



# Report: Civil Society Workshop on the Future of Peacekeeping Operations

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## I. Introduction

On 21 January 2021, a virtual workshop convened civil society representatives, researchers and academics from around the world, including from the main personnel- and finance-contributing countries to UN peacekeeping operations (hereafter peacekeeping operations), host countries and the five permanent members of the United Nations (UN) Security Council (the P5), to discuss the future of peacekeeping operations over a five-to-ten-year period. The workshop was part of the Future of Peacekeeping Operations (FOPO) initiative by the UN Department of Peace Operations (UNDPO), which aims to generate reflections on the future of peacekeeping operations and how the UN should prepare and adapt for challenges in the coming decade. It was generously funded by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The discussion focused on four areas: (a) the competing global normative discourses on how multilateral peace operations<sup>2</sup> (hereafter peace operations) can best contribute to conflict management and the extent to which, and how, they should also engage in human rights, democratization and development activities; (b) the relationship between populations, the state and different forms of security within the context of stabilization; (c) the need (and appetite of UN member states) for protection of civilians; and (d) the future of peacekeeping partnerships with regional organizations, civil society, and international development and peacebuilding actors.

This report presents reflections on the four key themes that emerged during the workshop: (a) geopolitical dynamics and future security challenges; (b) definitions, discourses and approaches of peace operations; (c) peacekeeping partnerships; and (d) preparing for the future.

<sup>1</sup> Views expressed and information contained in this document are the responsibility of the authors, and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any agency or organization.

<sup>2</sup> Unless otherwise stated, throughout this report the term 'peace operation' refers to multilateral peace operations, defined by SIPRI as 'Operations conducted under the authority of the UN and operations conducted by regional organizations or by ad hoc coalitions of states sanctioned by the UN or authorized by a UN Security Council resolution, with the stated intention of: (a) serving as an instrument to facilitate the implementation of peace agreements already in place; (b) supporting a peace process; or (c) assisting conflict prevention and/or peacebuilding efforts.'

## II. Geopolitical dynamics and future security challenges

The security environment in which peace operations are generally deployed has changed over the past decades: deployment settings are increasingly characterized by terrorism and violent extremism, organized crime, private security firms and mercenaries, environmental degradation, resource scarcity, urbanization, and epidemics and pandemics. Participants identified a growing trend in intrastate conflicts with transnational dynamics on the ground and a blurred division between conflict actors. One participant gave the example of the complex conflict environment in the Sahel, where armed groups are interconnected and frequently split, coalesce and shift allegiances, while the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) itself has been drawn into the conflict. Also, in several other settings there has been no peace to keep and peace agreements have been incomplete or lapsed.

The increasing competition between France, the United Kingdom and the United States (the P3) on the one hand and Russia and China (the P2) on the other, and the resulting fragmentation of the UN Security Council, has hindered political consensus and frustrated the Security Council's ability to deal with conflicts. Some participants noted that the decision on whether or not to act has become more interest based and less values and norms based. The view that peace is a global public good, which underpinned peacekeeping operations, has become less important.

The shift in the political centre of gravity away from the West, and away from global governance systems towards regional ones, may lead to a growing role of regional organizations in peace operations. However, there was a consensus that many regional organizations still lack the capacity and funds to deploy peace operations. Also, a number of participants from different regions pointed out that not all regional organizations are equally credible in the eyes of the international community, the host country or the local populations. One participant gave the example of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) in Eurasia and pointed out that this organization is not perceived as credible by Western governments. Although the CSTO has a designated 'peacekeeping' contingent and has sought to collaborate with the UN for over a decade, the initiative is still in the process of consultations. The same participant argued that a future shift away from the UN to regional organizations may lead to more peace operations being regarded as less legitimate. The majority of participants in the workshop agreed that in spite of the evolving geopolitical order, the UN is still perceived as the most impartial and capable body to deploy peace operations.

The general expectation among participants was that, operationally, peace operations will increasingly face unconventional warfare and its related techniques, such as hybrid warfare, disinformation and emerging technologies, including the increased use of information technology or cyber and drone attacks. This raised the question of how future operations would be impacted in practice, as 'cyber peacekeeping', for example, was questioned as to whether it is an effective response to these trends.

Participants also shared the belief that, given the increasing internationalization of armed conflict and the evolving geopolitical dynamics, regional and global powers are likely to engage more in proxy warfare to further their own interests.

### III. Definitions, discourses and approaches

In light of the evolving security environment and changing character of conflict, there was a consensus among participants about the need for redefining the role, potential and limitations of peace operations.

#### **Strategic aims**

There was a general consensus among participants that conflict management is inherently political in character, hence fostering genuine political dialogue, and that the promotion of political solutions should be at the core of peace operation mandates. The majority of participants felt that this should include promoting human rights, strengthening good governance and improving government–society relations. This discussion on political engagement was related to debates on the UN’s division between special political missions and peacekeeping operations. Participants agreed that the division hindered the effectiveness of all UN peace operations.

However, one participant from a P5 country argued for what he considered to be a more balanced approach to peace operations: between liberal peace and alternatives for Western democracy and market economy; between individual human rights and social and political consensus; between economic development and institution building; and between security and stability. Several participants from different regional backgrounds called for a stronger emphasis on prevention through improved diplomacy, early warning systems and the preventive deployment of peace operations. Only if these preventive measures would fail, should a stabilization mission be considered. Others noted, however, that preventive deployment may infringe on national sovereignty.

Although most participants understood the current political preference of the UN Security Council for smaller missions, they also stressed the need for comprehensive multidimensional missions to effectively deal with the conflicts at hand. This would, however, have to be done within the context of an anticipated continuation of tightening budgets.

#### **Definitions and approaches**

Although the importance of ‘stabilization’ and ‘protection of civilians’ (POC) was not questioned by any of the participants, discussion arose on the ambiguous use of such terms in the mandates of peacekeeping operations. Several participants from different backgrounds stressed the importance of a common understanding and operationalization of these concepts. This was suggested to help avoid divergent expectations between different stakeholders,

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who each may have articulated their own definitions. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), for example, has its own stabilization doctrine and concept of POC. A number of participants suggested that the UN Security Council should provide more concrete, explicit and clear mandates on what a mission does and does not do.

##### *Stabilization: Human versus state security*

The majority of participants asserted that the international community's focus on state security and the use of military approaches in the last two decades has not adequately addressed the structural root causes of conflict, nor sufficiently created stability. This is illustrated by the results in, for example, Afghanistan, Mali and Somalia. The lack of state presence and basic social service provision can play into the hands of insurgent groups, which have sometimes filled this gap, thereby further delegitimizing the state. As security is inseparable from development, and sustainable conflict resolution depends on tackling the population's grievances that gave rise to conflict in the first place, the majority of participants stressed that the improvement of human security should remain a key aim of peace operations.

One participant from a P5 country emphasized the importance of economic development and economic interdependency between countries to guarantee stability. Against this backdrop, he deemed the reintegration of former combatants into a country's work force and long-term development support essential. Other researchers pointed to the problem of state-centric approaches in environments where there is no clear distinction between state and non-state actors, such as in Mali or Somalia, where non-state actors have taken over responsibilities from the state (e.g. service provision and counterterrorism initiatives). There was a convergence of views on the need for a shift from a state- to a people-centred approach in peace operations. Although this would not imply that both approaches are mutually exclusive, participants did not have practical solutions for how they could be combined.

##### *Protection of civilians*

The importance of POC as such was not questioned. It was, however, noted that China would be concerned with the trend to have POC at the centre of mission mandates, as this would often be accompanied by the use of force and coercive measures. Two African participants asserted that peace operations should apply risk mitigation measures to avoid compromising their impartiality, and to prevent unintended consequences or doing harm. Examples were given in which the embracing of POC by the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) was said to have exacerbated tensions between different groups, as the mission was perceived to have chosen sides. Similarly, the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) has reportedly been perceived by the local population as partial and favouring certain armed groups.

The uneasy relationships between host governments and peace operations were also a point of discussion. What should a peace operation do when the government is not part of the solution but part of the problem, and civilians need to be protected against it? Most participants were concerned that support for such governments reinforces a culture of impunity and often fails to push the state to reform.

In general, regardless of their views on the best approach to and importance of POC, participants perceived the resources provided to peacekeepers as often inadequate to physically protect civilians in a sustainable manner. In the context of an anticipated increasing attention to cost-effectiveness, this development was not expected to change in the near future.

#### IV. Peacekeeping partnerships

The importance of establishing partnerships between peace operations and other actors was emphasized. Participants distinguished between two different kinds of partnerships: (a) with civil society and local communities; and (b) with regional and international organizations.

##### **Partnerships with civil society and local communities**

There was a consensus that peace operations should be more engaged with local communities and civil society actors in order to better understand local conflict dynamics and needs, instead of using one-size-fits-all approaches.

Participants agreed that the role of civil society should be enhanced beyond consultation. Relevant civil society representatives should be taken on board in the planning, implementation and evaluation of peace operations. This would better enable civil society to hold governments—the primary actors responsible for progress in peace processes—accountable. One official, suggested that civil society should already be included in the drafting of mandates. Stronger partnerships with civil society and local UN organizations were deemed indispensable for more sustainable exit strategies. As operations should anticipate the need for continued post-conflict reconstruction and peacebuilding, the transfer of knowledge and capacity to local actors and institutions was considered essential.

Many participants reasoned that the effectiveness and impact of a peace operation should be evaluated by the ‘end users of peace’, meaning the population of the host country. Peace operations should therefore move away from state-centric partnerships and include more decentralized levels of collaboration. One participant stressed that inclusivity also meant the inclusion of belligerent parties.

A number of participants stressed the need for stronger mechanisms to prevent misconduct by mission personnel, including sexual exploitation and abuse, and to deal with allegations when they occur. Peace operations should be held accountable for the actions they take, not least with regard to misconduct,

but also more broadly. The importance of gender-sensitive approaches, as well as female participation in peace operations, was also highlighted.

### **Partnerships with regional and international organizations**

In anticipation of regional organizations becoming more important in the maintenance of international peace and security, and in economic cooperation, most participants stressed that it is essential for peace operations to build partnerships and improve relationships with such regional actors.

The majority of participants expected that peace operations will increasingly involve complex constellations of missions in the future, with parallel international and regional operations operating alongside unilateral interventions, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa. As an example, they mentioned the Sahel and the Lake Chad basin region, which hosts the following: the African Union Mission for Mali and the Sahel (MISAHEL), the European Union Capacity Building Mission (EUCAP) Sahel Mali, EUCAP Sahel Niger, the EU Training Mission (EUTM) in Mali, MINUSMA, the French-led Operation Barkhane, the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel (JF G5-Sahel), and the regional Multinational Joint Task Force (MJTF). A number of participants noted that, in general, parallel deployments require better cooperation, coordination and a clear definition of their respective roles. The future need for a broad spectrum of expertise and capabilities strengthened participants' demand to further improve international comprehensive approaches. Participants therefore encouraged the creation of pragmatic functional networks of partners, based on a division of labour and led by the UN. Administration of the process and clarity on who does what should be provided by UN leadership in order to prevent unnecessary overlap and duplication, such as presently seen in the Sahel.

One European participant warned that regional organizations often intervene for their own interests, which could affect the success of missions. Therefore, a better understanding of their strategies, and the agendas and drivers of their members, would be required to help the international community in making the right decisions. On the other hand, most participants saw increased collaboration with regional organizations and individual states as an opportunity to unite the multitude of actors and activities. Another European participant argued this would also reinforce stability by channelling rival parties into a framework, similar to how the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE) fostered the relationship between the Soviet Union and the West. At the same time, participants noted that in Africa, despite the ambition of their member states, regional organizations still depend on donor organizations and the UN for financial assistance and strengthening their capacity. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), for example, was argued to have good post-conflict programmes, but lacks the capacity to implement them.

## V. Preparing operationally for the future

In addition to the recommendations above, participants identified four areas in which UN peacekeeping operations should reinvigorate efforts or prepare to be fit for the future.

### *1. Strengthen the knowledge of new technology and evolving hybrid challenges for both relevant UNDPO staff and military and civilian personnel in peacekeeping operations*

Relevant personnel need to be trained on how to develop tailored responses to new challenges and on how technology and innovation can be leveraged to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of peacekeeping operations. Several participants stressed political economy analysis should also be part of such training. Moreover, there was a consensus on the need for awareness of broader challenges such as food security and climate change. Considering the latter, one participant highlighted that this does not only apply to risk mitigation of the effects of climate change on conflict, but also to the climate impact of peacekeeping operations themselves.

### *2. Improve monitoring, evaluation and learning in peacekeeping operations*

The collection of lessons learned and best practices needs to be improved in two ways. According to multiple participants, peacekeeping operations' monitoring and evaluation of internal processes deserves more attention. Monitoring of the performance and evaluation of peacekeeping operations' impact should also be reinforced, despite the difficulties of doing so.

### *3. Increase policy coherence and civil–military coordination within peacekeeping operations*

There was a consensus on the need to better coordinate objectives and activities across and within the military and civilian components of missions.

### *4. Make mission mandates more strategic, including by moving away from annual renewals*

Last but not least, there was a consensus on the fact that one-year ad hoc mandates for operations are a major challenge for the planning of structural activities for positive peace. Participants called for a move away from such short-term perspectives towards more long-term structural strategies. However, if the political focus on peacekeeping operations remains short term, exit strategies should at least be developed at an early stage. Participants emphasized that the continuous collaboration of peacekeeping operations with civil society and local UN agencies is essential to mitigate the risk of doing harm with short-term activities. It was argued that only partner-based exit strategies could ensure and streamline the follow-up in countries after the closure of missions.