

# Challenges Annual Forum 2022



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# The Future of Peace Operations

The Challenges Forum is a global partnership that uses its convening power to generate innovative ideas and promote results for more effective peace operations. The partnership consists of 52 organisations in 24 countries, and it provides an impartial and informal platform for dialogue and convenes key actors for deliberations on different approaches to peace operations through events, workshops and publications. Central to the Challenges Forum founding concept is the hosting of the Challenges Annual Forum. The summary of the discussions held at the Forums constitutes one of the main collective outcomes of the partnership.



After two years of virtual events, the Challenges Annual Forum could finally take place in person, at the premises of our excellent partner and co-host the USI of India.

**Design:** Essen International

**Photo:** Mustafa Quraishi

This report was developed in consultation with the co-host of the Challenges Annual Forum 2022, the United Service Institution of India (USI). It does not necessarily represent the views of all participants at the Forum.

# 1. Introduction

The United Nations (UN) Secretary-General's report Our Common Agenda calls to develop a "New Agenda for Peace". In the document, Antonio Guterres stresses the need for a "new effort to agree on more collective security responses and a meaningful set of steps to manage emerging risks" to address the complex challenges the international community faces today. The report notes that our collective peace and security is increasingly under threat where traditional forms of prevention, management and resolution of risks are ill suited to solve conflicts. It further notes that to protect and manage global peace, we need a better understanding of the underlying drivers and systems of influence that are nourishing conflicts. The New Agenda for Peace should include renewed effort to agree on more effective collective security responses and a meaningful set of steps to manage emerging risks.

Against this background, this year's Challenges Annual Forum (CAF22), co-hosted by the United Service Institution (USI) of India, provided a unique platform for over 145 partners, policy makers, practitioners and scholars – with civilian, military, and police backgrounds, from 26 different countries from around the world – to

collectively generate thoughts and reflections on the future of peace operations. CAF22 placed a particular focus on the New Agenda for Peace initiative and the Summit of the Future scheduled to take place in 2024. Hence, this report outlines current trends within global peace and security, as well as the Challenges Forum's partnerships<sup>1</sup> collective suggested inputs to the New Agenda for Peace (NA4P)<sup>2</sup>.

*"The New Agenda for Peace should not be constructed on the idea that we are going to introduce all kinds of new and shiny tools, new institutions, and new processes. I think we roughly have the tools we need, and we need to build on that."*

– Elizabeth Spehar, Assistant Secretary-General for Peacebuilding Support, Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, United Nations



Jean-Pierre Lacroix, USG for UN Peace Operations, was one of many speakers at the Annual Forum, gathering participants from all over the world.

1. Challenges Forum is a global partnership, shaping the debate on more effective peace operations. Partners consist of organizations from Argentina, Armenia, Australia, Canada, China, Egypt, Ethiopia, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Japan, Jordan, Nigeria, Norway, Pakistan, Russia, South Africa, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, United Kingdom, United States of America, Uruguay, WFUNA. Challenges Forum International Secretariat is hosted by FBA – the Swedish Agency for Peace, Security and Development – on behalf of the Challenges Forum Partnership.

2. Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, New Agenda for Peace, United Nations, <https://dppa.un.org/en/new-agenda-for-peace>

# 2. Trends in Conflict and Peace Operations

*“International peace operations are facing a multitude of challenges, including entrenched armed conflict, systematic and brutal attacks on civilians, deadly asymmetric threats, violent extremism and climate related security risks.”*

– Per Olsson Fridh, Director-General of the Folke Bernadotte Academy

## **Dangerous world: increased conflicts and uneven risks**

Today the world is facing a growing number of armed conflicts. A total of 56 wars were recorded in 2020, the highest number since 1945. The level of violence and the distribution of risks differs by region where roughly half of the recorded conflicts are currently located on the African continent<sup>3</sup>. The very nature of conflict is also transforming. There are trends of more protracted intra-state and regional conflicts involving transnational networks, a multitude of new actors including private military contractors, rapidly evolving weapons technologies and disruptive digital technologies as well as use of mis- and disinformation. These developments make it increasingly difficult for international peace operations to understand and address the complex and underlying drivers of conflict.

## **Collective security mechanism: new technology & disinformation**

In parallel, several converging global “shocks” are raising the risks for new conflicts as well as the exacerbating and re-shaping of existing ones. A global economic decline has contributed to lack of supply of commodities, and subsequent growing inequalities among countries and people. In addition, the effects of climate change, including shifting weather patterns, drought and environmental degradation, have led to unprecedented climate risks for a large number of civilians, including the displacement of populations<sup>4</sup>. These developments result in inequalities and increased risks in many of the most vulnerable countries and conflict-ridden areas of the world.

Much has been done over the past years to promote and maintain international peace and security, including through the Action for Peacekeeping (A4P)<sup>5</sup> agenda and the reform of the UN Peace and Security Pillar. In many cases, the UN has been robust in dealing with emerging peace and security challenges and has managed to maintain a minimum degree of cooperation and operational resilience even in challenging contexts including in Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Mali.

However, the declining number of UN peacekeepers deployed to conflict areas over the past decade (there has been no new UN peacekeeping mission since 2014), is not seen by the Challenges Forum partnership to match the current trends in conflict. Instead, it rather indicates that there may be a larger need for multilateral international peace operations in the near to medium future.

3. Strand, H. and Hegre, H., 2021. Trends in Armed Conflict, 1946–2020. *Conflict Trends*, 3, p.4.

4. Warner, K., Hamza, M., Oliver-Smith, A., Renaud, F. and Julca, A., 2010. Climate change, environmental degradation and migration. *Natural Hazards*, 55(3), pp.689-715.

5. Action for Peacekeeping (A4P), United Nations Peacekeeping, <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/action-for-peacekeeping-a4p>

To meet the current and future demands, the Challenges Forum partnership assesses that the toolbox requires further rethinking to manage the fast-evolving global peace and security risks. This might include proposals for internal reorganization and reform within the UN, as well as closer cooperation with regional bodies such as the African Union. As has been seen in the recent past, when the UN Security Council falls short, affected countries, neighboring countries and/or regions increasingly opt to take parallel action through different ad-hoc arrangements to deal with conflict. These security arrangements might complement, or at times serve as an alternative to established UN instruments.

The Challenges Forum partnership deems that in the run-up to the New Agenda for Peace and the forthcoming Summit of the Future, it will be

essential to continue reflecting on the changing nature of conflict and how to best support and complement an evolving regional peace and security architecture within the framework of multilateralism and global solidarity.

*“We should take action and see that we are able to re-imagine, and re-look the entire concept of UN Peacekeeping, in a world that is mired with political uncertainties.”*

– Maj Gen BK Sharma (Retd) | Director, The United Service Institution (USI) of India

**Mis- and disinformation** forms a growing threat to peacekeeping. It negatively affects the safety and security of peace operations, as well as their ability to implement mandates effectively. The UN Security Council has introduced language on mis- and disinformation into the mandates of the four largest peace operations between 2019 and 2022.

A key challenge however remains how peace operations and their mission leadership could:

- better contain mis- and disinformation risks.
- better leverage opportunities for strategic communications as part of a whole-of-mission approach.

The UN Strategy for the Digital Transformation of Peacekeeping is a great start but more training and accompanying human, financial and technological resources are needed to better understand and monitor media landscapes. UN peace operations also need to get better at storytelling and use strategic communications more effectively to counter hostilities.

## Key Takeaways

- **Recommitment to UN principles, norms, and values:** In a world of growing polarization with critical converging threats to international stability, the 'New Agenda for Peace' is vital to re-energize multilateral peace and security and to obligate Member States to uphold the UN Charter.
- **Primacy of politics:** Sustainable political solutions addressing underlying causes of conflict should continue to be at the core of peace operations. In supporting host states, field missions should be careful not to unintentionally impede incentives for national peace processes.
- **Flexible and well-resourced peace operations:** More creative and adaptable mandates will allow fit-for-purpose field missions with the operational freedom and flexibility to effectively adjust to fast evolving threats, needs and contexts. Mandates need to be matched with adequate resources – a severe lack of funds and equipment are directly affecting the performance and credibility of peace operations.
- **Digital transformation:** Strategic foresight through timely, integrated data and digital technologies will significantly improve the performance as well as the safety and security of peace operations.
- **Containment of mis- and disinformation:** Better and more skills, tools, and resources are needed to understand digital social media landscapes to avoid growing threats to peace operations. Field missions need to become better in containing mis- and disinformation, and leverage opportunities for strategic communications through storytelling based on everyday efforts of peace operations.
- **Partnerships:** Regional organizations and security arrangements play important roles in the maintenance of peace and security. It is crucial for the UN to continue developing effective ways to engage with regional organizations, including on questions of capabilities, financing, but also norms and principles. Given the cross-border nature of many conflicts, regional mandates for peace operations should be considered when needed. UN engagement with ad hoc regional security arrangements needs to be based on clear common political objectives.

# 3. CAF22 Thematic Areas

The participants of the Challenges Annual Forum discussed the Future of Peace Operations through the lens of the three sub-themes: the Place for Preventive Deployment in Diplomacy, Protecting the Protectors, and the Protection of Civilians.

## 3.1 Preventive Deployments as Part of Future Peace Operations

The UN Secretary-General's report on Our Common Agenda notes that investments in prevention and preparedness pay for themselves many times over in the human and financial costs that are spared<sup>6</sup>. Hence, the option of launching UN operations to prevent rather than react to conflict remains important while discussing the future.

Many peace operations, including UN Special Political Missions, could contribute to conflict prevention in different ways. Recently there has been a renewed interest in what the model of so-called observing operations, sometimes called “one-dimensional missions<sup>7</sup>”, could offer in terms of prevention.



Participants joining one of three different working group discussions, focusing on different themes.

6. Our Common Agenda-Report of The Secretary-General, United Nations, 2021, <https://www.un.org/en/common-agenda>

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

Observer missions – traditionally, they are primarily military in nature – could become more prominent in the years ahead as they are less expensive and less intrusive compared to multi-dimensional field missions. Perhaps more importantly, they tend to be easier to negotiate in

today's world with a divided UN Security Council. The Challenges Forum partnership assesses that in certain contexts, preventive deployments should become one of the enhanced instruments in international peace and security as part of a spectrum of peace operations.

### **Observer missions can contribute to conflict prevention through at least five mechanisms<sup>8</sup>:**

**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 conflicting 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.

**3. Facilitating communication:** In situations where parties of conflict 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.

**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.

**5. 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.

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8. Preventive Deployments: Between the Old and New Agenda for Peace, Challenges Forum, <https://www.challengesforum.org/paper/background-paper-preventive-deployment-in-diplomacy/>

## Key Takeaway

**Out-of-the-box thinking:** The ‘New Agenda for Peace’ constitutes a momentum to advance a more comprehensive and integrated approach to international peace and security. Creative thinking is needed to update existing tools and frameworks and make better use of the full spectrum of peace operations across the range of instruments, including preventive deployments and special political missions.

*“We need to adapt our mindsets to these very flexible, volatile and unpredictable environments in which we operate in peacekeeping. We need to do this collectively, together with our troop and police contributing countries.”*

– Jean-Pierre Lacroix, Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations, United Nations

## 3.2. Safety and Security of Peacekeepers

With over a thousand peacekeepers killed since 1948<sup>9</sup>, a central question for peace operations and their Troop Contributing Countries (TCC’s) is how peacekeepers could be kept safe and secure whilst implementing the missions’ mandates.

Deliberate and targeted acts of violence against peace operations have come into focus recently. In addition to improving access to training and equipment for peacekeepers, added efforts to track and understand patterns and drivers of attacks also contribute to the safety and security of peace operations, and improve

the overall mission performance and mandate implementation<sup>10</sup>.

A more nuanced understanding of both causes and forms of attacks on peace operations will assist in devising appropriate responses. Systematically collected and detailed data of attack patterns will also contribute to keep ‘blue helmets’ safe. As the UN moves towards more data-driven approaches, continued efforts could unlock important insights to inform better operational judgement and decision-making of mission leadership, at all levels.

9. UN Peacekeeping: 70 Years of Service: Sacrifice Peacekeeping, United Nations Peacekeeping, <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/un-peacekeeping-70-years-of-service-sacrifice>

10. Protecting the Protectors, Challenges Forum, <https://www.challengesforum.org/paper/background-paper-protecting-the-protectors/>



Francesca Mold, Chief of Strategic Communications UNDP, discussing the topic of mis- and disinformation with SRSG Bintou Keita and partners of the Challenges Forum.

### **How deliberate attacks can affect mission performance<sup>11</sup>:**

- 1. Deliberate attacks** creating high-threat environments could hamper the willingness of peacekeepers to engage forcefully. Research indicates that the unwillingness of peacekeepers to take risks negatively affects the performance of UN missions.
- 2.** This can lead to **risk-mitigating efforts** (bunkering-up) adding distance between a peace operation and local communities. Limiting interpersonal contact with populations hampers efforts to generate support for interventions and the collection of information essential to keeping the mission personnel safe.
- 3. Force-protection** measures might be cost-intensive and in extension affect mission performance. A greater focus on force-protection could imply less capacity to conduct operations to support communities, including for key objectives such as protection of civilians.

11. Protecting the Protectors, Challenges Forum, <https://www.challengesforum.org/paper/background-paper-protecting-the-protectors/>

## Key Takeaway

**Safety and security:** Increased attacks on peacekeepers in field missions are alarming and directly affect their ability to engage with and protect local communities. Further support to mission leaders and a greater understanding of attack patterns could help tailor more effective responses and improve mission performance.

*“There is a need to equip peacekeeping missions with appropriate technological tools and equipment to enhance the effectiveness of the operations and safety of peacekeepers.”*

– Shri Sanjay Verma, Secretary, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India

## 3.3. Protection of Civilians in Future Peace Operations

Protection of civilians (POC) should remain a core objective of the UN as it is key to both the credibility and legitimacy of the organization. However, implementing POC mandates is facing growing challenges. Significant progress at the normative level as well as increased attention in the UN Security Council have not resulted in better POC on the ground. Many reports in fact suggest an increased violence against civilians in 2021<sup>12</sup>.

Peacekeepers are often deployed in areas where there is no peace to keep, whilst simultaneously lacking sufficient means to carry out their protection tasks. Extensive POC mandates have led to unrealistic expectations. As a result, confidence in UN peace operations has decreased, demon-

strated by recent violent protests against the field missions in the Central African Republic (CAR), DR Congo, Mali and South Sudan<sup>13</sup>.

Challenges remain in translating early warning into early action. This could be due to a lack of resources or the right mindset to respond, and restrictions hampering the freedom of movement of UN peace operations, imposed by the host government. While a proactive, robust attitude and free movements are requirements for field missions to be able to protect civilians, evaluations on how scarce resources can be best utilized in today’s mission settings needs to be undertaken.

12. Ninety Per Cent of War-Time Casualties Are Civilians, Speakers Stress, Pressing Security Council to Fulfil Responsibility, Protect Innocent People in Conflicts, United Nations, <https://press.un.org/en/2022/sc14904.doc.htm>

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

As existing multidimensional peace operations are transitioning and/or closing, future smaller sized peace operations will need to have “a more limited, but realistic, set of goals”<sup>14</sup>. However, the extent of complex protection challenges in conflict-affected areas indicates that a price will have to be paid for decreasing the footprint of UN peace operations, the brunt of which will likely be borne by civilians. Challenges Forum participants expressed concern that deploying UN peace operations with a lighter footprint will negatively impact the extent of protection work, especially in terms of the physical protection of civilians<sup>15</sup>. 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<sup>16</sup>. Besides political reconciliation and strengthening host states’ capacities, holistic and integrated people centered strategies – comprising civilian, military, and police components of UN peace operations as well as other protection actors – are required. Careful attention needs to be given to innovative ways where other protection actors can fill the gaps when UN peace operations decrease their footprint or withdraw completely.

### **Future POC requires innovative, holistic approaches and proactive mindsets<sup>17</sup>:**

**1.** 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’. Local perception studies should be used more systematically, also for measuring the effectiveness of peace operations through the eyes of local populations.

**2.** 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.

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

15. The Protection of Civilians in Future Peace Operations, Challenges Forum, <https://www.challengesforum.org/paper/background-paper-protection-of-civilians-in-future-peace-operations/>

16. Ibid

17. Ibid



The hybrid setting allowed for virtual participation. Here Cassandra Clark, Senior Advisor at U.S. Department of State, is virtually leading the Working Group on Protection of Civilians.

## Key Takeaways

- **Placing people at the center:** Effective protection of civilians is important for the credibility of peace operations. Mission planning and operational responses need to be strengthened through community engagement and a better understanding of local needs. Perception studies should be conducted and used more systematically, also for measuring mission effectiveness in the eyes of local populations. The role of youth and women in peace operations is essential and needs to be further enhanced.
- **Limits of peace operations:** It is important to acknowledge the limits of peace operations, particularly in UN mission settings with lighter footprints without deterrent capacity to protect civilians.

*“One of the first things we need to do as key stakeholders is to unlearn some of the stereotypes that enable us to think of young people as inexperienced and less passionate about development.”*

– Cynthia Chigwenya, African Youth Ambassador for Peace for Southern Africa, African Union

# 4. Way Forward

The Challenges Annual Forum 2022 (CAF22) generated useful insights and concrete takeaways on the future of peace operations and the New Agenda for Peace. Throughout the two-day event partners demonstrated a willingness and positive attitude to make use of the momentum created by the New Agenda for Peace, to re-energize the multilateral spirit and improve the toolbox of international peace and security. This would allow collective security mechanisms to truly focus on underlying and ever-more interconnected drivers of conflict, through a collective capacity for analysis and foresight, combined with the political will to strengthen the UN.

In an increasingly dangerous world with a multitude of volatile risks, it will be key for future peace operations to have the capacity to adapt quickly and flexibly to new challenges. Innovative out-of-the-box thinking is crucial to ensure that future peace operations can both prevent and respond to fast-moving situations and environments. The need to work together with regional security arrangements, based on clear political objectives, will also be of key importance.

The Challenges Forum Partnership assesses that the issue of the instruments for future peace operations remains high on the agenda.

Finding innovative ways for UN field missions to fulfill their mandates remains a key priority for its partner organizations and key stakeholders. The Challenges Forum Partnership, its International Secretariat and this year's host of the Annual Forum, the United Service Institution (USI) of India, hope that these CAF22 reflections and takeaways will serve as useful inputs for further reflections, and provide pointers for future events and strategic consultations in the run-up to the New Agenda for Peace and the Summit of the Future.

*“The New Agenda for Peace should be better aligned with non-UN peace operations (...) and should encourage more partnerships between Member States with different comparative advantages.”*

– Kano Takehiro | Director General, International Peace Cooperation Headquarters, Cabinet Office, Japan





*“There are no shortcuts to international peace and security. Peace can only be achieved on the ground, working together with affected countries and its people. It is therefore essential to put the population first and to apply a people centered approach to peace operations.”*

– Pernilla Rydén, Director of the Challenges Forum International Secretariat

## ABOUT THE EVENT

The **Challenges Annual Forum** serves as a platform for launching research, concepts and policy initiatives in the area of peace operations reform. The Annual Forum is hosted yearly on a rotating basis by partner organizations. The Challenges Annual Forum 2022 (CAF22) was held at the premises of the United Service Institution of India, in New Delhi. This summary report captures some of the discussions and recommendations that emerged during the two-day forum from a range of individuals, serving in peace operations and engaged in the reform of peace operations as part of the Challenges Partnership.

## ATTRIBUTIONS

This Annual Forum report was written by the Challenges Forum International Secretariat together with the United Service Institution of India (USI), on behalf of the Challenges Forum partners and Forum participants. It does not necessarily represent the views of all participants at the Forum.

## ABOUT CHALLENGES FORUM

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



The Challenges Forum consists of Partners from:

 Argentina

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 Indonesia

 Pakistan

 Turkey

 Armenia

 Ethiopia

 Japan

 Russia

 United Kingdom

 Australia

 France

 Jordan

 South Africa

 United States of America

 Canada

 Germany

 Nigeria

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