

BACKGROUND PAPER

# Operationalising Adaptable and Effective Peace Operations

## ABOUT THE EVENT

The Challenges Annual Forum 2024 (#CAF24Berlin) will gather partners and key stakeholders to discuss how to strengthen international peace and security and lay the foundation for the next generation of peace operations. The event is co-hosted by the Challenges Forum's German partner Center for International Peace Operations (ZIF), in Berlin on 3-4 December.

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:

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**UN peace operations have proven to be important tools for addressing challenges to peace and security. However, the manner in which they are planned, deployed and managed has not allowed them to adjust to changing circumstances and requirements.**

**The Pact for the Future’s request to review all forms of peace operations provides an opportunity to reflect on past reforms and initiatives. This can help us to identify how best to operationalise adaptable and effective peace operations, that can meet current and future needs.**

The end of the Cold War in the early 1990s was accompanied by a surge in demand for United Nations (UN) assistance in the maintenance of international peace and security. More peace operations were established in the first four years after the Cold War than during the forty years preceding them. An Agenda for Peace, issued in 1992, outlined an expansive vision for UN engagement across the areas of preventative diplomacy, peace-making, peacekeeping and peacebuilding.

The ambition and scale of early post-Cold War peace operations quickly exceeded the ability of the UN and its Member States to deliver. The failures in Somalia, Rwanda and Bosnia and Herzegovina led to a temporary contraction of peace operations as the organisation undertook some internal reflection and reorganisation. In the years that followed, the UN Headquarters built up policies, procedures, funding mechanisms and structures to more effectively plan, deploy and manage peace operations. Beginning in the late 1990s, a new generation of peacebuilding support offices were established and large multidimensional missions with protection of civilians’ mandates became the preferred model for peacekeeping operations.

However, over time, the policies and structures put in place to plan, deploy and manage peace operations have contributed to the existence of a body of conventional wisdom and preconceived notions of how different types of UN peace operations are understood by the Secretariat and Member States. This limits the UN’s available options to respond to crises and complicates efforts to adapt existing missions to changing circumstances and requirements.

#### **Past reviews and recommendations**

In the years since An Agenda for Peace, the UN has undertaken several reviews of peace operations to respond to changing requirements and lessons learned:

##### *Panel on UN Peace Operations (2000)*

In the lead-up to the Millennium Summit, Kofi Annan convened a high-level panel chaired by Lakhdar Brahimi to assess the shortcomings of existing approaches and to make recommendations for change. The panel’s report (A/55/305-S/2000/809) included a range of recommendations related to doctrine, rapid deployment and enhancing the structures at Headquarters to plan and support peace operations.

##### *Peace Operations 2010 (2005)*

The UN experienced a massive expansion in peace operations in the five years after the Brahimi report, prompting a review covering personnel, doctrine, partnerships, resources and organisation (A/60/696). This review resulted in the strengthening of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) as well as the establishment of the Department of Field Support (DFS) in 2007. It also led to the issuance of the Capstone Doctrine in 2008.

In parallel, the Secretariat put in place a new peacebuilding architecture in 2006 and pursued the strengthening of the Department of Political Affairs (DPA) to enhance the ability of the UN to undertake preventative diplomacy and good offices, including mediation, in 2007 (A/62/521).

### *High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (2015)*

The emergence of new challenges in peace operations and diverging views amongst Member States and the Secretariat on the role and limits of peacekeeping, prompted Ban Ki-moon to establish a high-level independent panel on peace operations (HIPPO). In its 2015 report, the HIPPO identified four essential shifts for peace operations: (1) ensuring the primacy of politics, (2) utilising the full spectrum of peace operations in a flexible manner to meet changing requirements on the ground, (3) enhancing global and regional partnerships and (4) making UN systems and structures more field-focused and people-centred.

The panel also called for the restructuring of the Secretariat's peace and security architecture, and for modernising the administrative framework for peace operations. In 2019, a new structure at Headquarters and a new approach to delegation of authority to empower field missions were put in place. DPKO became the Department of Peace Operations (DPO) and DPA became the Department of Peacebuilding and Political Affairs (DPPA) to reflect the inclusion of the Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO) in the new structure. To ensure coherence, a shared regional pillar was put in place and the new peace and security architecture is now governed by the Standing Principals Group, chaired by the Secretary-General.

### *New Agenda for Peace/Pact for the Future*

The New Agenda for Peace called for more nimble, adaptable and flexible mission models, and it stressed that peace operations should be significantly more integrated and leverage the full range of civilian capacities and expertise across the UN system and its partners. As part of the Pact for the Future adopted in September 2024, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to undertake a review of "all forms of UN peace operations, taking into account lessons learned from previous and ongoing reform processes" and to provide recommendations on "how the UN toolbox can be adapted to meet evolving needs, to allow for more agile, tailored responses to existing, emerging and future challenges".

### **Reflections on past reviews and the barriers preventing change**

Each peace operations review has identified shortcomings and lessons learned from which the Secretariat has developed proposals for the consideration of Member States. The nature, level of ambition and degree of follow-up on the proposals have varied.

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### *Trust between Secretariat and Member States*

In recent decades, the Secretariat has increasingly found it difficult to engage in honest introspection and it routinely self-censors in its recommendations to Member States. Independent or strategic reviews have become the preferred vehicle for generating recommendations of a more frank nature, but these are seldom truly independent or strategic in practice.

### *Implementation and follow-up*

Not all recommendations of previous reviews have been implemented, whether due to opposition from some Member States or the Secretariat. As a result, subsequent reviews often iterate on the unimplemented recommendations of their predecessors, without necessarily examining the reasons why the recommendations have not been implemented.

**Structural issues**

The bureaucratic and intergovernmental hurdles, arising from the ossification of arbitrary distinctions between peacekeeping operations and special political missions, have been persistent obstacles to necessary change since the 1990s. What was originally a different approach to reflecting resource requirements in budgets is now a fault line that demarcates two entirely different regimes with different approaches to planning, mandating, budgeting, financing, staffing, management and reporting to Headquarters, implementing an overlapping set of mandates with similar operational requirements.

Finally, numerous reviews highlighted the need for changes to organisational structures, but Secretaries-General only have the political capital to undertake major reorganisation within the Secretariat at the start of their term. In fact, the first-term reforms of Antonio Guterres represent a missed opportunity to address longstanding inter-departmental rivalries, modernise the structures and approaches related to the engagement of uniformed personnel, and rationalise the organisation of and division of responsibilities among thematic units. Moreover, the lack of proper reflection on the changed nature of the relationship between Headquarters and the field, after the direct delegation of authority to missions, has created confusion and tension that undermines mandate implementation in the field.

**The way forward: Mission design and mandate implementation**

Many of the key recommendations, especially those of the 2015 HIPPO to utilise the full spectrum of peace operations, remain unimplemented, along with earlier recommendations on how peace operations can better implement peacebuilding activities. As a result, the current UN peace operations toolkit does not necessarily contain the appropriate tools for responding to current and future requirements.

One approach to address this could be to define prescribed models and modalities for the deployment of peace operations. A more practical approach could be for the UN to adopt a more context-specific, flexible approach to mission design and mandate implementation. This would allow missions to draw upon capacity from across the UN system and external partners through a system of division of responsibility, based on considerations such

as capacity and expertise, and the necessary impartiality or alignment with the host government required for each activity.

For the UN to shift to a more flexible and modular approach, it needs to change the way in which missions are planned, budgeted and staffed. The policies and procedures currently in place drive a path dependency towards the usual approaches to mission design and mandate implementation. Although some elements are the result of General Assembly decisions, the existing limitations of planning, budget and staffing processes are often self-inflicted, driven by culture, structural disincentives for change and myths and misconceptions built up over time.

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**Guiding questions**

- The new peace and security architecture and the new management structures have now been in place for five years. What remains to be done to ensure greater coherence and success? What are the obstacles to change and how can they be overcome?
- How do we move beyond the factors that drive the persistence of templated approaches to the planning and deployment of peacekeeping operations and special political missions? What is needed for the UN to better utilise the full spectrum of peace operations?
- How can existing missions better adapt to changing circumstances and requirements? What kind of support is needed?

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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