



## CHALLENGES FORUM'S INPUT ON THE REVIEW ON THE FUTURE OF ALL FORMS OF UN PEACE OPERATIONS

August 2025

The International Forum for the Challenges of Peace Operations (henceforth the Challenges Forum)<sup>1</sup> is, since 1996, committed to the continuous development of effective and innovative peace operations. At a time when global peace and security face unprecedented strain, UN peace operations remain one of the international community's most effective tools to maintain international peace and security. They are a unique multilateral tool to foster international cooperation in favour of peace, as well as to generate multinational efforts. Their relative effectiveness and usefulness is undisputed, and, in most cases, UN peace operations constitute the difference between fragile peace and continued war.

Clear collective support and robust cooperation is needed to reinforce the UN's central role in maintaining peace and security. Much needed reforms come at a time when the UN is confronted with a stark contradiction: an acute liquidity crisis coinciding with the highest number of armed conflicts in decades and the largest forced displacement crisis since the Second World War.

The operational environment and the work of peace operations is per definition difficult, unpredictable and challenging. Member States must take this reality into account and adopt approaches to peace operations that are more resilient, realistic, and responsible, ensuring a strong and sustainable operational presence on the ground.

The Challenges Forum urges that financial and structural adjustments be guided by a strategic vision for the future of peace operations, one that safeguards the UN's institutional capacity to deliver on its core peace and security mandate, thereby focusing on what the UN does comparatively best.

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<sup>1</sup> The Challenges Forum is a global partnership consisting of 53 organisations from 25 countries, a platform for dialogue through events, workshops and publications. For more information see: [www.challengesforum.org](http://www.challengesforum.org)

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. Geopolitical fragmentation, coupled with a growing and disruptive disregard for the UN Charter and other international norms, hinders unified Security Council action and erodes the global political backing essential for UN peace operations. This not only weakens the UN's credibility and legitimacy as a broker and guarantor of international peace and security but also compounds the challenges of implementing political peace processes and agreements. Such processes are often hampered by diffuse political end states, unrealistic mandates and strategic objectives, limited buy-in from conflicting parties, and ineffective implementation incentives—all of which make it harder for peace operations to fulfil their core role of supporting political solutions.
  - b. The varying degree of support and engagement from host countries constitute a significant challenge for peace operations. Perceptions of ineffectiveness by local populations and/or host country, especially when the presence of peace operations is prolonged, often stems from a disconnect between ambitious mandates and the complex, shifting realities on the ground. Peace operations are often held accountable for critical issues that are the host country's responsibility, such as lack of political progress and peace agreement implementation, continued violence and insecurity, and growing prevalence of crime and corruption.
  - c. Peace operations face increasingly complex threats due to climate change, new technologies, transnational organised crime, and mis/disinformation and malinformation (MDM). These dynamics are rapidly reshaping the operational environment, which risks undermining mission effectiveness in the future.
  - d. Ad hoc regional forces as well as non-state armed groups and private military contractors are increasingly filling security gaps, complicating operational contexts and challenging cooperative arrangements.
2. **How can United Nations peace operations adapt in response to current and future challenges (e.g., in terms of political and substantive work, mandates, operational and administrative requirements, capacities)?**
  - a. Primacy of politics: UN peace operations should be anchored in comprehensive and inclusive political strategies. Accountability should to a higher degree be shared between the UN Security Council, peace operations and host countries.
  - b. Clear mandates: Peace operations should always have a clear and sequenced mandate, anchored in a political framework, that is adapted to the realities on the ground.

- c. People-centred approaches: Mandates should be implemented with the meaningful participation of local communities and affected populations, including women, men, girls and boys, to ensure an inclusive understanding of peace operations' mandates and the promotion of shared ownership and accountability for results.
- d. Peace continuum: Peace operations' mandates should be integrated with broader UN peacebuilding and development efforts to ensure coherence and sustained impact. UN leadership should promote integrated conflict analysis and planning processes and build systems that can anticipate emerging threats and enable timely, risk-tolerant innovation, that promotes learning from failure.
- e. Exit strategies: Exit strategies of newly mandated peace operations must be planned from the start of the deployment, in order to enable shorter missions, better integrated into the local landscape, in partnership with other actors and UN agencies, and in close coordination with local authorities to define realistic and achievable objectives from the moment the mandate is established. DDR and SSR aspects are critical to long term stability and should be well integrated within exit strategies planning.
- f. Modular approaches. The UN should adopt a more flexible, adaptive and needs-based modular toolbox approach, drawing on the full range of capabilities within the UN system. This includes rapid deployments and partnerships with international financial institutions (IFIs) and with regional- and subregional organisations. Flexible, predictable, multi-year funding would be a game changer for the UN.
- g. Structural and operational coherence: With more modular approaches to mission mandates, coherence and unity of purpose with other UN and international actors becomes more important. Streamlining financing, budgets, planning, leadership, staffing and data and information management, strategic communication and reporting for peacekeeping, special political missions and non-mission settings would greatly facilitate a more flexible toolbox addressing the whole peace continuum.
- h. Strategic communication: Peace operations need to communicate with host countries and communities on the scope and limitations of their mandate, and counter MDM also categorised as "harmful information". Beyond demonstrating successes and impact, the UN can also lead by example in transparently reporting when expected results have not been achieved.
- i. Inclusion and linguistic diversity: Peace operations should further promote linguistic and cultural diversity in documentation, communication. It should also be encouraged in peacekeeping training, which remains one of the most effective means to improve the security of peacekeepers and the performance of peace operations. Enhancing linguistic accessibility fosters

local ownership and inclusiveness, and contributes to mission legitimacy, operational effectiveness, and meaningful engagement with local populations.

- j. Participation of women in peace operations: The full implementation of the Women, Peace and Security agenda remains relevant. Special attention should be given to women leadership and full, equal and meaningful participation of women at all levels of peace operations and political processes. This includes ensuring targeted recruitment, robust protection frameworks, and enabling environments for women's leadership within missions and in host communities.

**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?**

- a. Inclusive peace processes: Peace operations are most likely to succeed when they are deployed in contexts where there is a credible political process, such as a ceasefire agreement, peace process or political transition, and when the host country trusts the UN mission, and its ability to implement its mandate. Missions anchored in robust collaboration with local, national and regional partners deliver better results, which are more responsive to the needs of the local population and thus carry greater legitimacy, including through gender mainstreaming.
- b. Flexible and well-resourced mandates: With more creative mandates, adequate resources, and realistic timelines, UN field missions will have the operational freedom and flexibility to effectively adjust to fast evolving threats, needs and contexts. Adequate and flexible funding for mandate implementation has a direct impact on the performance and credibility of peace operations, including for core tasks such as protecting civilians, and preventing conflict-related sexual violence.
- c. Digital capabilities: The UN should prepare for threats posed by new and emerging technologies by investing in digital defence, intelligence, and communication capabilities.
- d. Protection of civilians: Whenever a peace operation is deployed, there is an expectation for it to protect civilians. Protection of civilians should remain a central imperative for the UN and feature in the mandates of future peace operations and UN presences, including through civilian presence and tools in non-peacekeeping settings. Legitimacy and support for peace operations can be further strengthened when serious violations such as human rights abuses, sexual and gender-based violence, and child abuse is addressed resourcefully and in a transparent manner.

- e. Support to climate related security risks: As the links between climate change and conflict become increasingly evident, future UN peace operations will need to systematically integrate climate security considerations into their mandates, planning, and operational tools. Climate stressors, such as prolonged droughts and desertification, floods, and loss of biodiversity, exacerbate competition over resources, trigger displacement, and deepen livelihood vulnerabilities. These dynamics can fuel grievances, heighten social tensions, and interact with existing conflict dynamics in ways that undermine peacebuilding efforts.
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. Strategic partnership platform for crisis response: When the UN Security Council has defined a threat to international peace and security and agreed to address it with a selection of instruments, it should serve as a call to the wider international community – regional organisations, UN agencies, funds and programmes, IFIs, non-governmental and civil society organisations – to mobilise around a major threat and crisis response. Such a platform could enable quick and strategic responses, while respecting the integrity of the involved organisations. Such an approach has the potential to bridge several of the current divisions, and it could take international partnering to a new level during the UN's 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary year.
  - b. Partnerships: Joint missions between the UN, AU, EU, and others – underpinned by joint analysis, planning, financing, training, interoperability, and normative alignment – should be supported. UN Security Council Resolution 2719, allowing for UN-financed AU and African peace support operations should be implemented in adequate contexts, including accountability and compliance frameworks. AU-led peace support operations often act as first responders and can enjoy greater host-state acceptance and better adapt to diverse cultural and multilingual contexts, offering tailored responses to regional dynamics, thus complementing the UN's role.
  - c. Broadening resource mobilisation: As peace operations are increasingly confronted with complex threats, there needs to be renewed investment in diplomacy, prevention, and sustainable peace. The linkages between peace operations and the UN's prevention agenda, as well as Agenda 2030, need to be reinforced. Partnerships with IFIs, private sector, and civil society could invigorate resource streams beyond traditional assessed contributions. Development funding can support stabilisation efforts, embedding

peacebuilding into broader development strategies. Public-private partnerships can support renewable energy and climate resilience in mission areas.

- d. Transitions: The donor community and IFIs can play a key role in bridging the financial cliff that often ensues when peace operations wind down and the UN transitions to development engagement, by ensuring continued investments in governance, economic recovery, and infrastructure in fragile and conflict-affected states.

**5. Please share any additional observations that may benefit the Review**

- a. Leadership: UN leaders should be further empowered to think creatively, put forward bold proposals and take risks. Foresight and scenario exercises, as well as contingency planning, need to be conducted more systematically and new technology embraced. This shift in mindset requires more systematic support, resources and coaching for UN leaders.
- b. Coherence: The UN80 initiative, together with the Review on the Future of All Forms of UN Peace Operations, and the Peacebuilding Architecture Review should be seen as critical tools and a unique opportunity, amidst current challenges, to renew, reform, streamline and adapt peace operations to meet evolving needs. As many as possible of the UN's instruments for upholding international peace and security should be integrated within one organisational component with a single chain of command, thus constituting ONE coherent peace operations toolbox. This would facilitate more integrated strategic planning and operational alignment, and agile and adaptive use of all available response instruments.