

Making Reform Reality – Enabling Change for United Nations Peace Operations

Almost a year ago the *High-Level Independent Panel on United Nations Peace Operations* (HIPPO) published its report offering a broad range of recommendations aimed at enhancing UN peace operations. Their implementation is currently working its way through the UN system, particularly those aspects taken up in the Secretary General's (SG) subsequent implementation report. However, additional issues deserve Member States' consideration and support. Particular attention should be given to those reform aspects that make an immediate difference for field missions. This background paper therefore highlights six critical areas where UN peace operations have struggled in the past: robustness; protection of civilians; countering violent extremism and asymmetric threats; rapid deployment capabilities; peacebuilding; and prevention and mediation. It also provides suggestions for the way forward. Ultimately, it is Member States' engagement that will determine the success of the UN's peace operations review process.

In the words of UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon “[t]he world is changing and our support to peacekeeping, and indeed all peace operations, must keep pace.”¹ What, then, are the key changes, and how are they impacting UN missions? Firstly, there has been a surge in the number of major violent conflicts. After a long decline, their number has roughly tripled between 2007 and today. Secondly, four trends threaten the success of peace operations² and the safety of their staff: the increasing influence of transnational crime, the spread of

violent extremism, the lack of cooperation by many host governments, and the growing regionalization and global interconnectedness of conflicts. As a result, conflicts are becoming more complex, comprehensive political solutions are more difficult to achieve, and the risk to UN personnel is growing.

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The views and opinions expressed in this paper are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the Center for International Peace Operations or of any commissioning party.

¹ United Nations, “*Secretary-General's Remarks at Summit on UN Peacekeeping*,” 26 September 2014.

² This term is used here to encompass the full spectrum of UN peace operations although some of the issues covered in this paper, such as the use of force, are relevant primarily for multidimensional peacekeeping missions.

in *Special Political Missions* (SPMs) led by the *Department of Political Affairs* (DPA). Over 80 percent of UN personnel are currently deployed in sub-Saharan Africa. New operations were recently established in highly challenging environments in Mali and the Central African Republic (CAR), while existing operations in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and South Sudan underwent dramatic changes. In addition, the UN plays a key role in the Middle East and North Africa, with political missions and envoys advancing peace initiatives in Libya, Yemen, and Syria. The UN has also mustered the ingenuity and resources to pioneer entirely new mission formats, tackling both chemical weapons in Syria and viral diseases in West Africa.

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Against this background the SG commissioned the HIPPO to conduct a fundamental review of UN peace operations. The review represents a continuation of peace operations reform efforts that started with the Brahimi report in the year 2000. The HIPPO published its report in June 2015, taking up a broad range of strategic and operational issues and making dozens of recommendations spread over more than 100 pages. Less than three months later, the SG's implementation report offered a road map for the implementation of specific recommendations. This report is much shorter – due to its set format – and limited in scope, focusing on near-term objectives that can be taken forward during Ban Ki-moon's last year in office. This reflects both a desire to rapidly improve UN

system responses by “picking low hanging fruit,” as well as the SG's wish not to present his successor with a pre-set reform agenda. A number of aspects beyond those currently under implementation deserve consideration and it is now up to Member States to ensure that these are not lost and to drive change in critical areas. This paper focuses on six areas where UN peace operations have often struggled in the past: robustness; protection of civilians; countering violent extremism and asymmetric threats; rapid deployment capabilities; peacebuilding; and prevention and mediation. This paper is meant as a catalyst for frank discussions between Member States, the Secretariat and field missions. It aims to highlight those issues that make a difference in the daily work of UN personnel on the ground.

1. Robustness

The introduction of robust mandates has been one of the most significant conceptual changes in peacekeeping since its inception. Previous reform efforts – starting with the Brahimi report – have explicitly confirmed the concept of robustness: peacekeeping operations have to be able to protect civilians and defend themselves and the mandate, if need be through the use of force. They also stressed the operational requirements that come with robust mandates whether in the area of mobility, situational awareness, command and control, technology or training.³ Last but not least, they have called for greater clarity and consensus on what precisely robust peacekeeping entails.

Against the background of increasingly volatile environments, the HIPPO report focused on three categories of peace operations and highlighted the role that the use of force plays for each of them. *Ceasefire monitoring missions* (largely deployed during the Cold War) increasingly face asymmetric threats in their operational environments. *Peace implementation missions*, deployed in support of a peace agreement, must be able to protect civilians and proactively deter violent spoilers. *Conflict management missions* deployed in the absence

³ For a full list see: United Nations, “*A New Partnership Agenda. Charting a New Horizon for UN Peacekeeping*,” July 2009, p. 21.

⁴ United Nations, “*Uniting Our Strengths for Peace – Politics, Partnerships and People. Report of the High-Level Independent Panel on United Nations Peace Operations*,” A/70/95 – S/2015/446, June 2015, p. 44, para. 116 (hereafter: “HIPPO report”).



of a viable peace process “must operate on the assumption that the use of force may be necessary from the outset to protect civilians and to defend the mission and its mandate.”⁴

“Political efforts must be backed by firm resolve, including, where required, the use of force. ... However, a UN peace operation is not designed or equipped to impose political solutions through sustained use of force.”

(SG implementation report, p. 4, para. 15)

While the number of conflict management missions might be on the rise, the panel stressed their limits: “... absent fast-deploying and interoperable forces, a robust military logistics system, strong command and control and ready reserves ... peacekeeping missions may struggle even to reach full operating capability.”⁵ The panel noted that other actors – coalitions of the willing or regional organizations – might be better placed to respond in situations where there is no peace to keep. Should UN missions deploy in situations of ongoing conflict, their viability must be regularly reviewed against parallel political processes. Extreme caution, the panel argued, should guide mandates “to de-grade, neutralize or defeat a designated enemy.”⁶

The SG in his implementation report echoed the need for but also the limits of robust operations, stressing that “political efforts must be backed by firm resolve, including, where required, the use of force” while at the same time

UN peace operations are “not designed or equipped to impose political solutions through the sustained use of force.”⁷ He announced his intention to explore with the AU and EU how the *African Standby Force (ASF)* and *EU Battle-groups* may serve as bridging forces in situations of major conflict.

Experiences over the past decade have shown that a gap exists – and persists – between mandates and practice when it comes to robust peacekeeping. In practice, peace operations rarely make use of their authority to use force – even where the situation on the ground would require such action. A 2014 report by the *UN Office of Internal Oversight (OIOS)* for example found “a persistent pattern of peacekeeping operations not intervening with force when civilians are under attack.”⁸ The report also highlighted reasons for this pattern which include: difference in views between the Security Council (SC) and Police and Troop Contributing Countries (P/TCCs); a second line of command to P/TCC’s capitals; a lack of understanding of the legal obligation to act; (perceived) insufficient capabilities; and fear of penalties if the use of force was later judged to have been inappropriate.

How can this gap be closed and performance in the field enhanced? While – as the HIPPO report noted – Member States’ capacities play a key role, a number of factors need to come together to enable the implementation of robust mandates. Conceptual clarity needs to form the basis for greater consensus among the SC, the Secretariat and P/TCCs on the task at hand. Forging such a consensus will have to include continuous dialogue with P/TCCs on what they require in order to deliver on robust mandates. When it comes to implementation in the field, political backing will be just as important as the requisite operational capacity. Finally, reliable partnerships with other international organizations are required where the tasks exceed UN capacity, for example for the deployment of bridging forces.

⁵ Ibid, p. 45, para. 118.

⁶ Ibid, p. 12.

⁷ United Nations, “*The Future of United Nations Peace Operations: Implementation of the Recommendations of the High-Level Independent Panel on United Nations Peace Operations*,” A/70/357 – S/2015/682, September 2015, p. 4, para. 15 (hereafter: “SG implementation report”).

1. Robustness

The Way Forward

Member States should:

- Publish (national) experiences of successful robust peacekeeping;
- Engage in P/TCC-P/TCC dialogue on standards for and commitment to robust operations;
- Consider offering capabilities through the new force generation system, particularly in areas where capabilities for robust, high-tempo operations are missing;
- Avoid incentives for the non-use of contingent-owned equipment in the final agreement of the 2017 contingent-owned equipment and reimbursement review;
- Support UN-EU and UN-AU dialogue on partnering with a focus on bridging operations.

Member States should support the Secretariat in:

- Promoting clarity on robustness and providing the requisite tactical guidance and training;
- Reviewing capacities and identifying gaps, taking into consideration the new force generation system and pledges made at the “Leaders’ Summit on Peacekeeping” in New York in September 2015;
- Encouraging clear mandates and facilitating shared understanding of P/TCC needs and obligations through dialogue with the P/TCCs before deployment.

2. Protection of Civilians

The protection of civilians (PoC) is a moral imperative and a core task of the UN. Nothing does more damage to the legitimacy of a UN peace operation than the failure to stop attacks against civilians. In fact, over 98 percent of uniformed personnel deployed in peacekeeping missions today are specifically mandated to protect civilians, if need be through the use of force.

Both the HIPPO and the SG’s implementation report pointed to the numerous non-military PoC tools available. These include political advocacy by the mission leadership to promote peace and reconciliation processes, human rights monitoring and reporting, outreach to local communities, liaising with local and international humanitarian actors, and strengthening the capacity of host country security and rule of law institutions. While this approach has the advantage of being broad and inclusive and tying civilian PoC measures to the new emphasis on prevention and peacebuilding, neither the HIPPO nor the SG implementation report make clear how this is to be operationalized.

“It is an unfortunate reality that no amount of training and good leadership, or troops and helicopters, will ensure the protection of all civilians across the 11 million square kilometres that 106,000 uniformed UN peacekeepers are today asked to operate in.”

(HIPPO report, p. 41, para. 103)

When non-military tools fail, most mandates not only authorize, but actually require UN troops and police missions to use force to protect civilians. In practice, though, this is often not the case. The OIOS report on the implementation of PoC mandates pointed out that missions rarely respond immediately when civilians come under attack and when they do respond, they almost never use force against the perpetrators.

A number of urgent reforms are thus needed to close the gap between what UN peace operations are asked to deliver and what they can actually provide. Much conceptual work remains to strengthen the civilian component of PoC work and its coordination with the work of military UN actors. Intelligence on threats

⁸ United Nations, “Evaluation of the Implementation and Results of Protection of Civilians Mandates in UN Peacekeeping Operations. Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services,” A/68/787, March 2014, p. 1 (hereafter: “OIOS report”).



to civilians, as well as early warning systems, need to be improved. The Secretariat must realistically assess PoC needs during mission planning and clearly communicate resulting capacity requirements to the SC and Member States. Should the required resources not be forthcoming, should conditions on the ground change, or some contingents consistently underperform, the SG needs to inform the SC, Member States and the public and insist on remedial action. Finally, TCC's caveats should be communicated to the Secretariat ahead of the deployment in a transparent manner.

2. Protection of Civilians

The Way Forward

Member States should:

- Insist on proper reporting of PoC incidents from contingents to mission HQ to the Secretariat, to the SC and Member States;
- Increase capacities for information gathering, analysis and dissemination as the basis for improved assessment, planning, and evaluation of PoC requirements;
- Reduce, as far as possible, the use of national caveats and coordinate those that remain with the Secretariat before deployment.

Member States should support the Secretariat in:

- Operationalizing non-military, preventive PoC measures and making PoC a focus of long-term peacebuilding strategies, e. g. through better coordinating the efforts of the political, civilian affairs, protection, and human rights sections, as well as with development components of missions;
- Developing strategies for missions to engage both local communities and humanitarian actors in order to improve early warning mechanisms;
- Issuing precise guidance on how to prevent or counter threats to civilians to all police and military contingents in their native language to be used in pre-deployment training.

3. Violent Extremism and Asymmetric Threats

Today, a growing number of UN missions are facing asymmetric threats from violent extremists. Indeed, 90 percent of SPM personnel and two thirds of blue helmets work in high-risk environments. This raises one practical and two policy-related issues that urgently need to be addressed.

The practical issue concerns staff safety. The UN needs to enact measures that protect its personnel “while enabling, not limiting, operational activity”⁹ as simple “bunkerization” makes it impossible for the mission to engage with local counterparts and the population. In response to the HIPPO recommendations, the SG report listed a number of measures that the Secretariat is currently implementing. In the near future, all security resources for military, police and civilian personnel will be consolidated under the authority of the *Department of Safety and Security* (DSS). The Secretariat will also revise the existing *UN Security Management System* (UNSMS), and a new *Medical Support Manual* will be issued shortly that focuses on improving the UN’s response to medical emergencies.

There are other issues, however, on which both the HIPPO and the SG report are less concrete. A system to improve situational awareness and a mandatory regime of realistic crisis simulation exercises are required to improve staff safety in such settings. It is also high time that the UN introduced organizational changes that would allow it to accelerate human resources and procurement processes in crisis situations. Ideally, the organization should also provide for a surge capacity of security and medical personnel for quick deployment. More thought should be given to the creation of small guard units for those political missions that currently lack any armed component. There are precedents for this practice stretching back from Iraq in 2004 to the Central African Republic and Somalia in 2013. Furthermore, the UN needs to develop a policy on the use of private

⁹ H. Willmot, S. Sheeran and L. Sharland, “*Safety and Security Challenges in UN Peace Operations*,” International Peace Institute, July 2015, p. 1.

service providers, from security companies to emergency medical support, in order to consolidate its current case-by-case approach.

On the policy side, the UN's role in combating violent extremism needs to be clarified. The HIPPO report states that "UN peacekeeping operations ... are not suited to engage in military counter-terrorism operations."¹⁰ This view is also endorsed in the SG's report and shared by many Member States. While this red line is understandable politically, it does not take into account the realities on the ground in missions like Mali, where MINUSMA is unlikely to be able to deliver its mandate without tackling violent extremism. In this context, it is also important to note that threats to staff safety are not triggered by UN military action against violent extremists. The precise nature of the UN's posture makes no difference to such groups, as attacks on purely civilian presences in Afghanistan, Iraq, Algeria, and Nigeria demonstrate.

As to the second policy issue, neither the HIPPO nor the SG implementation report said much on how to integrate the prevention of violent extremism into the activities of UN peace operations. While there is agreement that field missions must play a role in implementing the UN's *Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy* and the SG's current *Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism*, a clear, actionable definition of that role does not yet exist. In addition, more clarity is needed on the connection between violent extremism and organized crime and their combined impact on UN peace operations.

A further complicating factor is the multitude of UN entities active in the field of countering violent extremism, from the *UN Office on Drugs and Crime* (UNODC) to the *Office of Rule of Law and Security Institutions* (OROLSI) and the *Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force* (CTITF). Much work remains to be done to coordinate their activities and create a "One UN" approach, based on a shared analysis of capabilities and priorities. Finally, this field

provides ample opportunities for the UN to profit from an exchange of experiences and concepts with other international organizations such as the EU, NATO and the OSCE.

3. Violent Extremism and Asymmetric Threats

The Way Forward

Member States should:

- Provide surge capacities for security and medical personnel in crisis situations;
- Generate consensus on the creation of guard units for political missions;
- Initiate a frank debate on the role of UN operations in countering violent extremism;
- Bring together the UN, EU, NATO and OSCE to exchange lessons learned and strategies in countering violent extremism.

Member States should support the Secretariat in:

- Improving the security of UN installations and reducing the threat posed by improvised explosive devices (IEDs) through improved pre-deployment training, the use of modern technologies, and the assistance of the UN Mine Action Service (UNMAS);
- Devising an effective system for acquiring, analyzing and operationalizing information for peace operations, specifically including a UN policy on sharing sensitive information;
- Installing a mandatory regime of realistic simulation exercises and providing technical assistance to P/TCCs in its implementation;
- Developing a policy on the use of private service providers;
- Critically evaluating P/TCC's experience gained from participating in MINUSMA and sharing the lessons learned with field missions, the Secretariat and Member States;
- Providing greater clarity on how to integrate the prevention of violent extremism into the activities of UN operations, beginning with a clear division of labor between the various UN entities active in this field.

¹⁰ HIPPO report, p. 45, para. 119.



4. Rapid Deployment Capabilities

As the HIPPO report underlines, “slow deployment is one of the greatest impediments to more effective peace operations.”¹¹ Delays turn high expectations with regard to the protection of the local population into disappointment, damaging UN legitimacy. Slow deployment also leaves early arriving elements dangerously exposed as the mission “trickles into a highly demanding environment.”¹² And yet, the average time from mandate authorization to deployment for a UN peacekeeping operation remains at about six months.

Force generation is a highly complex process requiring an intimate knowledge of the UN system which military staff seconded by Member States for limited periods of time often lack. It also needs to be based on a thorough understanding of the challenges on the ground and the capabilities available to tackle them. While speed of deployment is vital, it must be balanced against the need for contingents that, on the one hand, meet high standards and, on the other, are willing and able to act robustly if necessary. For this “impossible trinity” nobody has yet found a practicable solution.

A fully trained and equipped on-call UN vanguard force would be one possibility, and in fact this proposal is as old as Article 43 of the UN Charter. As one of the standard recommendations to improve the performance of UN peace operations, it has been put forward in almost every reform proposal since the Brahimi report. However, calls for a global, stand-by capacity have always gone unheeded. Member States clearly have serious misgivings about both the cost of such an arrangement and the possibility of creating a “UN army” under the control of the Secretariat.

While the creation of such a major stand-by capacity may be politically unachievable, modest progress may be possible. The HIPPO report identified four minimum capabilities: 1) small regional rapid deployment capabilities; 2) an arrangement for rapid transfer of assets be-

tween UN missions in a crisis; 3) a rapidly deployable integrated military, police and civilian headquarters capacity and 4) a system of national and regional stand-by arrangements. In this context, the report specifically mentioned the merit of securing commitments from emerging African capabilities.

Such a stand-by system should also include arrangements for ultimately transforming regional contingents into UN blue helmets, as recent re-hatting experiences in both Mali and CAR have been problematic. The UN and relevant (sub)regional organizations need to jointly develop robust rules on logistics, conduct, and performance standards. Here is a clear opportunity for Member States with advanced militaries to offer support in the form of training and the provision of equipment.

“Slow deployment is one of the greatest impediments to more effective peace operations. When a mission trickles into a highly demanding environment, it is dangerously exposed on the ground ...”

(HIPPO report, p. 63, para. 195)

In this field, the Secretariat has been very active and the SG’s implementation report listed a number of promising developments. A small *Strategic Force Generation and Capability Planning Cell* has been established to engage P/TCCs on required capabilities and to administer the new *Peacekeeping Capability Readiness System* (PCRS). In particular, the PCRS is working to operationalize the remarkable result of the “Leaders’ Summit on Peacekeeping” in September 2015. On this occasion, 40,000 new uniformed personnel, 40 utility and attack helicopters, 15 engineering companies and ten field hospitals were pledged to the UN. Building on these pledges, DPKO expects to have an additional 16,000 troops ready for deployment to UN missions by the end of 2016.

¹¹ HIPPO report, p. 63, para. 195.

¹² Ibid.

The Secretariat is also working on pre-established arrangements with Member States and regional organizations for key capacities such as strategic airlift, engineering, mobility, intelligence, and medical expertise. One promising model is the “Standing Engineering Capacity” provided by Germany, a unit that can be matched within 72 hours to their modular, ready-to-ship equipment and then deployed to peace operations as well as to humanitarian emergencies and disaster management.

A complementary initiative is the creation of triangular partnerships between the Secretariat, a TCC and a Member State providing specialist training, equipment or resources to the latter.

4. Rapid Deployment Capabilities

The Way Forward

Member States should:

- Work to overcome the political, administrative and financial obstacles to the implementation of the four minimum capabilities recommended in HIPPO;
- Participate in arrangements for the provision of specialized support packages for key capacities such as strategic airlift, engineering, mobility, intelligence, and medical expertise.

Member States should support the Secretariat in:

- Streamlining the re-hatting of regional contingents by jointly developing rules on logistics, conduct, and performance standards and provide training and equipment support;
- Creating a system of national and regional stand-by arrangements, specifically with emerging African (sub)regional capabilities as bridging forces.

5. Peacebuilding

Building and consolidating peace is a key success factor and the only plausible exit strategy for UN peace operations. The past two decades have seen a shift in peace operation mandates from a primarily military focus, such as ceasefire monitoring, to multidimensional operations that include a broad range of peacebuilding tasks. Both peacekeeping operations and SPMs thus make important contributions to peacebuilding efforts on the ground by “working with national counterparts and international partners on articulating peacebuilding priorities and providing strategic guidance, assisting in establishing an enabling environment for the implementation of peacebuilding tasks, and by implementing peacebuilding tasks themselves.”¹³

The HIPPO report fully subscribed to the notion advanced by the *Advisory Group of Experts on the 2015 Review of the UN Peacebuilding Architecture* that a new approach to “sustaining peace” is needed.¹⁴ It further highlighted seven deficits that peace operations need to overcome. These include: insufficient consultation with national actors on peacebuilding priorities; a lack of inclusion of a broad range of national actors in peacebuilding processes; disregard for national realities in reform design and implementation; and a lack of strategic planning, coordination and integration of international efforts, including on funding aspects.

The HIPPO report focused its recommendations for improving the sustainability of UN peacebuilding efforts on three main areas: the UN system, field missions and police components. For the latter, both the HIPPO and the SG implementation report called for an external review of the functions, structures and capacities of the *UN Police Division*¹⁵ so that it can better support the development of host country police and contribute to long-term peace in divided societies.

¹³ S. Hearn, A. Kubitschek Bujones, A. Kugel, “*The United Nations ‘Peacebuilding Architecture’: Past, Present and Future,*” Center on International Cooperation, May 2014, p. 13.

¹⁴ For an introduction to the concept of “sustaining peace,” see United Nations, “*The Challenge of Sustaining Peace: Report of the Advisory Group of Experts on the 2015 Review of the United Nations Peacebuilding Architecture,*” A/69/968 – S/2015/490, June 2015, pp. 8–10.

¹⁵ The findings of the review will be presented in the upcoming SG report on UN policing.



The first two areas are interlinked and both contain recommendations that impact the performance of field operations, such as increased cooperation and coordination between field missions and UN Country Teams. Most importantly though, the HIPPO report demanded respect for national ownership in all efforts to sustain peace, which also means a renewed focus on political processes in peacebuilding efforts. Consultations with a broad range of national stakeholders are particularly important in operating environments that lack a comprehensive peace agreement – an increasingly common situation.

In full support of HIPPO report recommendations, the SG therefore urged the SC to consider mandating missions sequentially. This would allow the Secretariat to consult with national stakeholders, UN Country Teams and other international actors regarding the assessment of a particular conflict and required mandated tasks. The sequencing of mandates would also allow for engagement with host countries and regional partners on expectations and commitments. This approach seeks to move away from the current practice of routinely including template language on a multitude of peacebuilding tasks in initial mission mandates irrespective of whether these tasks are a priority in stabilizing the situation on the ground. In addition, the SG has created an analysis and planning capacity at the Secretariat with the aim to enhance a strategic and coherent UN system response to conflict and to help generate comprehensive proposals for prioritized mission tasks.

The HIPPO report also made a case for more flexible financing mechanisms for peacebuilding activities. Under the current system, peace operation budgets do not cover programmatic costs for mandated tasks which are instead financed through voluntary contributions. In practice this means that peace operations usually have enough staff to implement programs, such as training for national police, but have limited access to funding to conduct such trainings.

In his report, the SG stated his intent to include programmatic funding in mission budget requests, as suggested by the panel. However, the HIPPO report foresees a higher level of flexibility, arguing that the most capable entity on the ground should have access to the funding.

Similarly, on enhancing UN system financing for sustaining peace, the SG plans to explore ways to provide predictable resources for the *UN Peacebuilding Fund*, as urged by the panel, but remains vague on the HIPPO report's proposal to establish pooled country-level UN funds that would enable comprehensive responses to peacebuilding tasks across the UN's development, peace and security, and human rights sectors.

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A further issue that is missing in both the HIPPO and SG reports is just how peace operations staff are expected to carry out peacebuilding tasks in dangerous operating environments. How does one engage local stakeholders in contexts where movement of staff is restricted, or when staff is actually located outside of its operating area, as is the case in Libya?

A related challenge is that peace operations are not mandated over time horizons that would be necessary to help build resilient institutions, which can take a generation or more, and thus lack the necessary sustained political commitment and access to regular, predictable and adequate funding.

5. Peacebuilding

The Way Forward

Member States should:

- Encourage the SC to explore ways to prioritize and sequence tasks in mission mandates, including through a sequential mandating process;
- Support the inclusion of programmatic funding in peace operation budgets and insist on the flexible use of these funds among the most capable partners on the ground;
- Support efforts to scale up the *UN Peacebuilding Fund* and encourage the exploration of advantages and disadvantages of interagency, pooled country-level funds as well as other long-term focused funding mechanisms;
- Explore ways for peace operations in dangerous operating environments to engage with national stakeholders beyond capitals;
- Draw from the experiences of donor countries in order to provide insights on how UN peace operations can better engage with development partners.

6. Prevention and Mediation

Although it is one of the core tasks of the United Nations, it is abundantly clear that, as the HIPPO report put it, “the international community is failing at preventing conflict.”¹⁶ Member States are often reluctant to seek support, fearing an internationalization of domestic affairs, while the SC rarely engages in emerging crisis, due to political disunity or concerns over national sovereignty.

Partly for these reasons, the UN’s prevention and mediation activities are chronically underfunded. Currently, a relatively small group of Member States carry the costs for core functions through voluntary contributions.¹⁷

In addition, while both peacekeeping operations and SPMs carry out important mediation and prevention tasks in the field, SPMs lack a support account for substantive backstopping at headquarters as well as mission start-up and expansion resources. This has an impact on support processes and mission performance.

Another set of challenges relates to prevention and mediation activities at the field level. Increasingly, UN missions operate in volatile environments where there is no peace to keep or where the presence of spoilers undermines peacemaking efforts, severely limiting the missions’ ability to engage with local communities. In addition, peace operations are increasingly confronted with multiple non-state actors that either defy negotiated settlements or at times find themselves sidelined in mediation processes, undermining the missions’ chances for success.

The SG implementation report took up the majority of the HIPPO report’s practical suggestions focusing primarily on strengthening existing UN system mechanisms and formats, including expanding the number of regional political offices, strengthening the preventive capacities of UN Country Teams, and the use of “light teams”, that is, of multidisciplinary groups of experts able to deploy quickly in emerging crises. In addition, the SG report highlighted the already existing reform proposals for funding and backstopping political missions before the General Assembly since 2011¹⁸ and called on Member States to reopen negotiations on the topic.

However, the SG in his report did not specifically endorse the panel’s call for a “single peace operations account”, from which all peace operations and their related backstopping activities would be financed in the future. The SG did reaffirm the SC’s early engagement as the Organization’s most powerful prevention tool, but did not take up the panel’s suggestions to strengthen the SC’s approach to dealing with emerging threats, such as through interactive

¹⁶ HIPPO report, p. 31, para. 65.

¹⁷ In 2015, the top three funders to extra-budgetary resources for UN DPA, the UN Secretariat’s lead department for conflict prevention and mediation activities, were the UK, Norway and Germany. See DPA Annual Report 2015, p. 43.

¹⁸ United Nations, “*Review of Arrangements for Funding and Backstopping Special Political Missions. Report of the Secretary-General*,” A/66/340, October 2011.



dialogues, engaging with regional actors and reviving working groups on prevention.

While the SG implementation report thus contains important suggestions on improving existing mechanisms, it leaves room to explore how peace operations – particularly in dangerous operating environments – can translate the key message of the HIPPO report on the primacy of politics into action. This should include ideas for innovative approaches to preventing conflicts and mediating disputes before violence erupts. The proliferation of actors with mediation and prevention capacities provides opportunities for the UN to explore new partnerships, including with civil society organizations, both as a partner and as an enabler and facilitator.

6. Prevention and Mediation

The Way Forward

Member States should:

- Address the concerns of those states that fear an internationalization of domestic affairs by clarifying what conflict prevention entails and what tools exist;
- Adopt the panel’s suggestion to convene an international forum to provide fresh input on approaches to conflict prevention, including closer engagement with local actors, and forge new partnerships;
- Encourage resumption of negotiations on the SG’s reform proposals on the financing of SPMs and consider options for a single peace operations account;
- Explore ways to improve the Security Council’s tools for monitoring emerging issues, such as the increased use of interactive dialogues.

Member States should support the Secretariat in:

- Strengthening field missions’ analytical capacities and situational awareness to provide analysis of complex drivers of conflict and to improve early warning mechanisms.

7. Conclusion

Critics have argued that the HIPPO report came at a difficult point in time. Not only does its implementation fall into the final year of the current SG’s tenure but it was released in a year that also saw two other major UN system reviews, a new, ambitious sustainable development agenda and a universal climate change agreement – all against the background of a changing conflict landscape and deteriorating human security.

At the same time, it can be argued that the moment for change is ripe and that the various reform efforts and reviews – on peace operations, the peacebuilding architecture and the implementation of resolution 1325 – interlink to create momentum for change. Moreover, renewed interest by Member States to invest in peace operations – as witnessed during the “Leaders’ Summit on Peacekeeping” or through the renewed participation of Western P/TCCs in UN-led peace operations – could also provide a window of opportunity for reform.

Ban Ki-moon has wisely chosen to concentrate on some of the more achievable proposals in his final year in office while leaving the bulk of the work to his successor. Her (or his) role will clearly be crucial, but given the magnitude of the challenge, now is the time for Member States to offer their active and practical support. As vital as technical, financial, and personnel resources are, political will is often the scarcest resource. It must be sustained over many years, in spite of emerging crises elsewhere, and it must be informed by and targeted towards the needs of field missions. Whether Member States act singly or in coalitions, it is their political support and concrete contributions that will ultimately determine the success of the UN’s peace operations review process and effectiveness of operations on the ground.

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About ZIF

The Center for International Peace Operations (ZIF) was founded in 2002 by the German government and parliament to strengthen civilian capacities for international peace operations.

The Center's core mandate is to recruit and train civilian personnel and to provide analysis and policy advice on peacekeeping and peacebuilding issues.

ZIF unites training, human resources and analysis expertise under one roof, allowing for an integrated approach.

ZIF works closely with the German Federal Foreign Office and is responsible in particular for Germany's civilian contributions to EU, OSCE and UN missions.

Through joint projects with international partners, ZIF works to expand international civilian crisis management capacities and to contribute to the conceptual evolution of peace operations.

