Managing Peace Operations

How to Exit the Groundhog Day Time Loop of Peace Operations Reform

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Table of Contents

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Executive Summary

United Nations (UN) peace operations currently face a crisis of confidence. No large mission has been launched in over a decade, existing missions struggle to implement their mandates, and the UN is increasingly marginalized from political processes. Although geopolitical divisions are a factor, the structures, processes, and mindsets of the Secretariat are also to blame. Despite successive attempts at reform over the years, challenges identified over numerous reviews in recent decades persist. This report examines why previous reform initiatives have floundered. It then examines four persistent challenges affecting peace operations today—the erosion of the primacy of politics, the distinction between peacekeeping operations and special political missions, templated mandates, and the absence of meaningful accountability for military and police performance—to identify why these problems exist and what practical measures can be taken by member states and the Secretariat to overcome them.

1. Introduction

Over the course of nearly eight decades, United Nations (UN) peace operations have proven to be important tools to support the pacific settlement of disputes and the maintenance of international peace and security.[1] But peace operations today are suffering a crisis of confidence. No large mission has been established in over a decade, existing missions struggle with the implementation of their mandates, and several missions have been asked to leave in recent years by their host governments. More broadly, the UN and its peace operations have become marginalized in peacemaking and the political resolution of conflict.

The UN argues that the current state of affairs is largely the consequence of the absence of unified political support for its peace operations.[2] However, successive reviews have also highlighted challenges in how peace operations are planned, deployed, and managed. In response, several rounds of reform have been launched over the years, but these challenges persist, not just because of intergovernmental politics, but also because of the structures, policies, and processes built up over time within the Secretariat. Much of this architecture underpinning contemporary peace operations was put in place during periods of rapid growth in the 1990s and 2000s to help the organization manage surges in the establishment and expansion of missions. The political and security context for peace operations today is very different, and many of the demands and assumptions that drove the creation of the architecture no longer hold.

This report—the second in a series of reports on the future of UN peace operations[3]—argues that, although previous reviews have identified persistent problems facing peace operations, the organizational culture of the Secretariat has prevented the development of the measures necessary to overcome those problems. This report begins with an overview of previous reviews of peace operations since the end of the Cold War and an assessment of why previous reform initiatives have only found limited success. The report then delves into the underlying causes of problems in several key areas raised in previous reviews that continue to pose challenges to contemporary peace operations despite successive attempts at reform. In each of these areas, several measures are presented for the consideration of the Secretariat and member states that can help address the identified underlying causes.

2. Lessons Learned from Previous Reform Initiatives

As part of the Pact for the Future adopted in September 2024, the UN General Assembly (UNGA) requested the Secretary-General to undertake a review of "all forms of United Nations peace operations, taking into account lessons learned from previous and ongoing reform processes." There have been many reviews of peace operations undertaken since the end of the Cold War. Several of these reviews have prompted reform initiatives to implement associated recommendations, though the nature, level of ambition, and degree of follow-up has varied.

2.1 Previous reviews of peace operations

With the end of the Cold War came a sense of optimism regarding the role of the UN Security Council (UNSC) in the maintenance of international peace and security. The resulting surge in the establishment of peace operations prompted both the establishment of new structures in the Secretariat—the Department of Political Affairs (DPA) and Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO)—and the release of the seminal report titled *An Agenda for Peace* in 1992, which outlined an expansive vision for UN engagement across the areas of preventative diplomacy, peacemaking, peacekeeping, and peacebuilding.[4] The ambition and scale of early post-Cold War peace operations, however, quickly exceeded the ability of the UN to deliver. The failures in Somalia, Rwanda, and Bosnia and Herzegovina led to contraction of peace operations as the organization undertook some soul searching, much of which was reflected in the 1995 Supplement to *An Agenda for Peace*.[5]

In the years that followed, the UN built up policies, procedures, funding mechanisms, and structures at UN Headquarters (UNHQ) to more effectively plan, deploy, and manage peace operations—setting the stage for a second surge in post-Cold War UN peace operations. Against this backdrop, Secretary-General Kofi Annan convened a high-level panel chaired by Lakhdar Brahimi whose report—commonly referred to as the Brahimi report—included a range of recommendations related to peace operations doctrine, rapid deployment, and

capacities.[6] In the five years after the Brahimi report, the continued expansion of peace operations prompted an internal review covering personnel, doctrine, partnerships, resources, and structures.[7] This led to the strengthening of DPKO and the creation of the Department of Field Support (DFS) in 2007. It also led to the issuance of the Capstone Doctrine in 2008. Secretary-General Annan also proposed the establishment of a new peacebuilding architecture as part of the 2005 World Summit[8] and pursued the strengthening of DPA to enhance the ability of the UN to undertake preventative diplomacy and good offices, including mediation, in 2007.[9]

In advance of the tenth anniversary of the Brahimi report, DPKO and DFS launched the New Horizon initiative to examine ways to address recurring challenges in peacekeeping operations. The 2010 Global Field Support Strategy included new measures and mechanisms to support rapid deployment and improve mission support arrangements.[10] Since special political missions were precluded from several of these measures, the Secretariat proposed alternative steps to improve the backstopping of special political missions in 2011.[11] The inability of member states to reach agreement on these proposals led to the establishment of a new General Assembly agenda item on the comprehensive review of special political missions and an annual reporting requirement, beginning in 2013. In parallel, growing recognition of the inflexibility of internal UN processes led Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon to convene a senior advisory group which issued a series of recommendations aimed at enhancing national ownership, enhancing partnerships, more effectively utilizing expertise across the UN system, and increasing the nimbleness of UN responses.[12] The Global Focal Point for Rule of Law, established in 2012, was the pilot for a series of thematic focal points working across institutional boundaries proposed by the senior advisory group.

Peace operations continued to grow, making many of the persistent challenges even more apparent, prompting Secretary-General Ban to appoint a high-level independent panel on peace operations (HIPPO) in 2014. The HIPPO report, issued the following year, identified four essential shifts for peace operations:

(1) Ensuring the primacy of politics,
(2) Utilizing the full spectrum of peace operations in a flexible manner to meet changing requirements on the ground,
(3) Enhancing global and regional partnerships, and
(4) Making UN systems and structures more field-focused and people-centered.

The Panel also called for the restructuring of the Secretariat peace and security architecture and to modernize the administrative framework for peace operations.[13]

A reorganization of the relevant departments at UNHQ was undertaken during the first term of Secretary-General António Guterres as part of the management reform[14] and restructuring of the peace and security architecture,[15] entering into effect in 2019.

The 2019 reorganization of the peace and security architecture, however, was much less ambitious in practice than presented on paper. Ian Martin, a member of the HIPPO, noted that "the rival mindsets carried forward from DPKO and DPA into the new structure have yet to be fully overcome. Many opportunities for common approaches to all peace operations continue to be lost."[16] Indeed, little changed in practice other than the lift-and-shift of the Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO) into DPA to create the new Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA). For all its fanfare, the single "political-operational structure" shared by DPPA and the Department of Peace Operations (DPO) represents far less of a change in practice than appears on paper. The desks of the former DPA and the integrated operational teams of the former DPKO were not merged or reconfigured, and they continue to report only to either DPPA or DPO, respectively.

UN peacekeeping operations reached a high-water mark in 2015, in terms of the number of personnel deployed and the total resource requirements, which peaked at USD 8.3 billion. The last large multidimensional peacekeeping operation, in the Central African Republic, was established in 2014, and subsequently, several large peace operations have closed or begun their withdrawal, with several doing so at the request of their host governments. Reviews conducted or commissioned by the Secretariat since this inflection point, including the *New Agenda for Peace*[17] and a study on the future of peacekeeping[18] commissioned by the Department of Peace Operations (DPO, the successor to DPKO), argue that peace operations remain a flexible tool to respond to a range of challenges and that the primary obstacles to their effectiveness are intensifying geopolitical competition and the lack of unified political support for missions. As an alternative to peacekeeping operations, the Security Council has increasingly turned to special political missions, including for monitoring activities that were previously primarily undertaken by peacekeeping operations. Special political missions reached a peak in 2023, with USD 768.3 million appropriated, but are also now in a period of contraction. Many of the same challenges that affect peacekeeping also affect special political missions, and several host governments have recently requested the closure of missions in their countries.

2.2 Reflections on past reviews

Each of these reviews has identified shortcomings and lessons learned from which the Secretariat has developed proposals for the consideration of member states, though the nature, level of ambition, and degree of follow-up from within the Secretariat has been uneven at best. As a result, many recommendations from past reviews remain unimplemented, despite the launch of several reform initiatives aimed to address issues identified. The lack of progress is not necessarily the result of deliberate obstructionism on the part of individual Secretariat staff members. Instead, it is the consequence of the system of interests and incentives that has emerged out of the policies, procedures, and structures that have built up over time.

One manner in which this system manifests itself is self-censorship, a phenomenon that has several causes. Individual departments and missions in the Secretariat engage in self-legitimation practices—the identification with narratives, principles, and norms—that helps define their organizational culture, foster camaraderie, and build a sense of legitimacy in their activities. Amongst the entities of the peace and security pillar, self-legitimation comes largely out of three distinct characteristics: the multilateral nature and impartiality of their activities, the normative underpinning of their work, and the specialized expertise they represent. However, these self-legitimation practices also help entities justify, excuse, or dismiss situations in which their efforts come under question.[19] As a result, these practices can drive "adverse consequences including stasis, resistance to change and a lack of innovation."[20] UN entities therefore self-censor as a means of self-preservation, including attempts to shift blame for shortcomings or to maintain self-identity or avoid reputational damage.[21]

This type of self-censorship and suppression of internal criticism has operational consequences. It hinders institutional learning, which prevents the Secretariat from being able to adopt the necessary shifts in the approach needed to adapt to changing circumstances.[22] As a result, reviews conducted internally by the UN generally focus on making incremental improvements, as in the case of Action for Peacekeeping, or on actions and commitments to be made by member states. They avoid major criticisms of existing structures and approaches, and therefore seldom generate recommendations regarding changes required within the Secretariat.[23] This also means that it is more likely for external or independent reviews to be more critical of Secretariat approaches than for ones conducted internally. It is for this reason that the review conducted by the HIPPO remains relevant given that many of the recommendations contained in its report would

have been difficult to generate from within the Secretariat. Even so, many of the key recommendations from the HIPPO remain unimplemented.

But progress is possible, despite the inherent resistance to change, especially if strong leadership from the Secretary-General and pressure from member states can be applied in such a manner to counteract the interests and incentives that reinforce the status quo in the Secretariat. Here, the HIPPO report also provides examples. Of the four essential shifts it highlighted, some progress has been made on two through a combination of member state support and the leadership of the Secretary-General. The signing of the UN-African Union (AU) Joint Framework for Enhanced Partnership in Peace and Security in 2017 and the adoption of Security Council resolution 2719 in 2023 are significant as symbolic milestones in the evolving relationship between the two organizations, even if the financing framework authorized through resolution 2719 will be difficult to operationalize in a manner that meets the demands of all stakeholders.[24] And, at least on paper, the 2019 system of delegation of authority empowered the field, aligning the responsibility for mandate implementation with the authority to manage resources with heads of missions. But, as many of the structures at Headquarters—and their associated staffing and ways of working—were not changed as a result of the reforms, the full potential of these changes have not been realized, and in many ways the old ways of working have stubbornly persisted.[25]

3. A Selection of Recurring Challenges

Progress remains stubbornly elusive in implementing several recommendations in the HIPPO report and other reviews, including in ensuring the primacy of politics, utilizing the full spectrum of peace operations, overcoming templated mandates, and ensuring meaningful accountability for contingent performance.

3.1 Primacy of politics

One of the main shifts called for by the HIPPO was for politics to drive the design and implementation of peace operations. The HIPPO emphasized that, were a UN peace operation is deployed, the UN should lead or play a leading role in political efforts, and that, "absent a major role in supporting a peace process, the success of a United Nations mission may be undermined."

3.1.1 The problem

There is no pure military solution to conflict, and victory on the battlefield does not necessarily lead to sustained peace.[26] For peacekeeping operations in particular, the wide range of mandated tasks entrusted to missions and the emphasis on physical protection in the implementation of protection of civilian mandates makes it challenging to focus on the political resolution of conflict. Jean Arnault, a member of the HIPPO, explained that the call for the "primacy of politics" was to counter the effective "primacy of the military" in the settlement of conflicts. He noted that large peacekeeping missions had become "almost entirely disconnected from any political process" and that "the Security Council was increasingly embracing forceful 'protection of civilians' as central to the mandate of peacekeeping missions. But it did so without a corresponding effort to find long-term political solutions that could make the protection of civilians effective and sustainable."[27] In fact, UN peace operations have become increasingly sidelined from political processes in the decade since the issuance of the HIPPO report, with Libya (2011), Syria (2012), and Yemen (2012) being the most recent examples of contexts where the UN has been granted the lead political role.[28] In many cases,

missions are now deployed in contexts where a regional organization or state is playing the role of mediator, or in contexts lacking any credible political process.

3.1.2 Analysis

Missions do not lack the expertise or capacity to support political processes. An evaluation by the Office of Internal Oversight Services found that "the analyses provided by the mission political affairs component have been of good quality overall" and "stakeholders and staff generally rated the analyses positively, including on timelines." But "the assessment of political analysis documents identified a few, but not may, examples in which they appeared to directly contribute to a strategic decision on political engagement with a positive outcome," and "it was less clear how the analyses aligned with one of the primary functions of mission political affairs components—developing strategies to help parties in conflict resolve disputes."[29] The issue, therefore, may be less with the ability or willingness of missions to engage, but rather with whether the positioning of the mission allows it to do so effectively.

Member states have embraced the rhetoric of primacy of politics and have affirmed its importance in numerous Security Council and General Assembly resolutions adopted since the issuance of the HIPPO report. At the same time, however, decisions taken by member states have pushed peacekeeping operations away from putting the primacy of politics into practice. In the past decade, the Security Council has specified that missions should prioritize the physical protection of civilians "under threat of physical violence," driven in large part by high-profile incidents in which peacekeeping missions failed to respond when civilians have come under attack.[30] The prioritization of physical protection has not only led to the marginalization of other approaches to the protection of civilians—namely protection through engagement and establishment of a protective environment—but it has also served as a trojan horse for the militarization of peacekeeping and its metamorphosis into stabilization.

Over the years, several peacekeeping missions have been designated by the Security Council as "stabilization" missions. Although no official definition exists for stabilization, there are several common characteristics amongst these missions, including the fact that they (1) are deployed in contexts with ongoing violent conflict and without a credible or sufficient political strategy for the resolution of that conflict, (2) support the host government in the extension of state authority, (3) conduct joint operations with and undertake capacity building activities with host state security forces, and (4) are expected to use force against armed groups that

pose a threat to the civilian population and the host government.[31] As a result, peacekeeping operations have become increasingly securitized such that their focus has shifted to pursuing military objectives—the defeat of armed groups—at the expense of political solutions, to the alarm of many practitioners.[32] The emphasis on applying military force to overwhelm opponents, however, fails to account for the limits of what can be achieved through force alone.[33] Instead of enabling political solutions and addressing root causes of violent conflict, the deployment of stabilization missions also reduces the incentive for the host government to engage in dialogue with opposition groups because of the stability they provide, enables authoritarian tendencies by building the security capabilities of the government, and makes it more difficult for a mission to exit because of the reduced likelihood that an insurgency can be decisively defeated.[34] Stabilization therefore subverts post-Cold War peace operations from their original missions of facilitating peacemaking and peacebuilding to becoming instruments of illiberal peace.

This shift to stabilization has been enabled by western members of the Security Council who have soured on expensive and long-term nation-building activities after the experiences of Afghanistan and Iraq,[35] host governments who seek multilateral deployments for regime security,[36] and the troop-contributing countries willing to take on kinetic operations.[37] The Secretariat has also been complicit, as—despite early push-back against the blurring of the lines between peacekeeping, peace enforcement, and counterterrorism—the Secretariat has legitimized the securitization of peacekeeping by insisting that stabilization remains in line with the three principles of peacekeeping despite the fact that peacekeeping forces conducting stabilization are no longer impartial, they primarily seek the consent of the host government, and they are encouraged to use force proactively.

When faced with a decline in confidence in peacekeeping, the Secretary-General has, instead of working to address the issues that have emerged in contemporary peacekeeping doctrine, called for “a new generation of peace enforcement missions and counter-terrorist operations, led by regional forces, with guaranteed, predictable funding.”[38] This positioning not only exacerbates the turn away from the primacy of politics, as it marks an intentional retreat by the UN from a central role in facilitating peacemaking, but it also relegates the role of the UN to that of a paymaster and logistical support provider to non-UN forces. Nowhere is this more clearly illustrated than in Somalia, where the Secretariat has acquiesced to both the

demand to withdraw its special political mission as well as the demand to finance an African Union mission with dubious chances of success.[39]

3.1.3 Recommendations

The principles of peacekeeping are not arbitrary limitations on the role of UN peace operations. Instead, they should be understood as the necessary but not sufficient conditions for the success of UN peace operations in managing and resolving violent conflict. No other actor has the same responsibility or legitimacy as the UN or potential to act as an objective, impartial mediator in a dispute, and the UN must not squander this legitimacy by undercutting its own impartiality.

Member states and the Secretariat alike should recognize the important role that peace operations play in peacemaking rather than treating them as separate activities. In the Pact for the Future, the General Assembly urged the Secretary-General "to actively use the good offices of the Secretary-General and ensure that the United Nations is adequately equipped to lead and support mediation."[40] The ongoing review of peace operations requested by the Pact must acknowledge that peacekeeping operations—in attempting to respond to crises and pursue the laudable goal of more robustly protecting civilians from physical violence—have undermined the primacy of politics and have made it more difficult to resolve violent conflict. UN peacekeeping operations must return to focusing on promoting and facilitating credible political processes for the resolution of violent conflict.

Member states and the Secretariat should avoid the trap of focusing on short-term security challenges and seek instead to use the tools available to UN peace operations to support or enable a credible political process. Protection of civilians should not be understood only in the context of physical protection (tier II); greater emphasis must be placed on protection through engagement (tier I) and the creation of a protective environment (tier III). And in considering requests to support non-UN forces, the UN should ensure that any provision of operational support is delivered in support of a political strategy for resolving the conflict; this is needed both to mitigate the risk that a militarized intervention serves to exacerbate the root causes of conflict and avoid the endless expense in blood and treasure of an operation focused on responding to the violent symptoms of conflict.

3.2 Full spectrum of peace operations

The HIPPO also highlighted the need for the United Nations to move away from the entrenched and often arbitrary distinctions between peacekeeping operations and special political missions that have developed since the 1990s in order to deliver tailored responses that draw upon the full spectrum of peace operations.

3.2.1 The problem

Ian Martin, a member of the HIPPO, explained that the panel insisted on "escaping the bifurcation in planning, management, and funding between peacekeeping operations and the large field-based special political missions…[to] enable the UN to deliver and adapt more flexibly-tailored missions, rather than be constrained by mindsets and bureaucracies inclined to templates."[41]

Currently, whether a mission has access to certain capabilities or resources depends on whether it is a peacekeeping operation or a special political mission, rather than on the operational requirements of the mission. Some of these restrictions stem from member state decisions, including the fact that only peacekeeping operations have unrestricted access to backstopping capacities at Headquarters financed through the support account, access to the Peacekeeping Reserve Fund for mission start-up or as a source of liquidity, and access to the provisions of the financial regulations and rules related to the disposition of assets in liquidating peacekeeping operations. Other distinctions are based on ingrained Secretariat mindsets rather than any intergovernmental restriction, such the fact that uniformed contingents (other than guard units), structures such as joint operations centers and joint mission analysis centers, and funding for programmatic activities and for quick-impact projects are generally only available to peacekeeping operations even when they could be useful in special political mission contexts.[42]

These limitations create practical challenges for special political missions. During mission start-up and reconfiguration, for example, special political missions can only access up to USD 10 million in commitment authority under what is called the unforeseen and extraordinary expenses (UEE) mechanism under the regular budget in advance of the appropriation of funds by the General Assembly. This is despite the fact that large field-based special political missions can have annual budgets that exceed USD 100 million. In contrast, peacekeeping operations can utilize USD 100 million of the available balance of the Peacekeeping Reserve Fund to meet expenses and capital requirements in advance of an appropriation. The difference is not just in the level of the commitment authority, but the fact that

peacekeeping special accounts can access cash from the Peacekeeping Reserve Fund while special political missions do not have access to cash to pay the obligations they incur under commitment authority. The use of UEE therefore exacerbates the already constrained liquidity situation in the regular budget. And during mission draw-down and liquidation, the financial regulations allow for the redeployment of property from liquidating peacekeeping operations to other UN activities funded through assessed contributions, while in special political missions, the transfer of property has to be on a cost-recovery basis.

Budget-related barriers between peacekeeping and special political missions also affect the backstopping of peace operations, creating both conceptual and operational challenges. For example, the support account was created in the early 1990s as a means of financing functions at Headquarters that support peacekeeping operations, including most of DPKO and DFS as well as capacitates in other departments such as the Department of Management (now DMSPC), the Office of Legal Affairs, and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, but none for DPA. This has been a cause for some resentment, as—over time—it has become much easier to get resources, including staffing, approved through the support account than through the regular budget. As the General Assembly has yet to take action on the proposals originally presented in 2011 by the Secretary-General on the backstopping of special political missions, the Secretariat has been forced to adopt ad hoc arrangements to meet the backstopping requirements of these missions. Maintaining a clear distinction between regular budget and peacekeeping financed activities at Headquarters has become increasingly difficult in successive decades. In practice, support account resources regularly support special political missions, as it is impractical to create duplicate capacities specifically to support special political missions under the regular budget in a time of financial constraint. Moreover, the rationale for why certain posts are funded from the support account as opposed to the regular budget has become increasingly difficult to maintain in recent years, especially after the 2019 reforms which not only created shared capacities in the peace and security pillar and reorganized DFS—a department primarily funded from the support account to provide administrative and logistical support to peace operations—into DOS, a department whose remit covered all activities of the Secretariat.

3.2.2 Analysis

The distinction between peacekeeping operations and special political missions has its origin in budgetary practices. When the UN was originally established, it had a single program budget (the “regular budget”) to cover the full range of activities

undertaken by the Secretariat. But beginning with the UN Emergency Force (UNEF) in 1956, the UN started creating special accounts separate from the regular budget for large-scale missions because the complexity of their requirements and the magnitude of their resource requirements far exceeded those of all other activities funded through the regular budget. Smaller-scale political, peace, and security activities—including older peacekeeping missions such as the UN Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO) and the UN Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan (UNMOGIP) as well as special envoys, fact-finding missions, and political offices—continued to be funded through the regular budget. After the end of the Cold War, the term "special political mission" became the common shorthand used to describe the political, peace, and security activities other than peacekeeping operations (i.e., UNTSO and UNMOGIP) funded through the regular budget.

Budgetary differences stemming from differences in operational requirements, however, are not the only way to construct a typology for UN peace operations; they can also be grouped other ways, including by who established them (i.e., the General Assembly, Security Council, or Secretary-General), the applicable scale of assessment, or the lead department (i.e., DPPA or DPO). Despite the operational and budgetary origins of the distinction between peacekeeping and special political missions, these other considerations began to be layered into the conventional understanding of the different mission types. For example, it is assumed that peacekeeping operations can only be established by the Security Council, when in fact the General Assembly has in the past established several peacekeeping operations, including UNEF, the first armed peacekeeping mission, and the UN Transitional Executive Authority, the first interim administration mission. It is also assumed that the expenses of all peacekeeping operations must be assessed under the peacekeeping scale of assessments, under which the permanent members of the Security Council are responsible for a larger share of costs, when in fact peacekeeping operations have been financed through a variety of means, including the regular budget (as in the case of UNTSO and UNMOGIP) and through voluntary contributions (such as the UN Interim Force in Cyprus, until 1993). And it is often assumed that DPPA is automatically the lead department for all special political missions and DPO is the automatically the lead department for all peacekeeping operations, when in fact this was neither what the Secretary-General proposed or what the General Assembly approved. In fact, when the lead department arrangement was first devised under Kofi Annan, missions were assigned based on their operational requirements, which is why large and complex special political missions, including the current UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, were originally assigned to DPKO.

These distinctions create political and bureaucratic incentives to push for missions to be established as either peacekeeping operations or as special political missions for reasons unrelated to the conflict to which they are being deployed and their operational requirements. And what was originally a different approach to reflecting resource requirements in budgets is now a fault line that demarcates two entirely different regimes with different approaches to planning, mandating, budgeting, financing, staffing, management, and reporting to Headquarters for missions implementing an overlapping set of mandates and deployed in similar contexts. The HIPPO recognized that the increasingly rigid understanding of peace operations as being divided between special political missions and peacekeeping operations not only limited the range of tools available to the UN in the management and resolution of conflicts, but also had negative operational impacts in the field and served to exacerbate departmental rivalries. As such, it proposed to eliminate the original budgetary distinction between the two types of activities by calling for the creation of a single peace operations account covering both special political missions and peacekeeping operations as well as their associated backstopping requirements at Headquarters (see "HIPPO proposal" in Figure 1 on the next page). This, however, was doomed from the start because the HIPPO failed to take intergovernmental considerations into account. Although the HIPPO did not specify which scale of assessments would be applied to such an account, the assumption amongst member states was that the peacekeeping scale would be used, thus prompting opposition from the five permanent members of the Security Council, which would have to pay a larger amount than under the status quo.

3.1.3 Recommendations

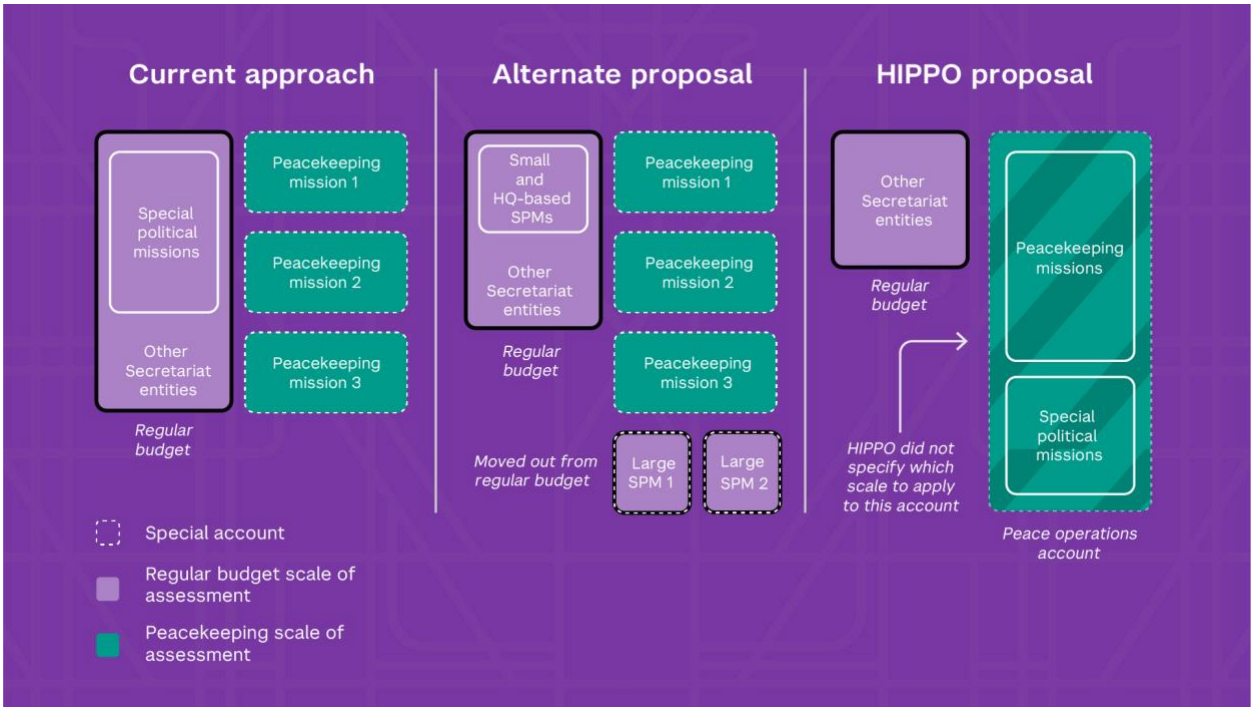
Breaking down the barriers to the full spectrum of peace operations requires a discontinuation of the arbitrary differences that have emerged over time in how the budgets of different types of peace operations are prepared, presented, and managed—but in a manner that does not cross the red lines of any key stakeholders.

Instead of the HIPPO recommendation to create a single special account for all peace operations, **one approach to consider is to create special accounts for all field-based operations without changing the applicable scale of assessment for each operation** (see "alternate proposal" in Figure 1).[43]

Peacekeeping missions (i.e., UNTSO and UNMOGIP) and the larger field-based special political missions should be moved out of the regular budget into special accounts. To avoid any impact to member state assessments, the regular budget

scale of assessment can be applied to the special accounts of missions currently funded through the regular budget.

Figure 1: Special accounts for all peace operations



If field-based special political missions are no longer part of the regular budget, the technical barriers to accessing the mission start-up, liquidity, and liquidation measures currently available to peacekeeping operations disappear. **The restrictions currently in place that currently limit access to start-up, liquidation, and liquidity arrangements should be adjusted such that they can be used in all peace operations funded from special accounts rather than being limited to peacekeeping operations**. Along with this change in eligibility, some changes in nomenclature—such as renaming the Peacekeeping Reserve Fund to the Peace Operations Reserve Fund—would be appropriate. As the mission start-up and liquidity measures all involve repayment once assessments are received, there would not be any risk that funds assessed under the peacekeeping scale of assessments would be used to subsidize activities assessed under the regular scale of assessments.

To address the fundamental problem driving the continued bifurcation of peace operations, member states should make decisions on how missions are supported based on their operational requirements rather than by the applicable scale of assessments. For peace operations, form should follow function rather than

financing method. In order to decouple questions of financing modality from decisions on mandate and lead department, member states should adopt a more objective approach to determining the applicable scale of assessments. An obvious approach to take would be to decide that the regular budget scale of assessments applies to all future missions mandated by the General Assembly and that what is now known as the peacekeeping scale should apply to all missions mandated by the Security Council. This would take into account the fact that, under the peacekeeping scale of assessments, the five permanent members of the Security Council are responsible for a larger share of costs on account of their special responsibilities for the maintenance of peace and security, in line with General Assembly resolution 1874 (S-IV).

Several of the suggested changes to mission start-up and liquidation would require amendments to the UN financial regulations and rules. But instead of simply updating the rules to allow start-up and liquidation measures to apply beyond peacekeeping operations to all activities funded through special accounts, **member states and the Secretariat should also take the opportunity to update the financial regulations and rules to reflect developments since those provisions were initially put in place**. When the provisions related to the disposition of assets for peacekeeping operations went into effect in 2003, for example, peacekeeping was in a time of rapid growth. As such, it is understandable that the provisions prioritize the transfer of equipment to other peacekeeping operations or for storage in the UN reserve in Brindisi, Italy, for use in future peacekeeping missions. But it has been over a decade since the establishment of the last peacekeeping operation, and missions have been drawing down and closing in the past decade, often without follow-on missions. **The General Assembly should therefore amend the financial regulations to allow the transfer, as opposed to the sale, of equipment to the UN country team, which is often left to continue the peacebuilding work of missions but with far fewer resources. Moreover, the possibility of gifting assets to local communities and host countries should not be the option pursued only when all other options of disposal are deemed unsuitable**. In fact, as part of the positive legacy of a mission, gifting assets to local communities and host countries arguably should be the default option for the disposal of assets, followed by transfer to a successor mission, transfer to the country team, and then the “normal” options for disposal, including through commercial sale.[44]

The current approach to budgeting of backstopping capacities at Headquarters is difficult to continue to justify. The maintenance of two separate budgets to finance

the requirements of departments at Headquarters—the regular budget and the support account—not only creates mismatches between work and funding sources, as noted in the recent report of the Secretary-General on the support account and funding issues,[45] but it also has contributed to the continued expansion of the support account in a manner that is entirely divorced from the level of peacekeeping activities. One solution would be to move towards a single budget that encompasses the requirements contained in both the regular budget and the support account. An earlier report, on a proposed funding model for the management architecture, described a manner in which this could be done, using the support account not as a separate budget existing in parallel to the regular budget, but as a source of funding for a single budget.[46] **This would not only ensure that all missions have access to the required backstopping resources without the need to duplicate resources between the regular budget and support account, but would maintain the two scales of assessments.** The General Assembly should revisit this earlier proposal when it considers the report of the Secretary-General, expected later in 2025 on the methodology for a single budget.

3.3 Templated mandates

In the past few decades, peace operations have settled into familiar patterns and forms, which have been reinforced both by the manner that peace operations are planned and the range of activities they have been mandated to undertake regardless of the context—an impulse commonly compared to decorating a Christmas tree. As a result, the HIPPO observed that "too often, mandates and missions are produced on the basis of templates instead of tailored to support situation-specific political strategies." In addition, the HIPPO also highlighted the need to prioritize and sequence mandated tasks so that missions "develop over time rather than trying to do everything at once, and failing." It argued that "fewer priorities, fewer tasks and better sequencing should be the aim."[47]

3.3.1 The problem

In 2010, Ellen Margrethe Løj, then the head of the UN Mission in Liberia, succinctly described the problem during a briefing to the Security Council when she argued that "We need implementable mandates rather than politically correct ones…Each mandate should be adjusted to the specific context on the ground. What works in one place may be impossible to implement in another. Furthermore, it is important that the Council exercise great care when changing a mission's mandate. If new tasks are being continuously added, the context surrounding the original ones,

including the provision of a security umbrella, and the conditions for its transition and exit will become increasingly difficult. If the goal post keeps changing, so to speak, there will be consequences as to when the desired end state can be reached."[48] The HIPPO agreed and pointed out that "the problem begins early in the planning process: expansive technical assessments generate comprehensive reports of the Secretary-General that in turn drive large mandates with often formulaic mandated tasks. These mandates frustrate efforts at prioritization and sequencing during implementation, and progress is increasingly hard to realize in more difficult settings."[49] In addition, the broad range of peacebuilding activities undertaken by missions can create major challenges during transition, as the country team may not have the capacity to quickly ramp up its staffing and resourcing to ensure programmatic continuity. Efforts to improve coordination and planning processes to mitigate this challenge over the past two decades have not yielded meaningful improvements.

Broad mandates also translate into heavy structures. When missions are established, their mission structure includes organizational units and a staffing table that comprehensively covers the entirety of the mission mandate, even if it often takes some time for a mission to be fully staffed up. This is despite the fact that the planning assumptions used to generate the staffing table may have been based on incomplete information, the mission may not yet be in a position to effectively implement certain mandated tasks, or prerequisites—such as the availability or readiness of counterparts with which the mission needs to engage—may not be in place. This also means that, absent a major change to the mission mandate and the associated reconfiguration of the mission, mission structures are generally very rigid, therefore making it challenging for missions to effectively adapt to a changing political or security environment.

3.3.2 Analysis

The dominant conception of peacebuilding in the post-Cold War era has been one that assumes that societies will achieve sustainable peace when they embrace democracy, a free-market economy, human rights, and the rule of law, and that peacebuilding can facilitate this shift by promoting liberal norms and building liberal institutions, peacebuilding was treated as a technical undertaking, based on the assumption that an intervention that worked in one context could generate the same results in another.[50] Indeed, when Secretary-General Ghali introduced the concept of peacebuilding to the UN in 1992, he described it as "the construction of a new environment" and something that required "technical assistance" provided by the UN to support the "transformation of deficient national structures and

capabilities, and for the strengthening of new democratic institutions."[51] Within the decade, however, the shortcoming of UN efforts led to a greater appreciation for a more context-specific approach, the so-called "local turn" in peacebuilding.[52]

A major challenge to designing missions more tailored to specific contexts, however, is the weakness of the planning function at the UN. As noted in the recent report commissioned by DPO on the future of peacekeeping, "tailored responses to crises require strong planning and analysis, but the UN currently lacks sufficient capacity. This encourages templated approaches and makes it more likely the Organization will repeat the same mistakes."[53] The UN currently lacks a culture of planning, as the peace and security pillar is often actively discouraged by both member states and Secretariat leadership from undertaking proactive planning out of concern that the act of planning for a scenario may be misinterpreted as the UN either expecting, supporting, or accepting a particular outcome. Moreover, the planning units that do exist often lack sufficient capacity and are often overburdened with activities unrelated to planning. These factors manifest in different ways across DPO and DPPA-led missions. DPO has multiple dedicated planning units for the military, police, integrated planning, and specialized capacities, but the weakness in planning culture and the embrace of a preferred model of mission—the multidimensional protection of civilian mission—drives a homogeneity in the missions generated by the DPO planning process. In contrast, the absence of a dedicated planning capacity in DPPA allows for greater diversity in the missions than the DPPA planning process can generate, but places practical limits on the potential size and operational complexity of the mission.

In the absence of a strong planning and analysis capacity, it is easy to adopt a more expansive approach to the inclusion of mandated tasks by default, given the many potential root causes of conflict and risk factors for violence in any context. In addition, there are also structural incentives for the inclusion of certain mandated activities regardless of the specific requirements of individual contexts. Thematic units at Headquarters, for example, are narrowly focused on highlighting their specific agendas and may lack the broader perspective on how to prioritize and sequence mandated tasks. And elected members of the Security Council often choose thematic issues to champion during their two-year terms, pressuring the Council to include the associated mandated activities in all mission mandates, often drawing on previously agreed language from other resolutions.

The primary challenge to the ability of missions to adapt to changing circumstances and sequence mandated tasks is the rigidity of the staffing tables in the budget. Currently, each individual post in the budget—corresponding to a

specific function, grade, and location in the mission structure—is approved by the General Assembly. Any changes to the staffing table, whether in the creation of a new post, the change of an existing post (function, grade, or location), or the abolishment of a post, requires a decision by the General Assembly. The front-loading of staffing tables also reflects the fact that the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ) and Fifth Committee are generally more open to considering large numbers of new posts during mission start-up. Later in the mission life cycle, staffing requests tend to get much more scrutiny and a much less receptive audience.

The mission planning and mandating process also has a major deficiency in that it fails to adequately consider the existing capacities and expertise of the UN country team. As noted in *A New Agenda for Peace*, "peace operations must be significantly more integrated and should leverage the full range of civilian capacities and expertise across the United Nations system and its partners."[54] Over the past decade, the Secretariat and the Security Council have increasingly relied upon mission-centric independent reviews as the basis for mission planning as opposed to strategic assessments which are intended to examine the overall configuration of the UN in a particular country context. And until the 2023 revision of the integrated assessment and planning policy, the existence of parallel strategic planning frameworks for missions and country teams further served to frustrate efforts to promote coherence. This lack of coherence in planning creates particular challenges during transitions and affects everything from program delivery to logistics and life support.

3.3.3 Recommendations

As a first step, **the existing capacities for field-based planning in the various departments and offices at Headquarters—including the civilian, military, and police planning capacities in DPO, the operational support planning capacities in DOS, and the planning capacity within the Development Coordination Office—should be brought together**, potentially in a matrix management approach, under the overall coordination of the Strategic Planning and Monitoring Unit in the Executive Office of the Secretary-General. This pooling of capacities would not only maximize the impact of existing capacities but would also help enable approaches to joint planning that take into account the expertise, mandates, and concerns of relevant UN system actors in a particular country context to ensure that the Secretariat and member states are able to make informed decisions about the mandate of a potential or existing peace operation.

It is unlikely that, under current arrangements, the incentives that drive units within the Secretariat or elected members of the Security Council to push to expand the range of mandated activities in peace operations can be overcome, though the pressure on individual member states to champion specific issues would be mitigated if it were the General Assembly—rather than the Security Council—mandating a particular mission. One way to work within these constraints is to simply avoid having the mission itself be responsible for implementing all of the mandated tasks. Instead, **missions should engage partners, such as relevant members of the UN country team, to implement mandated tasks on their behalf, using the associated portions of the mission budget**. Such an approach would leverage comparative advantages and take advantage of the breadth of expertise available across the funds and programs, many of which also undertake a range of peacebuilding tasks as part of their country programs. It would help ensure that the configuration of the UN in each country context does not follow a templated approach but instead takes into account the expertise and comparative advantage of all the entities present.[55]

To allow missions to be able to prioritize and sequence the activities that only a mission can implement or to better respond to changing political and security circumstances, **mission budgets should move away from rigid staffing tables in which any changes in staffing require a decision of the General Assembly. Instead, budgets should include a fixed allocation for staffing requirements**, the level of which should be based on an indicative staffing level. This would allow missions to reallocate resources within existing allocations to meet new requirements or priorities rather than force missions to have to request additional posts in budgets. It also obviates the need for the current practice of setting artificial vacancy rates in budgets as a workaround for the mismatch between actual staffing needs, actual staffing levels, and approved posts. Moreover, the requirement for missions to operate within a fixed allocation reduces the problem of accretion in mission budgets—in which there is a tendency for posts to be added to address new requirements but not for posts to be removed when their functions are no longer required. The manner in which missions use their staffing allocation would be fully transparent and reported in the context of the budget performance report. This would also allow for missions to more flexibly use different types of personnel, including both staff and non-staff personnel, including UN Volunteers and government-provided personnel, as required.

At the country level, the planning capacities between missions and the country team can also be pooled to allow the UN to better engage in joint contingency

and transition planning and potentially placed under the deputy head of mission double-hatted as the resident coordinator. The opportunity to leverage the combined capacities of the mission and the country team for logistics, service delivery, and business operations, such as through the alignment of the mission support concept and the business operations strategy should not be lost either. Instead of missions deploying large templated mission support components, the UN system should consider approaching their support requirements as a jointly financed activity not only to increase efficiency, but also to ensure that, regardless of the configuration of the UN system in a country context and even during transitions, all parts of the UN system are adequately supported. This, plus the use of mission assessed funding by UN country teams to implement relevant mandated tasks, would also help enable more meaningful programmatic coherence and integration across UN system actors in a particular country context.[56]

3.4 Accountability for performance by contingents

Military and police contingents represent the largest share of the personnel of peacekeeping operations, and their associated costs represent nearly half of the budgets for peacekeeping operations. They are also present in several special political missions, often in the form of individual police officers and guard units. Similarly, the HIPPO noted that the UN "has struggled to get sufficient forces on the ground quickly enough and relies on under resourced uniformed capabilities with little or no interoperability and weak command and control. Rapidly deployable specialist capacities such as aviation, medical specialists and engineers are difficult to mobilize in advance of infantry units."[57] In addition to challenges with force generation, issues with contingent performance were also of concern to the HIPPO, which noted that underperformance of contingents against reasonable expectations results in "reputational damage to the Organization and contributing countries alike."[58]

3.4.1 The problem

The existing architecture for the deployment of military and police personnel in UN peace operations underpins the current model of multidimensional peacekeeping operation. This architecture includes military and police planning and generation capacities at Headquarters, model memorandums of understanding, and reimbursement frameworks for personnel, major equipment, and self-sustainment capabilities. This architecture, however, was largely created in the 1990s, at a time

when the appetite for multilateral solutions was high, the scale of UN peace operations was growing, and the capacity of the UN Secretariat to manage demand was limited. In 2012, a Senior Advisory Group convened by the Secretary-General concluded that "the basic military model and force requirements of United Nations peacekeeping…needs to evolve. Historically, it has been based on deployments of infantry battalions into relatively static configurations. Yet demands in the field call for evermore mobile and responsive forces as well as more tailored, dynamic approaches to address the specific operational requirements of different missions."[59]

The current approach to force generation drives several persistent problems that affect peace operations. First, the UN struggles to generate specialized and enabling capabilities, such as medical capability, technological support, engineering, intelligence and analysis, and aviation units. Second, the framework for the reimbursement of troop- and police-contributing contributors creates a system of incentives that is at odds with the outcomes sought in peace operations. Third, the existing arrangements make it difficult to hold contributing countries accountable for the performance of their personnel. These challenges have implications beyond UN peace operations, as elements of the UN reimbursement framework have applied to African Union peace support operations since the adoption of resolution 2036 in 2012. Despite the fact that secretaries-general Ban and Guterres informed the Security Council in 2017[60] and 2023,[61] respectively, that the existing UN reimbursement frameworks are not appropriate for African Union (AU) peace support operations, the Security Council decided that UN reimbursement frameworks should apply to AU missions authorized under the arrangements contained in resolution 2719 (2023).

3.4.2 Analysis

The existing approach to force generation for a mission begins with the development of a military concept of operations for the mission. This, in turn, is translated into a statement of force requirements listing the tasks, organization, and number of units and personnel envisaged for the military component of the mission. A statement of unit requirement is then generated for each individual unit that includes the tasks, capabilities, organization, major equipment, and self-sustainment needs of that unit. Over time, military unit manuals have been developed providing further detail on these considerations as they relate to common unit types, such as infantry battalions. The statements of unit requirement are then shared with member states who have expressed interest in contributing to a mission, with priority given to those member states who have

previously registered pledges of units into the Peacekeeping Capability Readiness System, a rapid-deployment roster for force generation. A similar approach is used for the generation of formed police units.

This templated approach to force and police generation was developed to help the UN generate units at a time when peacekeeping operations were expanding rapidly. However, this approach creates several challenges for both contributing countries and the UN. For example, such an approach creates barriers for potential contributors whose militaries are organized in a significantly different manner from the standardized unit types, and the UN may find it difficult to generate specialized requirements that do not fit into standardized unit types. This is not just the case with military units, but also with specialized police teams[62] and other types of capacities that can potentially be contributed by governments.

Another challenge that stems from templated statements of unit requirement is that they are developed around the tasks that a unit should be able to perform as opposed to the effect that they should have in the field. The focus on tasks rather than effects, however, makes it difficult to hold contingents accountable for performance. Moreover, the HIPPO noted that "the ability of field commanders to ensure performance is severely hampered…by the use of caveats and national controls."[63] Caveats are restrictions imposed by many troop- and police-contributing countries on the types of activities that a unit is willing to undertake. Although some caveats are disclosed in advance of deployment, in several cases there have been undeclared caveats that the UN was not made aware of until after the unit had already deployed. A unit may have the theoretical ability and equipment required to undertake certain tasks, but they might not actually undertake those activities when deployed, including if they are subject to a caveat, if they lack the necessary training, or if they are simply unwilling to do so.

The existing framework for engaging troop- and police-contributing countries also lacks the correct incentives to incentivize performance on the part of contingents. The contingent-owned equipment system, which was established in 1996, provides reimbursement to troop- and police-contributing countries on a monthly basis for equipment deployed as part of the memorandum of understanding signed between the country and the UN that is verified to be operational. This, however, creates an incentive for contingents to bring as much equipment as possible but not to use it in order to maximize reimbursement, as equipment that is non-operational—whether due to regular wear and tear, maintenance shortfalls, hostile action, or any other reason—is not eligible for reimbursement. The reimbursement for individual items of major equipment is also calculated based on the generic fair

market value and estimated useful life of that type of equipment rather than the actual value and age of the equipment, therefore creating incentives for contributing countries to deploy older or obsolete equipment. Moreover, the manner in which reimbursement is provided compensates contributing countries for the use of equipment already in inventory but does not facilitate the procurement of new or specialized equipment for deployment. The contingent-owned equipment system also gives the responsibility for the provision of petrol, oil, and lubricants to the UN, which disincentivizes contributing countries from deploying more efficient equipment and reinforcing the traditional reliance of peace operations on diesel generators for their electricity requirements.

In 2013, the General Assembly adopted resolution 67/261 approving the recommendations of the Senior Advisory Group to implement changes to the personnel reimbursement system—which had not been changed since the 1970s—to not only introduce a more representative cost survey system, but to also introduce three elements of performance into reimbursement to troop- and police-contributing countries. These elements were a risk premium, payable to units that performed well under situations of elevated risk; an enabling capabilities premium to incentivize the deployment of critical enablers that are perennially in short supply; and a reduction in the reimbursement provided to contingents with a high degree of contingent-owned equipment unserviceability. The General Assembly, however, limited the impact of these measures by limiting the deduction on account of equipment non-serviceability. Moreover, it has been several years since missions submitted requests for the payment of the premiums, likely due to lack of awareness on the part of force commanders and police commissioners of these premiums.

3.4.3 Recommendations

The current architecture for uniformed personnel primarily consists of the planning and force generation process, the contingent-owned equipment system, and the personnel reimbursement framework. Much of it dates to the 1990s, when the UN was struggling to manage the surge of peacekeeping activity after the end of the Cold War. But the systems put in place to meet requirements 30 years ago have long struggled to meet the requirements of contemporary multidimensional peacekeeping operations operating in nonpermissive environments. New approaches to force generation and reimbursement are required to ensure that missions have the capabilities necessary to implement their mandates.

Today, force generation is essentially focused on output—the deployment of a specified number of units based around pre-defined generic unit types to a mission. Statements of unit requirement today consist of lists of capabilities, tasks, and equipment developed from templated statements of unit requirement for pre-defined generic unit types. **Instead, force generation should shift to focus on outcome—the achievement of specific objectives through the use of military and police units. Statements of unit requirement should focus on what a unit is intended to achieve rather than specifying what a unit should bring**. Each potential contributor would present a proposal for how it would meet the bid using a combination of personnel and equipment. The accepted proposal would then be signed between the UN and the contributing country under a memorandum of understanding. Such a shift in how planning and force generation is undertaken would have multiple benefits. First, it would allow for different approaches to achieving the same objectives and therefore reduce the barriers to entry for potential contributing countries who organize their militaries and police in manners that are significantly different from the generic UN unit types. Second, it would provide the UN a stronger basis for an objective measurement of unit performance, including caveats.[64]

Member states should not treat the next triennial meeting of the Working Group on Contingent-Owned Equipment in January 2026 as business as usual. To address the deficiencies in the contingent-owned equipment system in incentivizing performance, member states should consider reconceptualizing the manner in which reimbursement for contingent-owned equipment is paid to consider the extent to which equipment was used in support of operations. They can also consider ways to apply the risk factor currently applicable to the personnel reimbursement framework to major equipment reimbursement to better meet the increased maintenance requirements of specific units that operate effectively under situations of elevated risk. Moreover, member states should take advantage of the fact that 2026 is the first time that the General Assembly will have an opportunity to examine the contingent-owned equipment system and the personnel reimbursement framework at the same time to identify ways of aligning the two elements into a consolidated approach to more effectively enabling the deployment of required capacities and incentivizing performance of contingents deployed to UN peace operations.

Member states should also take advantage of the fact that the Security Council ultimately did not decide to apply the financing framework of resolution 2719 on the AU Support and Stabilization Mission in Somalia[65] to revisit the question of

whether the UN contingent-owned equipment system and personnel reimbursement frameworks—which were developed for the operational requirements of peacekeeping operations, taking into account the diversity of the UN troop- and police-contributing countries—are appropriate for African Union peace enforcement and counterterrorism operations, which have very different operational requirements. **The African Union, with the support of the UN, should develop a reimbursement framework appropriate for its peace support operations doctrine rather than to attempt to retrofit the UN framework to African Union missions.**

4. Conclusion

To restore the effectiveness of UN peace operations and, by extension, the relevance of the UN, it is essential that peace operations are realigned with their core purpose—supporting credible political processes that can resolve conflict and build lasting peace. This requires breaking down the counterproductive bifurcation between peacekeeping and special political missions, tailoring mission design to context rather than template, and reforming performance and accountability frameworks to better support mission effectiveness. It also requires the Secretariat and member states to grapple with the fact that the stabilization approach that has dominated peacekeeping over the past decade has not worked, and that the militarized approach to the protection of civilians has served as a trojan horse that has cemented the primacy of the military in peacekeeping operations.

These are not novel observations. And yet, despite numerous reviews, reforms, and restructuring efforts initiated over recent decades, United Nations peace operations remain trapped in a cycle of repetitive diagnostics and limited transformation—a Groundhog Day of reform without resolution. While peace operations have been constrained by external geopolitical dynamics, many of their most persistent challenges are deeply rooted in the internal architecture, culture, and incentive structures of the Secretariat itself. Although these elements of the Secretariat were all put in place in response to specific challenges, they have calcified over time into rigid structures, outdated planning paradigms, and rigid budgeting approaches that stifle adaptability and innovation. An organizational culture of self-censorship and suppression of dissent has also prevented the Secretariat from being able to honestly diagnose the challenges faced by its operations and present recommendations to member states on the types of measures necessary to address those challenges.

However, this cycle is not immutable. In the past, crises at the UN have served as powerful catalysts for reform, and the crisis of confidence in peace operations and the liquidity crisis affecting the Secretariat can provide an impetus for thinking about new approaches to peace operations. Over the next eighteen months, several ongoing and upcoming processes can be vehicles for engaging in the discussions necessary to inform a new approach to peace operations, including the ongoing review of peace operations mandated in the Pact for the Future and the

upcoming meeting of the Working Group on Contingent-Owned Equipment. These processes, in turn, can inform the development of the reform agenda of the next Secretary-General, who will take office in early 2027. But to take advantage of the window of opportunity will require honest self-assessment, bold yet pragmatic proposals, and the political will to confront entrenched interests. At stake is not only the future of peace operations, but the credibility of the UN in preventing, managing, and resolving violent conflict.

Endnotes

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