

BACKGROUND PAPER

# Preventive Deployments: Between the Old and New Agenda for Peace



## ABOUT THE EVENT

The Challenges Annual Forum 2022 (#CAF22Delhi) will take place from 6–7 October and discuss the Future of Peace Operations through three lenses: Preventive Deployment in Diplomacy, Protecting the Protectors and Protection of Civilians in Peace Operations. The co-hosting partner for this year's event is the United Service Institution of India (USI).

**Challenges Forum** is a global partnership that uses its convening power to generate innovative ideas and promote results for more effective peace operations.

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**The idea of preventive deployment goes back a long time. Is the United Nations Secretary-General’s “New Agenda for Peace” an opportunity to revitalize the idea of preventive deployment? This paper focuses on the role of “one-dimensional” peace operations as there has recently been a renewed interest in observer missions as some believe these may become more prominent in the years ahead in a period of geopolitical tension. The paper outlines how preventive peace operations may reduce the risks of conflict/escalation and its impact on populations. The paper ends with some key questions for participants in the 2022 Challenges Annual Forum.**

*“United Nations operations in areas of crisis have generally been established after conflict has occurred. The time has come to plan for circumstances warranting preventive deployment, which could take place in a variety of instances and ways.”*

An Agenda for Peace, 17 June 1992<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> UN document A/47/277 – S/24111 (1992), para 28.

Thirty years after the Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali introduced the idea of “preventive deployment”, the United Nations (UN) has only mounted one mission explicitly branded as such: The UN Preventive Deployment Force (UNPREDEP) in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) from 1995 to 1999.<sup>2</sup>

Yet the idea of launching UN operations to prevent rather than react to conflict remains appealing. Successive Secretaries-General, including the incumbent António Guterres, have embraced “prevention” as a guiding philosophy for the UN. In 2021, Guterres committed to prepare a “New Agenda for Peace” to address current security challenges.<sup>3</sup> Is this report an opportunity to revitalize the idea of preventive deployment?

This paper outlines six ways in which preventive peace operations may reduce both (i) risks of conflict and escalation; and (ii) the associated costs of conflict for populations. It focuses on the role of “one-dimensional” peace operations (also called/named observer or monitoring missions) in addressing these challenges. The background paper concludes with questions for participants in the 2022 Challenges Annual Forum.

### **Prevention and the role of “one-dimensional” missions**

In UN documents, “prevention” typically refers to (i) actions meant to avert conflict but also (ii) efforts to mitigate the damage

of active conflicts; and (iii) efforts to prevent the re-ignition of conflict after a ceasefire or political settlement. There is therefore a linkage between these different phases of prevention and the broader notion of “sustaining peace”, with its overarching approach to “preventing the outbreak, escalation, continuation and recurrence of conflict.”<sup>4</sup>

Many peace operations – including UN Special Political Missions without significant military components – can contribute to conflict prevention in different ways.<sup>5</sup> There has, however, recently been a renewed interest in what so-called “one-dimensional missions” – observer operations that are solely or primarily military in nature, without the broad multi-dimensional mandates that have characterized many larger post-Cold War operations – may offer in terms of prevention. These missions include among others UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL, Lebanon); United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF, Golan Heights), United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP, Cyprus).<sup>6</sup> Some analysts believe that “one-dimensional missions” may become more prominent in the years ahead as (i) they may offer less expensive and more tailor-made responses to future crises compared to multi-dimensional operations; and (ii) it may be easier to negotiate mandates for such missions in a divided Security Council during a period of geopolitical tension, as was also the case during the so called Cold War.<sup>7</sup>

2 FYROM is now North Macedonia. UNPREDEP was a successor to UNPROFOR Macedonia, part of the broader UN peacekeeping operation in the former Yugoslavia. UNPROFOR Macedonia was “the first Blue Helmets operation to be predominantly about conflict prevention and to be established prior to the outbreak of an armed conflict.” UNPREDEP, which succeeded UNPROFOR Macedonia in 1995, however remains the only standalone UN mission explicitly described as “preventive”. Thierry Tardy, “United Nations Preventive Deployment Force (UNPREDEP – Macedonia)” in Joachim A. Koops et al. (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of United Nations Peacekeeping Operations* (Oxford University Press, 2015), p500.

3 António Guterres, *Our Common Agenda: Report of the Secretary-General* (UN, 2021), pp59-60.

4 See UN documents A/RES/70/262 (2016) and S/RES/2281 (2016).

5 See Richard Gowan, *Multilateral Political Missions and Preventive Diplomacy* (USIP, 2010).

6 See Alexandra Novosseloff, *A Comparative Study of Older One-Dimensional UN Peace Operations: Is the Future of UN Peacekeeping Its Past?*, (EPON/FES, 2022).

7 See Novosseloff, *op.cit.*; Zachary Myers and Walter Dorn, “UN Peacekeeping Missions in the Middle East: A Twenty-First Century Review,” *International Peacekeeping* online, 12 April 2022; and Richard Gowan, “For UN Peacekeeping, Smaller is Looking Better – Again,” *World Politics Review*, 5 July 2022.

“One-dimensional missions” can contribute to conflict prevention through at least six mechanisms:

- 1. Deterrence:** The presence of a peace operation can act as a preventive measure for the parties to a conflict using force, by either (i) having the capabilities and mandate to respond with force to escalatory acts; or (ii) creating a “tripwire”, i.e. signaling that the Security Council and/or other international actors militarily – or by other means – will intervene if the operation faces a significant threat.
- 2. Creating transparency:** Even relatively small peace operations can create transparency – and try to reduce tensions between conflict parties – by (i) observing events in areas at risk of violence; (ii) monitoring the movements and actions of fighting forces; (iii) verifying that conflict parties uphold commitments that they have made as part of a ceasefire or other deal; and (iv) investigating specific flare-ups to avoid incidents spiraling out of control.<sup>8</sup>
- 3. Facilitating communication:** In situations where conflict parties have limited contact with each other, or have extremely high levels of mutual mistrust, peace operations can either (i) act as go-betweens passing messages; or (ii) oversee good office mechanisms and forums for the parties to engage in dialogue. An example of the latter is the so-called Liaison and Coordination mechanism, which is a “tripartite forum” overseen by the UNIFIL, providing a platform where Israeli and Lebanese army officers communicate directly with each other.<sup>9</sup>
- 4. Conflict mitigation:** Peace operations can reduce the effects of conflict by cooperating with humanitarians to get aid to vulnerable populations, negotiate local ceasefires, improve infrastructure and support confidence-building measures such as prisoner exchanges.<sup>10</sup>

#### **5. Conciliation and addressing the root causes of conflict:**

Before, during and after conflict, peace operations can contribute to reducing tensions by (i) creating frameworks for both political and people-to-people dialogues about the sources of a conflict; and (ii) advising authorities from one or both sides on steps to address the others’ grievances (by, for example, enacting or implanting laws on minority rights or human rights issues).

#### **6. Conflict containment:**

In cases where violence threatens to spread from one country (or pair/group of countries) to neighboring and nearby states, a peace operation can help deter these spillover effects and reassure neighboring states that they can avoid violence.

*“The presence of a peace operation can act as a preventive measure for the parties to a conflict using force.”*

It should be clear that all of these mechanisms are only partial responses to threats of conflict. It is easy to identify cases in which missions have succeeded in delivering to some degree on their mandate in technical terms, but ultimately failed to ward off violence. UNPREDEP (former FYROM) is often cited as “one of the successful UN peacekeeping operations” as there was no major ethnic conflict in what is now North Macedonia during its deployment.<sup>11</sup> Yet, once the mission withdrew the country slowly descended into armed conflict.

<sup>8</sup> This paragraph and the next draw on Zachary Myers and Walter Dorn, op.cit, especially p3.

<sup>9</sup> Adam Day, “Preventing Military Escalation Between Israel and Lebanon,” Peace Policy online, 3 October 2018. See also A.K. Bardalai, United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon: Assessment and Way Forward (Pentagon Press LLP, 2021).

<sup>10</sup> On “conflict mitigation” and “conflict containment” in today’s security environment, see Richard Gowan, Major Power Rivalry and Multilateral Conflict Management (Council on Foreign Relations, 2021).

<sup>11</sup> Tardy, “United Nations Preventive Deployment Force,” p505.

### **Policy options and questions**

Notwithstanding that the success of preventive deployments – and all peace operations with a preventive component to their mandate – ultimately rests of the willingness of conflict parties to cooperate with the specific mission, it is still possible to identify ways that the UN secretariat and major Troop and Police Contributing Countries to UN missions (TCCs and PCCs) could work together to boost these missions.

As food for thought for the Challenges Annual Forum 2022, the authors would suggest six sets of questions:

#### *Technical support*

- **What sort of military, police and civilian expertise is most important for prevention?**  
If UN and other peace operations aim to prevent conflict by creating transparency and promoting conciliation, what expertise is needed to work in these environments? What technical knowledge and other capabilities, such as language skills, are most in demand?
- **How can new tools and innovations assist preventive deployments?**  
How can Artificial Intelligence, drones, radar, satellites and other tools assist peacekeepers monitor, verify and investigate conflict actors' behavior?
- **What can peace operations credibly do to deter violence?**  
What military capabilities, and/or policy capabilities, rules of engagement, and political backing do preventive UN and other peace operations require in order to have a real deterrent effect on conflict actors?

#### *Partnerships*

- **Could preventive peace operations coordinate with regional arrangements and other partners, and if so what would possible coordination look like?**  
What are the best approaches for UN peace operations to align their efforts with other players such as regional and sub-regional organizations involved in prevention – like the AU or ECOWAS – as well as bilateral special envoys to the country or region?

#### *Political backing*

- **How do major power tensions affect the credibility of one-dimensional peace operations and their prevention strategies?**  
Given the importance of high-level political backing to prevention (for example in giving “tripwire” deployments credibility), how do current geopolitical tensions and divisions in the world, reflected in the Security Council, affect the position of UN operations in the field?
- **How should the Secretary-General frame “preventive deployment” in his New Agenda for Peace?**  
Should the Secretary-General put a particular focus on “one-dimensional missions” in the New Agenda for Peace, and what policy issues should the report highlight?

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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