

FIVE KEY MESSAGES TO A NEW UN SECRETARY-GENERAL ON THE FUTURE OF UNITED NATIONS PEACE OPERATIONS

In times of global uncertainty, there is political and popular demand for effective and predictable multilateral responses to conflicts and crises. While recent setbacks have exposed weaknesses in the UN system, they have also highlighted what works, providing a practical starting point for moving ahead. Building on these hard-won lessons offers an opportunity to refine instruments, modify approaches, strengthen partnerships, and provide the leadership needed to address today's complex – but solvable – global peace and security challenges. This momentum should be taken forward with clear direction and political courage by our new Secretary-General.



UN Photo / Loey Felipe

1. Champion the central role of UN peace operations in maintaining peace and security

- At a time when multilateralism is under severe strain, visible and consistent leadership will be essential to uphold the value and understanding of peace operations as a central and indispensable instrument of the United Nations. This has been consistently reaffirmed by Member States and is supported by a substantial body of proven experience and research.
- The Secretary-General should actively champion peace operations as effective tools that support the prevention, management, and resolution of armed conflicts by facilitating political processes, protecting civilians, and helping create the necessary conditions for lasting peace as maintaining international peace and security is the *raison d'être* of the United Nations.

2. Make flexible use of the full UN peace operations toolbox and networked multilateral approaches

- Building on the Pact for the Future and recent reforms, the Secretary-General should advance peace operations within an innovative and integrated framework. This requires the dynamic and seamless use of the full spectrum of UN peace and security tools, including preventive action, peacemaking, peacekeeping, peace enforcement, peacebuilding, and special political missions.
- The Secretary-General should also ensure that all efforts are grounded in clear political strategies, supported by adequate mandates, resources, and technology, and designed to adapt to evolving conflict dynamics.
- Promoting stronger networked multilateral approaches and deeper partnerships with regional organisations, needs to be key priorities for the Secretary-General. In this context, regional arrangements under chapter VIII of the UN Charter, including African-led peace operations, should be supported.
- The Secretary-General should actively demonstrate how the full peace operations toolbox could be applied across different contexts. By clearly articulating creative options and building coalitions of support, the UN can move from a reactive posture to a more strategic role in shaping crises responses.

3. Engage in person with host countries, conflict parties and UN field operations

- To build trust and create the conditions for political solutions and effective mandate implementation, the Secretary-General should engage early, visibly, and consistently with host governments, host societies, conflict parties, troop, police and resource contributing countries, UNSC members, and field missions.
- The Secretary-General should ensure that such engagement sustains consent, reinvigorates political processes, and fosters more balanced and shared accountability for mandate delivery among Member States, host countries, and peace operations.
- In parallel, the Secretary-General should strengthen strategic communications to improve the narrative and perceptions of peace operations, particularly among host governments and societies, including by enhancing communication capacities and advancing a coherent approach to countering misinformation, disinformation, and hate speech.

4. Foster a more proactive, innovative, and efficient UN organizational culture

- The UN system must become more agile, flexible and forward-leaning in line with the spirit of the UN Charter, establishing a system with inherent flexibility and scope for evolution. The Secretary-General should empower the Secretariat and field missions to adopt a more proactive, efficient and innovative mindset.
- The Secretary-General should delegate appropriate authority, strengthen early contingency planning, enable proactive political engagement, foster innovation, and support the development of context-specific mission models.
- The Secretary-General should ensure that the UN Secretariat and field missions are structured and led in ways that enable earlier and more effective action in line with the Organization's prevention mandate, including encouraging senior leaders to be less risk-averse and to lead with integrity.

- The Secretary-General should promote the adaptability of peace operations in response to emerging and evolving threats, including those related to artificial intelligence and autonomous weapons, while also leveraging new technologies to support the transformation and effectiveness of UN peace operations.

5. Encourage a more resilient and realistic approach to UN peace operations among Member States

- The Secretary-General should encourage Member States to adopt a more resilient and realistic approach to peace operations, including by sustaining political support, promoting multilingual capacities, and investing in peace through predictable contributions of military, police, and civilian capabilities also in times of competing security challenges.
- The Secretary-General should support Member States to draw on evidence-based lessons from past peace operations and to set strategic objectives and expectations that are realistic and aligned with operational realities, recognizing that peace operations are inherently complex, unpredictable, and require sustained engagement over time.
- The Secretary-General should foster a clearer and more consistent understanding among Member States of the role and value of peace operations, including their practical impact and effectiveness: saving lives, alleviating suffering, creating space for political processes, and supporting institutional and societal development.

Peace operations operationalize the principles of the UN Charter and often constitute the difference between fragile peace and continued war. While missions may not fully achieve all objectives, they deliver critical and meaningful results and represent a collective multilateral response. In today's conflict-affected world, sustained investment in and support for peace operations is essential.

The incoming Secretary-General will need courage and strategic judgment to shape and advance peace operations as a central instrument for maintaining global peace and security, and to lead the United Nations through global complexity and competition. In doing so, there is a clear opportunity to leave a lasting mark, by making peace operations more relevant and impactful in meeting the challenges ahead. A broad coalition of partners stands ready to support this ambition and to work collectively to turn it into reality.

The Challenges Forum is a global partnership that uses its convening mandate to generate innovative ideas and promote results for more effective peace operations. The partnership consists of more than 50 organisations in 25 countries, and it provides an impartial and informal platform for dialogue convening key actors for deliberations on different approaches to peace. The Challenges Annual Forum is a central driver of the partnership. Its outcomes are widely taken forward and used by partners and key stakeholders. The Challenges Forum International Secretariat is hosted by the Folke Bernadotte Academy (FBA), the Swedish Agency for Peace, Security and Development, on behalf of the Challenges Forum Partnership.

