should have a built-in and real-time review mechanism to foster adaptability to the ground reality, allowing for immediate adjustment based on ground developments.

Primacy of politics

- A major leap of faith is required to realise the aspiration for the primacy of politics in peace operations, which was broadly endorsed, including in the 2015 HIPPO report. The UNSC, as the primary mandating authority, must insist on including political solutions in the mission mandates, which should not be secondary to military interventions.
- Institutionalising the primacy of politics in peace operations requires a mindset shift and anchoring the design and implementation of these operations in a coherent political strategy.⁵

Adapt a Modular Approach to Peace Operations

- The modular approach has received considerable traction to ensure peace operations are tailored and adapted to the context. However, implementing the modular approach requires its system-wide definition to prevent ambiguities. Field planners and regional partners warn that lacking this clarity could make modularity seem like a rebranding of current tasks or a generic 'one-size-fits-all' template, hindering innovation.
- Implementing a modular approach to UN peace operations should be based on a shared strategy and planning frameworks tailored to specific contexts, integrating early political strategy into mission development.
- The modular approach —covering political, security, and governance—should aim at shared political goals, with mechanisms for real-time review and in a manner that improves cooperation with UNCT and regional actors.

⁵ Karim, S., Rowse, S., Lilja, I., Attai, Z. & Fallon, K., 2025. *The Future of Peacekeeping Needs Everyone: A Path Forward for Women's Meaningful Participation in Peace Operations*. Policy Brief No. 03. Gender and Security Sector Lab (Cornell University) & DCAF – Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance, April. Available at: https://www.dcaf.ch/sites/default/files/publications/documents/FuturePeacekeepingNeedsEveryone_EN-may2025.pdf

Protection of Civilians (POC)

- It is vital to institutionalise further protection of civilians, which remains a priority in peace operations. POC must be incorporated into mission structures by creating POC plans that are aligned with transition milestones, including community engagement, mobile *Temporary Operating Bases* (TOBs), communications, and intelligence.
- In contexts where the UN peace operations are deployed with regional forces, joint POC training should be compulsory, and political, humanitarian, and development actors need aligned protection goals.
- Peace operations should develop a strategy that prevents the 'protection cliff' (reversals after transition) during mission drawdowns, which includes establishing verified host-state capacity frameworks.

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

- In the coming years, UN peace operations are expected to become more targeted, adaptable, and partnership-oriented, responding to changing conflicts. Future mandates will be influenced by the specific conflict context and the need to accomplish more with fewer resources.⁶
- Protecting civilians remains a fundamental aspect of future missions, not least due to the increasing threat to civilians arising from contemporary conflicts. One key expectation is for missions to act with clear authority, as the Brahimi Report (2000) highlights.⁷ Missions are also expected to help host nations restore governance by supporting rule-of-law institutions, training police and other law enforcement agencies, disarming combatants, supporting elections, and advising reforms.⁸
- UN SPMs will be increasingly called to facilitate dialogue and elections during political transitions.
- The current conflict landscape and future projection, especially in Africa, require missions with robust peace enforcement, stabilisation, and counter-terrorism mandates. UN peace operations will be expected to support these missions, including partnering with regional forces, through mechanisms such as Resolution 2719 (2023). The UN should focus on preventing extremism, leaving direct CT operations to regional partners.
- Considering the evolving trends, future peace operations may be mandated to deal with transnational organised crime, maritime security, and cybersecurity by leveraging regional initiatives.

⁶ Anyadike, O., 2024. The changing face of peacekeeping: What's gone wrong with the UN? 'There is a crisis on the demand and supply side of the equation.' The New Humanitarian, 9 July. [Accessed August 2025]. Available at:

<https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/analysis/2024/07/09/changing-face-peacekeeping-whats-gone-wrong-un#:~:text=Yet%20UN%20peacekeeping%20is%20suffering,has%20come%20to%20an%20end>

⁷ Humanitarian Practice Network, 2003. The Brahimi report: politicising humanitarianism? HPN/HPG Journal (online), 4 June. Available at: Humanitarian Practice Network [Accessed August 2025]. Available at: <https://odihpn.org/en/publication/the-brahimi-report-politicising-humanitarianism/#:~:text=weaknesses%20in%20the%20way%20the,of%20only%20marginal%20strategic%20relevance>

⁸ Dworschak, C. & Mross, K., 2025. *Why United Nations Peacekeeping Matters*. The Current Column, 12 May. Bonn: German Institute of Development and Sustainability (IDOS). Available at: IDOS [Accessed 15 August 2025]. Available at: <https://www.idos-research.de/en/the-current-column/article/why-united-nations-peacekeeping-matters/#:~:text=The%20primary%20goal%20of%20the,mandate%20and%20host%20country%20consent>

- Resurgence of interstate tension also indicates that UN peace operations may be called upon to address traditional tasks such as monitoring ceasefires and implementing peace agreements.
- Climate security is increasingly important, suggesting the need for peace operations to engage in the future, supported by climate analysis, mitigation advice, and assisting communities with resource disputes and greener practices.
- Supporting member states in upholding human rights and gender equality will remain a key demand for UN peace operations. Women's participation and gender perspectives will remain priorities. Progress in gender-responsive training and design must continue, with mandates promoting female leadership and protecting women and children.

Conditions Where Peace Operations Struggle to Achieve Objectives

- Power divisions and geopolitical contestations in the Security Council weaken political support for UN missions. Disagreements among major powers delay action and reduce the likelihood of new deployments despite the presence of conflict that warrants deployments.
- Host-country obstruction or lack of consent hampers UN peacekeeping. Hostile governments, restrictions, or withdrawal of approval hinder success. In Mali, government resistance led to MINUSMA's expulsion; in Sudan, opposition sped up UNITAMS's exit. Such conditions make mandate implementation difficult, especially when host leaders prioritise military victories or oppose oversight, reducing mission impact.
- The UN's effectiveness declines in active conflicts without peace agreements and counter-terrorism contexts, especially against groups like Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab that reject negotiations. Military action alone doesn't ensure peace.
- Success is compromised in contexts where peacekeepers lack the right resources, including the ability to fight insurgents, risking high casualties, as in Mali. Their neutrality is challenged when opposing armed groups. The Security Council's reluctance to deploy UN forces against Al-Shabaab, favouring AU-led forces, shows UN peace operations may struggle in such areas.
- When missions don't adapt to the conflict landscape, their effectiveness declines. Rigid bureaucracies and slow decisions delay threat responses. If missions don't adapt to using new technologies and tactics—like drones, warning systems, or agile units—they lag behind the demands of the operating environments.
- Fragmented efforts and competing actors weaken UN peace missions, with regional and major powers acting separately, creating obstacles. External interference, including by private security contractors, often uses aggressive tactics to undermine UN peace operations, due to divergent norms and approaches.

4. What could be the role of partnerships, with regional organisations, international financial institutions, or other actors, in future UN peace operations? What are the opportunities and challenges presented by partnerships, and what principles should underpin them?

- In the evolving landscape of United Nations peace operations, partnerships with regional organisations, international financial institutions, and other actors are poised to be pivotal in

enhancing adaptability and effectiveness. These partnerships could facilitate context-specific deployments, where contributing countries maintain strong diplomatic relations with host nations.

- Partnerships would enable joint conceptualisations and assessments, ensuring operational strategies are tailored to local dynamics. Regional organisations, in particular, could assume lead roles in rapid response mechanisms, conflict prevention, mediation, and stabilisation, leveraging their proximity and cultural affinities to bolster UN efforts.
- International financial institutions contribute through targeted funding for post-conflict reconstruction and economic resilience-building, integrating peace operations with sustainable development initiatives. Other actors, including non-governmental organisations and private sector entities, could provide specialised expertise in areas such as technology for monitoring ceasefires or capacity-building for local security forces. This multifaceted approach would allow UN peace operations to address emerging challenges like hybrid threats and climate-induced conflicts by drawing on diverse resources and perspectives.

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

- The opportunities presented by these partnerships are manifold, yet significant challenges persist. Resources, institutional structures, capabilities asymmetries, and norm divergences often lead to misunderstandings and tension among partners.
- Within the partnership ecosystem, aligning interests among UN Security Council members, troop-contributing countries, and regional bodies often proves arduous, compounded by incompatibilities in doctrines, approaches, operational standards, and strategic priorities.
- Delayed decision-making arises from the complexity of coordinating multiple actors. While the principle of subsidiarity, which prioritises interventions by those closest to the conflict, is key, it can inadvertently intensify issues or result in fragmented responses if regional interest and capacities are uneven.
- Partners like the UN or the African Union's over-involvement in enforcement actions may undermine their neutrality in negotiations, ruling out their engagement in mediation roles.
- Effectively implementing partnerships requires the genuine establishment of core principles, including mutual respect and trust to ensure equitable collaboration, flexibility to adapt to context-specific needs, and alignment of principles in areas of common interest.
- Clearly defining regions and partner roles is essential to streamlining engagements and avoiding diffusion across numerous partners.
- Adherence to established principles remains paramount for peacekeeping operations, while bespoke principles should be developed for other forms of peace operations, drawing lessons from experiences and ground realities.

5. Please share any additional observations that may benefit the Review

- A cursory look at previous reviews, such as Brahimi (2000) and HIPPO, indicates the recurrence of specific themes and recommendations. This underscores the need for the upcoming review of all UN

peace operations to assess the implementation status of the recommendations from previous reviews and examine implementation progress and bottlenecks.