

Secretary-General's Review on the Future of All Forms of United Nations Peace Operations

General

The United Kingdom welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this review. We supported the review's inclusion within the Pact of the Future to help ensure that UN peace operations - as a core tool to support international peace and security - remain as effective and impactful as possible in a changing global context. This timely review can also make a positive contribution in the context of important UN80 reforms.

We remain deeply committed to strengthening the effectiveness of UN peace operations in an increasingly complex world. Our submission offers reflections grounded in our longstanding experience as a permanent member of the Security Council, troop and police contributing country, and a consistent advocate for effective multilateralism.

We reaffirm the unique and indispensable role that UN peace operations provide in supporting international peace and security. Peace operations should continue to remain a core function and capability of the UN, and an area in which it holds a distinct comparative advantage. The capacity of the UN to deploy credible, multinational peacekeeping forces under the legitimacy of the blue flag is unique and invaluable, as is its ability to deploy UN special political missions. Recent trends towards the increased use of peace enforcement or warfighting by regional or coalition operations is not a substitute for UN peace operations. Nor does it indicate a decline in the utility of deploying UN peacekeeping and political missions in appropriate contexts.

Peace operations are a major tool in the global peace and security architecture. Their role should be situated alongside other instruments including mediation and regional initiatives. They are effective when deployed in environments that meet the necessary political, security and operational prerequisites.

Guiding Questions for all Member States

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

- a) **The risk of overloading peace operation mandates.** It is important that peace operations are not tasked with broad, open-ended objectives that stretch beyond their core comparative strengths – from ambitious state-building to wide-ranging governance reforms. This would risk diluting focus, worsening operational impact, escalating costs, and increasing the gap between mandate and delivery. Overly complex mandates can also make it harder to measure success, leaving missions vulnerable to criticism, including from local communities, and jeopardising host state consent and wider UN legitimacy when they fall short of unrealistic expectations. However, it is not the case that ambitious mission mandates can never succeed, rather they work when key and influential stakeholders are bought in and support the objectives of the mission.

- b) **Ensuring accountability for attacks against peacekeepers.** High level of attacks directed at UN peacekeepers as they work to deliver mandates agreed by the UN Security Council are unacceptable and may constitute war crimes.
- c) **Chronic financial arrears and delays in payments remain a major challenge.** The UN as an organisation must be able to plan on the basis of reliable financial forecasts. Delays in payments from member states undermine missions' effectiveness, especially against a backdrop of rising operational costs.
- d) **The threat of 'rolling-back' on hard-won progress in improving the effectiveness and performance of peace operations.** We are keen to ensure that ongoing reform discussions are used to *strengthen* hard won progress in areas such as gender parity, rather than diminish them. Safeguarding these policies throughout reform debates is critical: they underpin local trust, operational legitimacy, the credibility of peace operations and of the wider UN.
- e) **Mis- and disinformation, increasingly amplified in the digital age, undermines mission legitimacy, host state consent and local support.** These are vital for operational effectiveness. Without this consent, missions face restrictions, including on movement, which hampers the fulfilment of their mandates. For example, a 2023 DPO study found that 58 percent of UN peacekeepers reported that mis- and disinformation severely or critically impacted the work of the mission.¹ There is also evidence that this can lead to physical threat against UN personnel.
- f) **A lack of gender parity continues to weaken mission credibility and operational impact.** For example, a 2020 survey looking at female peacekeepers and operational effectiveness in UN peacekeeping operations found that women peacekeepers are widely seen as boosting operational effectiveness in multiple ways.² At least 80 percent of respondents agreed that women's participation contributes to a better situational understanding of conflict contexts, higher reporting of sexual gender-based violence (SGBV), improved intelligence gathering, better local legitimacy, and increased civilian outreach.
- g) **Varied training, performance and conduct standards within contingents present significant challenges.** Lack of context-specific training, focussed on cultural, language, geographic awareness, as well as local security threats, means that it often takes time for new contingents to become fully effective, especially with shorter rotations. This is exacerbated by the lack of systematic and sufficient handover processes within missions, inhibiting effective knowledge transfer. The lack of accountability mechanisms for conduct undermines trust in the mission and allows misconduct to go unaddressed. Furthermore, in-mission refresher training is limited and systemic post-deployment learning is not often captured. Performance standards can sometimes be inconsistently enforced, by both the UN and T/PCC's.
- h) **Exit strategies driven by imposed timelines or political pressures rather than the delivery of mission objectives.** This can lead to premature withdrawals that risk reversing peace gains. Additionally, unclear separation of responsibilities between peace

¹ Report - A Conceptual Analysis of the Overlaps and Differences between Hate Speech, Misinformation and Disinformation (June 2024)

² Osland, Kari M., Jenny Nortvedt and Maria Gilen Røysamb, (2020), 'Female Peacekeepers and Operational Effectiveness in UN Peace Operations.' <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/resrep25749.pdf>

operations and development actors can result in gaps in governance and security, especially when coordination is weak during the drawdown phase.

- i) **Sometimes contingents deploy without the necessary equipment or capabilities required for their assigned roles** or do not have access to technology to best deliver their work. Frameworks for reimbursement do not always align with required capabilities and skills.
- j) **Delays in the deployment of T/PCC personnel and equipment can significantly hinder the effectiveness of UN peace operations.** These delays can result from logistical bottlenecks within the UN system, including procurement and coordination processes. Additionally, obstruction by parties to conflict such as access restrictions or interference can further impede timely deployment and disrupt mission readiness.

2. How could United Nations peace operations adapt in response to current and future challenges?

- a) i. **Mission planning should be embedded within a whole-of-UN approach, allowing peace operations to focus on security and political tasks where they have a comparative advantage, while development or humanitarian actors lead complementary work.** This is aided by the UN Secretariat providing timely and pragmatic advice to the UN Security Council on what the UN's role could be in each conflict situation when asked, including consideration of what should be led by a UN peace operation, and what should be led by other UN agencies. Importantly, this should include, where appropriate, a frank assessment of where the UN is *not* best placed to act.
 - ii. **Mandates should focus on targeted, well-defined, and prioritised objectives that are tied to a clear political strategy for conflict resolution.** Peace operations should be designed to support this strategy by providing a political roadmap that outlines how the mission will use its comparative advantage to contribute to advancing political outcomes. For example, protecting civilians to enable an election, rather than broad-state building tasks that are better handled by specialised agencies. Seamless collaboration among DPPA, DPO, DOS, DMSPC and other UN branches or stakeholders (as relevant) will be essential to align operational objectives with realistic political strategies and peacebuilding outcomes.
- b) **It is important that the UN and member states are clear with parties to conflict, or other stakeholders, that the safety and security of UN peacekeepers are paramount and that their UN Security Council-given mandate must be respected.** Ensuring their protection is essential to maintaining operational effectiveness, upholding the credibility of peace operations, and preserving the integrity of the UN's role in conflict settings.
- c) **Member States should meet their assessed contributions in full, on time and without conditions.**
- d) **Missions and mandates should be adaptable to rapidly changing conditions on the ground.** To further enhance adaptability of peace operations, the UN should strengthen its standby and rapid deployment capabilities, and consider adopting modular approaches — deploying specialized, scalable units that can be tailored to specific operational needs. The UN must improve processes to ensure the right people are in the right place quickly. Technology is critical for this, for example, improving situational awareness through drones, satellite imagery and social media analysis, in both peacekeeping and political

missions. UN peace operations need the right skills profile to maximise the use of data and technology.

- e) **Strategic communications must be strengthened.** Beyond marketing and PR, UN operations need to better use radio, social media or community engagement, in order to protect local consent and reinforce mission legitimacy as well as to tackle mis- and disinformation.
- f) **Increasing women's participation at all levels – from patrols to senior leadership – will improve mission conduct, community trust and operational effectiveness.** The UK supports initiatives like the Elsie Initiative Fund, of which we are currently co-chairs, and have undertaken our own Gender Barriers Study to help identify and address institutional and practical obstacles to deployment. We encourage all member states to engage with similar initiatives or activities, as well as encourage the UN to platform them to enhance awareness and take up. This advocacy must continue and be prioritised throughout UN reform initiatives and budget negotiations, including UN80.
- g) **Training for personnel should be context-specific, offered pre-deployment and supported by regular in-mission refreshers.** A practice of structured post-deployment feedback, to ensure lessons learned from those with mission experience are passed onto new personnel, should be implemented. This will help contingents arrive better prepared, adapt quickly and enhance operational performance and effectiveness. Training should also reinforce standards of conduct and accountability. In parallel, missions should ensure accountability mechanisms are not only in place during operations but also consistently enforced to address misconduct, uphold discipline, and maintain trust in the mission's integrity.
- h) **Exit strategies should be in place from mandate conception,** based upon tangible peace outcomes and with the support of national authorities. Peace operations' exit strategies should be tied to delivery of the mission's objectives, rather than imposed timelines or political pressures unrelated to mission's mandate, to the greatest extent possible. The separation of responsibilities of peace operations on security and political tasks, and development actors on complementary tasks – while maintaining constant and mutually supportive coordination towards delivering Council mandates - helps maintain gains and reduce vacuums after drawdowns.
- i) **There should be stronger verification mechanisms to ensure contingents deploy with the necessary equipment and capability.** Where technological gaps exist, the UN should proactively procure or lease mission-specific tools such as advanced surveillance systems, early warning platforms, and secure communications technology—to enhance situational awareness, threat response, and overall operational effectiveness. Proposals should be evaluated within individual mission budgets, with a clear demonstration of value for money and efficiency gains.
- j) **Logistical and procurement systems should be strengthened to facilitate the more timely movement of T/PCCs and equipment. Member States should ensure that they in no way hinder or delay the deployment of T/PCC personnel or equipment.** The 2026 Contingent Owned Equipment Working Group could be an opportunity to address some of these challenges.

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? Under what conditions are United Nations peace operations most likely to achieve their objectives?

- a) **Peace operations should avoid being given tasks and objectives they cannot credibly discharge, either from the outset or through their evolution.** As aforementioned, mandates should prioritise tasks central to the UN's unique strengths. Large, multi-dimensional missions tasked with activities that are better delivered by developmental or other actors are likely to be less effective. Such missions may also risk becoming entangled within local conflict dynamics and institutions, making disengagement harder and risking security vacuums. Targeted, tailored missions with clear, focused goals and a strong political strategy can be more agile and sustainable, and less difficult to withdraw.

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?

- a) **The UN retains its comparative advantage in peacekeeping.** It remains a unique and impartial actor able to generate, deploy, and sustain missions around the world with global legitimacy. It also has unique legitimacy, experience and institutional knowledge in supporting political processes through bespoke missions. The UN also has the most advanced compliance standards, e.g. on human rights, gender and accountability which make its peace operations particularly effective as a tool for international peace and security. It is important that future or ongoing partnerships are built around these comparative advantages. Regional organisations, particularly the African Union, also have an important role to play in support of regional peace and security. Particularly, regional organisations such as the African Union play an increasingly important role in peace enforcement, which can complement the UN unique capability and comparative advantage in peacekeeping or other peace operations. The landmark Security Council resolution 2719 (2023) provides an important new tool to potentially support future AU-led peace operations. We urge and support continued work by the AU and UN to ensure all the modalities and procedures are in place – including joint planning, strengthened compliance frameworks, and alignment of operational models – to enable any future mission deployed under the framework to be a success.
- b) **The role of the SG's good offices remains critical.** This is a unique tool that can support international peace and security, especially through using the SG's platform as a global mediator-in-chief. Its role can complement UN peace operations. We encourage the current and future SGs to continue ensuring this unique tool remains effective in an evolving global context, including by being able to draw on the right expertise and networks to enhance peace operations. We also encourage consideration of where and how to deploy this capability to support peace and security objectives.

- c) **As engagement by UN peace operations with the private sector grows – whether through technology, logistics or security contracts, core UN principles must remain central: impartiality, consent, non-use of force and full respect for human rights.**

Guiding Questions for T/PCCs

5. What factors shaped your country's decision to become a T/PCC to United Nations peace operations? What factors and considerations will determine whether your country will remain an active T/PCCs in future United Nations peace operations?

- a) **The UK's decision to contribute troops to UN peace operations reflects our enduring commitment to multilateral security and upholding the rules-based international order.** We see UN peace operations as a unique tool for reducing conflict, protecting civilians, promoting global norms and political processes.

6. How would you assess the degree to which your views as a T/PCC were, or are, taken into consideration with regard to the mandates of United Nations peace operations and their implementation?

- a) **It remains essential that the Security Council retains oversight for mandate design and strategic direction of UN peace operations in accordance with its primary responsibility for peace and security under the UN Charter.** The UK recognises and welcomes efforts to consult with T/PCCs, particularly on operational matters such as force generation, training standards and deployment planning. This engagement ensures that mandates are implemented with realistic expectations of the capabilities and resources available. However, striking an appropriate balance between inclusive consultation and the need for clear, coherent political and operational direction is critical. Peacekeeping forces must remain capable of adapting their composition and capabilities to the evolving situation on the ground, while staying aligned with the tasks set in Security Council mandates.

7. From your perspective as a T/PCC, what are the most pressing challenges confronting the United Nations peace operations that you are involved in?

Many of these challenges echo those discussed under Question 1.

- a) **We note the practical importance of host-state consent.** Without it, missions encounter restrictions on movement, denial of critical enabling assets (for example, drones), and limits on engagement with local communities, which are essential for the delivery of protection mandates and wider operational effectiveness.
- b) **The quality and preparedness of troop and police contingents is vital for overall mission effectiveness.** This includes modern and serviceable equipment, effective use and assurance of logistics and robust medical pathways, supported by Force Protection capabilities that are ready and willing to act in the event of casualties.

8. Based on your experience deploying peacekeepers, what capabilities and support would be needed for deployments in the future?

Here too there is significant overlap with our recommendations under Question 2.

- a) **Systematic pre-deployment training that is tailored to specific mission contexts.** This should be reinforced by in-mission refresher courses and structured post-deployment lessons learned sessions, is essential to ensure that contingents can adapt rapidly and perform effectively.
- b) **Critical enabling assets, such as air assets, medical support, medevac, UAVs and counter-UAV technology, defensive force protection and other engineering and specialist intelligence capabilities.** These must be both available and deployable without undue host-state restriction.
- c) **Wider use of technology – such as drones, artificial intelligence, satellite imagery and data analytics, should be prioritised.** This is essential to extend reach, improve situational awareness and better protect peacekeepers and civilians.