Leadership and Cooperation to Strengthen Protection of Civilians

Executive Summary and Recommendations

This policy brief could be of interest to policy actors and practitioners in the peace operations community.

The brief identifies challenges that UN peace operations could face in protecting civilians, grouped in three potential tensions:

1. principles and pragmatism;

2. national and local support; and

3. armed and unarmed strategies.

The brief proposes that leadership and cooperation could be important inter-linked denominators for balancing the potential tensions, and strengthening protection of civilians.

The UN policy on protection of civilians, and its addendum, include aspects on leadership and cooperation, and missions often have coordination mechanisms for protection of civilians.

Member States and the UN Secretariat could support UN peace operations in the effective implementation, however, by:

1. appointing senior mission leaders, or assigning them mentors, who are experienced in balancing the potential tensions in protection of civilians;

2. deploying protection of civilians advisers and other key mission personnel for protection of civilians strategically and locally; and

3. organising in-mission trainings and table top exercises on context-specific protection of civilians:

Background details

This paper was originally produced as a background paper for the Challenges Annual Forum 2018. The Forum was hosted 27 to 29 November in Stockholm by the Swedish Armed Forces and the Folke Bernadotte Academy. More than 140 participants from over 30 countries, the United Nations, academia and think-tanks took part in the dialogue over two days. The theme for the annual forum was *Action for Peacekeeping: Strengthening the Effectiveness of Future Peace Operations*.

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   i. understanding the protection of civilians concept and mandate and the political and legal frameworks in the specific context;
  ii. developing a mission-specific mission-wide strategy on protection of civilians, aligned with other key strategic mission documents;
 iii. ensuring coherence between different mission components, and an integrated approach with the UN country team;
  iv. developing and maintaining dialogue and engagement with all relevant actors, drivers for and against protection; and
   v. connecting support to the national level with local concerns and capacities, including women, men, girls and boys, of protection of civilians.

Introduction

Protection of civilians (POC) has developed into a priority mandate of UN peace operations over the past 20 years.[1] The UN Secretariat and UN field missions have produced guidance and tools to implement the protection of civilians mandates.

This brief could support ongoing work on POC policy and implementation[2], and be of interest to policy actors and practitioners.

The brief sets out to address the following questions:

1. What are some of the challenges that UN peace operations could face in protecting civilians?

2. What could assist UN peace operations in meeting these challenges?

3. How could Member States and the UN Secretariat support peace operations in meeting these challenges?

The brief is informed by UN policy and resolutions and reform initiatives such as the Action for Peacekeeping (A4P) and by the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (HIPPO)[3], including deliberations at the 2018 Challenges Annual Forum.

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1 In 1999 the UN Security Council authorized the UN Assistance Mission in Sierra Leone "to afford protection to civilians under imminent threat of physical violence" (S/RES/1270, paragraph 14). Today, POC is listed first of the priority tasks in mission mandates for the Central African Republic (S/RES/2448), DR Congo (S/RES/2409), Darfur (S/RES/2429) and South Sudan (S/RES/2406).
2 The UN Department of Peace Operations is currently revising the policy on POC (DPKO/DFS, Policy, "The Protection of Civilians in United Nations Peacekeeping", July 2015). In parallel, the department is developing a handbook on POC, with the support of the Folke Bernadotte Academy, to operationalize the policy.
3 The commitments on POC in the 2018 "Declaration of Shared Commitments for Action on UN Peacekeeping Operations" (paragraph 10) reiterate previous reform proposals, for example, by the HIPPO report ("Uniting Our Strengths for Peace: Politics, Partnership and People", A/70/95-S/2015/446). The A4P initiative aims to strengthen collective commitments on the implementation of POC.

Potential Tensions

This section identifies and analyzes potential tensions that could challenge the ability of UN peace operations to protect civilians, if not appropriately balanced. The inter-linked tensions are grouped under three headings: 1) principles and pragmatism, 2) national and local support, and 3) armed and unarmed strategies.

Principles and Pragmatism

This part identifies potential tensions between principles and pragmatism, by analysing UN policy and basic principles and their application by UN missions.

Missions are to protect civilians regardless of the source of the threat...

The Department of Peace Operations' policy on POC provides the operational concept and approach to protecting civilians to be followed by UN peacekeeping operations. The POC mandate is authorized by the UN Security Council within capabilities and areas of responsibility and without prejudice to the responsibility of the host government.

UN missions are to develop, and constantly adapt, tailored strategies with clear objectives for each prioritised threat of physical violence against civilians. They are also to prevent and respond to threats to civilians in their close proximity[4].

Missions are to protect civilians regardless of the source of the threat, according to the UN POC policy. Sources of threats of physical violence against civilians in the mission environments will depend on the specific context and could include:

- domestic (including proxies and other state-associated entities) and foreign security forces and international peacekeeping forces;

- non-state armed groups;

- community-based violence, inter-communal violence and self-defence groups; and

- serious criminality.

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4 Within 1 kilometre of a UN peacekeeping base, according to the "Executive Summary of the Independent Special Investigation into the violence which occurred in Juba in 2016 and UNMISS response", 1 November 2016, p. 6.

The missions could face challenges in living up to the requirement of protecting civilians irrespective of the identity of the threat. The challenges could be present with several of the threats above, and particularly in places where the host state government is constituting threats to civilians[5].

There are cases, for example, in Sudan and DR Congo (and other hostile and non-permissive environments), where missions have failed to protect civilians from violence by the governments. The reasons could be political considerations and related to the principle of "consent of the parties"[6], usually of the host government.

UN peace operations rely on consent for their presence in the host countries to be able to move around freely and support the protection of communities at risk. Responding to threats from the government (or affiliated forces)[7] could be viewed unfavourably and create a political dilemma for peace operations.

If they neglect to prevent or respond to these threats, however, the missions' legitimacy and credibility and the principle of "impartiality"[8] could be compromised. This, in turn, could limit the ability of UN peace operations in both of their priority mandates: facilitating the political process and protecting civilians.

National and Local Support

This part identifies the potential tension of national and local support, including by looking at the two priority mandates of protection of civilians and facilitation of the political process, as well as operations in support of the host state.

When UN missions support national peace talks there could be a temporary upspring of violence against civilians at the local level by those who are not part of the talks. Also, support to politics can involve brokering deals between elites or those who may not prioritise the protection of the civilian population.

The potential tension between national and local support is related to the dilemma of responding to threats against civilians from the host government. Again, when missions do not respond to these threats they could lose the credibility and legitimacy in the eyes of the populations.

The state- and people-centred approaches are both found in the UN

If they [UN missions] neglect to prevent or respond to these threats, however, the missions' legitimacy and credibility and the principle of "impartiality" could be compromised.

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5 See, for example, Fjelde, Hultman and Nilsson, "Protection through Presence: UN Peacekeeping and the Costs of Targeting Civilians", International Organisation, 2018, p. 26.
6 UN DPKO/DFS, "United Nations Peacekeeping Operations: Principles and Guidelines", 2008, p. 31.
7 Missions can use force against elements of government forces at the tactical level, when required to protect civilians, according to the UN POC policy.
8 UN DPKO/DFS, "United Nations Peacekeeping Operations: Principles and Guidelines", 2008, p. 33.

Charter and could be linked to these tensions. The protection of civilians mandate embodies the people-centred approach. Yet, the limits of UN missions in providing POC could be referenced to the international system of sovereign states.

Moreover, missions are to deliver the mandate "impartially" but are often also deployed to support the capacities of the host state in protecting civilians (and to extend state authority).

Examples of this tension can be observed in the missions in the DR Congo and the Central African Republic with the use of offensive military operations against certain non-state armed groups. The opinion of what constitutes prioritised threats to civilians could differ between "locals" and the host government.[9]

The Human Rights Due Diligence Policy (HRDDP) is an instrument that is to be used when missions support non-UN security forces, such as national and international forces.[10] It aims to ensure that UN support is not given to forces that have committed human rights violations. The HRDDP started off as the conditionality policy of the UN mission in DR Congo in 2009 and was then adopted across the UN in 2011. Progress has been made but there are allegedly still some challenges with ensuring full implementation of the policy[11].

The UN mission in Mali is reportedly experiencing similar challenges in its support to the Malian Armed Forces (as well as the G5 Sahel Joint Force and the French Operation Barkhane) in so called counter-terrorism operations in the region.[12]

Additionally, a heavy focus on the use of military force to protect civilians, as in the cases above, could become problematic (to be discussed below). The engagement with local communities and humanitarian and development actors could also be negatively affected by security and legal consequences, and perceptions.

Armed and Unarmed Strategies

This part identifies the potential tension between armed and unarmed POC strategies, by studying the policy, mandates, reform initiatives and operations in the field.

The UN policy emphasizes protection of civilians as a whole-of-mission

The opinion of what constitutes prioritised threats to civilians could differ between "locals" and the host government.

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9 Vinck et al. 2015, "Peacebuilding and Reconstruction Polls in Eastern DRC", Harvard Humanitarian Initiative, for example, shows that the population in Fizi territory and Rutshuru territory ranked (state) armed forces higher than (non-state) armed groups as a cause of feeling of insecurity.
10 "Human Rights Due Diligence Policy on United Nations Support to Non-United Nations Security Forces", A/67/775-S/2013/110.
11 Dialogue strand discussion at Challenges Annual Forum, November 2018.
12 Ibid. (Support to the Malian Armed Forces is within the mandated support to the extension of state authority.) See also Di Razza, Namie, "Protecting Civilians in the Context of Violent Extremism: The Dilemmas of UN peacekeeping in Mali", International Peace Institute (IPI), October 2018, p. 25.

activity with the three tiers of the POC concept:

Tier I: Protection through dialogue and engagement

Tier II: Provision of physical protection

Tier III: Establishment of a protective environment

The tiers can be applied by all components (civilian, military and police) and be mutually reinforcing throughout the lifecycle of a mission. The context and threat at hand is to determine the appropriate method to be applied.

Some refer to an over-focus on military POC approaches[13] and call on missions, such as in the DR Congo[14], Mali and the Central African Republic, to use the appropriate tool for each threat. New empirical research shows, for example, that military means are not as effective on physical violence against civilians by host states[15].

Members of the UN Security Council have recently made explicit reference to dialogue and engagement in the POC tasks listed in mission mandates.[16] Components could, for example, improve support in dialogue, mediation, conflict resolution, reconciliation and liaison at different levels. Unarmed protection of civilians strategies were also stressed in the recommendations of the HIPPO report[17].

The UN POC policy describes an active duty to protect civilians, with the use of force (expressed as "all necessary means")[18] when required, under the conditions outlined in the policy. Military and police components have additional guidelines on POC and are respectively guided by the rules of engagement and directive on use of force.

When using force, missions are to adhere to applicable international law. The principle of necessity differs in the two legal frameworks of international humanitarian law and international human rights law and how they regulate force[19]. This necessitates a distinction in each situation of which legal framework that is applicable. Missions are also to follow the principles such as impartiality and be seen as fair (proportionate, equal and transparent)[20]. This could be important in order to maintain credibility and legitimacy as well as for the threat of force to be a leverage, credible deterrence.

Some refer to an over-focus on military POC approaches and call on missions, such as in the DR Congo, Mali and the Central African Republic, to use the appropriate tool for each threat.

13 Dialogue strand discussion at Challenges Annual Forum, November 2018. See also, for example, Mamiya, Ralph, "Protection of Civilians and Political Strategies", IPI, May 2018, p. 3.
14 The Force Intervention Brigade of the UN mission in DR Congo is authorized "to neutralize armed groups", UN Security Council Resolution 2409 (2018), paragraph 36(i).
15 See, for example, Fjelde et al., 2018, p. 26.
16 South Sudan: S/RES/2406, para 7 (mediation), 15 March 2018; DR Congo: S/RES/2409, para 36 (local mediation efforts), 27 March 2018; and Mali: S/RES/2423, para 38 (dialogue), 28 June 2018.
17 HIPPO report, paragraph 86.
18 The first resolution that explicitly stated that using all necessary means includes "the use of force" was UN Security Council Resolution 2436 (2018) on performance.
19 Lamont, Carina, "Empowering the Protection of Civilians. Legal aspects of the use of force to protect civilians in peace operations", FOI, July 2012, p. 46.
20 Ibid, p. 43.

There are reports of UN troops being too cautious in using force when required to protect civilians.[21] Discrepancies may originate from disclosed and undisclosed national caveats. Contributing countries commit, in the A4P Declaration, to redouble efforts to communicate clearly on caveats that impede missions' abilities to protect civilians.[22] Other high-level commitments include the Kigali Principles on protection of civilians launched in 2015.[23] However, the implementation of the commitments reportedly still lack behind, for example, regarding the proactiveness of UN troops and readiness to respond when required.[24]

Contemporary mission settings could be characterised by several different operations in the same area; UN, national, regional and sub-regional operations as well as ad-hoc security arrangements, as in Mali.

There are examples of non-UN forces as "first responders" with robust and enforcement mandates, supported by authorizations of the Security Council as well as capabilities of Member States or sub-regional organizations.[25]

The A4P Declaration recognizes the need for partnerships as well as "a clear delineation of roles between operations"[26], which could be considering different forces operating in the same geographical contexts. The UN is currently working with regional entities on the development of a joint compliance framework and stressing the full application of the HRDDP and international humanitarian law[27]. Moreover, there are requests for the UN human rights screening policy of the UN military and police provided by Member States to be aligned with the HRDDP.[28]

The nature and scope of support to parallel forces have also raised legal questions whether or not UN troops could be considered "party to the conflict", "combatants" and "legitimate military target" under international humanitarian law.[29]

Compliance frameworks are currently also under development in connection with operational and logistical support to parallel ad hoc security arrangements such as the G5 Sahel Joint Force[30]. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR) is involved in training these forces on international humanitarian law and international human rights law.[31]

21 For example, Office of Internal Oversight Services, "Evaluation of the implementation and results of protection of civilians mandates in United Nations peacekeeping operations", A/68/787, 7 March 2014, p. 7.
22 A4P Declaration, paragraph 15.
23 "The Kigali Principles on the Protection of Civilians" issued at the conclusion of the High-Level International Conference on the Protection of Civilians, Kigali, 28-29 May 2015.
24 See, for example, UN Security Council Resolution 2406 (2018), p. 5 and Fjelde et al., 2018, p. 26.
25 Dialogue strand discussion at Challenges Annual Forum, November 2018.
26 A4P Declaration, paragraph 18.
27 UN Secretary-General, "Note to Correspondents: Joint Declaration of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission and the Secretary-General of the United Nations", New York, 6 December 2018.
28 Dialogue strand discussion at Challenges Annual Forum, November 2018.
29 Ibid. See also, for example, Khalil, Mona, "The world needs robust peacekeeping not aggressive peacekeeping", ICRC Humanitarian Law and Policy Blog, 15 May 2018.
30 UN Security Council Resolution 2391 (2017) and "technical agreement on 23 February 2018 between the UN, the European Union and the G5 Sahel".
31 International Institute of Humanitarian Law, "First course on IHL and Human Rights for the G-5 Sahel", 3 December 2018.

Leadership and Cooperation

This section examines what could assist UN missions, and how they could be assisted, with regards to the potential tensions identified in the previous section. It proposes that the role of the senior mission leadership, and internal and external cooperation, could be central in balancing the potential tensions, and strengthening POC.

Senior Mission Leadership to balance tensions

Senior mission leaders[32] have individual responsibilities attached to their roles and functions in relation to the priority mandate of protection of civilians. A case in point is the shortcomings of the UN mission in South Sudan to protect civilians during the violence in 2016, which led to the replacement of the Force Commander[33].

The UN Security Council resolution on performance in 2018 stressed "the importance of continued and further engagement by senior mission leadership" in the mission's POC mandate.[34]

An addendum to the policy on protection of civilians was added the same year.[35] It aims to clarify the core individual responsibilities of the senior mission leaders in POC and the related accountability mechanisms.

Leading potential tensions, as those identified in this brief, could be part of the tasks that senior mission leaders have to master in protection of civilians.

In order to lead potential tensions, the senior mission leadership could have a particular responsibility in grasping:

- the POC mandate and concept;

- the development and implementation of the POC strategy;

- how to use different POC tools available to the mission;

- the political and legal frameworks in the particular context; and

- the coherence of the POC strategy with other strategic documents such as the mission plan, concept of operations and the political strategy.

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32 The senior mission leadership is identified for the purpose of this brief, although leadership is important at all levels, from the decision-making on mandates in the Security Council, to the responsibility of the host governments, to the missions' engagement with local actors in the field.
33 Global Peace Operations Review, "Accountability for peacekeeping failures must be shared by the UN in New York", 8 December 2016 and "Executive Summary of the Independent Special Investigation into the violence which occurred in Juba in 2016 and UNMISS response", 1 November 2016.
34 UN Security Council Resolution 2436 (2018)
35 Addendum 2018 to the 2015 DPKO-DFS Policy on Protection of Civilians in United Nations Peacekeeping: Accountability for implementation of Protection of Civilians (POC) mandates.

...senior mission leadership is 'to ensure that the mission's political strategy reflects and complements its POC mandate, and that the mission's good offices are leveraged to prevent and mitigate threats to civilians'.

Balancing Principles and Pragmatism

This part suggests that senior mission leadership could have a central role in balancing the potential tension between principles and pragmatism, in relation to context-specific approaches to protecting civilians.

Responding to threats from the host government, or supporting its operations, could pose dilemmas connected to the basic principles of "consent" and "impartiality", and political considerations. The credibility and legitimacy of UN peace operations in protecting civilians could be related to the basic principles, as examples in the previous section indicate.

"The ability to carefully weigh ends and means" is another way that the balance between politics and principles has been expressed by senior leaders.[36]

The senior mission leader is to be in regular communication with the host state government, as well as other parties. They could interact on the political process and protection of civilians responsibilities as well as access and security of mission personnel. In the A4P Declaration host governments commit to cooperate with missions on these matters[37]. As noted previously, however, gaps could be found between commitments and the sometimes hostile or non-permissive realities on the ground. The senior mission leaders may need to balance the tension.

The addendum to the POC policy states that the senior mission leadership is "to ensure that the mission's political strategy reflects and complements its POC mandate, and that the mission's good offices are leveraged to prevent and mitigate threats to civilians".[38]

The A4P Declaration highlights tailored, context-specific approaches to protecting civilians. Missions, including the senior leadership, could be required to have comprehensive knowledge and understanding of the area of deployment.

Experiences from other places cannot necessarily be transferred. The capacities of host states and other protection actors may differ, and to what extent there is a coherent vision and approach among the actors. The community dynamics in one conflict setting may also be different to another, therefore tools such as community alert networks may not always be effective, for instance.

Factors that could determine which protection activities that are necessary include the:

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36 Hochschild, Fabrizio, "In and above conflict. A study on leadership in the United Nations", Geneva, July 2010, p. 75.
37 A4P Declaration, paragraphs 9 and 19.
38 Addendum 2018, p. 3.

- threats (their nature, intent, capacity and opportunity),

- vulnerabilities of the populations or communities at risk,

- impact the violence would have on civilians,

- likelihood of occurrence,

- drivers/capacities for protection,

- drivers against protection,

- time, and

- area.

The senior mission leadership could have a particular responsibility in ensuring that the mission prioritizes strategic threats to civilians, in addition to the threats in their proximity. The ongoing assessments of risks to civilians could specifically identify the strategic threats; violence that could result in mass civilian causalities. They could also include an "atrocity prevention lens"[39], systematically looking at larger patterns of threats of physical violence against civilians. This could be part of the work of the Joint Mission Analysis Centres, which are usually the main units responsible for strategic threat assessments.

Cooperation - internally and externally - to balance tensions

In addition to the role of the senior leadership, cooperation and coordination is identified as key for missions' protection of civilians.[40]

Cooperation is defined broadly in this brief, with all relevant actors, depending on the context. It ranges from internal collaboration between mission sections, to coordination with other UN entities, to mission engagement with the host government, a local community or an armed group.

Balancing Armed and Unarmed Strategies

This part proposes that an effective whole-of-mission, integrated and comprehensive approach - led by the senior leadership - could help in managing the potential tension between armed and unarmed strategies.

The A4P Declaration reiterates that, at its best, "peacekeeping is one of the

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39 Dialogue strand discussion at Challenges Annual Forum, November 2018. See also Gorur and Sharland, "Prioritizing the POC in UN peace operations. Analysing the recommendations of the HIPPO Report", Stimson, 2016.
40 See, for example, UN Secretary-General, "Note to Correspondents on the findings of the Central African Republic Special Investigation", 24 January 2018, recommending both improved cooperation and senior leadership.

most effective tools available to the UN"[41]. The different competences of military, police and civilian personnel - complementing each other - make UN peace operations unique.

The three-tiered approach, armed and unarmed tools, forms part of effective protection of civilians. The appropriate tool is to be determined by the threat at hand...

The three-tiered approach (see the previous section), armed and unarmed tools, forms part of effective protection of civilians. The appropriate tool is to be determined by the threat at hand, for example, political pressure (rather than the use of force) to prevent and respond to threats by host governments. As noted previously, the credibility and legitimacy as well as the coordination with other protection actors could otherwise be compromised.

Context-specific trainings and continuous engagement with the troop- and police-contributing countries on the POC mandate could be central throughout the mission's lifespan.

Internal coherence of the different mission components could be an important task for the senior mission leadership team. Here it could be vital to ensure that frameworks for coordination and information-sharing are functioning, and that silos are addressed.

The senior leadership could assure that all sections develop and implement their different workplans in accordance with the mission-wide POC strategy. It could lead the mission to achieve this aim, with the support of a senior POC adviser, in the senior management group for protection. Ensuring that missions have the required civilian expertise for protection of civilians could also be crucial.

Some of the mission sections and components cooperating on protection of civilians, with the support of the POC units, include[42]:

- Political Affairs offices that could link the political strategy with the protection of civilians mandate. This work could be particularly pertinent in Tier I of the POC concept on protection through dialogue and engagement, as noted previously.

- Civil Affairs offices that cooperate closely with local community-based partners, for example, in intergroup dialogue, conflict prevention, early warning and support to community protection plans. It could be important to engage both national and sub-national actors in protection of civilians (to be discussed in the next part).

- Joint Mission Analysis Centres, referred to above, that build the threat assessments on information from all sections, for example, the Political Affairs and Civil Affairs offices and the police and military components.

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41 A4P Declaration, paragraph 3.
42 Apart from the sections mentioned elsewhere in the brief such as Disarmament Demobilisation and Reintegration/ Community Violence Reduction, Public Information, Human Rights, Child Protection, Women Protection and Gender offices; in addition to Rule of Law/Justice, Security Sector Reform, Strategic Planning and Mission Support sections.

- Joint Operations Centres that track and report POC indicators and coordinate joint operations.

- UN police officers that assist the national police in POC through the prevention of criminal activities and lawlessness, and support engagement between the police and local populations.

- UN troops that typically constitute the majority of the mission personnel. They can be deployed in areas where civilian and police components cannot, due to UN security and safety restrictions. Military and police protection measures and means could also enable a more secure and safe environment for the work of civilian sections. The senior mission leadership team could cooperate closely to ensure coherence of strategic and operational plans.

The military bases that are deployed locally could be supported by deployments of joint protection teams, with personnel from civilian substantive sections and the UN police. In addition, community liaison assistants from the Civil Affairs offices could deploy to the bases. These POC "tools" were developed in the mission in the DR Congo and have been mirrored in other missions. The senior management group for protection has also been advanced in this and subsequent missions, such as in the Central African Republic, to assist prioritisation and cooperation on POC.

The POC policy also promotes the integrated approach, including coordination with the UN country team and the humanitarian country team. A forum for this is the Protection Cluster with the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), the Office of the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and the UN International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), among others. Sub-national, national and international non-governmental organisations could participate. UN agencies and other humanitarian actors in the mission setting could also be invited to several of the mission POC coordination mechanisms.

For the tasks in creating a protective environment (Tier III), UN missions could coordinate with partners and stakeholders who are working on development long term. This could also be pertinent in terms of missions' exit strategies and to facilitate future transitions between UN peace operations and UN country teams.

The transition from the UN peacekeeping operation to the UN country team in Liberia has been described as a successful example. The senior mission leader reportedly had a key role in facilitating the close cooperation between the mission and the country team.[43]

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43 Daniel Forti, Daniel and Connolly, Lesley, "The Mission Is Gone, but the UN Is Staying: Liberia's Peacekeeping Transition", IPI, December 2018, p. 21.

Support to the POC capacity of the host states and their institutions (or civil society or local communities) could be on the POC responsibility of the government, good governance or the rule of law.

The POC policy outlines that missions are to assess who is best suited to address the prioritised threat, in each situation...

The POC policy outlines that missions are to assess who is best suited to address the prioritised threat, in each situation, based on:

•   mission capacity,

•   comparative advantage, and

•   possible consequences of (in)actions.

It might not be the UN that is best placed to address the specific threat to civilians. It could be the host state (which has the primary responsibility to protect its citizens), or a local community-based protection mechanism. A humanitarian organisation in that area may be best positioned, or a regional organisation.

The A4P Declaration reiterates the need to improve partnerships and enhance collaboration, including with regional organisations such as the African Union (AU).[44]

The peace operations community continues to explore the strategic and practical partnerships. More clarity could be sought on the respective comparative advantages, roles and responsibilities of UN and regional peace operations in effectively preventing and responding to threats to civilians.[45] Support to a comprehensive approach, including civilian and police POC tools, could facilitate cooperation between the different missions. This could also help transitions and re-hatting between missions.

Principled engagement with both national and local, state and non-state, actors could help missions gain and maintain credibility and legitimacy...

Balancing National and Local Support

This part suggests that ensuring both national and local support could help in balancing the potential tension between the two, in all stages of analysis, planning and action. With both state- and people-centric approaches, missions could connect support to the POC efforts of the host states with local concerns and capacities, for a sustainable impact.

UN missions could engage with all relevant actors, independent of their incentives, methods and connections, with reference to the principle of

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44 A4P Declaration, paragraph 18.
45 Dialogue strand discussion at Challenges Annual Forum, November 2018.

"impartiality". Principled engagement with both national and local[46], state and non-state, actors could help missions gain and maintain credibility and legitimacy in the priority mandate of protecting civilians (and facilitating the political process).

As with tensions in relation to "consent", missions may have to balance competing interests such as between the policies of the government and sub-national grievances.

Missions could aim to engage both drivers for and against protection of civilians for a stronger effect. Which actors who are relevant will depend on the specific context and situation. This could mean engagement of missions with groups or individuals who are opposing the host government or parties, even those labelled "terrorists".

The UN Secretariat is developing further guidance on mission engagement with "non-state armed groups", for example, with a view to influence intent and behaviour.[47] The mission leaders have to manage the balance of different options in relation to each specific armed group (or other source of threat) in each context. They have to decide in which situations, for instance, uniformed tools could be a leverage or when political pressure, monitoring, sensitisation or community violence reduction projects could contribute to POC (and the political process). A case in point is the child protection sections that engage with armed groups in signing action plans to end child recruitment.[48]

Communication could be part of managing tensions. Strategic communications are highlighted in the A4P Declaration[49], likely due to high expectations on UN missions in protecting civilians. Strategic communications could be at the centre of the dialogue and engagement of missions, in particular of the senior mission leadership. In complex challenging environments it is not enough what you do, but what you communicate about what you do could be just as important.

This is related to the potential tension of political considerations and principles. For example, the mission in Mali is allegedly struggling with its credibility in protecting civilians (as discussed previously). Some argue that other actors, such as the host government, and not the mission itself, have been in control of defining the role and perceptions of the mission.[50]

Missions could aim to engage both drivers for and against protection of civilians for a stronger effect.

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46 Although this brief uses categorisations, such as "locals", it recognizes that "locals" are not a homogenous group and that relevant actors have to be identified in each situation across all segments of society, including with a gender perspective. This is also prevalent when referring to "civilians", "women", "youth" or "non-state armed groups", for example. Also, "civilians", similar to other categorisations used, such as "peace operations", could themselves be both protectors and perpetrators, just like community dynamics could be peaceful and have violent, excluding and destructive characteristics.

47 Mamiya, Ralph, "Engaging with Non-State Armed Groups to Protect Civilians: A Pragmatic Approach for UN Peace Operations", IPI, October 2018.

48 UN Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, "20 years to better protect children affected by conflict", December 2016, p. 42.

49 A4P Declaration, paragraph 10. See also Birnback, Nick, "Under the Blue Flag: Leadership and Strategic Communications in UN Peace Operations", Background Paper, Challenges Annual Forum, November 2018.

50 Arthur Boutellis and Marie-Joëlle Zahar, "A Process in Search of Peace: Lessons from the Inter-Malian Agreement", IPI, June 2017, p. 38.

This alludes to the importance of cooperation of the Public Information office with the senior leadership and the POC advisers, and other sections involved in POC.

The management of expectations is preferably not the only reason for the dialogue and engagement with local populations though. Missions could involve them, and community-based protection mechanisms, to understand POC risks and capabilities in order to take informed decisions and appropriate actions.

Inter-communal tensions could also quickly escalate to violence and state-level conflict, especially if groups or individuals have strategic leverage. This lesson has, for instance, been drawn in the Central African Republic where conflicts between migrating Fulani cattle herders and local farmer communities have impinged on the national-level conflict.[51]

Involving national and local women's groups and youth groups[52] in all stages of analysis, planning and implementation could be crucial to ensure important perspectives and capacities on POC.

Women and children are often disproportionally affected in conflict and post-conflict environments. There are specialised protection mandates on women and children, and missions deploy designated women protection advisers and child protection officers.

The POC policy also states that mission responses are to be based on an analysis of the populations or communities at risk in each specific case. Similarly, a gender perspective as well as the mainstreaming of child protection concerns have proven to be effective approaches to protect women and children. This analysis is, for example, required to assess which women, men, girls and boys who are at POC risk, sometimes in different ways, in each situation.

UN missions are also to do risk mitigation analyses, including considering unintended consequences to ensure that missions do not cause any harm, in their national and local support. These could include the risks of "substituting" the responsibility or capacities of the host state or community-based protection mechanisms.

Where mandated and appropriate, local owners could be part of driving the process and designing the POC strategies and plans. National and international actors could then focus on empowering and supporting coherence, resilience and sustainability.

The management of expectations is preferably not the only reason for the dialogue and engagement with local populations though. Missions could involve them, and community-based protection mechanisms, to understand POC risks and capabilities in order to take informed decisions and appropriate actions.

51 UN DPKO/DFS, "The Role of United Nations Peacekeeping Operations in Addressing Local Conflicts", 2017, p. 12.
52 A4P Declaration, paragraph 8 (Women, Peace and Security). See also Sharland, Lisa, "Women, Gender and the A4P Agenda: An Opportunity for Action?", Background paper, Challenges Annual Forum, November 2018. Youth, Peace and Security in UN Security Council Resolutions 2250 (2015) and 2419 (2018).

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