A New Vision for Peace Operations

(Or how I learned to stop worrying and love Christmas tree mandates)

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Executive Summary

Over the past eight decades, United Nations (UN) peace operations have demonstrated themselves to be valuable tools for prevention, peacemaking, peacekeeping, and peacebuilding. But they have also struggled to meet the expectations of their varied audiences, including the Security Council, host governments, and local populations. Many of these struggles stem from the supply-driven approach to how missions have been planned and deployed, which drives many of the shortcomings that are evident in missions today, such as sprawling mandates that are not focused on the political solutions necessary to resolve conflict, templated approaches to mission design and mandate implementation, and friction with other UN entities and organizations. Although these shortcomings are present throughout the mission lifecycle, they are particularly evident now with ongoing drawdowns and transitions in Mali, Sudan, Somalia, Iraq, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and as countries increasingly turn to alternatives to UN peace operations, such as peace enforcement and counterterrorism operations undertaken by regional organizations and ad hoc coalitions, despite their poor track record at fostering lasting peace.

A new approach to peace operations is necessary to overcome these shortcomings, one that acknowledges that UN peace operations always operate in an environment alongside other actors and that no single entity or organization has the capacity and resources to tackle the full range of activities required to help a country towards sustaining peace. By adopting a modular approach to mission design and mandate implementation, the UN can leverage the existing capacity present in countries, including from the UN country team, to implement mandates in a more differentiated manner. This would allow missions to focus on shorter-term activities as well as those that depend on a mission's impartiality while allowing relevant partners to focus on longer-term peacebuilding activities that require alignment with the host government. Such a differentiation would have several benefits, including reinforcing the mission's orientation around identifying and supporting political solutions to conflict while enabling a context-specific demand-driven approach to mission design, reducing the risk that missions become instrumentalized as tools of regime preservation, and helping to ensure programmatic continuity during transitions.

In advocating for a shift in the planning, design, and management of UN peace operations, this report provides ideas for how to implement recommendations from A New Agenda for Peace as well as considerations for the upcoming 2025

peacebuilding architecture review. Elements of this approach can already be put into practice as part of transition contexts, where the Peacebuilding Commission and the General Assembly can play an important role in considering follow-on arrangements and how to provide countries with tailored packages of support to national prevention strategies. By allowing peace operations to better meet the expectations of key stakeholders such as the host government and Security Council while reducing friction with the UN country team and other actors, this new approach can help overcome the current crisis of confidence in UN peace operations and ensure that the UN can continue to play an important role in the maintenance of international peace and security in a time of increasing geopolitical contestation.

Introduction

The history of United Nations (UN) peace operations is a story of growth, contraction, and adaptation reflecting changing security preoccupations and geopolitical circumstances.[1] Many missions in our current phase of peace operations, which arguably began in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks, are multi-functional—in that missions perform a wide range of political and peacebuilding tasks, often involving a mix of civilian, military, and police personnel. Such UN peace operations have been effective in helping to implement peace agreements, shepherding countries through decolonization and independence, protecting civilians against the threat of physical violence and helping to establish the conditions for lasting peace.[1] There are many signs, however, that the current phase of peace operations is drawing to a close. No major mission has been established in the past decade. Today, the overall scale of peace operations—in terms of the number of missions in place, the number of personnel deployed, and the level of approved resources—is smaller than in 2007, when most of the structures currently in place to support UN peace operations were created.

UN peace operations are suffering a crisis of confidence. As they balance a proliferation of mandated tasks, peace operations have become increasingly distracted or disconnected from the credible political processes necessary to resolve conflicts and foster peace. They have become too supply-driven in their design and execution and primarily reflect the preferences and priorities of the Secretariat at the expense of meeting the demands and expectations of key national and international stakeholders. As a result, many missions have closed in recent years or are preparing to depart, not because they have succeeded in fostering durable peace but because they have lost the support of either host governments or the Security Council. Moreover, successive waves of reform over the past two decades intended to improve the effectiveness of peace operations and improve coherence across the UN system have not made a significant impact.

Concurrently, the world has entered a new era of fragmentation and geopolitical contestation. The broad agreement required to deploy multilateral peace operations, particularly within the Security Council and among its permanent members, is increasingly elusive. Alternatives to UN peace operations have emerged, including operations undertaken by regional organizations such as the

[1] This report uses the term “mission” to refer to UN field-based presences with political or peace and security responsibilities. It uses the term “peace operations” to refer collectively to all missions, including but not limited to peacekeeping operations and special political missions.

African Union (AU) and subregional organizations as well as action by ad hoc coalitions such as the Multinational Security Support mission in Haiti. These alternatives are often more attractive to host governments or more politically or financially palatable to members of the Security Council and are generally framed as being able to undertake activities that are more robust than those typically undertaken by UN peace operations, such as peace enforcement and counterterrorism. The adoption last year of Security Council resolution 2719 (2023), which approved a framework for financing AU peace support operations using UN assessed contributions, may serve to accelerate this trend away from UN peace operations, moving the UN out of the role of peacemaker and peacekeeper and relegating it to the function of a provider of logistical and financial support.

However, there remains an important role for the UN to play in the maintenance of international peace and security. No organization enjoys the same degree of legitimacy or has the same breadth of capabilities. Most alternatives to the UN are focused on short-term securitized responses, while the UN has the capabilities and expertise to engage across areas, including preventative diplomacy, peacemaking, peacekeeping, and peacebuilding. Over the next few years, through processes such as the 2025 peacebuilding architecture review, the Berlin peacekeeping ministerial, and the 2026 review by the General Assembly of the personnel reimbursement and contingent-owned equipment frameworks for peace operations, member states have a unique window of opportunity to address the underlying causes for the current decline in enthusiasm for UN peace operations.

This report builds on the recommendations in the sections of A New Agenda for Peace on peace operations, peace enforcement, and support to the AU and subregional peace support operations.[2] It presents a new approach to peace operations for member states and the Secretariat to consider as part of the review on the future of all forms of United Nations peace operations requested in the Pact for the Future adopted during the Summit of the Future on September 22, 2024. This new approach may help overcome the current crisis of confidence in UN peace operations and allow the UN to remain relevant in the maintenance of international peace and security at a time when multilateralism is under threat. The report begins by explaining the origins of the current approach to peace operations before unpacking the recurrent challenges facing peace operations today, including the proliferation of mandated activities, the tensions between missions and other actors, and the difficulties faced in the reconfiguration of UN country-level presences during transitions. To address these problems, the report argues for a shift away from templated approaches to the design and deployment of peace

operations towards more tailored, adaptive, and people-centered mission models. This can be achieved through a new approach to the design of peace operations that is intended from the start to better leverage the comparative advantages of entities and organizations within and outside the UN system and their degree of alignment with host governments. Such an approach would not only reduce competition while helping ensure that mandated activities are implemented in a manner that takes into account the competing interests of key stakeholders. It also envisages larger roles for the General Assembly and Peacebuilding Commission, not only in contexts where the Security Council is unable to reach an agreement.

1. Historical Context

UN peace operations emerged from efforts of the UN in 1948 to secure and supervise a truce in Palestine with the decision by the General Assembly to create the position of UN Mediator in Palestine and the decision of the Security Council to deploy military observers in support of the Mediator. The UN Mediator in Palestine was the first of what are known today as "special political missions" and the military observers—which became known as the UN Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO)—were the first peacekeeping operation.

During the Cold War, the UN used a variety of special political missions to support negotiations and undertake activities in support of decolonization, primarily through the deployment of special envoys, good offices, and smaller field-based missions.[2] At the same time, it expanded peacekeeping operations beyond their origins as unarmed military observers to larger-scale operations undertaking an increasingly ambitious range of tasks. The experience of the US-led UN Command in Korea—not a peacekeeping operation under UN command and control, but instead, peace enforcement authorized by the Security Council in 1950 and led by the United States—demonstrated the potential value of international military action under the UN flag. It helped pave the way for the General Assembly to establish, in 1956, the UN Emergency Force (UNEF I), the first armed UN peacekeeping operation. The Security Council built on this experience in 1960 when it established the UN Operation in the Congo (ONUC). ONUC not only performed a significant range of civil tasks in addition to its military functions,[3] but the Security Council also authorized it to use force as a last resort.[4] And in 1962, the General Assembly established the UN Transitional Executive Authority (UNTEA) in West Irian, the first peacekeeping operation with formal administrative authority over a territory.

Geopolitical divisions, particularly within the Security Council, limited the contexts to which UN peace operations were deployed. However, the end of the Cold War created new opportunities for multilateral cooperation in international peace and security. The optimistic mood was reflected in the statement issued at the end of the first-ever meeting of the Security Council at the level of heads of state and government on January 31, 1992, which noted that "there are new favourable

[2] In line with the 2023 UN integrated assessment and planning policy, this paper uses the term "field-based special political mission" to refer to a country-specific special political mission with an ongoing in-country presence. It does not include panels, monitoring and similar expert bodies or regional offices with mandates covering multiple countries.

international circumstances under which the Security Council has begun to fulfil more effectively its primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security."[5] Building on this optimism, Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali issued a report later that year titled An Agenda for Peace, which outlined an ambitious vision of improving the UN's capacity to pursue and preserve peace through preventative diplomacy, peacekeeping, and peacebuilding.[6] Marrack Goulding, the head of the newly-established UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO), remarked later that year that "it's immensely exciting to see this organisation at last being used in the way it was intended to be used, and to see it being, in almost all cases, the first institution to which the international community turns when there is a problem of international peace and security to be solved. That is exactly the way it should be."[7]

More UN missions were established between 1990 and 1994 than in the previous forty years combined.[8] Beyond increasing the number of peace operations deployed, the UN experimented with new models of peace operations, including civilian-led multidimensional peacekeeping operations with broad mandates and large civilian components. The prototype for such missions was the UN Transitional Assistance Group (UNTAG) in Namibia, of which Goulding later noted, "Despite a bad start, it was arguably the most successful of them all, completing its mandate ahead of schedule and below budget."[9] The UN also deployed a preventative mission in North Macedonia—the UN Preventative Deployment Force (UNPREDEP)—at the request of the government before the outbreak of conflict and without specific identification of a potential adversary, which was also widely regarded as a success.[10] Special political missions also grew in number and complexity in the period after the end of the Cold War. In fact, the term "special political mission" emerged in the 1990s to describe the range of prevention, peacemaking, and peacebuilding tasks financed through the UN program (or "regular") budget,[11] in contrast with peacekeeping operations which were funded separately from the regular budget.[3]

Managing this massive expansion in peace operations, however, required a reorganization of the Secretariat. Shortly after taking office in 1992, Boutros-Ghali reorganized six separate entities into a new Department of Political Affairs (DPA) and the aforementioned DPKO.[12] He entrusted DPA with responsibility over political

[3] Since 1973, the separate accounts of peacekeeping operations had been assessed using a different scale of assessments from the regular budget; this approach gave the five permanent members of the Security Council additional financial responsibility and placed other member states into different tiers based on their level of economic development.

matters, including in peacekeeping operations, as well as for preventative diplomacy and peacebuilding,[13] while giving DPKO responsibility over operational matters.[14] This particular setup was driven by the desire of the Secretary-General for DPA to serve as a counterweight to DPKO, which was dominated by the United States and largely staffed by military planners and logisticians from western militaries.[15] However, this division of responsibilities between the departments based on "political" and "operational" functions proved to be unworkable in practice and was replaced in 1997 by a more clear-cut approach in which one of the two departments was designated the "lead department" for a particular mission.

In 1993, Goulding was appointed head of DPA, and his former deputy, Kofi Annan, was promoted to head of DPKO. Although Goulding firmly believed that successful peacekeeping required adherence to the basic principles that had emerged out of lessons learned from missions as far back as UNEF[16]—most notably consent of the parties, impartiality, and non-use of force except in self-defense[17]—Annan was more amenable to US pressure for peacekeeping to adopt a more aggressive posture, which led to the deployment of the second UN Operation in Somalia (UNOSOM II), the first UN operation authorized from the start to use force proactively, in 1993.[18] However, the growth in the scale and ambition of UN peace operations at the time quickly outstripped the capacities of the Secretariat, particularly given the ongoing financial challenges faced by the UN.[19] Goulding later reflected that "the member states are piling on the Secretariat tasks which we do not have the capability to carry out."[20] In January 1995, the failures of UNOSOM II, the weak response of the UN Assistance Mission in Rwanda (UNAMIR) to the Rwandan genocide, and the challenges faced by the UN Protection Force (UNPROFOR) in Yugoslavia led to a period of retrenchment in peacekeeping operations and prompted the Secretary-General to issue a Supplement to An Agenda for Peace offering a sober reflection of the experience of UN peace operations since the end of the Cold War. In addition to reaffirming the three key principles of peacekeeping, Boutros-Ghali cautioned against having the UN undertake peace enforcement, stressing that "[t]he logic of peacekeeping flows from political and military premises that are quite distinct from those of enforcement; and the dynamics of the latter is incompatible with the political process that peace-keeping is intended to facilitate."[21]

After a period of retrenchment, a new model of peacekeeping emerged in the late 1990s and became dominant in the period following the September 11 attacks. Like the new generation of special political missions, these were, more often than not, responsible for implementing an increasing number of peacebuilding tasks in recognition that they "must include not only short-term measures to prevent the

outbreak of fighting or stop fighting which has already started, but also long-term measures to address the root causes of the dispute which has given rise, or threatens to give rise, to armed conflict."[22] Indeed, four missions established in 1999 "incorporated development goals into their mandates to an unprecedented level."[23] Peacekeeping missions were also increasingly focused on the protection of civilians, an activity that first appeared as part of the mandate of the UN Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL).

In the 2000s, the UN expanded its ability to address challenges to peace and security through the implementation of recommendations from the 2000 report of the UN Panel on Peace Operations (the "Brahimi report"), the creation of a new peacebuilding architecture as part of the 2005 World Summit Outcome, the expansion of DPKO and creation of a dedicated Department of Field Support (DFS) in 2007, the strengthening of DPA and articulation of a new capstone doctrine for peacekeeping the following year, and the establishment of the UN Office to the AU (UNOAU) and approval of a global field support strategy in 2010. Once again, Western members of the Security Council increasingly pushed for the UN to adopt a more "robust" approach to peacekeeping operations. Although they acknowledged that peace enforcement and counterterrorism remained beyond the scope of even robust peacekeeping, they pushed the UN to provide an increasing range of support to non-UN operations engaged in such activities, including through the UN Support Office to the AU Mission in Somalia (UNSOA) established in 2009. Member states also increasingly questioned the distinctions between peacekeeping and special political missions given the fact that both sets of missions were often entrusted with similar peacebuilding mandates and because they shared similar field support and backstopping requirements.[24] Fundamental differences in perspective among key stakeholders—including Security Council members, individual Secretariat departments, troop- and police-contributing countries, and host governments—on the nature and purpose of UN peace operations became increasingly difficult to reconcile.

In 2015, UN peace operations reached their peak in terms of the number of missions in place, the number of personnel deployed, and the level of financial resources approved. That year, the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (HIPPO) convened by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon concluded that "[d]espite the diversity of operational tools developed by the United Nations over the past six decades, those tools have not been used with sufficient flexibility. Disputes about bureaucratic boundaries, the limits of budgets and definitional debates have slowly eclipsed the true purpose of the enterprise: to provide the

most relevant and appropriately configured peace operations to help prevent and resolve armed conflicts and sustain peace." The HIPPO noted that "[t]erms such as 'special political missions' and 'peacekeeping operations' are ingrained in mindsets and the bureaucracy of the United Nations, but should not constrain the Organization's ability to respond more flexibly to the needs on the ground". It, therefore, called for the adoption of a more tailored, flexible approach, drawing upon the full spectrum of peace operations.[25] The restructuring of the peace and security architecture in 2019 was ostensibly intended to address some of the problems identified by the HIPPO, including through the reorganization of DPKO into the Department of Peace Operations (DPO), the merger of the Peacebuilding Support Office and DPA into the new Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA), and the joint oversight by the two departments of eight regional divisions, each supporting a mix of peacekeeping operations, special political missions, and non-mission settings. However, this reorganization has not been sufficient to overcome the historical rivalry and tension between DPPA and DPO.[26]

2. Shortcomings of the Current Approach

In the past decade, the UN has pointed to missions such as those deployed to Liberia and Colombia as examples of contexts in which the UN has successfully supported peace agreements, fostered political transitions, or helped strengthen state institutions. Indeed, there is a significant body of evidence that demonstrates that peace operations have been effective in reducing violence in the countries to which they have been deployed,[27] and many have contributed to progress in areas such as strengthening state institutions and promoting the rule of law as well as increasing the likelihood of democratization.[28] At the same time, UN peace operations have faced serious challenges in several mission contexts, including the reputational damage suffered as a result of failures to protect civilians against physical violence, respond to incidents of sexual exploitation and abuse by UN personnel, and prevent scandals such as the cholera outbreak in Haiti. In recent years, unconstitutional changes of power have also taken place in several mission contexts, including Mali (2020 and 2021), Afghanistan (2021), and Sudan (2021). And dissatisfaction with the performance of missions has had consequences for mission mandates, including the decision by the Security Council to end the mandate of the UN Mission for Justice Support in Haiti (MINUJUSTH) in October 2019, the September 2023 request by the DRC to accelerate the drawdown of the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the DRC(MONUSCO), and the requests by host governments (or de facto authorities) for the departures of the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) in June 2023, the UN Integrated Transition Mission in Sudan (UNITAMS) in December 2023, the UN Mission in Somalia (UNSOM) in October 2024, and the UN Assistance Mission in Iraq (UNAMI) by December 2025.

2.1 The primacy of politics and the principles of peacekeeping

The crisis of confidence largely stems from the tensions inherent within the sprawling mandates implemented by multi-functional missions.[29] Mandated tasks vary widely in the degree of impartiality and the time required for their implementation. At the same time, different stakeholders—whether host governments, local populations, Security Council members, or troop- and police-

contributing countries—have different interests when it comes to peace operations, which are reflected in different priorities among the mandated tasks of missions. It takes adroit mission leadership to be able to balance these often-contradictory interests and priorities, and if this delicate balance is lost, it becomes increasingly likely that a mission will be shown the door. At the same time, in managing this unwieldy portfolio of mandated tasks, it is possible for a mission to miss the forest for the trees and fail to pay sufficient attention to supporting or establishing the groundwork for a credible political strategy to resolve the underlying conflict.

In its 2015 report, the HIPPO noted the increasing marginalization of the UN in peace processes and emphasized the primacy of politics, stressing that "political solutions should always guide the design and deployment of United Nations peace operations and political momentum must be sustained."[30] The Secretary-General reaffirmed this call in A New Agenda for Peace when he recommended that "[peace operations] must be deployed based on and in support of a clearly identified political process." The political strategies of missions need to facilitate the alignment of domestic, regional, and international actors, without which even the most capable and well-resourced mission is likely to fail.[31] But the manner in which missions implement their sprawling mandates has implications for the ability of the UN to effectively support political processes and set countries on a path towards sustaining peace. Current approaches serve to undermine the impartiality of the UN, with the consequence of reducing the ability of peace operations to effectively engage in or foster political solutions.

2.1.1 The trap of host country consent

A key actor in any context, of course, is the host state. The emphasis of UN peace operations, particularly after the end of the Cold War, has been to prioritize the consent of the government, particularly as UN engagement has shifted away from resolving conflict between states to conflict within states. This is for practical reasons; a mission can only deploy with the consent of the government, and the possibility of the host state revoking consent hangs like a sword of Damocles over every peace operation, giving the government a unique influence over the UN that no other party to the conflict enjoys This creates a constant pressure on missions to align outcomes with government preferences.[32] The UN may become reluctant to call out government abuses and violations of the status of forces agreement out of fear of straining relations with the government and further limiting access.[33] This pressure, when combined with mandates intended to strengthen host state

institutions and extend state authority, undermines the impartiality that is necessary for missions to be able to support a political solution to the conflict.[34] The erosion of impartiality is, in fact, the objective of a statist alternative to the liberal peacebuilding paradigm that has emerged in the past decade which emphasizes the imposition of peace through state authority rather than by addressing risk factors for violence and root causes of conflict.[35]

The mandate of a peace operation can be understood as a type of "bargain" between the UN and the host state. In exchange for the inclusion of government priorities, the government is willing to tolerate the priorities of the Security Council.[36] If the balance is not properly calibrated, a mission can be saddled with a difficult working relationship with the government from its inception, as has been the case with the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS). At the time of independence in 2011, the fledgling government of South Sudan primarily wanted a UN peacekeeping mission in place to protect the sovereignty of the new country against Sudan, with building the capacity of the state as a secondary priority. Although UNMISS included an ambitious state-building mandate, it was established as a chapter VII mission with strong protection of civilians mandate,[37] one that the government perceived as being directed towards it and therefore an insulting infringement of its sovereignty.[38] UNMISS has, therefore, had a strained relationship with the government of South Sudan from the start, and this animosity has, in the intervening years, led to everything from the normalization of violations of the status of forces agreement to attacks on UN personnel and premises by government forces. The ability of the Secretariat to push back forcefully on such violations is handicapped by the ever-present threat of expulsion by the host government.

2.1.2 Stabilization and the use of force

The post-Cold War proliferation in mandated activities was largely driven by the conventional wisdom of the dominant liberal peace paradigm, which held that peace could be secured through technical measures to promote development, security, and human rights.[39] However, the prioritization by Western governments of counterterrorism in the post-September 11 era and the ascendance of the protection of civilians mandate pushed missions away from peacebuilding and political strategies towards stabilization and more securitized approaches. This was reflected in the establishment by the Security Council of several peacekeeping operations whose names include the word "stabilization", namely the UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH), MONUSCO, MINUSMA, and the UN

Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA). Despite the frequency with which "stabilization" appears, the UN has no agreed definition of the term. A study of stabilization missions by the Stimson Center found that many peacekeeping personnel interviewed viewed stabilization as synonymous with the restoration and extension of state authority.[40]

The framing of these missions as stabilization missions has largely been driven by the three Western permanent members of the Security Council, which have pushed for missions to undertake, as part of their protection of civilians mandates, increasingly robust mandates typically directed at armed groups opposed to the government. Such mandates not only align missions with the host governments but also emphasize a militarized response to the crisis at the expense of approaches focused on political solutions and addressing root causes. MINUSMA, for example, had a mandate to "stabilize key population centers…[and] to deter threats and take active steps to prevent the return of armed elements".[41]In the case of MONUSCO, this push culminated in the establishment of a "Force Intervention Brigade" with a peace enforcement mandate. After the establishment of the Brigade, the UN Legal Adviser underlined how this step had undermined the mission's impartiality when she warned that "MONUSCO may end up becoming a party to armed hostilities in the DRC, thus triggering the application of international humanitarian law. … [T]his may mean that military members of MONUSCO…may lose their protected status under the Convention on the Safety of United Nations and Associated Personnel."[42]

2.1.3 From impartiality to instrumentalization

Together, the need for missions to appease host governments to avoid expulsion and their mandates to support host governments combine to create pernicious mutually reinforcing effects. Particularly in contexts that are weakly democratic—which account for many of the contexts to which peace operations have been deployed—the support provided by the UN to host state institutions and the absence of strong pushback from missions against norm violations have the unintended consequence of enabling autocracy and undermining democratization in host states.[43] These pressures may also serve to instrumentalize missions in service of host government interests through the weaponization of host country consent. In the DRC, for example, the government called in September 2023 for the accelerated drawdown of MONUSCO, a move that was seen as a way to boost the popular standing of President Tshisekedi in advance of the December 2023 elections.[44] Despite the numerous problems with the conduct of the elections,[45] the

UN refrained from criticizing the process or its results, describing the elections as an “important milestone” and “[w]elcoming the commitment by President Tshisekedi during his inauguration speech to the unity of the DRC and to fostering an inclusive government.”[46] After the elections and given the persistence of the Rwanda-backed M23 insurgency, the government reversed course, signaling that the departure of MONUSCO is unlikely while Rwandan troops remain in the country.[47] Together, the instrumentalization of MONUSCO by the government and the limited leverage of the mission risk transforming the mission into a de facto tool of regime preservation at the expense of a more sustainable resolution to the multiple overlapping levels of conflict in the DRC.

2.2 Mission design

The early decades of UN peace operations were marked by innovation and creativity regarding mission mandates, structures, and approaches. After the end of the Cold War, the increased demand for peace operations was addressed through the standardization of policies and processes for planning and deployment. This ossification of working methods and organizational culture has resulted in the entrenchment of preconceived notions regarding how different types of peace operations look, how they are mandated, and what they can do. In 2015, the HIPPO highlighted the need for the UN to avoid being locked into the dichotomy between peacekeeping and special political missions and instead to flexibly draw upon the full spectrum of peace operations. Indeed, numerous studies have demonstrated the greater effectiveness of adaptive approaches compared to templated approaches in sustaining peace.[48] However, little progress on this front has been evident in the past decade. In A New Agenda for Peace, the Secretary-General acknowledges the need to enable “more nimble, adaptable and effective mission models while devising transition and exit strategies, where appropriate.” The UN, however, should move past the mentality of "models,” which imply a templated approach, towards a new way of conceiving peace operations.

2.2.1 Templated mindsets

The current institutional setup of the UN drives a path dependency whereby the selection of a lead department largely dictates the form a peace operation will take, and the types of activities included in its mandate. The various lead departments—currently DPPA for special political missions, DPO for peacekeeping operations, and the Department of Operational Support (DOS), the successor to DFS, for

support offices—have different capabilities, institutional priorities, and key constituencies that influence how they approach mission design and management. Over time, structures, policies, and procedures have put in place standard approaches to plan, budget, and support the types of missions that each lead department specializes in. Such a templated approach helps create predictability and (at least in theory) reduces the time required to deploy missions, but this also makes it difficult to tailor missions to the requirements of each context or for missions, once deployed, to adapt to changing circumstances and requirements on the ground.

Peacekeeping missions are particularly prone to this path dependency, as structures have been built up over time at Headquarters specifically to support the planning and deployment of multidimensional protection of civilians missions, to the point that DPO (and formerly DPKO) struggles to plan or design any other model of mission. In contrast, the absence of a common doctrine and the lack of dedicated planning capacities at Headquarters for special political missions has contributed to their relative diversity in form and function compared to peacekeeping operations. In fact, special political missions have even subsumed mission types—such as observer missions—previously deployed as peacekeeping missions prior to the dominance of the multidimensional mission model. Yet special political missions are themselves not immune to templated approaches, including ones aimed at creating distinctions from peacekeeping operations.[4]

However, the inability of the UN to adopt more tailored, flexible approaches based on the needs of particular contexts cannot only be blamed on the bureaucratic inertia of the Secretariat. As noted earlier, the original reason behind the creation of DPA and DPKO (now DPPA and DPO, respectively) as two separate departments was driven by a desire to counter member state dominance over parts of the Secretariat. Member states have also undermined more recent attempts at reform. Indeed, the 2017-2019 restructuring of the peace and security architecture sought to break down the siloes between special political missions and peacekeeping operations by assigning lead departments of peace operations not by their financing mechanism but based on their operational and support requirements. DPO, as originally intended by the Secretary-General, would have been responsible not only for large peacekeeping operations but also for complex field-based special political missions such as the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and

[4] Examples include resistance by DPPA to include as part of SPMs capabilities or resources (such as programmatic funding and quick impact projects) it associates with peacekeeping operations, as well as the general assumption that special political missions are smaller in scale.

UNAMI. The General Assembly, however, decided in its resolution 72/252C that DPPA would be the lead department for these special political missions, therefore further entrenching the bifurcation between peacekeeping and special political missions by assigning them different lead departments at Headquarters.

Beyond structures, a templated mindset also applies when deploying a mission. In the aftermath of the Srebrenica massacre, the notion that a peacekeeping operation should only be deployed when there is peace to keep gained traction.[49] The extent to which the Security Council has adhered to this mantra has ebbed and flowed over time, but in recent years this notion has once again become the conventional wisdom in New York particularly as missions deployed in contexts without credible peace processes in place have struggled. In 2023, Secretary-General Guterres highlighted the limitations of ambitious mandates without adequate political support in missions deployed into contexts with no peace to keep.[50] A pragmatic understanding of how and where a peace operation can engage is necessary, especially since the type of comprehensive peace agreement common in the immediate post-Cold War period has become increasingly elusive.[51] This is in part because of a shift in the nature of conflict, away from ones with limited numbers of cohesive actors to ones involving often highly fragmented and weakly-structured belligerents.[52] Peace operations have a role to play in contexts in which more limited agreements, such as ceasefires, are more likely, but they need to be prepared for the eventuality that such agreements may fail and to be able to use their influence to get the political process back on track.

Another scenario first articulated in the 2008 Prodi report is for the AU to act as a first responder for crises on the African continent and for the UN to take over after six months.[53] This concept has since gained a second life in the aftermath of the adoption, in December 2023, of Security Council resolution 2719, which approved a framework for planning, mandating, and financing AU peace support operations authorized by the Security Council. While there is a logic to the idea of deploying an AU enforcement mission to create the conditions conducive to the deployment of a UN peacekeeping mission, this sequential scenario has never worked in practice. The transition from the African-led International Support Mission to Mali (AFISMA) and the African-led International Support Mission in the Central African Republic (MISCA) to UN peacekeeping missions in 2013 and 2014, respectively, was prompted not by the African-led missions having prepared the way for successful peacekeeping, but because of the impending collapse of both AFISMA and MISCA before the completion of their initial one-year mandates. In fact, the rushed re-hatting of both missions into UN peacekeeping missions under duress and without

a credible political process in place created strategic and operational challenges for both missions from the start.

2.2.2 Mandated tasks

In A New Agenda for Peace, Secretary-General Guterres emphasized that peace operations must be deployed based on and in support of a clearly identified political process and that mandates must be clear, prioritized, achievable, sufficiently resourced, and adapted to changing circumstances and political developments. These recommendations echo those of earlier reviews, such as the 2015 HIPPO report. Although there are several interpretations of the adage of maintaining the "primacy of politics" in peace operations,[54] the critical element is ensuring that the political activities of a mission are not treated as one among a series of mandated tasks. Instead, the entirety of the mandate should be oriented around the political function of the mission,[55] and "[n]o element…should be mandated without prior understanding of its relevance to the grievances and interests that drive the conflict, and the prospect of a political settlement among national actors."[56] Unfortunately, this is not the case in peace operations today. A recent OIOS evaluation found that mission staff often did not understand or were not aware of the political vision of the special representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG), i.e., the head of mission and that coordination between the political affairs component and other components was a challenge, as were the linkages between mission headquarters and field-based political work.[57]

The lack of focus on politics is partly a product of inexperience and ill-prepared SRSGs, but it is also a product of the sprawling mandates that have been given to peace operations in the post-Cold War era, a phenomenon commonly referred to as "Christmas tree mandates." In 2018, Secretary-General Guterres implored the Security Council, to "put an end to mandates that look like Christmas trees. Christmas is over, and the United Nations Mission in South Sudan cannot possibly implement 209 mandated tasks. By attempting too much, we dilute our efforts and weaken our impact." [58] There are several drivers behind the continued proliferation of mandated tasks, including the recognition of the many underlying root causes that underpin contemporary conflicts and the heavy top-down approach inherent to liberal peacebuilding.[59]

After the failures of Rwanda and Srebrenica, protection of civilians has emerged as a priority task for peacekeeping operations in particular, but the emphasis on protection of civilians—especially measures to provide physical protection—often comes at the expense of other mandated tasks in terms of the focus of mission

leadership and in the use of mission resources,[60] particularly when the protection of civilians mandate verges into the realm of peace enforcement, as in the case of MONUSCO and MINUSMA. The choice to prioritize protection often comes at the expense of the political efforts that should be the overarching focus of a mission and has had significant unintended consequences in several mission contexts. Indeed, the "strong gravitational pull of militarized forms of protection and the urgent need to protect those facing imminent risks has fed a continuing tendency of PoC strategies to become divorced from deeper, longer-term objectives of sustainable peace."[61] For example, the support given by MONUSCO to the DRC armed forces (FARDC) as part of its protection of civilians mandate may have led to increased civilian harm in the eastern DRC, while the focus on short-term crisis response and maintaining protection of civilian sites in South Sudan has come at the expense of progress in implementation of the revitalized peace process.

Beyond examining the interplay between the protection of civilian mandates and political strategies, recent scholarship has also examined compatibility across the full range of mandated tasks through several dimensions, such as long- and short-term orientation, requisite impartiality, cost, and level of coordination required. One study of five multidimensional missions noted that compatibility of mandated tasks "may not be at the forefront of policy considerations" and that "[d]ecision makers might seriously consider whether peace operations are the mechanisms to carry out peacebuilding [tasks] that are largely incompatible with their other security-oriented [tasks]". Some notable findings of this study include the fact that success in basic security tasks—such as maintenance of a ceasefire and disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration—have a positive downstream consequence for other mandated tasks, that early elections and democratization mandates do not have a meaningful impact on the success of peacebuilding tasks, and that there are synergistic effects across peacebuilding mandates in areas such as security sector reform, local governance, and rule of law.[62]

2.3 Coherence with other actors

Peace operations are not the only actors present in any of the contexts in which they are deployed. The agencies, funds, and programs of the UN country team are present before the deployment of a mission and will remain after the mission eventually departs. In addition, there may be other operations, including those deployed by non-UN international organizations, regional organizations, and ad hoc coalitions, with or without a Security Council mandate,[63] as well as countries

engaged bilaterally, non-governmental organizations, and private military and security companies operating in parallel. A consistent challenge for the Secretariat in the post-Cold War era has been failure to take into account these actors already present in the planning and design of missions, and therefore, failing to take advantage of potential synergies with actors with complementary objectives or build in coordination and deconfliction mechanisms with other actors.[64]

2.3.1 Non-UN

The crisis in confidence affecting UN peace operations and the rise of non-UN alternatives to peace operations are arguably mutually reinforcing trends in the deinstitutionalization of global crisis response.[65] The AU consensus paper on the financing of peace support operations argued that "[t]he very nature, structure, and scope of peacekeeping as presently constituted is outdated and grossly inadequate to be impactful in tackling the myriad of security challenges facing Africa" and that, in contrast, "[t]he African Union and its regional organizations have demonstrated a clear comparative advantage as first responders with the political will to undertake offensive operations in high-risk environments".[66] In recent years, host governments and the Security Council alike have turned to regional organizations and ad hoc coalitions instead of UN peace operations to address peace and security challenges in contexts such as the G5 Sahel Joint Task Force, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Mission in Mozambique (SAMIM), the East African Community (EAC) Regional Force in the Eastern DRC, the SADC Mission in the DRC (SAMIDRC), and the Multinational Security Support mission in Haiti. These reflect what host governments increasingly want out of peace operations—not liberal institutions, but rather instruments of regime preservation. At the same time, they also play to the parsimonious tendencies of the permanent members of the Security Council by offering a seemingly low-cost alternative to UN peace operations.

The substitution of UN peace operations with non-UN operations reflects a shift in preferences away from peacemaking and addressing root causes towards the use of force as the primary means of responding to crises. Research and experience have shown, however, that these more securitized interventions may end up being counterproductive, as they can exacerbate the underlying social, political, and economic drivers of violence.[67] Moreover, the more effectively a securitized intervention maintains stability, the less incentive there is for elites to find long-term political solutions.[68] The UN has made some attempts to respond to the host

country and Security Council's preferences. As previously noted, UN peacekeeping has engaged in some forays into peace enforcement, including the authorization of the Force Intervention Brigade in MONUSCO in 2013 and the 2015 MINUSMA mandate "to stabilize key population centres and areas where civilians are at risk…and, in this context, to deter threats and take active steps to prevent the return of armed elements to those areas".[69] More than a decade after these attempts were launched, the objectives of both attempts at peace enforcement have not been achieved. Beyond the operational shortcomings of peace enforcement and stabilization in the DRC and Mali, these have also been strategic failures for the UN because they undermined the impartiality of UN peacekeeping, set unrealistically high expectations of what the UN could achieve, and failed to address the root causes of violence. As a result, they have reduced confidence in UN peace operations on the part of the host countries, host populations, and the Security Council alike.

The recognition by the Secretary-General of the limitations of peacekeeping and his call "for a new generation of peace enforcement missions and counter-terrorist operations, led by regional forces, with guaranteed, predictable funding"[70] is arguably a response to these forays into peace operations and an attempt to clarify the limits of peace operations.[71] The Secretary-General has sought to retain the relevance of the UN by supporting non-UN operations, including through the provision of logistical and financial support,[72] and the Security Council has since adopted resolution 2719 (2023) providing AU peace support operations access to UN assessed contributions on a case-by-case basis. Reducing the role of the UN to that of a service provider, however, may exacerbate the increasing marginalization of UN peace operations in political processes, a trend highlighted nearly ten years ago by the HIPPO.

2.3.2 Friction within the UN system

The challenges of coordination and coherence are not limited to UN engagement with non-UN actors. Differences within the UN system, driven by differences in mandate and historical rivalries, also pose challenges to peace operations.

As noted earlier, the organizational divide between DPA and DPKO has long created challenges for the UN in the planning and management of its peace operations. The 2019 restructuring of the peace and security architecture at Headquarters was intended to enhance effectiveness "by reducing the fragmentation of efforts and ensuring a more joined up, whole-of-pillar approach to the delivery of mandates and stronger cross-pillar cooperation."[73] As a result of the

restructuring, a joint regional structure consisting of eight regional divisions was created, along with an office for common services. However, these shifts have less of a practical effect than they may appear in practice. Despite the apparent integration of the two departments at the level of their regional divisions, their capacities remain distinct in terms of both reporting lines and budget. Although Secretary-General Guterres envisaged DPO serving as the lead department for large special political missions as well as peacekeeping operations, based on their operational requirements,[74] this was a point of significant contention between the two departments, given that the assignment of lead department responsibility affects the resources available to departments. Due to heavy lobbying from within the Secretariat bureaucracy, the General Assembly decided in its resolution 72/262 C to assign the lead responsibility for those special political missions to DPPA. Despite the fact that DPPA and special political missions do not have a monopoly on peacebuilding, "DPPA remains ontologically (and, because of its name, now even institutionally) associated with the former"[75] while DPO, despite its new name and the original intention of the Secretary-General, is responsible only for peacekeeping operations.[5] As such, instead of addressing the HIPPO recommendation to move towards a flexible, tailored approach to the full spectrum of peace operations, the restructuring of the peace and security architecture served to further entrench the peacekeeping-special political mission dichotomy while maintaining intact the bulk of the pre-existing DPA and DPKO structures, reporting lines, organizational culture, and institutional rivalries.

Friction also exists between the two departments and other entities within the UN. At the UN, attempts to ensure that topics are given sufficient attention and resources also drive the proliferation of intergovernmental processes and their associated bureaucratic structures. These have, over time, created overlap in how these topics are considered and siloes in how they are operationalized.[76] Although thematic units have been built up over time in DPPA and DPO to develop guidance and best practices on the full range of mandated activities in peace operations, there are many other entities in the Secretariat with mandates or expertise in one or more mandated activities. These include the Office for Disarmament Affairs (ODA), Office of Counter-Terrorism (OCT), Office on Drugs and Crime (ODC), Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the SRSG on Children and Armed Conflict and the SRSG on Sexual Violence in Conflict. Beyond the Secretariat, there are also funds, programs, and related entities with relevant

[5] Before the reform, DPKO actually served as lead department for specific special political missions, most notably the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) from 1 November 2002 to 30 September 2014.

mandates and expertise, such as the UN Development Programme (UNDP), the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), and UN Women. As early as in the 1995 Supplement to An Agenda for Peace, the UN already acknowledged that "[m]ost of the activities that together constitute peace-building fall within the mandates of the various programmes, funds, offices and agencies of the UN system with responsibilities in the economic, social, humanitarian and human rights fields."[77] Ensuring alignment across all of these entities in the context of peace operations is a constant challenge.

To enhance coherence, the UN system has taken several steps under the rubric of "integration",[6] including structural integration between peace operations and UN country teams through the dual—or triple—hatting of deputy SRSGs as resident coordinators (RCs)—and, where applicable, humanitarian coordinators (HCs)—as well as through implementation of an integrated analysis and planning policy. Efforts to foster integration, however, have had limited success as entities have often approached integration as a box-checking exercise to meet the minimum requirements of the integrated analysis and planning policy without necessarily enhancing strategic, programmatic, or operational coherence. As such, differences in mandates, financing arrangements, and institutional cultures impede coordination between peace operations and the UN country team, even in structurally integrated contexts.[78] A 2021 review of integration in the UN system noted the "institutional obstacles to integration, including the lack of incentives or accountability mechanisms to promote or enforce integration," a lack of understanding by staff members of the principles and priorities that guide the work of other pillars, and the fact that enhanced coherence depended more on personality than on policy.[79] In several cases, missions—which are often orders of magnitude larger in terms of staffing and overall footprint—have simply disregarded the UN country team where there have been differences in opinion on priorities and approaches. Such mindsets can generate considerable resentment against peace operations on the part of UN funds and programs.

[6] The 2023 UN integrated assessment and planning policy defines integration as "the bringing together of United Nations entities across pillars to enhance the individual and collective impact of the United Nations response, concentrating on those activities required for sustaining peace."

2.4 Transitions

The moments in which the gap between the rhetoric and reality of integration is the most evident are transitions. Transitions in the context of UN peace operations are the reconfiguration of the overall UN presence in the country as part of the drawdown or withdrawal of peace operations, including situations in which one mission is succeeded by a smaller mission.[7] As such processes always result in an overall reduction in the UN presence and capacity in a country, the premature or mismanaged exit of a mission can jeopardize the gains achieved during the lifecycle of a mission and saddle a successor mission or the UN country team with unrealistic expectations and reputational baggage, increasing the risk of relapse into conflict.

Over time, the UN has developed policies, such as the 2013 policy on transitions in the context of mission drawdown or withdrawal and the 2019 planning directive for the development of consistent and coherent UN transition processes, as well as a body of lessons learned from previous transitions. Even so, the UN continues to experience the same recurring challenges in transitions. In 2022, the Secretary-General submitted a report to the Security Council on transitions in UN peace operations highlighting three broad areas in which these challenges manifest. In the area of planning, it highlighted the lack of sufficient joint analysis and planning capacity, the need to align transition plans with national peacebuilding strategies, and the treatment of liquidation as an accounting exercise rather than an opportunity to support capacity building. In the area of resourcing, it pointed to the lack of coordination in budget planning and resource mobilization necessary to mitigate the "financing cliff" for peacebuilding activities that usually accompanies mission closure and the need to harmonize the different budgetary arrangements used for peacekeeping operations and special political missions, as well as the need to address the unique staffing challenges faced during transition contexts. The adoption of General Assembly resolution 78/257 approving an annual allocation of $50 million in assessed contributions to the Peacebuilding Fund beginning in 2025 is welcome but is not in itself sufficient to fill the peacebuilding financing gap. In the area of post-mandate considerations, it highlights the need to monitor progress in peacebuilding after the departure of a mission and the need to ensure

[7] Technically, situations involving start-up and expansion of a peace operation are also transitions, but as there has not been an entirely new integrated mission deployed since 2014, this report uses transitions only in the context of a UN reconfiguration in the case of drawdown or closure.

that the departure is done in a responsible manner that mitigates negative impacts on the environment and the local economy.[80]

These are considerable challenges even in the smoothest of transitions. The traditional conception of transitions assumes that a UN transition commences only after a certain degree of progress has been achieved in the implementation of a mission mandate, often measured through benchmarks. The transitions of recent years, however, have been ones in which peace operations have increasingly been forced to terminate their mandates, in several cases extremely abruptly, not because of progress towards sustainable peace but as a result of deteriorating political support for the mission either on the part of the Security Council or the host government. In particular, the UN is hamstrung by the absence of a culture of planning. The Secretariat is highly risk-averse and tends to avoid proactive transition planning out of concern over how such planning may be interpreted either by member states or host governments. Despite the existence of internal policies and directives stipulating early transition planning, the Secretariat generally waits until after the Security Council has given a clear indication of its intention to draw down a mission before planning begins in earnest. Given that transitions are likely to continue to be driven primarily by the political and financial considerations of host governments and the Security Council, waiting for such an indication is far too late. Instead of discouraging the Secretariat from planning out of fear that Secretariat plans could send a political message or prejudge intergovernmental decision-making, the Security Council should encourage proactive contingency planning to such an extent that planning becomes routine and individual plans and options under development are unremarkable. In line with the 2013 transition policy, planning for the eventual mission exit should be part of planning from the very start of every peace operation to help normalize such processes and reduce the likelihood of a reaction from either the Security Council, the parties to the conflict, or local populations.

3. A New Approach

Yet despite the crisis of confidence affecting peace operations and the string of recent and current mission transitions, peace operations are not likely to disappear as the problems they are intended to solve are not likely to disappear anytime soon.[81] Indeed, the Arab League recently called for the deployment of UN peacekeepers to Gaza,[82] and—even though no large multidimensional mission has been established in the past decade, several smaller missions have been established, including the Office of the Special Envoy for Myanmar in 2018 and the UN Mission to support the Hudaydah Agreement (UNMHA) in 2019. There is evidence that peace operations can work under the right circumstances, as shown by the number of countries that have been shepherded out of conflict by peace operations since the end of the Cold War. Moreover, the potential alternatives seeking to displace UN peace operations have major challenges of their own, ranging from their persistent capability and resource deficiencies to the fact that securitized interventions delinked from political strategies and peacebuilding activities are unlikely to address root causes and may even exacerbate risk factors for violence. Indeed, the current retrenchment in peace operations provides an opportunity to undertake a serious reflection on the shifts required to address the shortcomings of peace operations to meaningfully reflect long-neglected lessons learned in the conception, planning, and design of missions and to restore confidence in the effectiveness and relevance of peace operations as tools of prevention, peacemaking, peacekeeping, and peacebuilding.

3.1 Conceptualizing the full spectrum of peace operations

Many of the shortcomings of contemporary peace operations stem from the current templated, supply-driven approach which takes as its starting point the question of whether a mission ought to be planned and budgeted as a peacekeeping operation or as a special political mission. The 2015 HIPPO report called for utilizing the full spectrum of peace operations without clearly articulating what this might entail in practice. A demand-driven adaptive approach to the design of peace operations tailors mandates and structures to the context. Form should follow function. Secretary-General Boutros-Ghali was the first to use the term “peace operations” to collectively refer to UN preventative diplomacy, peacemaking, peacekeeping, and peacebuilding efforts, and peace operations can

theoretically undertake any subset of these functions. The form a peace operation takes to address its mandated functions can be driven primarily by two main factors: the scale of desired UN engagement and the range of other actors present from within and outside the UN with complementary objectives and expertise. On one end of the spectrum, missions can have large footprints with a mix of personnel types, including UN civilians as well as military, police, and other government-provided personnel. On the other end of the spectrum, a peace operation can be as small as a unit attached to a resident coordinator's office. Such "UN country team-plus" (UNCT+) models would build on the example of the small DPA liaison office that remained in Nepal for a few years after the closure of the UN Mission in Nepal (UNMIN)[83] as well as the experience gained from the deployment of peace and development advisors, human rights advisors, and temporary staff secondments to resident coordinators offices.[84] In A New Agenda for Peace, the Secretary-General recommends that all member states develop national prevention strategies. UNCT+ models can be particularly useful as platforms through which the UN system can deliver tailor-made packages of support and expertise to member states seekng to establish or strengthen such strategies or infrastructures for peace by supplementing the capacities of the UN country team with the specialized expertise of the peace and security pillar at Headquarters.

Across the full spectrum, the goal of any peace operation should be to support a political solution to a conflict or potential conflict, but its specific activities will vary based on the context. Much blame has been placed on Christmas tree mandates over the years, with the HIPPO suggesting in 2015 that "sequenced and prioritized mandates will allow missions to develop over time rather than trying to do everything at once and failing."[85] The Security Council subsequently committed to considering "sequenced and phased mandates, where appropriate"[86] and has also engaged in a process of "streamlining" mandates as an attempt to move beyond the Christmas tree approach, though some Council members have concerns about the value of reducing the word count of resolutions and the potential harm of losing hard-won normative language and deprioritizing aspects of the mandate, such as human rights.[87] Several studies have recommended that the Security Council focus on objectives rather than listing tasks [88] and that Council members avoid systematically advocating for certain issues.[89] However, these recommendations do not appreciate the underlying drivers of Christmas tree mandates. Beyond the fact that the reasons for violence are multifaceted and require a comprehensive approach to address, there are bureaucratic and political incentives that drive the inclusion of mandated tasks. Within the Secretariat, thematic units in missions and at Headquarters have a clear incentive to promote

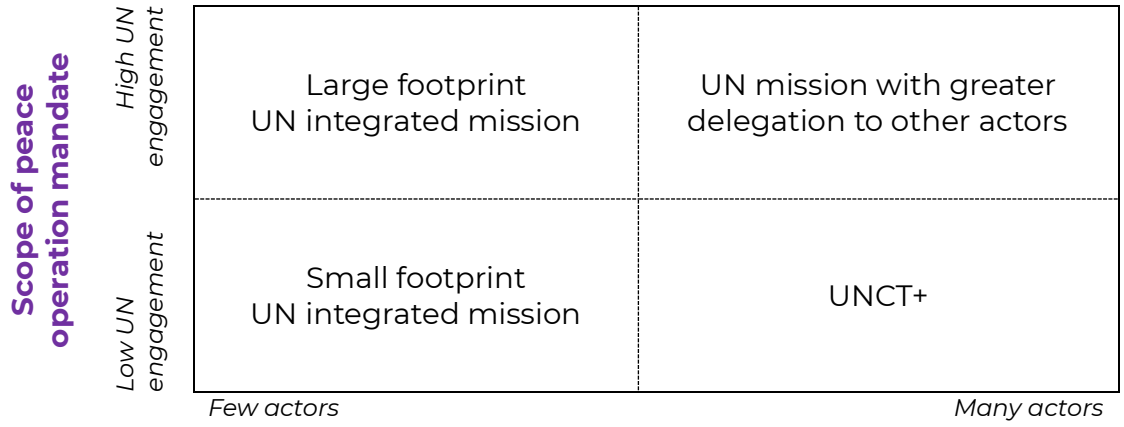
their issues to maximize their influence and resources.[90] Within the Security Council, the ten elected members often choose a handful of issues to champion and try to insert them in as many resolutions as possible in an attempt to make a mark during their two-year terms.[91] As these pressures are structural and unlikely to change, it may be more constructive to find ways to channel this phenomenon constructively rather than to pursue a quixotic effort to curtail Christmas tree mandates.

The Security Council and Secretariat traditionally focus only on missions and treat the UN country team as an afterthought. This is also reflected in the proliferation of mission-focused independent strategic reviews in recent years at the expense of strategic assessments that examine the overall UN configuration in-country. And yet, a 2001 review of peacebuilding support offices found that "[w]hereas there is almost universal support for the core political functions undertaken by the Representatives of the Secretary-General and peace-building offices, difficulties arise when the peace-building offices become involved in operational activities which are traditionally the world of funds, programmes and agencies."[92] The Secretary-General, in his policy brief on A New Agenda for Peace, alluded to a possible way forward when he called for peace operations to be "significantly more integrated and should leverage the full range of civilian capacities and expertise across the United Nations system and its partners." This call could be implemented through a more modular approach to peace operations.

Under a modular approach to peace operations, preconceived notions of what a peacekeeping operation or special political mission should look like, how a mission can be mandated, and what it can or cannot do should be discarded. Rather than the traditional approach of having missions undertake the full range of mandated activities by themselves, peace operations established under Christmas tree mandates should only implement a subset of the mandated activities themselves. They should take advantage of the broad range of expertise available within and outside the UN system, delegating the responsibility—and the associated financial resources—for undertaking other activities to partners based on their respective mandates and expertise. At the same time, the inclusion of an activity within the mandate provides the Secretariat with the justification for requesting resources under assessed contributions, ensuring that they are adequately resourced regardless of who is implementing them. Such an approach builds on the existing practice of missions using UN and non-UN implementing partners to implement specific projects as part of a mission's budget for programmatic activities and therefore is already possible within the existing financial regulations and rules.

Delegation to the UN country team is not something that can be directed by the Security Council, which has no authority over the funds and programs (let alone the specialized agencies) but is something the Secretary-General may choose to do through the signing of a memorandum of understanding or other partnership agreement. This delegated approach would help ensure the mandated activities would be implemented by the actor best placed to implement them while still retaining accountability with the SRSG, therefore helping to tailor the mission design to the specific context while maximizing coherence with the UN country team and other partners.[93]

Figure 1: Examples of mission types across the full spectrum of peace operations



When a peace operation is envisaged with an expansive mandate, the UN system should, as part of the integrated assessment and planning process, examine potential mandated activities based on criteria such as (1) the degree of impartiality required to implement them, (2) the extent to which other actors present enjoy a comparative advantage to implement those mandates, and (3) the time horizon required to implement those activities. Activities requiring impartiality, such as the facilitation of peace agreements and the observation of ceasefires, are ones that should be handled by missions themselves. Many peacebuilding and capacity-building activities, however, require alignment with host country authorities and may take longer than the time horizon of a mission to implement, particularly when a mandate can be terminated at any moment. Such activities are prime candidates for implementation by members of the UN country team, where the

relevant agencies, funds, or programs have the requisite mandate and expertise. This also reflects the fact that, under the 2023 revision of the integrated assessment and planning policy, the UN sustainable development cooperation framework—a document jointly signed by the resident coordinator and the host government—serves as the common strategic framework for the UN system for activities in support of sustaining peace. At the same time, missions should carefully craft implementing partner agreements to ensure that the manner in which peacebuilding activities are pursued supports the broader political strategy by altering incentives to make genuine cooperation between parties more attractive and sustainable peace more likely.[94]

Protection of civilians mandates are a special case. Rather than a single mandate, they should be understood as a cross-cutting activity. Tier 1 (protection through dialogue and engagement) and tier 3 (establishing a protective environment) should be an element of the implementation of all mandated activities, whether they be implemented directly by the mission or delegated to a partner. Missions with uniformed components may be the only part of the UN system in country with the capabilities to pursue tier 2 (provision of physical protection) tasks. Tier 2 tasks that dip into peace enforcement, counter-terrorism, or material support to host country forces are ones that compromise the impartiality of a mission. When such tasks are included in a mission mandate, they should be delegated to non-UN forces to the extent possible.

3.2 Cluster mapping

Identifying comparative advantage within the UN system, however, is easier said than done, especially when so many actors across the UN system have mandates and expertise in a range of peacebuilding tasks. Given the persistent challenges of coordinating across the multiplicity of actors within the UN working on the various areas of peacebuilding, a senior advisory group proposed in 2011 to establish a system of clusters and cluster leads, based on the system used in the coordination of humanitarian assistance.[95] The cluster system categorizes activities into thematic clusters, each with a designated lead organization responsible for coordination.

Table 1: Clusters and subclusters of core tasks proposed by the Senior Advisory Group

Clusters	Subclusters
Basic safety and security	Community violence reduction Disarmament and demobilization Mine action Police* Protection of civilians Security sector reform and governance
Justice*	Corrections* Criminal justice* Judicial and legal reform* Transitional justice*
Inclusive political process	Constitutional processes Elections and electoral processes Mediation, good offices, and conflict resolution
Support to civil society	Political party development Public information and media
Core government functionality	Aid policy and coordination Anti-corruption Executive branch Legislative branch Local governance Public administration reform Public financial management Urban planning
Economic revitalization	Employment generation Natural resource management Private sector and industrial development Public works and infrastructure
Basic safety and security	Community violence reduction Disarmament and demobilization Mine action Police* Protection of civilians Security sector reform and governance
Justice*	Corrections* Criminal justice* Judicial and legal reform* Transitional justice*

* Areas covered under Global Focal Point for the Rule of Law

In response to the recommendation of the senior advisory group, the Secretary-General committed to establishing a focal point for each of the thematic clusters.[96] As an internal review of rule of law arrangements that was supposed to have been completed in 2010 had not yet begun, the Secretary-General decided to repurpose the review such that—in addition to assessing existing rule of law capabilities, gaps. and coordination mechanisms—it also informed the designation of the focal point for the justice cluster identified by the senior advisory group.[97] Various options were considered, including one option of making DPKO the focal point for mission settings and UNDP for non-mission settings and another option of making DPKO the focal point for police and corrections and UNDP for justice. Ultimately, opposition to these options led to the compromise of DPKO and UNDP jointly being designated the global focal point for police, justice, and corrections in 2012.[98] No effort was subsequently made to identify focal points for the other areas. Although a 2018 assessment of the global focal point for police, justice, and corrections found that it had led to some improvements in coherence, there were limits to what could be achieved through a minimalist approach that "[drew] together the largest parts of the UN's expertise without changing mandates, functions, or reporting lines, and within a framework that was intended to be cost-neutral".[99] Continuing barriers to progress identified by the assessment included the failure to provide strategic support for integration, the perpetuation of siloed approaches, and the absence of co-location.

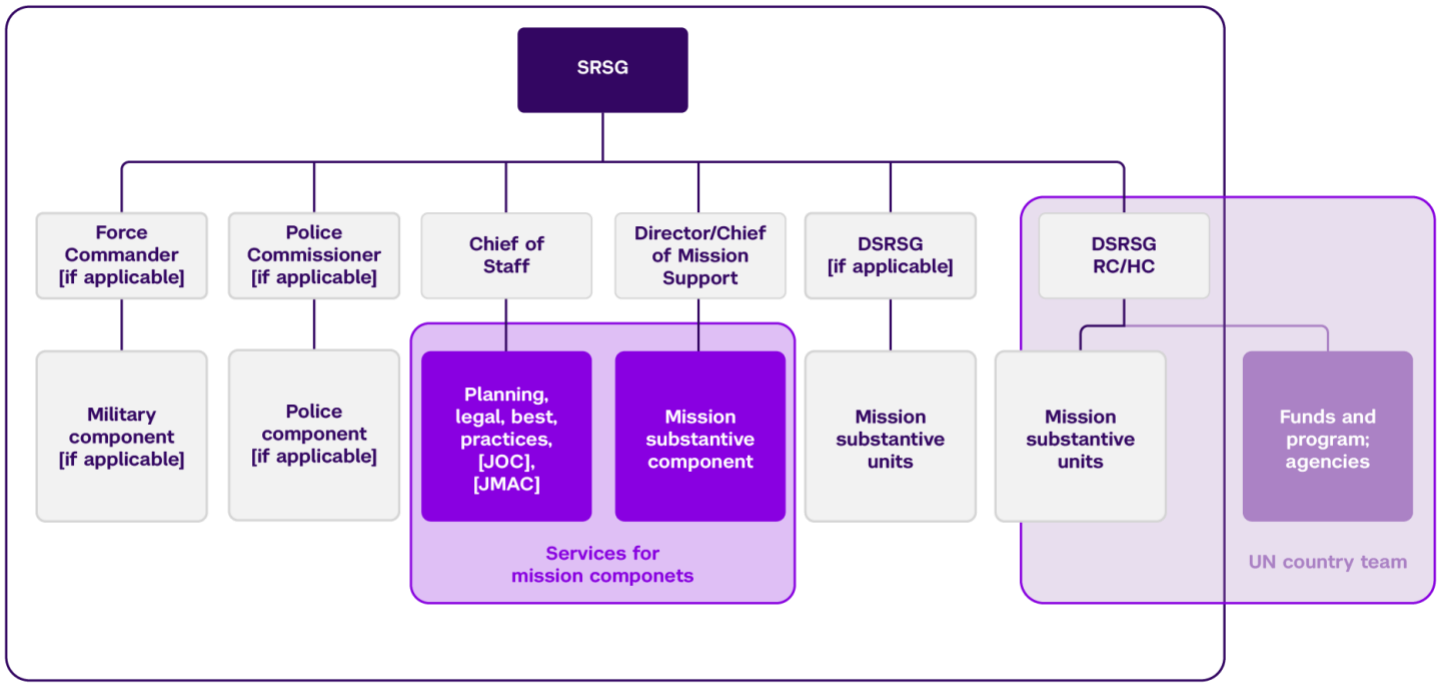
It is worth revisiting the cluster system proposed by the senior advisory group, particularly since the continuing retrenchment of peace operations is prompting elements of the Secretariat at Headquarters to engage in mandate creep in an attempt to stave off anticipated reductions in support account funding. An example is the Police Division within DPO, which designated itself in 2019 as "the focal point and global lead for police and law enforcement matters within the UN system"[100] until the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions noted that the Division lacks such a mandate. More recently, the Division has engaged in forays into dealing with transnational organized crime despite the fact that the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, which has a General Assembly mandate on crime prevention and criminal justice that predates the establishment of DPKO, is already engaged in efforts to prevent and combat transnational crime. The shortcomings of the global focal point and the fact that the recently-constituted UN inter-agency task force on policing has over a dozen members[101] shows not only how crowded the policing space is within the UN system, along with the limitations of existing minimalist approaches to coordination. Indeed, the designation of cluster and sub-cluster leads can not only help create greater

predictability in planning processes but can help foster clearer divisions of responsibilities and development of specialized expertise across the system.

3.3 New approach to mission design

Today, multifunctional peace operations, whether they be multidimensional peacekeeping operations or field-based special political missions, have much in common, regardless of where they are deployed and the specific activities within their mandates. In a multidimensional peacekeeping operation, a special representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) leads the mission, and substantive units—with units in place to cover every mandated activity—are divided between two deputy special representatives (DSRSGs), one of which also serves as the dual-hatted resident coordinator or triple-hatted humanitarian coordinator (RC/HC). Also reporting to the SRSG are the force commander, police commissioner, civilian chief of staff, director of mission support, and chief security advisor. Functions such as the strategic planning unit, the joint operations centre (JOC), which supports situational awareness and crisis management, and the joint mission analysis centre (JMAC), which generates analysis and predictive assessments, report to the chief of staff while the mission support component is organized into an operations and resource management pillar, a supply chain management pillar, and a service delivery pillar. Field-based special political missions are generally organized around a subset of the generic peacekeeping operation structure, omitting components (such as the military component) that are not part of their respective mandates. Moreover, they may only have one DSRSG, and some substantive units may report directly to the SRSG. Most special political missions also lack a JOC and JMAC, as these are generally considered peacekeeping-specific structures, regardless of whether a mission could benefit from the situational awareness and analytical functions provided by such units.

Figure 2. Current approach to mission configuration



Generic peace operation (current)

Under a modular approach in which some mandated tasks are delegated to the UN country team, missions would no longer establish organizational structures to cover all mandated activities. Determining which part of the UN system is best positioned to undertake a particular activity should be based on the findings of a joint strategic assessment involving all UN actors, as required—but not always undertaken—by the integrated assessment and planning policy. Tasks to be delegated would be undertaken by the relevant members of the UN country team on the basis of a memorandum of understanding or some other partnership agreement. These activities would be undertaken using the portion of the mission's assessed budget associated with the mandated activities in question, including for both post and non-post resources. In this way, not only are the civilian capacities and expertise across the UN system used efficiently, avoiding duplication of effort, but institutional memory and programmatic continuity can more easily be maintained beyond the lifecycle of the mission. A precedent for such an approach is the implementation by UNDP and UNICEF of the rule of law and gender aspects of the mandate of the UN Mission in Timor-Leste (UNMIT) towards the end of its mandate.

Doing this more systematically requires strengthening the office of the triple-hatted DSRSG/RC/HC as a driver of integration at the country level. Currently, substantive support services such as planning, best practices, and—where present—JOCs and JMACs are generally located in the office of the mission chief of staff, where they serve as resources for mission components. Under a modular approach, consideration should be given to placing these functions under the DSRSG/RC/HC in order to serve as the core of the joint UN system-wide analysis and planning capacity to enable greater coherence. This would reduce the fragmentation in the monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of the UN sustainable development cooperation framework (CF)[8] in the contexts where the CF serves as the common strategic framework for the UN system for sustaining peace.[9] This would also respond to findings from several recent OIOS evaluations, including that co-location and integrated teams were perceived as enhancing collaboration and information sharing,[102] that the convening role of the RC contributed to greater programming coherence, including through the role of the resident coordinator in leading common country analysis[10] and CF processes,[103] and that enhancing the capacity of resident coordinator offices (RCOs) would enhance their ability to foster policy coherence by RCs, who are frequently impeded by the limited capacity of most RCOs.[104] Moreover, missions lack economic expertise and bringing together the economic knowledge of the UN country team in a joint analytical capacity under the DSRSG/RC/HC can help ensure that the UN can "address analytic blind spots and overcome fragmentation" by adopting a political economy lens, allowing UN country configurations to better understand political dynamics and calibrate more effective incentives for reinforcing peace and inclusive governance.[105]

Greater efficiency and unity of purpose can also be promoted through the greater use of common administrative and logistical services between missions and UN country teams. Under a more minimalist approach to common services, the mission support component should be designed considering the UN country team's existing capacities and requirements applying a division of labor approach

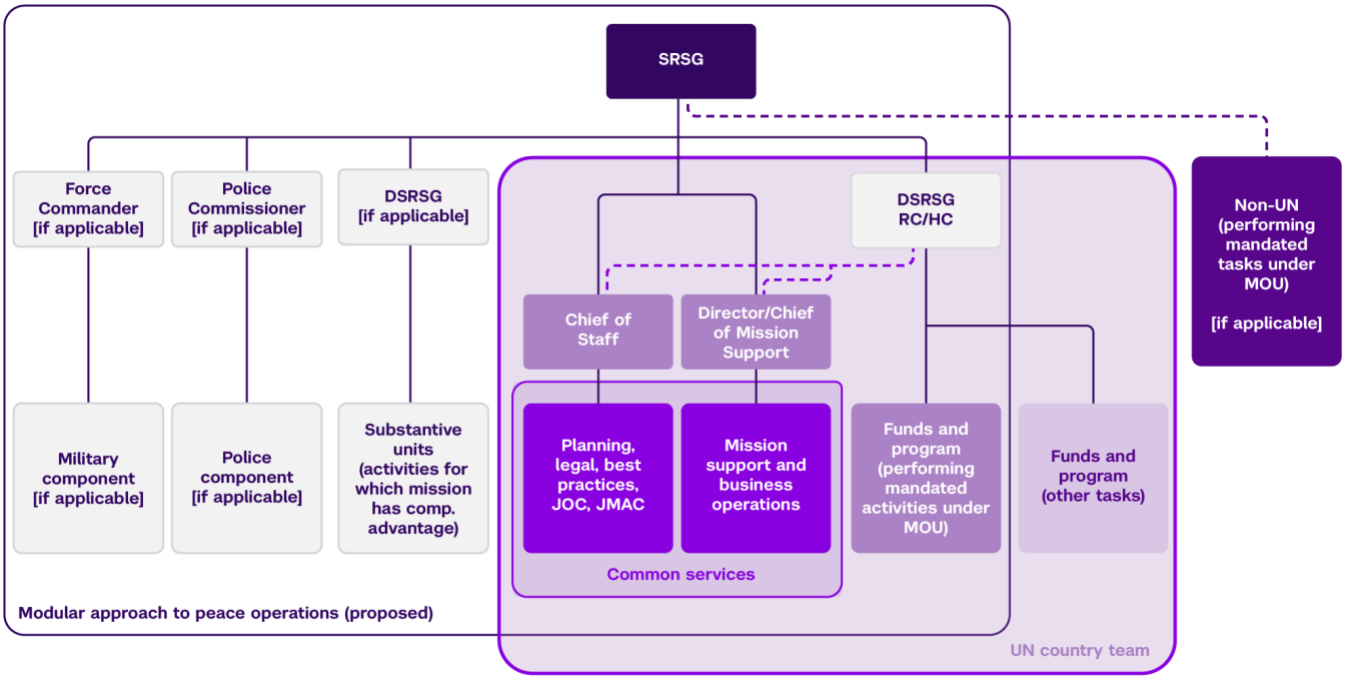
[8] The CF is the document that guides the planning and implementing of UN sustainable development activities at the country level and is agreed between the UN and the national government.

[9] By default, the CF serves as the common strategic framework not only in non-mission settings, but in settings where a UN peace operation is present alongside the UN country team. However, an alternative common strategic framework, such as the integrated strategic framework (which, unlike the CF, is not agreed with the government) may be in place in politically contested situations, including those where an unconstitutional change in government has taken place.

[10] The common country analysis is the UN system's collective assessment and analysis of a country situation for internal use in developing the CF.

to maximize efficiency. A far more ambitious approach would be to pool the capacities of the mission support component and the operations management team of the UN country team into a common support structure providing administrative and logistical services to the entirety of the UN presence in-country as part of an integrated business operations strategy. Each participating UN entity or organization would be responsible for a pro-rated share of costs based on an agreed cost-sharing formula, and the overall magnitude of the support capacity would scale up and down based on the overall requirements.[106] Such an approach can build on the experience of existing jointly financed arrangements, such as for security. The initial setup of such a structure would admittedly be administratively and bureaucratically complicated, but once set up, it would have many benefits when compared to a division of labor approach, including in terms of burden-sharing and ensuring continuity of services even after the departure or drawdown of a mission.

Figure 3. Modular approach to mission configuration



Peace operations must also recognize that mission support activities do not occur in a vacuum but also impact the political economy of conflict. A major focus of the start-up phase of missions is the construction or procurement of the infrastructure and property required to sustain a mission and implement its mandate. These activities, however, are currently done with a narrow focus on initial mission

requirements without recognition of either the impacts of such decisions throughout the mission life cycle, including during mission closure, or of the peacebuilding potential of mission support activities. Here, however, the UN is hindered by financial regulations, rules, and policies established at a time of rapid expansion in peace operations and which focus on financial accounting and the transfer of assets from downsizing missions to support the start-up and expansion of other missions rather than considering their potential to support peacebuilding.

There is an opportunity to build these considerations into mission planning processes to (1) take advantage of the mission presence and budget and (2) to build in a consideration of positive legacy from the start. This can include strategies for the acquisition of mission property that take into account the potential use by the UN country team, host government, or local communities after the departure of the mission. It also can include considerations such as switching from the traditional reliance of missions on diesel generators to meet electricity requirements to leveraging the purchasing power of missions to develop renewable energy infrastructure that can be handed over after the departure of a mission.[107] Not all of the energy requirements of peace operations can be met through renewable energy—operational requirements such as the movement and sustainment of forces as part of military operations will continue to rely on fossil fuels[108]—but the requirements for fixed installations and enduring locations can potentially be met primarily through renewable energy.

3.3.1 Partnerships with regional organizations

In the context of UN partnerships with regional organizations, a modular approach affords greater flexibility by which the UN can deploy joint missions. There are, in fact, several examples in which a UN peace operation was established as a joint mission, including the UN-OAU International Civilian Mission in Haiti (MICIVIH), the UN-AU Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID), and the UN-OPCW Joint Mission in Syria. For the more recent examples of UNAMID and the UN-OPCW Joint Mission, the actual level of jointness was limited to the selection of the head of mission and the reporting arrangements, whereas for MICIVIH there was actually some degree of joint mandate implementation by the UN and OAU mission personnel. The modular approach provides a way the joint mission option could be operationalized for an AU peace support operation authorized under the framework of Security Council resolution 2719 (2023), therefore facilitating a division of responsibilities between the UN and AU in the implementation of a single mandate.

But a modular approach does not require a mission to be explicitly mandated as a joint mission for the UN to be able to tap into the expertise and capacity of a regional organization. One notable precedent is the implementation of the democratization and institution building pillar of the mandate of the UN Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) under Security Council resolution 1244 (1999), which was led by the OSCE Mission in Kosovo. Where it is in the strategic interest of the UN to do so, the Secretary-General may decide to engage a regional organization to undertake specific mandated activities in lieu of having the UN mission undertake those activities itself. As part of the formal implementing partner agreement with the regional organization, the UN may, as appropriate, provide the resources in the mission budget associated with those activities to the implementing organization while spelling out the expected accomplishments and indicators of achievement and an accountability framework, including monitoring, reporting, and evaluation arrangements. This type of an arrangement would be an example of the networked multilateralism alluded to by the Secretary-General in A New Agenda for Peace.

In situations where the Security Council decides that peace enforcement or military counter-terrorism action is required, such action should be undertaken by a regional organization or other non-UN configuration in order to preserve the impartiality of the UN in support of its peacemaking and humanitarian functions, particularly in integrated contexts. If, however, the UN is specifically mandated to provide support to such operations, the UN should avoid being relegated to an effective role as a service provider or an extension of that non-UN force. Instead, the UN should use its mandate to provide support in a strategic manner to align the activities of the non-UN force with the political strategy of the mission to help harness the efforts of the non-UN force to create incentives for dialogue and sustainable peace.[109] This means that, where possible, support packages should be delivered through a UN peace operation with a political mandate, such as the light and heavy support packages delivered to the AU Mission in Sudan by the UN Mission in Sudan, rather than through a stand-alone support office, such as the UN Support Office for the AU Mission in Somalia (UNSOA) and its successor, the UN Support Office for Somalia (UNSOS).[11]

[11] The establishment in 2009 of a standalone support office to support the AU Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) and its successor, the AU Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS), was not a reflection of best practice, but instead a measure of last resort. At the time, there was no Secretariat presence in Somalia through which to deliver that support. The UN Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM) was not established until 2013, replacing the previous Nairobi-based UN Political Office for Somalia, but a merger of UNSOA and UNSOM was not feasible because UNSOA—which originally had a mandate to support the eventual transition to UN peacekeeping in Somalia—was funded in the manner of a peacekeeping operation while UNSOM was established as a special political mission.

3.3.2 Opportunities presented by transitions

Given the ongoing retrenchment of peace operations, the idea of applying a modular approach to a new mission is largely an academic exercise. But ongoing mission drawdowns and transitions can provide an opportunity to implement elements of the modular approach, such as by consolidating analysis and planning capacity under the triple-hatted DSRSG/RC/HC. Missions also tend to progressively scale down their substantive activities over the course of mission drawdown. This is driven both by the timetable for mission downsizing and by the higher attrition rate during transitions. When faced with the impending closure of a mission, it is in the interest of staff members to seek jobs elsewhere. When those staff members depart, missions find it very difficult to fill the resulting vacancies and often are forced by circumstance rather than by design to rely heavily on the UN country team to complete residual programmatic activities. Instead, missions could work with the UN country team early in the transition process to delegate mandated activities to appropriate agencies, funds, and programs along with the associated financial resources. This would, in turn, facilitate the transfer of relevant staff from the mission to the UN country team, therefore ensuring the maintenance of institutional memory while also providing the agencies, funds, and programs an early understanding of the level of resources they must mobilize to be able to maintain programmatic continuity to avoid the abrupt reduction of available funding and capacity—commonly known as the peacebuilding funding cliff—at the end of the mission mandate.

The Secretariat should also use ongoing transitions to highlight issues with the existing regulatory framework governing mission closure. For example, the UN Financial Regulations and Rules have provisions for the disposal of assets in liquidating peacekeeping operations, introduced in 2003, that do not apply to special political missions. They also treat liquidation as an accounting exercise rather than an opportunity to reinforce the positive legacy of a mission. For example, the regulations and rules give current and potential future peacekeeping operations priority over assets—a relic from when peacekeeping operations were still expanding—while affording the host country the lowest priority. The regulations also specify that infrastructure built by a peacekeeping operation, such as airfield installations, buildings, and bridges, is normally to be provided in return for compensation by the government. The regulations fail to take into account the strategic and reputational value of making mission assets available to the UN

country team, the host country, or local communities. They also fail to account for the fact that the value of an asset may be less than the cost of shipping it to another mission or to the UN Global Service Center in Brindisi, Italy, for refurbishment and storage as part of the UN reserve. These are examples of issues that can be raised in the context of Fifth Committee deliberations of the requirements of downsizing missions and of the disposition of assets of closed missions.

3.3 Mandating through the Peacebuilding Commission and General Assembly

The majority of peace operations have been mandated by the Security Council, either through a decision or through an exchange of letters. In A New Agenda for Peace, however, Secretary-General Guterres notes that "The General Assembly has a critical role to play, based on its strong legitimacy and universal membership, to address a range of peace and security challenges and exercise its powers under Articles 10 to 14 of the Charter. This role can be particularly important when the Security Council is unable to fulfil its primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security." Secretary-General Boutros-Ghali made a similar observation in the 1995 Supplement to An Agenda for Peace when he noted that "[i]t may also be necessary in such cases to arrange the transfer of decision-making responsibility from the Security Council, which will have authorized the mandate and deployment of the peace-keeping operation, to the General Assembly or other intergovernmental bodies with responsibility for the civilian peace-building activities that will continue." In fact, on at least nineteen occasions, the General Assembly—not the Security Council—has mandated the deployment of a UN peace operation, as indicated in table 2. Peace operations mandated by the General Assembly include some of the most innovative missions, including the first armed peacekeeping operation (UNEF), the first transitional administration mission (the UN Temporary Executive Authority in West Irian), and the first joint mission with a regional organization (MICIVIH).

Table 2: List of UN peace operations mandated by the General Assembly

Entity	GA resolution[12]	Type	Years
UN Mediator in Palestine	186 (S-2)	Special political mission*	1948-1949
UN Conciliation Commission in Palestine	194 (III)	Special political mission*	1948-1951
UN Commission for Eritrea	289 (IV)	Special political mission*	1949-1950
UN Commissioner for Libya	289 (IV)	Special political mission*	1949-1952
UN Emergency Force I (UNEF I)	1001 (ES-I)	Peacekeeping operation	1956-1967
UN Special Representative in Amman	1237 (ES-III)	Special political mission*	1958-1967
UN Temporary Executive Authority in West Irian/UN Security Force (UNTEA/UNSF)	1752 (XVII)	Peacekeeping operation	1962-1963
UN Observer Group for the Verification of Elections in Haiti	45/2	Special political mission	1990-1991
UN-OAS International Civilian Mission in Haiti (MICIVIH)	47/20 B	Special political mission (joint mission)	1993-1999
UN Observer Mission to Verify the Referendum in Eritrea (UNOVER)	47/114	Special political mission	1993
UN Special Mission to Afghanistan (UNSMA)	48/208	Special political mission	1994-2001
Office of UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process (UNSCO)	48/213	Special political mission^	1994-present
UN Mission for the Verification of Human Rights and of Compliance with the Commitments of the Comprehensive Agreement on Human Rights in Guatemala (MINUGUA)	48/267	Special political mission with peacekeeping operation component subsequently attached	1994/1997
UN Mission in El Salvador (MINUSAL)	49/137	Special political mission	1995-1996
UN Office of Verification in El Salvador (ONUV)	50/226	Special political mission	1999-2001
International Civilian Support Mission in Haiti (MICAH)	54/193	Special political mission	1999-2001
UN Office to the African Union (UNOAU)	64/288	Special political mission^	
UN Special Envoy for Syria	66/253	Special political mission	2012-present
UN Special Envoy for Myanmar	72/248	Special political mission	2018-present

[12] Entities marked with an asterisk (*) are often considered special political missions even though they predate the concept of special political missions, which was introduced in the 1990s. Entities marked with a carat (^) are not technically special political missions as they are reflected separately in the UN program budget even if they have many characteristics of special political missions.

At a time when the divides within the Security Council have been exacerbated by broader geopolitical contestation, there is a window of opportunity for the General Assembly to build on past precedent and play a larger role in the planning and mandating of peace operations, particularly in the context of UN transitions or in response to requests for support to peacebuilding activities or the design and implementation of national prevention strategies and infrastructures for peace. In such situations, the initial request can be considered by the Peacebuilding Commission given its mandate under General Assembly resolution 60/180 and Security Council resolution 1645 (2005) to "provide recommendations and information to improve the coordination of all relevant actors within and outside the United Nations, to develop best practices, to help to ensure predictable financing for early recovery activities and to extend the period of attention given by the international community to post-conflict recovery." It can then make a recommendation to the General Assembly on the future configuration of the UN system in that particular country context.

In a transition context, a major challenge faced by the UN system is the absence of a consolidated picture of peacebuilding financing requirements during mission transitions. This lacuna is not a result of a gap in policy, but rather that of a gap in implementation. The 2019 transition planning directive issued by the Secretary-General created a new requirement for the UN system to develop a resource mobilization strategy. Similarly, the 2023 revision of the integrated assessment and planning policy states that the strategic assessment should provide a common basis for the development of recommendations for the configuration, resource requirements, and transition timelines for UN engagement in a particular context. The Peacebuilding Commission can draw upon its mandate to ensure predictable financing to hold the UN system accountable for putting together a peacebuilding financing inventory and gap analysis in transition contexts.

The Peacebuilding Commission could also advise the General Assembly in authorizing and financing prevention and peacebuilding activities. An indicative process that could be envisaged is as follows. A member state seeking support for peacebuilding activities or national prevention strategies from the UN, including in the context of a UN transition, would channel its request through the Peacebuilding Commission. Following deliberations in the Peacebuilding Commission, the Chair would send a letter to the President of the General Assembly conveying the request from the member state and recommending the dispatch of a fact-finding mission by the Secretary-General to develop options for a tailored package of support. The endorsement of such a request by the General

Assembly would trigger a strategic assessment to generate options for the UN configuration, which could include options such as UNCT+ and light-footprint peace operations that build on the existing capacity of the UN in-country. These options would then be considered, along with their associated resource requirements, by the General Assembly.

There is a stigma associated with being on the agenda of the Security Council. As such, for support to national prevention strategies to be considered by the General Assembly through the Peacebuilding Commission would help reduce the barriers for countries potentially interested in UN assistance in peacebuilding and prevention and, in turn, increase buy-in for the prevention agenda at the UN. Similarly, in transition contexts, host governments may be more likely to accept a discussion on the reconfiguration of the UN presence in the Peacebuilding Commission rather than in the Security Council, given the desire of many host governments to come off the Security Council's agenda. For such discussions to take place in the Peacebuilding Commission would also allow the Commission to more effectively help countries avoid the post-mandate financing cliff in line with its financing mandate. At a time when the Security Council is preoccupied with stabilization and peace enforcement, a reassertion of the role of the General Assembly in peace operations would provide an outlet for pursuing political solutions and non-securitized approaches to peacebuilding while enhancing the role of the Peacebuilding Commission in a meaningful manner.

Conclusion

This report presents a vision for a new approach to UN peace operations based on an analysis of the shortcomings of the current approach to peace operations. It represents a possible end state that the UN—including both member states and the Secretariat—can strive towards. A new approach to peace operations should be more adaptive and should break out of outdated notions of what activities can or cannot be done by certain types of UN missions and in what manner. This new approach seeks to leverage the broad range of capacity and expertise already existing across the UN system in a manner that maintains the impartiality of the mission while ensuring that peacebuilding activities help reinforce political solutions. This can be accomplished through a modular approach in which peace operations fully delegate certain mandated tasks to another UN or non-UN entity, along with the associated budgetary resources. Such a differentiation of mandated tasks between missions and UN country teams can not only help programmatic coherence across the UN system and reduce friction between missions and country teams but would also help lay the groundwork for effective transitions by ensuring that peacebuilding tasks with a longer time horizon remain with country teams, therefore reducing the likelihood of programmatic interruption or the loss of institutional memory upon the departures of missions.

Articulating this approach, however, is the easy part. A much more difficult task will be to overcome the policies, processes, and structures built up over successive decades to enable and reinforce current approaches to the planning, design, and management of peacekeeping operations and special political missions. ForFor example, a major driver of the dichotomy between peacekeeping operations and special political missions is that different scales of assessments are used for the two missions, which reduces the cost to the permanent members of the Security Council. However, differences between how these two categories of peace operations are budgeted—many of which are driven by longstanding practice and not by policy—create further arbitrary differences and restrictions in what missions can and cannot do. Subsequent reports in this series will focus on unpacking the key areas of mission planning, resourcing, and force generation to illustrate how they contribute to path dependency and to provide concrete recommendations on how they can be reimagined to meet contemporary demands.

In the short term, member states and the Secretariat can already consider putting into practice several recommendations, including:

- Revisiting the idea of the cluster system for peacebuilding activities as part of the 2025 peacebuilding architecture review;
- Ensuring that when UN support is being considered for a non-UN operation—including but not limited to ones authorized under the framework of Security Council resolution 2719 (2923)—such support is leveraged as a strategic enabler to align the efforts of the non-UN operation with the broader political strategy for the resolution of the underlying conflict;
- Strengthening joint analysis and planning at the country level through the pooling or co-location of analysis and planning capabilities from missions and the UN country team;
- Considering using UN transitions as an opportunity for delegating areas of mission mandates, along with their associated financial resources, to relevant members of the country team to help ensure the maintenance of institutional memory and programmatic continuity after the end of the mission mandate;
- Using the Peacebuilding Commission as a forum for considering follow-on arrangements in transition contexts as well as requests for UN assistance in the design and implementation of national prevention strategies and infrastructures for peace; and
- Approving, through the General Assembly, tailored packages of support to member states in the form of UNCT+ and light footprint integrated missions that can contribute specialized political, peace, and security expertise to existing UN country team capacities on the ground.

UN peace operations always operate in an environment involving other actors, and no single entity or organization has the capacity and resources to effectively tackle the full range of activities required to help a country towards sustaining peace. For the UN to be able to meet the new and emerging challenges in policing does not require the creation of new mandates or capacities—it simply requires a better understanding of the expertise already available and the existing arrangements that can be used to leverage that expertise in support of the Secretary-General's vision, in A New Agenda for Peace, for "a system of networked multilateralism and strengthened partnerships."

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