

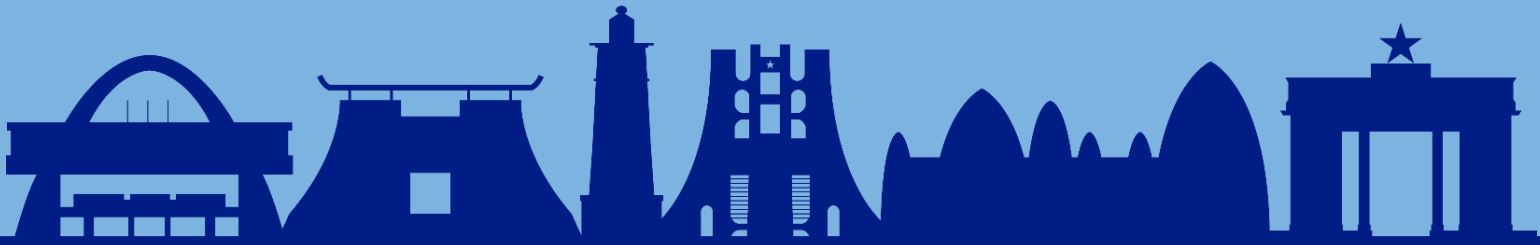
Challenges Annual Forum 2025



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Forum



“Adapt and Advance: Renewing the impact of Peace Operations”

KEY TAKEAWAYS

The 2025 Challenges Annual Forum (CAF25) hosted by the Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre (KAIPTC), took place in Accra, Ghana, on 14–15 October 2025. It brought together over 170 partners and key stakeholders – including representatives from the United Nations (UN), regional organizations, government agencies, think tanks, civil society and academia – to discuss how to adapt, advance and renew the impact of international peace operations. CAF25 was pledged by Ghana and Sweden at the Berlin Peacekeeping Ministerial in May 2025, with the aim to inform and contribute to the Review on the Future of All Forms of UN Peace Operations (*the Review*), the UN80 initiative and the Peacebuilding Architecture Review.

Against a backdrop of geopolitical polarisation and friction, unprecedented financial challenges within the UN system and the highest number of wars, armed conflicts and refugees in the world since World War II, CAF25 provided partners and participants with a timely opportunity to generate new ideas, identify common ground and align long-term thinking on the future role, mandates and priorities of international peace operations. Discussions also focused on the role of regional organizations in addressing armed conflicts and regional instability; leveraging the use of new technologies; and integrating climate change analysis and strategies into peace operations.

Despite their imperfections, **peace operations remain one of the most effective and legitimate tools available for managing and resolving conflicts.** The empirical record shows that UN peace operations reduce violence, protect civilians and create space for political processes. Yet too often, their successes are unacknowledged. All UN member states, especially troop contributors and host countries, have a responsibility to share experiences, learning and results of peace operations. Stronger political advocacy could help restore confidence in the instrument and

encourage more conflict-affected countries to seek UN support rather than turning to ad hoc coalitions, unilateral interventions or illegitimate security actors.

The UN's Adaptive Legacy: A Formula Also for the Future of Peace Operations?

History shows that the UN and its instruments have repeatedly adapted to shifting geopolitical realities. Today's crisis is political, financial, and conceptual. To remain relevant, the UN must draw on its capacity for reinvention, embracing pragmatic innovation, political responsibility and solidarity across regions. Participants highlighted that UN peace operations often constitute the difference between fragile peace and continued war. The future of peace operations depends not only on reforming structures but on renewing a shared commitment to collective action for peace. The various UN reform initiatives provide an opportunity to renew, realign and re-energise how the UN system delivers on peace and security.

1. **A Reality Check for Peace Operations:** The current liquidity crisis facing the UN presents an acute test of the resilience and adaptability of peace operations. This financial strain extends to the wider UN system and the entire humanitarian-development-peace nexus. In this financially austere context, doing more with less is neither realistic nor responsible. While expectations must be managed carefully, **peace operations should seek to transform challenges into opportunities and strive to do things differently with the resources available to them.**
2. **Navigating the Politics:** Debates over the “core tasks” of peace operations risk becoming overly technical and detached from reality, devolving into ideological disagreements rather than pragmatic problem-solving. **What matters most is context: understanding the political and conflict dynamics in each setting and designing interventions that are both integrated and politically smart.** This requires stronger political coherence and consistent backing from the UN Security Council. It is in the long-term interest of all Member States to reinforce multilateral mechanisms, rather than treating peace operations as arenas for short-term zero-sum competition. Within the UN Secretariat, **a more candid, forward-leaning posture is needed:** one that communicates plainly, resists bureaucratic self-preservation and champions the UN's assembling role, broad toolbox of instruments and proven ability to adapt and remain relevant.
3. **Restoring the UN's Political Role:** **Peacemaking must be made more central in the UN's engagement,** in coordination with and complementing regional and bilateral efforts. This means moving beyond hampering risk aversion, taking calculated initiatives and rebuilding trust with both conflict parties and affected populations. **The UN's impartiality remains one of its greatest comparative advantages, but it must be matched by proactive and visible political leadership that demonstrates responsibility, courage and creativity.**
4. **Further Integrating the Peace and Security Toolbox:** Sustained investment is essential to preserve the UN's institutional capacity to deliver on its peace and security mandate. The UN must be able to mobilise capabilities more flexibly across the full spectrum of peace operations, with mission design guided by evolving needs and operational realities. **A more networked and collaborative approach is required ensuring that relevant actors, including UN country teams and regional partners, work in an integrated manner under**

an overarching political strategy that leverages their respective comparative advantages. While the most critical challenges facing peace operations lie beyond the control of the Secretariat, others stem from internal structural arrangements and outdated approaches to mission planning and budgeting. These long-recognised constraints should be addressed within the forthcoming Review and the UN80 initiative, with key reforms initiated early in the tenure of the next Secretary-General.

5. **Relations with Host Countries:** The varying levels of support and engagement from host countries continue to pose a significant challenge for peace operations. **The UN must deepen its understanding of how host governments and societies perceive, negotiate and derive value from the presence of peace operations.** Genuine national ownership should extend beyond implementation to include also the mandating and planning phases of missions. Host countries should be regarded not as beneficiaries, but as partners and co-architects of the strategies aimed at stabilising their societies. In turn, host governments must demonstrate sustained commitment and responsibility in supporting peace operations throughout their entire lifecycle. **Accountability for mandate delivery should be more evenly shared between the UN Security Council, host authorities and peace operations.** If this shift could be achieved it would significantly improve the political and operational prerequisites for peace operations. At the same time, peace operations must recognise that host countries are not monolithic: the interests of a government may not always reflect those of the broader population. Peace operations must remain vigilant to ensure they do not become instruments of regime preservation, but rather agents of inclusive and legitimate peacebuilding.

Partnerships with Regional Organizations

Looking ahead, many participants underscored that Africa will play a central role in shaping the next generation of peace operations. The continent's innovative drive, experience and determination are vital to renewing the global peace and security architecture. With its resources, dynamic human capital and growing institutional capacities, Africa is well positioned to advance "African solutions to African challenges." Realising this potential will depend on deepening complementary and forward-looking partnerships with regional and subregional organizations. Significantly increased African political and financial ownership of peace operations is also essential. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) initiative to activate its Standby Force exemplifies this commitment. Moreover, the landmark UN Security Council resolution 2719 (2023) now needs to be operationalised, tested and refined through practical implementation to ensure it delivers on its transformative promise.

6. **Responding to Violent Extremism through Coherent Multilateralism:** Violent extremism and terrorism have become existential threats for many countries in West Africa and remain a central concern of the African Peace and Security Architecture. The growing demand for counter-terrorism operations in West Africa and the Sahel calls for a careful recalibration of roles among international, regional and subregional actors. **Cooperation must be guided by shared principles and values, subsidiarity and complementarity, with each organization acting in line with its comparative advantage while avoiding further fragmentation of effort.** A more institutionalised and comprehensive approach is required: one that balances long-term peace, governance and state resilience over short-term military solutions. **Contemporary African security challenges cannot always**

be addressed through traditional UN peace operations alone: in some contexts, they demand political strategies, complemented by counter-terrorism responses and more robust enforcement options. It is urgent to clarify how and under what conditions UN tools can effectively support these complementary operations while remaining consistent with the UN's principles and mandate.

7. **Implementing Security Council Resolution 2719**: UN Security Council resolution 2719 (2023) needs to be operationalised, tested and refined through practical implementation to ensure it delivers on its transformative promise. It offers a significant new framework for authorising and supporting African-led peace support operations. The resolution represents a tool for time-bound, high-intensity operations where there is “no peace to keep.” Its purpose is to create a flexible instrument for peace enforcement and stabilisation under UN–AU partnership. While the UN and AU are making progress in addressing the technical prerequisites for implementation, it may also be timely to explore complementary approaches, such as networked multidimensional operations.

Effective Use of New Technologies

Technology has always been an important vector of peace operations reform, and several initiatives are under way to harness new technologies to improve the effectiveness of peace operations, including through the digital transformation strategy for peacekeeping operations.

8. **Improved Mandate Implementation**: New technologies will undoubtedly improve mandate implementation, enhance situational awareness, improve safety and security of personnel and counter mis- and disinformation. Unmanned aerial vehicles have the potential to patrol long or inaccessible borders, or ceasefire lines, in support of peace operations and operational planning and execution ought to be data-driven to a much higher degree.
9. **Mitigating Negative Impacts of Data Bias and Exclusion**: Technology can be a double-edged sword; although it can help improve the effectiveness of peace operations, it also has the potential to undermine peace operations if misused. Asymmetric dominance of a limited number of artificial intelligence platforms has the potential to introduce bias in data inputs, reasoning processes and prescriptive outputs and must therefore be thoughtfully engineered. **Appropriate safeguards are required to ensure the ethical use of new technologies as well as to mitigate the unintended risks to populations resulting from the misuse of collected data.**
10. **Capacity-building**: Effective and ethical use of new technologies in peace operations requires investment to ensure that UN's staff members, as well as troop, police and resource contributing countries, have the requisite skillsets and expertise on data, digital technologies and the use of artificial intelligence. Peace operations should also support local capacity-building efforts that could, inter alia, increase resilience against mis- and disinformation.

Climate Security Integration

Peace operations have the potential to play a transformative role in mitigating climate –security risks, particularly when combined with innovative approaches to strategic analysis and planning, program design, resource allocation, partnerships and implementation. The Climate Security Mechanism aims to help the UN more systematically address linkages between climate change, peace and security. In addition, several peace operations have made progress in integrating climate security considerations into their work, but much more can be done.

11. Climate Mainstreaming: The adoption of climate-sensitive approaches in peace operations can help prevent and manage conflicts. **Peace operations should anchor climate–security responses in the implementation of the broader mission mandate, including through the mainstreaming of climate–risk assessments into conflict analysis and integrated mission planning.**
12. People-Centred Approaches: Climate security considerations should be more systematically integrated into peacebuilding efforts to help communities better manage risks and serve as catalytic entry points for political solutions and local reconciliation. Peace operations efforts must consider the fact that climate and security concerns affect men, women, boys and girls differently. Working closely with civil society actors, including women’s and youth organizations, ensures that responses are more inclusive and locally anchored.
13. Partnerships: Because of the temporary nature of peace operations, it is crucial to engage in long–term climate sensitive programming and build sustainable partnerships with UN agencies, funds and programs, as well as with local, national and regional actors. **Transboundary strategies, early warning systems, political support and predictable funding are key to adequate climate–security responses.**