

Review on the future of all forms of United Nations peace operations

PORTUGAL CONTRIBUTION

Questions for all Member States

1. Main Challenges for UN Peace Operations – Present and Future

Peace operations are an irreplaceable element of the UN toolbox and, in many conflict scenarios, they are the only solace of devastated communities, by ensuring the safe entry of humanitarian aid and life-saving supplies and by providing security where it is most needed.

Peace operations today face a complex array of challenges, including the increasing geopolitical fragmentation that hampers Security Council unity and, consequently, consensus on mandates. Security Council should be encouraged to engage in a more regular dialogue and a more collaborative work with other UN main bodies, in particular the PBC, and with regional and subregional organisations, namely the African Union and the European Union, ensuring coherence and complementarity. A broader and more frequent exchange of experiences amongst peace operation actors, civil society, think tanks and academia, can enrich the Security Council deliberations and foster more flexible, context-sensitive and adaptable planning of the mandates.

In the field, many missions operate in fragile environments, amid protracted conflicts, governance vacuums or asymmetric threats such as terrorism. The erosion of host-state consent, rising misinformation targeting missions and underfunding further impair effectiveness. Looking forward, climate-induced insecurity is emerging as a critical threat multiplier. Rising sea levels - according to the latest scenarios from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) - place coastal missions at increasing risk. This trend could potentially displace between 40 and 140 million people by 2050, exacerbating resource-based conflicts, deepening governance gaps, and placing additional strain on infrastructure and supply chains. These dynamics underscore the urgent need to integrate climate risk into the planning of peace operations. At the same time, growing geopolitical fragmentation is diverting both financial resources and political attention away from UN peace operations. This not only undermines their financial sustainability but also complicates consensus-building within the Security Council. Also, rapid urbanization and cyber threats are expected to reshape conflict dynamics. These trends will increasingly demand multidimensional responses.

There is an actual disconnection between the strategic, tactical and operational levels of peacekeeping missions. In the years ahead, the main task for the UN will

be to align the political views of its MS, correctly address them in the Council and then ensure they are reflected in the mandates adopted and the budgets provided. The liquidity crisis and lack of certainty for the next budgeting cycles will play an immense role in the effectiveness – or lack thereof – of peace operations.

Additionally, political views that privilege bilateral or smaller multilateral frameworks to address peace and security challenges may continue to weaken the UN's capacity to warrant peace and security. Investing in strategic partnerships while maintaining the validity of the UN will be the most needed task to perform.

2. Adapting UN Peace Operations to Current and Future Challenges

Portugal supports the modernization and adaptation of UN peace operations, with the objective of making them more agile, responsive and tailored to the specific context in which they are deployed. To this end, Portugal proposes the following strategic priorities:

- i. Realism and prioritization of Mandates
 - Aligning mission mandates with political strategies and operational realities;
 - Promoting phased and flexible approaches that are achievable and supported by sustained diplomacy;
- ii. Strengthening political engagement
 - Enhancing the role of conflict prevention and mediation, with a particular focus on local levels ;
- iii. Technological Modernization
 - Promoting the integration of digital technologies and artificial intelligence (AI);
 - Leveraging tools such as predictive analytics, satellite monitoring and telemedicine to improve early warning systems and environmental risk assessments;
 - Recognizing and addressing emerging risks, including AI-driven disinformation (e.g. deepfakes in conflicts zones) and the potential misuse of autonomous weapons systems;
 - Considering the appointment of AI ethics officers to uphold ethical standards and counter the spread of disinformation;
- iv. Strategic planning and Coordination
 - Enhancing coordination between UN Headquarters, field missions and regional actors to ensure coherent and timely responses;
 - Strengthening climate mitigation and adaptation measures, including: transitioning to renewable energy sources (e.g. Denmark-Ghana solar initiative in Sudan);

- Training mission personnel in disaster response and mediation of resource-related conflicts;
 - Adopting modular mandates that allow for flexible deployment and rapid adaptation to complex climate events, such as simultaneous droughts and floods;
- v. Investing in Personnel
- Promoting gender parity, cultural awareness and language skills;
 - Providing targeted training to address disasters and resource-related conflicts;
 - Ensuring operational flexibility through adaptable and context-sensitive mandates.

3. Future Roles and Conditions for Success

Future UN peace operations may need to focus more on supporting political transitions and inclusive governance as well as in addressing root causes of conflict, including socioeconomic inequalities and climate risks. At the same time, they should operate to facilitate disarmament, demobilization and reintegration. Also important, strengthen the rule of law. They are *least effective* where there is no viable political process, lack of host government cooperation or fragmented international support. Conversely, they are *most effective* where there is a clear political strategy, coherent mandates, sustained funding, regional buy-in and the consent of local actors.

Peace operations must be based on clear and solid political strategies that encompass the mission's total lifespan, from conception to exit strategies and subsequent consolidation solutions. Such political strategies must have the protection of civilians at their core and consider the root causes of conflict, prioritizing prevention, peaceful conflict resolution and peacebuilding thereafter. Climate-related considerations, namely the existential risks associated to sea-level rising, should be consistently pondered in ongoing or imminent conflicts. This requires integrating climate-related risk into mission planning – including addressing climate-induced displacement (e.g., drought-driven migration in the Sahel) within Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) programs and considering sea level rise when developing exit strategies, especially in Small Island Developing States (SIDS).

Empowering the effective participation of local communities, especially women and youth, in the planning of mandates and their implementation is of the utmost importance. Specialized training, including in telemedicine, is required to adapt peace operations to today's complex conflict environments and emerging threats. Clear, transparent messaging on mandate objectives and limitations is essential to build trust and manage expectations. The safety and security of peacekeepers must remain as a significant priority, including in post-deployment settings.

4. Role of Partnerships

Portugal underscores the importance of inclusive and principled partnerships. Regional organizations such as the African Union or European Union can bring critical political leverage, contextual knowledge and operational support. International financial institutions contribute to stabilization and development transitions. Civil society actors enrich local legitimacy. Partnerships must be coherent, coordinated and anchored in international law and the principles enshrined in the UN Charter.

Portugal, as a steadfast supporter of multilateralism and contributor to peace operations over the past 65 years, stands ready to work with partners to ensure UN peace operations remain a central and credible tool for sustaining international peace and security and to improve the life of millions of people around the world.

Questions for Member States that are hosting United Nations peace operations or have hosted them in the past

Non applicable to Portugal

Questions for current and former Troop- and Police-Contributing Countries

9. Portugal's participation in UN peace operations – factors and considerations

Multilateralism is a pillar of Portugal's foreign policy. As a country living in peace, we understand it as our responsibility toward global partners to help provide peace where needed. And because peace is not merely the absence of war, Portugal is invested, in the UN and beyond, in all phases of the peace continuum: from bilateral cooperation on judicial matters to Health and Education beyond our borders, from military and defense training missions in African partners to capacity building in the field of the Rule of Law or institutional edification, we have been coherent in our approach to peace and security.

UN peace operations are the operational arm of the global governance architecture when it comes to peace and security, and Portugal has been contributing, without caveats, to these missions. From Timor-Leste to Colombia, from Afghanistan to the Central African Republic, Portuguese troops, police and civilian personnel were deployed to where the UN asked us to and without hesitation.

Portugal remains deeply committed to MINUSCA in the Central African Republic, with the provision of a Quick Reaction Force (QRF) which is recognized for its capacity, flexibility and effectiveness.

Multilateralism and UN peacekeeping operations, will remain central to Portugal's engagement within the UN system. Looking ahead, the upcoming challenges are primarily logistical – it is essential to ensure that mandates are clear, realistic and adopted in a timely manner, enabling the proper preparation of military, police, and civilian personnel.

This will facilitate the implementation of well-structured rotation schemes, with recruitment processes launched transparently and as early as possible. Moreover, the provision of feedback on unsuccessful applications is crucial to improve alignment with the operational needs and expectations of the UN Secretariat and operations, thereby enhancing the effectiveness and responsiveness of future contributions.

Furthermore, Portugal's extensive experience in civil protection and environmental response can significantly enhance the logistical readiness of peace operations. In this regard, the accelerated recruitment of environmental security specialists is recommended, allowing Portugal to share its expertise in areas such as the wildfire management and civil protection.

11. Pressing challenges confronting the United Nations peace operations

The lack of results and slow pace of changes in the security, social and governance domains remain as some of the most pressing challenges facing PKO today, affecting the credibility of mandates as a whole.

12. Capabilities and support in the future

The future of peace operations, considering the current landscape of conflicts, will demand a greater level of combat readiness and preparation from the forces on the ground in all operational domains. Quick reaction forces, including those able to operate in demanding urban settings, will be essential for the success of future peace operations. The mandates set out by the UN Security Council must reflect this reality.

Specialized police units will be a key component of future UN peacekeeping operations, not only for public order management, but also for more specific objectives, such as training for climate resilience and response to health emergencies and disasters. Their role is critical in densely populated urban areas, where the majority of human casualties and economic losses tend to occur during crises.

Portugal considers that these units should be equipped and trained to:

- Respond to climate-induced emergencies (e.g., floods, heatwaves, wildfires);
- Support public health responses in the context of pandemics or large-scale outbreaks;

- Operate in high-density environments with complex logistical and social dynamics;
- Contribute to community engagement and trust-building, especially in fragile post-conflict settings.

These specialized police units will be needed within the peacekeeping realm but also as a support mechanism for transitional justice and long-term peacebuilding strategies once peace is achieved. Their continued presence and expertise can help ensure stability during fragile post-conflict transitions, support institutional reform, and foster trust between communities and state authorities.

Updated and effective command and control, force protection (both passive and active protection) are required to succeed in the current operational environment affected by uncertainty and emerging threats, potentiated by the use of technology.