CHALLENGES FORUM'S INPUT TO THE NEW AGENDA FOR PEACE

2023

The International Forum for the Challenges of Peace Operations (henceforth Challenges Forum)[1] welcomes United Nations (UN) Secretary-General António Guterres' plan to re-energize multilateral peace and security through *the New Agenda for Peace* (NAP), and to ensure Member States to uphold the vision and the fundamental principles of the UN Charter. This document presents suggestions from the Challenges Forum partnership to the NAP, building on broad consultations as well as findings from the Annual Forum 2022[2], and on extensive research and recommendations from the partnership over the years[3].

The Challenges Forum deems that the UN will face increased demands in the future covering the full spectrum of peace operations. This includes a mix of tailor-made preventive diplomacy, peacemaking, peace enforcement, peacekeeping and peacebuilding efforts, within the overall framework of sustaining peace. Recognising the importance and relative effectiveness of UN peace operations[4], **the Challenges partnership strongly wishes to see this instrument, and its broad palette of modalities and combinations, manifested in the NAP.**

Fundamental Relevance of UN Peace Operations

UN peace operations are an operationalisation of the UN Charter, authorised by the Security Council in order to restore or maintain international peace and security. Despite inherent challenges and limitations, **many peace operations have been successful with a positive impact on conflict-affected countries and their populations,** thereby significantly reducing civilian casualties, shortening conflicts [5], and facilitating critical peace processes.

Member States are proud of their contributions to UN peace operations, and they clearly see their positive impact and operational results. Today there is a

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[1] The Challenges Forum is a global partnership consisting of 52 organisations from 24 countries, a platform for dialogue through events, workshops and publications. www.challengesforum.org
[2] https://www.challengesforum.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/CAF22_report.pdf
[3] The Challenges Forum partnership includes significant experience and understanding of the full palette of peace operations (operational, policy, supportive, and development). The partnership consists of major troop and police contributing countries as well as policy contributing countries to both UN and regionally arrangements.
[4] The Challenges Forum uses the High-level Panel on Peace Operations (HIPPO) definition of "peace operations" to denote the full range of responses, including peacekeeping operations and special political missions.
[5] Howard, 'Power in Peacekeeping 2019.

global community of peace operations centers, deployment organisations, expert institutions, researchers and analysts, as well as veterans and personnel that have served in a broad range of field missions. This community is well anchored within the Challenges Forum partnership. Their critical experience constitutes a consolidated global resource for peace, security and development which deserves to be strategically managed. **Peace operations are a UN instrument that mobilises Member States**, and keeps the UN values alive. It has served humanity well for 75 years.

UN's Unique Role and Palette of Peace Operations

In an increasingly globalised and interdependent world, there is growing convergence between national and international peace and security needs, including regional and trans-border challenges, such as regionalised armed conflicts, climate change, mis- and disinformation, violent extremism, economic uncertainties, irregular migration, vulnerable supply chains and organised crime. Even against the backdrop of competing security concerns, **all UN Member States should be encouraged to contribute to peace operations**, as appropriate. Being a member of the UN entails a responsibility to actively and in solidarity address situations that have been determined to constitute threats to international peace and security.

When confronted with armed conflicts and war, the UN should make better use of the full palette of peace instruments and resources[6]. **No other international organisation has the codified authority and complete peace operations capabilities like the UN**. Parallel actions and *ad hoc* security initiatives can have short term successes to deal with conflict, but they potentially pose a risk to undermine the established international and regional peace architecture.

Shift in Cooperative Culture and Mindset

Changes in approaches, attitudes and culture are needed to allow for more flexible, nimble, modular and integrated responses – across the scope of options – in conflict settings. Many of the capabilities that the UN has developed – for example mediation, rule of law, policing, DDR, expertise on natural resources – are relevant to maintaining peace and security regardless of whether a country hosts a peacekeeping operation, special political mission,

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[6] Including, but not limited to, peace mediation, preventive observer missions, robust military responses, multidimensional peacekeeping, special political missions, police missions, hybrid missions, and regional missions.

Special Envoy, UN county team or for that matter a UN regional office. Building on existing models like for example the Peace and Development Advisers programme or the global focal points for the rule of law platform, the UN should increase its ability to support the full spectrum of peace operations with specialized expertise. Beyond the peace and security pillar, **the complete UN system** should overcome organisational obstacles and administrative barriers to mobilise and **operate more coherently** as "One UN", according to complementary strengths and system-wide competencies.

Realistic, Flexible and Responsibly Resourced Mandates

In a polarised world, with a divided Security Council, diplomatic engagement is highly needed. Every effort should be made to ensure that UN peace operations are provided with realistic and well sequenced mandates, reasonable expectations, adequate resources, flexible approaches, competent mission leadership, sound accountability, and effective coordination. More **blended and flexible planning and financing** modalities are needed to re-configure, change and adjust peace operations within a broader peace and security continuum. The Challenges Forum deems that this matter deserves the attention of Member States.

Instead of being reactive, the UN needs to be proactive, primarily through better capabilities to identify and plan for viable **entry strategies**. The Challenges Forum deems that **data-driven analysis** is key when planning for new UN peace operations. Future field missions could **use available resources in a more responsive and adaptable way**, including specific "modules" the UN can draw upon to deliver quick and situation-specific responses.

Mission mandates should[7] to a higher degree be limited in scope, with tighter parameters for measuring success, and indicate an estimated time limit on the presence of a peace operation. Given the regional and cross-border nature of many conflicts, transnational mandates for peace operations should be considered when needed. At times, this may require humility in relation to what the UN is expected to achieve.

Clearer exit strategies, based on implementation benchmarks, should commence being developed from the onset of a mission. Stakeholders, including troop contributing countries, UN Agencies, Funds and Programmes should be involved at an early stage and as a more integral part of the planning to ensure a smooth future transition.

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[7] https://issafrica.org/iss-today/un-peacekeeping-in-africa-needs-tighter-parameters

Mandate reviews should include periodic independent assessments, as a basis for deliberations on future mandates. National stakeholders from governments as well as civil society, through consultative processes in appropriate forum, should be more involved in reviewing UN mandates in their countries or regions. National consent and engagement should be ensured throughout all stages of the mandating processes. International non-governmental organisations or global associations working in international peace and security could also be included as needed.

Responsibly mandated missions need to be underpinned with appropriate preparations and training, on both the individual and organisational level. There are no shortcuts in preparing for peace operations, and genuine training is a direct investment in operational success. This includes a set of measures, both before deployment and during missions, to better protect the full range of UN personnel in hazardous operational environments.

A strive for more adequate and realistic mandates is crucial. **It is important to bear in mind, that mandates, resources, and time ultimately are a function of the nature and complexity of the conflict and challenges at hand**. It is impossible to anticipate the exact scope and content of a mandate, and for that reason the approach to mandates needs to be flexible, tailor-made, and realistic.

Primacy of Politics and Importance of Further UN Guidance

Inadequate attention to political solutions continues to undercut UN's response to conflicts globally. The **primacy of politics and sustainable political solutions** should be more central in framing UN peace operations. Political solutions need to be time-bound, with clearer benchmarks, nationally owned, as well as regionally and/or internationally supported [8]. Peace operations should be mindful of spoilers and intervention dilemmas. It must be careful not to unintentionally impede incentives for national peace processes. There is an urgent **need for UN to develop strategies and guidance on how to engage with multitude of actors in conflict contexts**, including private security actors, foreign fighters, mercenaries, as well as sponsors of those actors – as these increasingly erode the concept of host nation consent and negatively impact the effectiveness of peace operations.

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[8] The AU endorsed the Cairo roadmap introduced for the first time the concept of "quadrilateral consultation", to advance host nations' ownership of the political process: Consultations with the host nations, the UN Security Council, troop/police-contributing countries, and the UN Secretariat (as well as relevant regional and sub-regional organizations and actors engaged in support of the political process).

Stronger Prevention and Improved Early Warning

UN peace operations need to improve their capacities to align and **use the full range of prevention tools. This includes accelerating the digital transformation** and use of new technologies for peace operations, which will allow for better data analysis, strategic foresight, and early warning. **Resident Coordinators, UN Country Teams and UN Regional Offices should also enhance their capacities** in the field of early warning and prevention to inform and advise the Security Council on emerging situations on the ground.

A more systematic approach to prevention could be achieved through new forms of analysis and a more developed framework of indicators, linked to different options for action. In addition, strengthened partnerships with international and national actors could provide new angles, and data on potentially negative developments. **The palette of peace operations provides the UN with several important and concrete options for preventive action**, through for example tailor-made observer missions, special political missions, *ad hoc* expert missions, peace-process support teams, dialogue facilitation initiatives, and *interim* strengthening of existing UN Country Teams. The prevention of armed conflicts requires imagination, agility, and a forward-leaning approach. The UN should have mechanisms and procedures in place to be able to take quick and responsible action, and relentlessly strive towards proactive conflict prevention.

Combined Global and Regional Efforts

The role of regional and sub-regional organisations in maintaining peace and security is continuing to grow. The UN Security Council has ultimate responsibility for maintaining international peace and security. This said, regional organisations are the UN's most important strategic and operational partners. A stronger "global-regional" peace and security partnership is needed to prevent and respond to the more interconnected and challenging crises of tomorrow. **UN peace operations need to work closer with regional bodies and arrangements, such as the AU, EU, OSCE, NATO, and other regional and sub-regional organisations such as ASEAN** *et cetera.* The division of labour should be in a coherent manner and based on comparative advantage.

It is crucial for the UN to continue developing effective ways to engage with regional organisations, including on creating better convergence at strategic levels and streamlining mandating processes. Financing of collaborative peace operations and addressing bottlenecks around UN funding of peace operations, especially AU Peace Support Operations, is a key issue that needs to be addressed

urgently. Questions around command and control, capabilities, core principles and rights-based approaches for these operations are also crucial. **The UN-regional partnerships will be even more crucial in the future. They are critically dependent, though, on regional political will and capacity development**. It will require close international cooperation in order to develop effective and functioning operational approaches that combine UN and regional responsibilities and ensures accountability.

Reinforcing Leadership for Peace

Given the rapidly changing international situation caused by a multitude of global crisis, the role of the UN to respond timely and effectively to these challenges has become more crucial. **Enhancing and reinforcing the authority and support functions for the UN Secretary-General to carry out leadership for peace, will become even more critical in the future**.

At the operational level, the issue of leadership is equally important. **Effective, inclusive, and value-based mission leadership is an important success factors for UN peace operations**. Far-reaching responsibilities are delegated to the senior mission leadership, and the decision-making in the field has a determining impact on the outcome of a peace operation. **The UN needs more qualified women and men for these challenging positions**. There is an untapped potential in Member States, an increased and systematic efforts should be made to raise awareness as well as interest and facilitate lean recruitment processes. In addition to this, **the UN and Member States need to continue to improve their combined support to mission leaders** and mission leadership teams, including both prior to, and during their assignments. Pre-deployment preparations, training, capacity building and supportive materials, including digital tools, need to be adequate and fit for purpose.

People-Centred and Sustainable Solutions

Peace operations should be anchored more in **local conflict analysis** with a better understanding of the populations' needs and the conflict drivers. It is important to develop **innovative approaches to protect civilians.** They need to be people-centered and coordinated with host states and other protection actors. Local communities should play a central role in such initiatives and local

perception studies should be used more systematically. Overall, more attention should be given to language and **cultural proximity of peace operations**[9].

Based on lessons learned, peace operations need to find new ways to better engage with multiple stakeholders and affected groups, including women and youth, many of whom experience compounded vulnerabilities and face systemic barriers to participation in political processes. Winning the **trust and participation in peace processes** of these groups can contribute to the development of more responsive, equitable, credible, and sustainable solutions to conflict. Empowering the large youth populations in areas where international peace operations are deployed, is of key importance. Robust international support for youth-led organizations serve to build a foundation for more inclusive peace processes and more resilient societies, while also mitigating some of the root causes of conflict by combatting youth distrust in institutions.

Women and girls gain access and security through the full implementation of both the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) and the Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) agendas. This being the case, the UN's **normative agenda** on WPS and YPS **should be translated into more practical and operational solutions** in field missions. These UN frameworks need to be sufficiently domesticated and implemented through the development of National Action Plans. Local advisory groups can help ensure active participation in peacebuilding and conflict resolution efforts. Establishing National Youth Councils putting forward recommendations might also be considered.

Clearer Links to the Sustainable Development Goals

Sustainable development is essential for achieving and maintaining peace. The strengths of **peace operations need to be better embedded into broader, more long-term work** of Agencies, Funds and Programmes in support **of Agenda 2030** and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and efforts to strengthen the nexus between peace, security, and development. The work on the SDGs and UN peace operations has the potential to be much more mutually supportive and reinforcing. There needs to be better cooperation and communication between responsible bodies, when it comes to both strategic planning and operational work. This is also an important factor when it comes to preparing for the transition to more long-term development efforts. In addition, peace operations need more integrated competencies on overlapping issues, such as climate change, migration, and poverty reduction.

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[9] Bove, Ruffa, and Ruggeri, 'Improving peacekeeping effectiveness by increasing diversity of mission composition', 2020.

Managing New Information Landscape

New technologies have revolutionised the information landscape also in UN peace operations. Today, new channels of communication and influence constitute both critical assets and significant challenges for missions. To succeed, peace operations need to be equipped with the necessary strategies, competencies, and resources. Information management should be an integrated part of all mission planning, execution, and evaluation.

The multitude and increase of mis- and disinformation forms a growing threat to peace operations and negatively affects safety and security of UN personnel[10]. A challenge remains how peace operations as a whole and mission leadership specifically, could more proactively mitigate and contain mis- and disinformation risks, as well as hybrid treats as a whole and leverage opportunities for strategic communications as part of a mission-wide approach. **More training and capacity-building, as well as accompanying human, financial, and technological resources are needed** to better understand and monitor hybrid treats as well as cyber and media landscapes in the areas of field missions. Peace operations also need to **improve their strategic communications capacity** to more effectively counter mis- and disinformation.

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[10] UN Security Council has introduced language on mis-and disinformation into the mandates of the four largest peace operations between 2019 and 2022.