

BACKGROUND PAPER

The Protection of Civilians in Future Peace Operations



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.

Challenges Forum consists of Partners from:

- | | | |
|---|--|---|
|  Argentina |  India |  Sweden |
|  Armenia |  Indonesia |  Switzerland |
|  Australia |  Japan |  Turkey |
|  Canada |  Jordan |  United Kingdom |
|  China |  Nigeria |  United States of America |
|  Egypt |  Norway |  Uruguay |
|  Ethiopia |  Pakistan |  World Federation of United Nations Associations |
|  France |  Russia | |
|  Germany |  South Africa | |

The protection of civilians remains a core objective of UN peace operations, yet the implementation of these mandates is facing ever-growing challenges. Mission environments are changing rapidly and are becoming increasingly complex. Adapting and responding to these changing environments is essential for UN peace operations to retain their relevance and realize mandated protection objectives. This requires clear and achievable mandates, improved support and resource allocation, and more effective utilization of existing resources, and the political will to implement protection mandates. Moreover, future peace operations are likely to have lighter footprints. How can the protection of civilians be safeguarded in these changing operational settings? How is this best achieved and by whom?

Drawing on research by NORCAP¹ and the Effectiveness of Peace Operations Network,² the purpose of this background paper is to stimulate discussion during the 2022 Challenges Annual Forum's (CAF22) dialogue on ways to effectively protect civilians in areas where UN peace operations are deployed.

Protection by UN Peace Operations in Increasingly Challenging Settings

As highlighted by the UN Security Council in May 2022, civilians account for nearly 90 per cent of war-time casualties. During 2021, over 11,000 civilian casualties were recorded in various conflicts around the world, while 140 million people suffered from conflict-induced hunger and 84 million civilians were forcibly displaced.³ In these contexts, UN peace operations and other international actors are deployed to support host States in their prime responsibility of protecting civilians.⁴ Currently, more than 95 per cent of UN peacekeepers serve in field missions with a Protection of Civilian (PoC) mandate.⁵

Several interlinked enablers determine the success of PoC – these include the host State's ability and willingness to protect civilians, as well as the effective coordination with host states and other protection actors, such as UN Country Teams, non-governmental organisations, civil society organisations, and (sub-) regional organisations. Simultaneously, to be able to protect civilians, UN peace operations need to be resourced, staffed, and equipped to operate in today's fast-changing, unpredictable, and highly demanding environments, such as the Central African Republic (CAR), the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Mali and South Sudan.

Many of these areas are becoming increasingly contested and congested, witnessing elevated asymmetric threats against UN peace operations and a growing presence of bilaterally deployed forces and private military contractors. Human rights violations and abuses by these actors against local populations are increasingly reported, and their presence

1 NORCAP is a global provider of expertise to the humanitarian, development, peacekeeping and peace-building sectors. www.nrc.no/norcap

2 Vermeij, L., et. al (2022) 'UN Peacekeeping Operations at a Crossroads: The Implementation of Protection Mandates in Contested and Congested Spaces'. Norwegian Institute of International Affairs.

3 UN Security Council (SC/14904). Ninety Per Cent of War-Time Casualties Are Civilians, Speakers Stress, Pressing Security Council to Fulfil Responsibility, Protect Innocent People in Conflicts. 25 May 2022. <https://www.un.org/press/en/2022/sc14904.doc.htm>

4 Simonovic Evan (2016). The Responsibility to Protect. December 2016, No. 4 Vol. LIII, Human Rights

5 Simonovic Evan (2016). The Responsibility to Protect. December 2016, No. 4 Vol. LIII, Human Rights

frequently challenges or even obstructs the mandated protection tasks of UN peacekeepers.⁶ Furthermore, several peacekeeping missions operate in areas where host government lack the political will to advance political processes often fuelled by corruption. These dynamics are further complicated by increasing climate-related security risks and risk-averse attitudes by several Troop- and Police-Contributing Countries (T/PCCs), all calling into question what form future requirements, resourcing, and configurations UN peace operations should take to be able to protect civilians.

“This indicates that, as existing peace operations are transitioning out, future peace operations are likely to be smaller in size with ‘a more limited, but realistic, set of goals’.”

Transitions and Lighter Footprints

Today’s UN peace operations are often criticized for not providing timely and/or adequate protection to civilians. Although the extremely complex settings in which these missions operate combined with the insufficient level of resources provided to them are often overlooked in such critiques, the criticism has, amongst other factors, led to a decreasing appetite within the UN Security Council to deploy and fund large, multidimensional UN peace operations. Adding to this tension, when host governments demonstrate a lack of will to advance political processes, the willingness to fund large UN missions quickly evaporates. This indicates that, as existing peace operations are transitioning out, future peace operations are likely to be smaller in size with “a more limited, but realistic, set of goals”.⁷

However, the extent of complex protection challenges in conflict-affected areas indicates that a price will be paid for decreasing the footprint of UN peace operations – the brunt of which will likely be borne by civilians. Experts fear that deploying UN peace operations with a lighter footprint will negatively impact the extent of protection work that can be done, especially in terms of the physical protection of civilians. To ensure that PoC activities continue in areas of concern, careful attention needs to be paid on ways in which other protection actors such as (sub-) regional organizations can fill the gaps when UN peace operations decrease their footprint or withdraw completely.

Innovative, Holistic Approaches and Proactive Mindsets

In view of the above, it is key to develop innovative approaches to protect civilians, which are people-centered and coordinated with host States and other protection actors. Local communities should be central to such initiatives. UN peace operations currently work on protection together with communities using tools such as ‘Community Alert Networks’. Although these are useful instruments to gather information and generate early warning, challenges in translating this information into early action and rapid responses remain unresolved. This is often due to a combination of scarce resources, a lack of (political) will to act amongst mission leadership and/or some T/PCCs, and/or restrictions imposed by the host government that hamper the freedom of movement of UN peacekeepers.

While a proactive, robust mindset and the freedom of movement are some of the key requirements for UN peace operations to be able to protect civilians, reviews need to be undertaken on how scarce resources can be best utilized in today’s mission settings. In addition to this, there is an urgent need to develop innovative approaches to protect civilians, using new technologies, enhancing strategic communication, and strengthening comprehensive, integrated approaches.

6 Vermeij, L., et. al (2022) ‘UN Peacekeeping Operations at a Crossroads: The Implementation of Protection Mandates in Contested and Congested Spaces’. Norwegian Institute of International Affairs.

7 Gowan, R. (2022). For U.N. Peacekeeping, Smaller Is Looking Better—Again. World Politics Review.

Given the crossroads at which UN peace operations find themselves, the time has come to give a new look at PoC and the involvement of various actors, including the (political) role of host governments. Besides political reconciliation and strengthening host states' capacities, holistic approaches should be prepared to implement PoC at all levels, with the engagement of communities to drive the agenda.⁸ Integrated strategies – comprising civilian, military, and police components of UN peace operations as well as other protection actors – are required to strengthen PoC approaches. In addition to physical protection, further emphasis should be placed on comprehensive political dialogue as well as creating a protective environment through long-term peacebuilding initiatives such as rule of law and security sector reform, human rights, and countering sexual and gender-based violence.

Managing Expectations and Accountability

Today, peacekeepers are often deployed in areas where there is no peace to keep, whilst simultaneously lacking sufficient capabilities, resources, and assets to carry out their mandated protection tasks. Vast PoC mandates have led to unrealistic expectations and as a result confidence in UN peace operations has decreased, demonstrated by recent violent protests against UN missions in multiple contexts.⁹ The number of UN peacekeepers in countries like CAR, DRC, Mali and South Sudan are too thinly spread to have a credible and lasting impact on PoC, with mis- and disinformation fuelling anger against the missions. Frustrations of host governments and populations are amplified further by the varying levels of (political) will of UN mission leadership and/or T/PCCs to engage on protection issues, which are significantly impacting the performance of missions on the ground. To address some of these issues, there have been calls to bring in more accountability into the operational aspects of PoC planning and execution.^{10 11}

The volume of multi-faceted challenges impacting the PoC performance of UN missions has led to questions around consent by host governments as well as affected populations. This in turn fuels the engagement of bilaterally deployed forces and private military contractors by host States to achieve their military and security objectives, often at the expense of existing peace and diplomatic processes and human rights. With UN peace operations facing vast challenges to fulfil their PoC mandates, will this vicious circle be the sign of a new era during which a shrinking or even disappearing PoC role for UN peace operations will be witnessed? And if this is the case, which actors will be best placed to safeguard the protection of civilians when governments are not able or willing to do so?

“Besides political reconciliation and strengthening host states' capacities, holistic approaches should be prepared to implement PoC at all levels.”

8 UN Security Council (SC/14904). Ninety Per Cent of War-Time Casualties Are Civilians, Speakers Stress, Pressing Security Council to Fulfil Responsibility, Protect Innocent People in Conflicts. 25 May 2022. <https://www.un.org/press/en/2022/sc14904.doc.htm>

9 Sengenya, C. Why We're Protesting Against UN Peacekeepers in Congo. The New Humanitarian, 18 August 2022. <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news-feature/2022/08/18/DRC-MONUSCO-protests-peacekeeping>

10 Namie Di Razza, “The Accountability System for the Protection of Civilians in UN Peacekeeping,” International Peace Institute, December 2020 (1. Establish the roles and responsibilities of all actors. 2. Provide support and resources to all actors. 3. Monitor, track, and oversee performance through a system of controls and reporting. 4. Incentivise good performance, disincentives for poor performers and sanctions on underperformance/gross negligence.)

11 Collinge, D. (2019). The Missing Link. Journal of International Peacekeeping, 23(1-2), 82-104. <https://doi.org/10.1163/18754112-20200002>

Guiding questions

As food for thought for the CAF22, the following set of guiding questions are suggested:

- How can UN peace operations enhance their effectiveness in implementing PoC mandates, including at operational and tactical levels?
- How can accountability measures be used to strengthen protection efforts by UN peace operations as well as host governments?
- How can local communities be engaged to create more people-centred strategies, moving towards more holistic protection models?
- Given the changing realities that UN peace operations face, how can strategic communication, new technologies and innovative approaches be developed and used to protect civilians?
- Which role can other protection actors fill, when UN peace operations decrease their footprint or withdraw?
- What role can (sub-) regional organisations play in protecting civilians given the narrative that regional (e.g. AU, EU) and sub-regional organisations (e.g. ECOWAS, EAC, ECCAS and SADC) should play a larger role in peace and security?

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Dr Lotte Vermeij, is a Senior Expert on UN Peace Operations and Sexual Violence in Conflict at NORCAP/Norwegian Refugee Council. She was deployed to MONUSCO as a Women Protection Advisor and Child Protection Team Lead in eastern DR Congo from 2015-17, and has done extensive work on protection matters with UN Headquarters, MINUSCA, MINUSMA, and UNMISS. Dr. Vermeij frequently facilitates peacekeeping training and workshops for the UN and national peacekeeping training centres around the world. She led the NORCAP and EPON study on 'UN Peacekeeping Operations at a Crossroads: The Implementation of Protection Mandates in Contested and Congested Spaces' (NUPI, 2022) and is the author of 'Woman First, Soldier Second: Taboos and Stigmas Facing Military Women in UN Peace Operations' (IPI, 2020).

Col (Dr) KK Sharma, was a military observer in UNTAC Cambodia and a founding member of the Centre for UN peacekeeping Delhi. In management education, he has been a head, director, regional head, HOD and Dean with various organizations since 2006, post his retirement. A life member and a visiting Fellow with the United Services Institution of India, where he headed an editing team in compiling the USI Book on 'For the Honour of India: A History of Indian Peacekeeping' in 2006-09 and is now a project in-charge and author for the forthcoming book 'India and the UN Peacekeeping'. He was an active member in writing of UN Capstone Doctrine on peacekeeping, manuals for trainers in the OHCHR, Geneva and was a research member for EPON study with NUPI Norway, on the effectiveness of protection mandate.



Visiting Address:
Drottning Kristinas väg 37,
Stockholm, Sweden

Postal Address:
Sandövägen 1,
SE-872 64 Sandöverken, Sweden

E-mail: info@challengesforum.org
www.challengesforum.org
Phone: +46 (0)10 456 23 00



Challenges Forum International Secretariat is hosted by FBA – the Swedish Agency for Peace, Security and Development – on behalf of the Challenges Forum Partnership.

