



## Multinational Collaboration in UN Peace Operations: How to Build Better Bridges?

### Challenges Forum Seminar in Paris



On 25 April 2024, the Challenges Forum organised a seminar at Sciences Po Paris, exploring how peacekeepers from different nationalities interact with one another, and thereby can translate ambiguous mandates into effective action.

The event launched a research brief by Professor Chiara Ruffa, Sciences Po Paris, and Professor Sebastiaan Rietjens, Netherlands Defence Academy, titled *Mandate Interpretation and Multinational Collaboration in the UN mission in Mali*, as part of a series of briefs sponsored by the Challenges Forum, Folke Bernadotte Academy (FBA) and the Swedish Defence University. It explores the important relationship between peacekeepers from different nationalities. As peace operations are becoming more multinational, the ability to manage diversity has become a crucial factor for better mandate implementation. Their findings show that an “othering” behaviour is harmful for a mission’s performance. Their policy recommendations suggest that the UN should promote a bridge-building mindset, while increasing the blue helmets’ understanding of the overall mission goals.



To discuss the policy recommendations from the research brief, former Force Commander, UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) Gen. Dennis Gyllensporre and former Force Chief of Staff, MINUSMA, Gen. Guillaume Ponchin participated. Fatima Maiga, President of the Coalition des Femmes Leaders, provided views from a local perspective virtually. The discussion was moderated by Pernilla Rydén, Director Challenges Forum International Secretariat.

### Key takeaways from the discussion

#### ***Diversity in missions***

It was emphasised that diversity is a core value of the UN and a success factor of UN peacekeeping. As such, a responsibility for all leaders of a UN field mission. Diverse peacekeeping has proven an ability to better listen to local communities and better explain mission objectives. These field presences have also succeeded more in countering mis- and disinformation and managing local expectations. It was also highlighted that officers and soldiers – from different nations – are united by a global core of military commonalities, which form a bedrock for bridging differences.

- Mission commanders focus on the skills and capabilities required to perform tasks, and subsequently adjust mission composition to optimise diversity of troops. In doing so, commanders should **balance both diversity and performance** and find ways so that both parameters could reinforce each other.
- Geographical proximity of troops to the mission area can sometimes improve local populations' acceptance of the peacekeepers, but it is most important to **maintain impartiality of peacekeeping missions**.

#### ***Mission leadership's role in managing diversity***

It was highlighted that good mission leadership promotes cohesion by explaining mission mandates, goals, and end states; as well as clarifying, articulating, and simplifying concepts; and communicating this consistently.

- More focus should be given to **transforming national soldiers into international peacekeepers**. Formal onboarding ceremonies for incoming units could assist in internalising UN peacekeeping principles, shifting mindsets and managing expectations.
- **Regular consultations** between UN mission leadership and Senior National Representatives (SNR) from Troop Contributing Countries (TCCs) are essential to build bridges and ensure cohesion. More can be done to explain the nature of UN peacekeeping missions to the political and military leadership in TCC capitals.

#### ***Training and promoting cohesion to manage diversity***

It was emphasised that pre-deployment training is key and an essential national responsibility of TCCs. It was recognized that much progress has been made in pre-deployment training, in collaboration with the UN Department of Peace Operations and peacekeeping training centers around the world. Positive lessons learnt and best practices should continue to be harvested.

- There is room for improvement in **making training material accessible** to soldiers, e.g. through animated technologies resonating better with soldiers.
- **In-mission training often competes with operational tasks** and priorities, but is, and should be done on a daily basis, through adapting to specificities of operational theatres.

Improved cohesion through “socialisation” of peacekeepers is important and could be done in various ways: battle space, e.g. conducting operations in difficult circumstances shapes cohesion across different units with different skillsets; welfare space, e.g. sports and social events; and spatial organization of mission camps, allowing for optimal social interaction between troops.

- Missions should be given **more space to creatively promote mission cohesion and “build bridges”**.
- MINUSMA provided **good lessons learnt on promoting cohesions by addressing several factors**: perceived feeling of discrimination and injustice among troops; perceived feeling of powerlessness among troops and the inability of making sense of working environment and end state; and language divide.