Five Trends in UN Peace Operations
And Five Calls to Action

Annika S. Hansen, Wibke Hansen, Tobias von Gienanth, Monika Benkler, Tobias Pietz, Martin Waehlisch

zif Center for
International
Peace Operations

Publication details

1. Introduction

Peace operations are the UN's most visible expression of multilateral crisis management.

Since their first incarnation in 1948, over 120 UN peace operations have been deployed. They have proven a flexible and effective tool in diverse conflict contexts, performing tasks from monitoring ceasefires and creating buffer zones between belligerents to supporting peace agreements, elections and, notably, protecting civilians under imminent threat. Through their adaptability, peace operations have remained relevant as the nature of conflict evolved. And yet, over the years, peace operations have often come under pressure – from belligerents, host countries and member states. The Security Council's willingness to mandate new operations as well as the host states' willingness to accept and welcome their presence have fluctuated. Over the past decade, these pressures have mounted in an unprecedented way.

Peace operations have proven a flexible and effective tool in diverse conflict contexts, but pressures have mounted in an unprecedented way.

While world-wide conflict-related suffering is on the rise, peace operations are drawing down: Fewer new peace operations are being launched, while existing missions are being scaled down or closed. This trend has been forming and accelerating over the last ten years with the last multidimensional peace operation being authorised in 2014 – MINUSCA in the Central African Republic. At present, the appetite for new large-scale peace operations appears to have waned, as nations are preoccupied with issues closer to their immediate national interests.

Peace operations personnel (UN, EU and OSCE), 1992 – present

© ZIF 2024
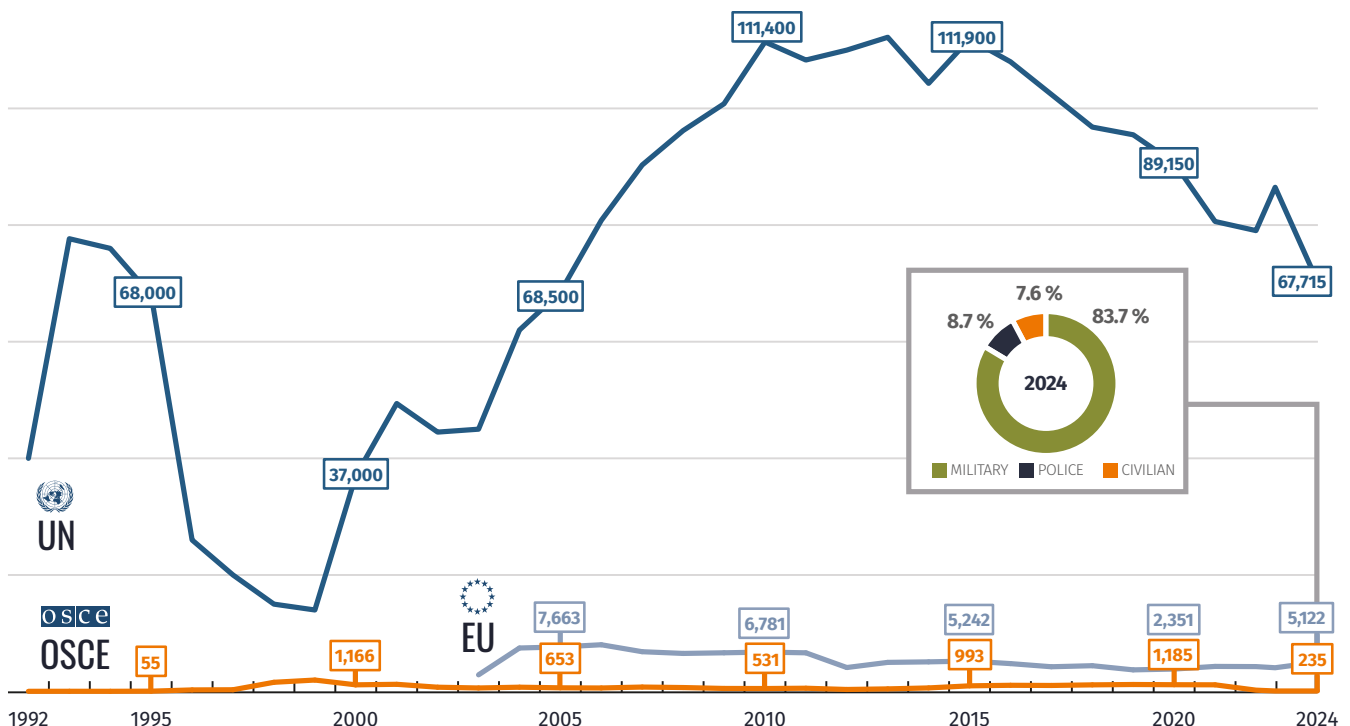
At the beginning of 2025, the UN deploys 11 peacekeeping and 12 field-based special political missions.[1] From late 2023 alone, personnel numbers shrank by roughly 20 % from 85,000 to 68,000 – mainly due to the closure of the UN operation in Mali. This continues a downward trend that began in 2015 – the high-point of peace operations with 112,000 civilian, military and police personnel deployed.[2]

In this publication, we explore both trends that affect the deployment and the effectiveness of peace operations, and opportunities for adapting them to a new global context. Peace operations in their diverse configurations are a key tool in the multilateral toolbox and remain central for international efforts to make, build and sustain peace. Two initiatives offer glimpses of hope for reform, adaptation and innovation.

In 2023, the UN Secretary-General published his *New Agenda for Peace*, outlining his perspective on the state of multilateralism and offering recommendations for alleviating existing pressures. He stressed the need to respond to all types of violence and called for a review of peace operations.

In the *Pact for the Future,* member states reaffirmed their commitment to multilateral conflict management.

In the *Pact for the Future,* adopted by the UN membership in September 2024, member states picked up many of these ideas and added more – tying together their concerns in the areas of development, peace and security, finance and technology. Most importantly, member states reaffirmed their commitment to multilateral conflict management, prevention and peacebuilding and to peace operations as a pivotal tool for peace and security. With the Pact for the Future, member states created a moment of unity in uncertain times and against the backdrop of a changing world order.

1   In addition, the UN Department of Peacebuilding and Political Affairs deploys 9 Special Envoys, eleven Panels of Experts and similar mechanisms, and support offices to the AU and to the Cameroon-Nigeria border commission. As of April 2024.

2   In this publication we understand the term "peace operations" to encompass the full spectrum described in this paragraph: from smaller political missions to large multidimensional peace operations.

2. Five Trends in UN Peace Operations

Geopolitical gridlock weakens consensus on peace operations

Trend 1

The world is in flux. The <u>New Agenda for Peace</u> describes a world in transition to a new, more multipolar global order in which the "unity of purpose expressed by Member States in the early 1990s has waned." Instead, competition, a wanton disregard for international law and a loss of trust raise questions around whether and how a consensus may be found on future peace operations and indeed multilateral crisis management.

The answers to these questions are being hashed out in a divided Security Council and, partially, in an increasingly assertive General Assembly that is rediscovering its historical role. With the growing geopolitical polarisation, especially among the Security Council's permanent five members – between Russia and China on the one hand, and the United States, the United Kingdom and France on the other – mandating and sustaining peace operations has become more difficult. At the most fundamental level, there is a lack of consensus on which situations warrant moral outrage or constitute a threat to international peace and security and therefore require action by the Council.

While the Security Council has routinely renewed most existing missions, it has been unable to agree on significant mandate adjustments or new set-ups over the past few years. The opposition from Russia and China to a new peacekeeping mission in Haiti in October 2024 and Russia vetoing a resolution that called for a ceasefire and humanitarian access in Sudan in November 2024 are cases in point. The Security Council's inconsistent engagement leaves authorised missions bereft of reliable political backing and their leverage when supporting political and peace processes undercut. This lack of unity and backing also makes itself felt at a more granular level when it comes to normative elements of mandates, especially remits to report on human rights violations or to promote gender issues.

The wider membership of the UN is frustrated with both the blocked and national-interest-driven Security Council and with the lack of representation in decision-making bodies. This manifests itself in the growing emphasis on the General Assembly as a forum for discussion among all member states as well as a decision-making body on peace and security issues. Since authorising the UN Emergency Force in response to the Suez Crisis in 1956, the General Assembly has continuously played an important role. This role diminished slightly when the Security Council was fully functional, but is being reclaimed now.

Competition, disregard for international law and a loss of trust raise questions around how a consensus may be found on future peace operations.

The Security Council's inconsistent engagement leaves authorised missions bereft of reliable political backing.

Multilateral conflict management is complicated by the changing role of third-party engagement in conflicts, where some member states fail to align their bilateral involvement with UN Security Council resolutions. Moreover, regional and middle powers, for example in the wider Gulf region, seek a greater political role and fill the space left by a blocked Security Council. Through political, financial and economic support they exert significant influence on conflict parties. In some conflicts, they have even proven their peacemaking potential. Peace operations, too, are learning to navigate these dynamics.

Here and elsewhere, alliances are more transactional, and loyalty is contextualised. For host governments, these alliances or partnerships have opened up fall-back options for external support without uncomfortable strings attached and without the presence of peace operations, which are often perceived as intrusive. As a result, the relationship between host governments and peace operations has deteriorated, with host governments increasingly vocal in demanding the departure of missions or simply withdrawing consent for their presence.

At the same time, the emphasis placed in the Pact for the Future on strengthening prevention and peacebuilding efforts, both of which benefit host governments seeking to secure gains in peace and security, offers the UN an opportunity to reclaim its diplomatic space and more effectively employ peace operations – their most unique and multi-faceted tool.
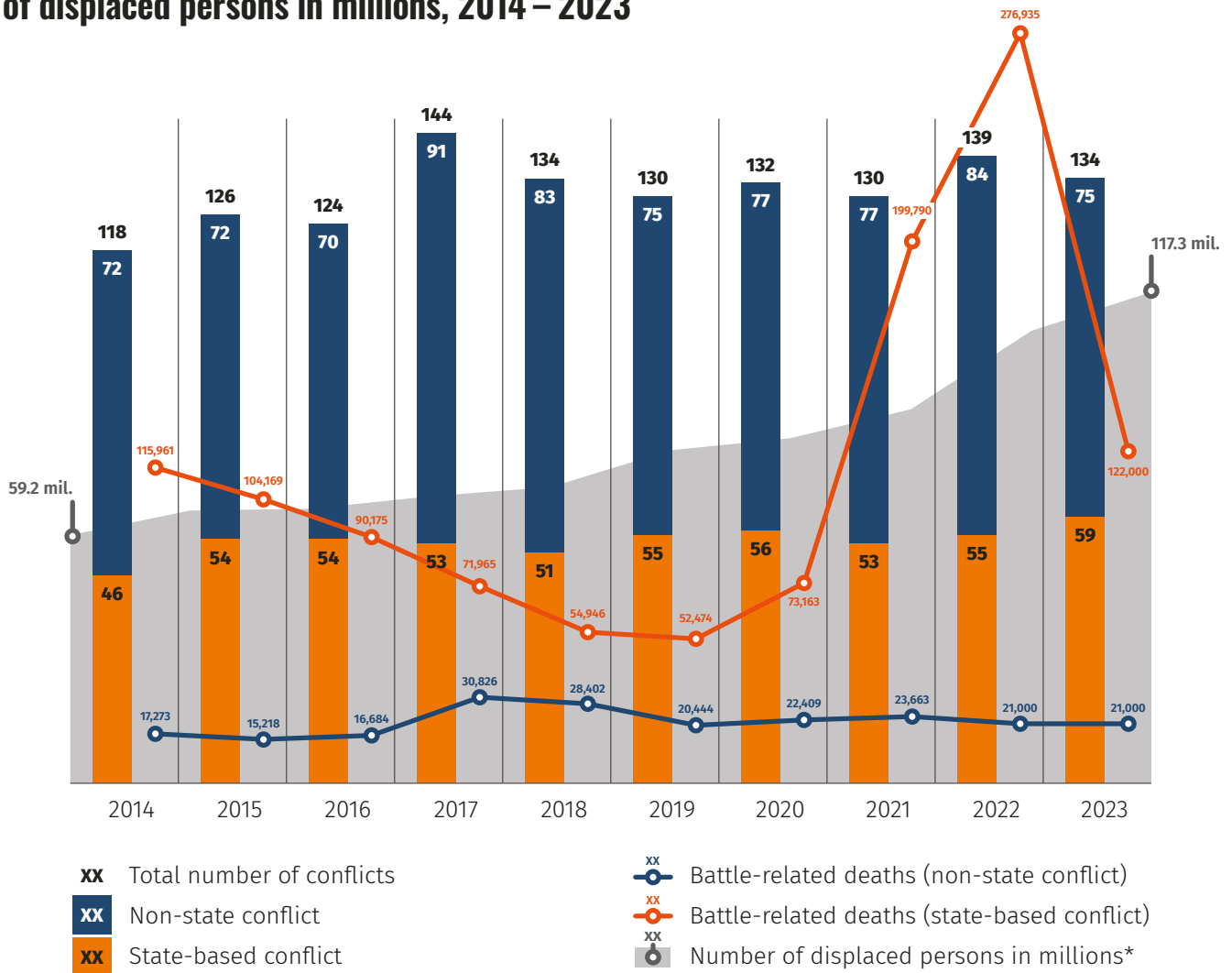
Trend 2

A fragmented and internationalised conflict landscape challenges peace operations

We are witnessing a marked quantitative and qualitative evolution in the nature of conflict that poses new challenges for peace operations and multilateral conflict management overall. During the post-cold war period, peace operations were almost exclusively deployed to conflicts within states. After an initial spike in the early 1990s, the number of civil wars declined until about a decade ago. Since then, however, this trend has reversed. Conflict data by the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO) indicates a 28 % rise in state-based conflicts over the past decade: 2023 saw a record 59 conflicts where at least one party was a state across 34 countries. While most of these conflicts took place within states, the return of inter-state war, signified most notably by Russia's invasion of Ukraine, has had a significant impact on international peace and security. In terms of battle-related deaths in state-based conflicts, "2023 was the third most violent year since 1989." Given escalating conflicts in the Middle East, Ukraine and Sudan, this figure is likely to have risen in 2024.

Projections for 2025 estimate that over 305 million people will require humanitarian aid.

As global norms erode, civilians become increasingly vulnerable: In 2023, over 117 million people were forcibly displaced by violent conflict. By mid-2024 alone, this number had risen to over 122 million. An estimated 299 million people were in need of humanitarian aid in 2023, a staggering figure compared to the 81 million covered by humanitarian response plans in 2014. The most recent projections for 2025 estimate that over 305 million people will require humanitarian aid this year. Reports from various conflict zones indicate that conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) has sharply increased. Reliable figures are hard to come by and are distorted by massive underreporting, but mounting evidence suggests that CRSV is being used as a weapon of war. Compared to the previous year, the number of UN verified CRSV cases was 50 % higher in 2023.

Number of conflicts, number of battle-related deaths and number of displaced persons in millions, 2014 – 2023

Legend:
- XX — Total number of conflicts
- XX — Non-state conflict
- XX — State-based conflict
- XX — Battle-related deaths (non-state conflict)
- XX — Battle-related deaths (state-based conflict)
- XX — Number of displaced persons in millions*

* Forcibly displaced people at the end of 2023 as a result of persecution, conflict, violence, human rights violations or events seriously disturbing public order

Sources: UNHCR Refugee Data Finder – Key Indicators; UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset and UCDP Battle-Related Deaths Dataset (Petterson, Davies, Engström, and Öberg, 2024) | © ZIF 2024

Where livelihoods and critical civilian infrastructure are destroyed, human development stagnates and progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals is reversed, this has long term consequences for future generations.

A fragmented actors' landscape makes today's conflicts intractable. PRIO observed a rise in the number of countries experiencing several state-based conflicts, suggesting a complex conflict environment characterised by multiple actors. The tangled webs of interests, needs, fears and grievances of governments, populations, insurgent groups, criminal gangs and private security providers render identifying entry points for conflict resolution extremely challenging. Global terrorist networks and their local incarnations as well as transnational criminal groups exploit or operate in crisis-afflicted states. The Islamic State, for instance, has been a major driver of state-based conflicts since 2015. While this decreased slightly in 2023, other militant jihadist groups especially in West Africa have picked up the slack.

Reports indicate that conflict-related sexual violence has sharply increased.

Risk factors in conflict areas with international peace operations

Legend:

8.	Index/Ranking
(line)	Position

Countries hosting peace operations 2024/2025

IRC Emergency Watchlist 2025

Global Hunger Index 2024

Corruption Perceptions Index 2023

Fragile States Index 2024

Freedom in the World 2024

Index/Ranking

Countries

Country	Freedom in the World 2024	Fragile States Index 2024	Corruption Perceptions Index 2023	Global Hunger Index 2024	IRC Emergency Watchlist 2025	Countries hosting peace operations 2024/2025
South Sudan	3.	3.	2.	*	5.	●
Somalia		1.	1.	1.	10.	●
Syria	3.	4.	2.		4.	
Sudan	8.	2.	12.		1.	
Haiti		9.	6.	6.	8.	●
Yemen		6.	5.	2.		●
Central African Republic	7.	7.		9.		●
Afghanistan	8.	7.		12.		●
Myanmar		11.	12.		3.	
Democratic Republic of the Congo		5.	12.	5.		●
Chad		10.		3.		●
Equatorial Guinea	7.		6.			

* Individual score for South Sudan could not be calculated. However, using data from previous years, it can be postulated that they are likely to be ranked among the top 10 countries in the Global Hunger Index 2024.

© ZIF 2024

Pursuing political strategies and securing reliable political commitments becomes more difficult and, overall, there are fewer comprehensive peace agreements of the type that peace operations supported in the 1990s. In many peace operations contexts, unconstitutional changes of government have not only reversed peace and security gains, but highlighted how national political developments affect the ability of crisis management operations to support national paths to peace and deliver on their mandates.[3] Information disorder, including disinformation, adds oil to the fire, exploiting grievances for purposes of political manipulation while long-term structural factors such as climate change are increasingly influencing conflict drivers and dynamics.

3 Note that the 2019 unconstitutional change of government in Sudan led to a power-sharing government which was widely supported by the international community until it was upended by the 2021 military coup.

Contemporary conflicts are frequently internationalised, i.e. one or more third-party government(s), including major powers, interfere by delivering military equipment, providing other forms of military, financial and logistical support, or, in fact, by deploying troops. As a result, local conflict becomes entwined with global and regional dynamics. Examples are many: from the Sahel through Sudan to Syria and from Libya to Lebanon, major and regional powers are putting their fingers on the scale. Third parties have vested interests and at times fuel conflicts, and precisely for that reason also need to be part of any conflict resolution. The presence of Private Military and Security Companies has also severely hampered the work of peace operations – all the more where they are proxies for state interests.

The convergence of these conflict trends sets a high bar for peace operations which must navigate conflict settings marked by rising levels of violence and displacement, among complex networks of actors within multilayered information environments and in the face of weakened global norms and global governance.

Timeline of unconstitutional changes of government in Africa 2014 – 2024

Burkina Faso
◦ November 2014
◦ January 2022
◦ September 2022

Sudan
◦ April 2019*
◦ October 2021

Mali
◦ August 2020
◦ May 2021

Chad
◦ May 2021

Guinea
◦ September 2021

Niger
◦ July 2023

2014 2019 2020 2021 2022 2023 2024

Mali: MINUSMA
UN April 2013 – December 2023

Sudan: UNITAMS
UN June 2020 – February 2024

Sudan: UNAMID
UN July 2007 – December 2020

Niger: EUMPM
EU December 2022 – June 2024

Niger: EUCAP Sahel Niger
EU August 2012 – September 2024

* Note that this unconstitutional change of government led to a power-sharing government which was widely supported by the international community until it was upended by the 2021 military coup.

© ZIF 2024

Extension of conflict into the digital realm

Internet users 2023

2023

Global Internet users

67%

Internet users in Least Developed Countries

35%

rural areas **26%**
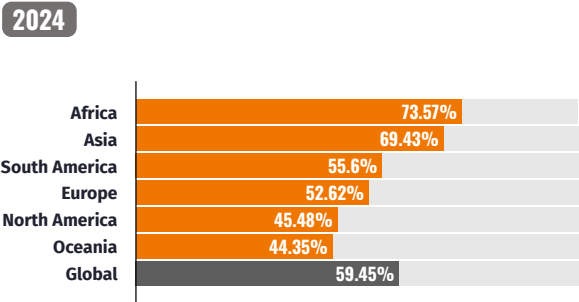urban areas **55%**
////// other
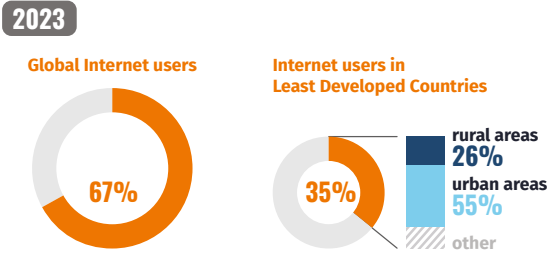
Source: ITU Facts and Figures 2023 | © ZIF 2024

Most popular social networks worldwide as of April 2024, by number of monthly active users (in millions)
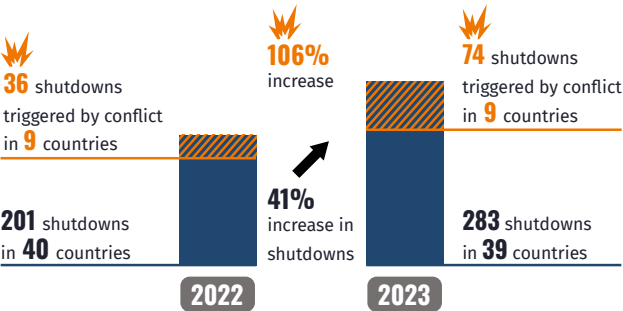
2024

Facebook	3,065
Youtube	2,504
Instagram	2,000
WhatsApp	2,000
TikTok	1,582
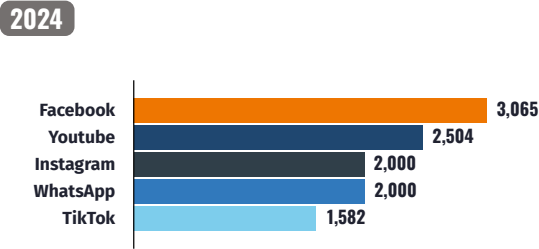
© Statista 2024, adapted by ZIF

Mobile internet traffic as percentage of total web traffic in January 2024, by region

2024

| Region	Percentage
Africa	73.57%
Asia	69.43%
South America	55.6%
Europe	52.62%
North America	45.48%
Oceania	44.35%
Global	59.45%

© Statista 2024, adapted by ZIF

Conflict increasingly a trigger for internet shutdowns

36 shutdowns triggered by conflict in **9** countries

201 shutdowns in **40** countries

106% increase

41% increase in shutdowns

2022

74 shutdowns triggered by conflict in **9** countries

283 shutdowns in **39** countries

2023

Source: Access Now /#KeepItOn, Shrinking Democracy, Growing Violence, Internet shutdowns in 2023, May 2024 | © ZIF 2024

Disinformation campaigns in Africa

189

>50 +

almost quadrupled

2022   **2024**
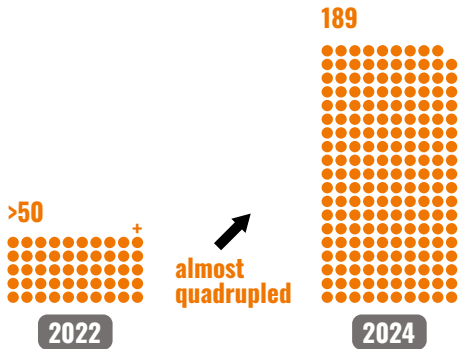
Source: Africa Center for Strategic Studies 2024 | © ZIF 2024

Number of cyber incidents with a political dimension (globally)

353

719

104% increase

2022   **2023**
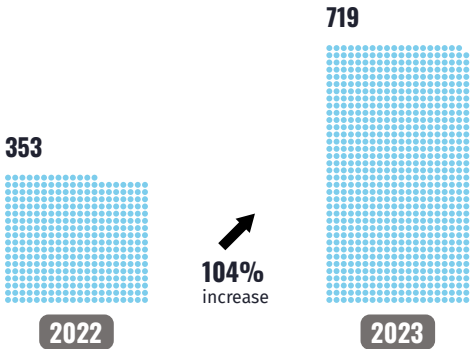
Source: Cyber Incident Dashboard, European Repository of Cyber Incidents | © ZIF 2024

Worldwide expected financial turnover through AI applications in bn. USD

Year	Value
2016	3.2
2017	4.8
2018	7.3
2019	11.3
2020	17.3
2021	26.0
2022	38.0
2023	53.2
2024	71.0
2025	89.8
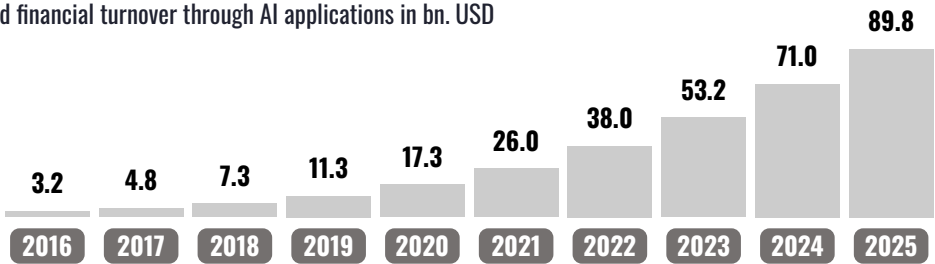
© Statista 2024 | adapted by ZIF

Disinformation poses a threat to peace and a challenge for peace operations

Against a backdrop of geopolitical tensions and rapid technological progress, hybrid threats such as disinformation are becoming a key challenge for peace operations. In Africa, the region with the most extensive UN operations, the number of disinformation campaigns has almost quadrupled in the past two years from approximately 50 (2022) to 189 (2024).[4] At the end of June (2024), UN Secretary-General António Guterres spoke of a "tsunami of false-hoods and absurd conspiracy theories" that peace operations have to deal with.

The consequences are fatal: hostile narratives, deliberately launched disinformation or entire campaigns by external and internal actors delegitimise peace operations, deprive them of the trust of the population, fuel existing tensions, thereby endangering civilians, and hinder mandate implementation. The UN mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), MONUSCO, for example, was the target of disinformation for years and was confronted with false allegations of selling weapons to rebels, or of exploiting natural resources, and increasingly lost legitimacy as a result. In a hostile information environment, whether influenced by external or internal forces, staff security is also threatened. In a 2024 internal UN survey, 42 % of UN peacekeepers expressed concern for their safety and security.

Developments in (generative) artificial intelligence (AI) are already enhancing disinformation further – as a weapon in conflict, a threat to peace and a challenge for peace operations. The production and distribution of harmful content is accelerated, its quality, scope and accuracy enhanced, and production costs are reduced. This significantly lowers the threshold for accessing AI-based tools and renders hybrid instruments more easily available to state and non-state actors alike. For instance, the Russian Wagner Group and its follow-up Africa Corps operates in various countries where UN operations are deployed[5] and is an important instrument through which the Kremlin spreads disinformation. The convergence of easily accessible technologies and global hyperconnectivity has led to a diversification of the actors available as proxies ("deepfake as a service").

In response to this and related phenomena in the cyber and information space (misinformation and hate speech), UN peace operations have adopted a common approach.[6] For instance, they are bolstering their own resilience, which above all includes efficient cyber defence, and are using strategic communications to proactively and preventively strengthen information integrity in a complex operational environment. Still, questions remain as to how peace operations can keep pace with rapid digital change and use it in a targeted manner in support of mandate implementation. The UN Strategy for the Digital Transformation of UN Peacekeeping already provided important answers in 2021. The Global Digital Compact adopted by the UN in September 2024 as part of the Pact for the Future now provides a broader framework that will also serve peace operations. It aims to effectively manage the risks of digital technologies (including international governance of AI) while maximising their benefits.

In Africa, the number of disinformation campaigns has almost quadrupled in the past two years.

AI is already enhancing disinformation – as a weapon in conflict, a threat to peace and a challenge for peace operations.

4   Nearly 60 % of these originate from external state actors – with Russia in the lead (around 40 %).

5   The Central African Republic, where the UN mission MINUSCA is deployed, is the focus of its activities in Africa.

6   UN DPO Policy on Information Integrity in Peacekeeping Settings (16 December 2024).

Trend

4

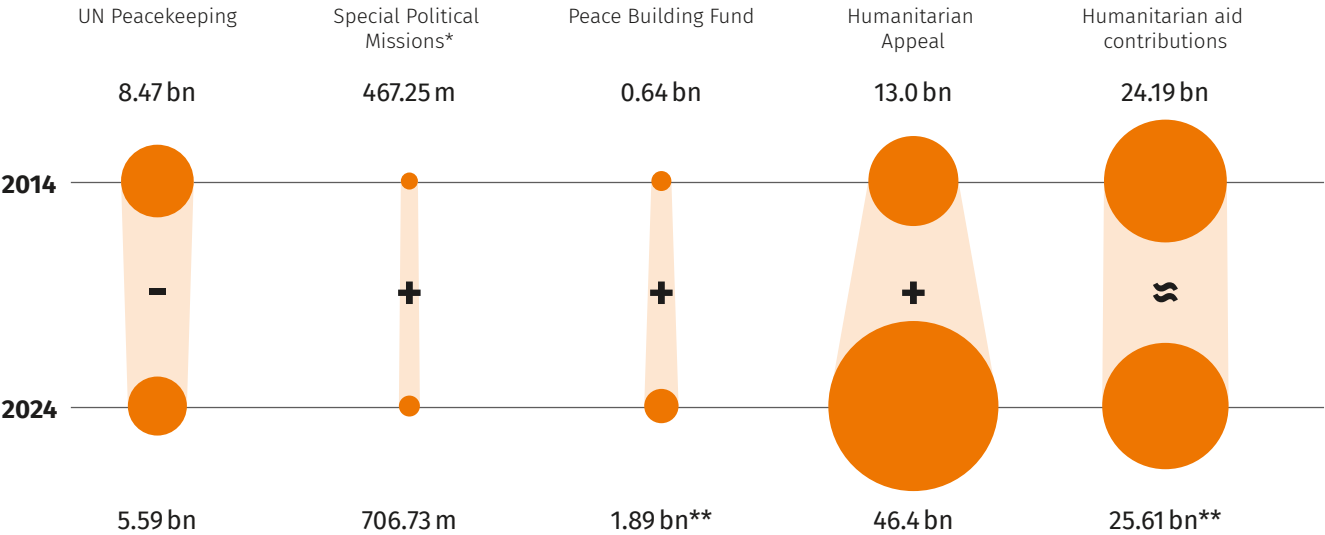# Resource constraints strangle peace operations

Global financial pressures and economic downturn strain international resources for multilateral peace operations, while military spending by UN member states has surged as conflicts intensify and interstate wars re-emerge. In April 2024, the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) reported a record 2.443 trillion USD in global military expenditure, marking a 6.8 % increase from the previous year and the highest level since records began in 1988.

Over the past decades, resources allocated to peace operations have fluctuated significantly, making it increasingly unpredictable whether they will be mandated and sustained. Financial pressure has directed the spotlight onto large multidimensional peace operations and their – perceived lack of – impact. This scrutiny has reduced the appetite for mandating new large operations and contributed to a noticeable preference for smaller and cheaper political missions. Meanwhile, the demand for protection of civilians, peacebuilding activities and humanitarian assistance has been steadily rising due to the growing frequency and complexity of crises.

Financial pressure has directed the spotlight onto large multidimensional peace operations and their impact.

The UN continues to grapple with recurrent liquidity issues rather than outright financial crises. Donor priorities have become more volatile and funds are withheld for political reasons, contributing to an unpredictable financial landscape, which also impacts peace operations. This uncertainty puts essential programmes at risk, as sudden budget cuts or delays in funding can severely disrupt ongoing operations. Over the past decade, the failure of a number of member states to meet their financial obligations on time or in full have exacerbated the strain on the UN's budget and operational capacity. Member states with the highest arrears have aggravated the UN's

Comparing budget developments in USD

	UN Peacekeeping	Special Political Missions*	Peace Building Fund	Humanitarian Appeal	Humanitarian aid contributions
2014	8.47 bn	467.25 m	0.64 bn	13.0 bn	24.19 bn
	−	+	+	+	≈
2024	5.59 bn	706.73 m	1.89 bn**	46.4 bn	25.61 bn**

* Proposed programme budget for the coming financial year; data includes: Thematic cluster I: Special and personal envoys, advisers and representatives of the Secretary-General; Thematic cluster III: Regional offices, offices in support of political processes and other missions; plus UNAMA and UNAMI.

** as of November 2024

Sources: UN Peacekeeping 2014 and 2024; Special Political Missions 2014 [ZIF] and 2024; Peacebuilding Fund 2014 and 2024; Humanitarian Appeal 2014 and 2024; Humanitarian aid contribution 2014 and 2024 | © ZIF 2024

dire financial situation, with about 1.5 billion USD in unpaid regular budget assessments at the end of the third quarter of 2024, the highest amount in four years.

To navigate these challenges, the UN has often resorted to emergency borrowing from reserves and special accounts to keep critical programmes afloat. However, this reliance on stopgap measures undermines the organisation's ability to plan for and maintain long-term stability. The cycle of short-term fixes compromises the sustainability of peace initiatives and reduces their potential to achieve lasting impact.

The failure of member states to meet their financial obligations has exacerbated the strain on the UN's budget.

In parallel, there have been a few key shifts in funding for peace: For one, donors have pivoted toward voluntary, extra-budgetary contributions that are tightly earmarked for specific purposes. While this allows for the funding of targeted projects, it also fosters dependencies and exposes the UN to potential political influence. This erodes the organisation's independence and weakens the multilateral spirit that underpins its mission. At the same time, the proportion of Official Development Assistance going towards peacebuilding and conflict prevention is at a record low, which threatens to undercut the work of peace operations in integrated settings.[7]

The adoption of General Assembly Resolution 78/257 in December 2023 marked a significant development in financing peacebuilding activities and addressing long-standing resource challenges. The resolution established a dedicated multi-year special account, the Peacebuilding Account, as a financing mechanism for the Peacebuilding Fund. It further approved 50 million USD in assessed contributions annually, starting from 01 January 2025, contingent on revising the Peacebuilding Fund's terms of reference. This initiative reflects a concerted effort to ensure predictable and sustainable funding for peacebuilding, reinforcing the UN's capacity to address the root causes of conflict and support long-term stability in fragile contexts.

At the same time, the broader financial challenges remain unresolved. The increasing demand for more flexible and targeted approaches to peace operations, underscores the pressing need for predictable and collaborative funding mechanisms.

Regional organisations are willing to take on more responsibility

Trend 5

Several factors have led to a renewed interest in regional actors as first responders to crises in their areas of responsibility. The most obvious one is geopolitical rivalries in the Security Council that make effective UN engagement difficult in regions like the Middle East or the Sahel, where Council members have strong and competing interests. But UN operations have also been hampered by the withdrawal of host government consent or resistance by local communities. Regional operations are seen by some as a potentially more legitimate alternative that is also more flexible and conflict-sensitive in addressing local conflicts.

Regional operations are seen by some as a potentially more legitimate alternative that is also more flexible and conflict-sensitive.

Some, as the European Union with its missions under the Common Security and Defence Policy, have opted to forego authorisation by a blocked Security Council and instead relied on invitations by the host government. In this way, the EU was able to set up new missions in Ukraine, Armenia and Moldova. At the same time, however, this type of workaround, if adopted more broadly, could erode the UN's role in peace and security.

7   See OECD *Report on the implementation, dissemination and continued relevance of the DAC Recommendation on the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus* (DCD/DAC/INCAF (2023)1/FINAL, 11 March 2024); see also *New Challenges Require New Types of Partnerships: Peacebuilding is Meeting Finance, Interpeace,* October 2024.

Regionalising peace operations: Map of all AU and sub-regional missions 2014 – 2024

Mali and the Sahel

◦ JF-G5S
Joint Force of the G5 Sahel,
07/2017 – 2024

Mali

◦ MISAHEL
AU Mission for Mali
and the Sahel,
since 08/2013

The Gambia

◦ ECOMIG
Economic
Community of
West African
States Mission
in The Gambia,
since 01/2017

Guinea-Bissau

◦ MASGB
ECOWAS Stabilisation
Support Mission,
since 06/2022

◦ ECOMIB
ECOWAS Mission in Guinea-Bissau,
05/2012 – 11/20209

Ghana

◦ MNJTF-AI
Multinational Joint Force –
Accra Initiative, since 06/2022

Lake Chad Basin

◦ MNJTF
Multinational Joint Task Force,
since 03/2015

Central African Republic

◦ MOUACA
African Union Military Observer Mission
in the Central African Republic, 07/2020 – 2023

◦ MISAC
AU Mission for the Central African Republic
and Central Africa, since 09/2014

◦ MISCA
African-led International Support Mission
to the Central African Republic, 10/2013 – 09/2014

© ZIF 2024

Libya

◦ AU-Mission in Libya,
since 02/2020

Misc.

◦ RTF
AU-led Regional Task Force
the Elimination of the
Lord's Resistance Army,
11/2011 – 09/2018

Darfur

◦ UNAMID
African Union /
United Nations Hybrid Operation,
10/2007 – 12/2020

South Sudan

◦ CTSAMVM
IGAD Ceasefire and Transitional
Security Arrangements Monitoring
and Verification Mechanism,
since 05/2016

Ethiopia

◦ MVCM
AU Monitoring, Verification and
Compliance Mission, since 12/2022

Burundi

◦ AU Observer Mission
07/2015 – 05/2020

Somalia

◦ AUSSOM
AU Support and Stabilization Mission
in Somalia, since 01/2025

◦ ATMIS
AU Transition Mission in Somalia,
04/2022 – 12/2024

◦ AMISOM
AU Mission in Somalia,
02/2007 – 03/2022

Democratic Republic of the Congo

◦ SAMI-DRC
Southern African Development Community
Mission, since 12/2023

◦ EAC JRF
East African Community Joint Regional
Force, 09/2022 – 12/2023

Mozambique

◦ SAMIM
SADC Mission, 07/2021 – 07/2024

Personnel numbers

● less than 100
● 100 – 1,000
● more than 1,000

But nowhere is this interest in empowering regional organisations more visible than in Africa. Not only did the continent see the number of state-based conflicts double in the last decade, it also still leads the world in both the number and the size of peace operations deployed. Both the New Agenda for Peace and the Pact for the Future, specifically name the African Union (AU) and African subregional organisations as key partners that also might fill a critical capability gap.[8]

There is broad agreement that UN peace operations are not suited to enforce peace or fight terrorism. Yet for many African states, this is exactly the kind of support they are looking for. Therefore, the New Agenda called for "a new generation of peace enforcement missions … led by African partners with a Security Council mandate … with guaranteed funding through assessed contributions."

There is broad agreement that UN peace operations are not suited to enforce peace or fight terrorism.

UN Security Council Resolution 2719, passed in December 2023, finally gave the AU access to this source of funding to cover up to 75 % of the cost of future AU-led Peace Support Operations (AU PSOs) that have received a UN mandate. While the resolution clearly marks a milestone for the UN-AU partnership, it is not the silver bullet that will on its own overcome all challenges to peace operations on the African continent, even if some representatives of the AU and its member states hailed it as such.

One acute problem is the unresolved issue of "subsidiarity," a principle that calls for solutions to be sought as close to the problem as possible and is used to delineate the responsibilities of the AU and the multitude of sub-regional organisations engaged in crisis management on the continent. To make matters worse, some African countries have multiple and overlapping memberships and use these to "forum-shop". For instance, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, unhappy with the stance of the UN mission MONUSCO, invited an enforcement mission from the East African Community to fight Rwandan-backed rebels in the east of the country. When this also failed to make any headway, it was replaced by a similar operation by the Southern African Development Community (see map).

Resolution 2719 also – and very much intentionally – left numerous issues vague. While some progress has been made on UN-AU cooperation, the first mission meant to receive funding under 2719, AUSSOM, did indeed replace ATMIS in Somalia on 01 January 2025 – but in name only. As of mid-January 2025, both the financing of stipends and the number of troop contributors remains unresolved.

A number of open questions must urgently be clarified and operationalised. First, the UN, AU and potential donors need to discuss how to cover the 25 % funding gap for AU PSOs. Second, the UN and AU need to develop joint planning guidelines and modalities for joint decision-making and specifically clarify the level of oversight the UN would retain over AU PSOs. Third, in order to be able to meet these requirements, various AU units will have to be strengthened, both in size and capacities. Fourth, the UN should think of how to adapt some of their rules and regulations regarding procurement and reimbursement to the requirements of AU PSOs. The broader question of whether all this will ultimately yield better results for populations suffering from conflict remains open.

8   See Action 10 in the New Agenda for Peace
    and Action 21 in the Pact for the Future.

3. Five Calls to Action

<table>
<tr><td>Call to Action</td><td>1</td></tr>
</table>

Modular approaches – rethinking peace operations models

While most member states remain committed to peace operations, different challenges, including trust deficits, delivery failures and financial pressures, have encouraged thinking around how peace operations might be reconfigured to better navigate complex and changeable conflict environments. For years, peace operations have been called upon to be more flexible and adaptive to local contexts as well as to changing dynamics over the course of the mission's lifecycle. The configuration of peace operations – in concert with their partners – must be context-specific and conflict-sensitive. At a more strategic level, they must also prepare for a constantly evolving conflict landscape.

The UN system has a unique range of tools that no other international organisation can match.

It is also clear that no one organisation or actor can fully deliver on the demands of complex conflict settings including multiple sets of grievances and root causes. The UN system has a unique range of tools that no other international organisation – let alone state – can match, but these have not been calibrated to their best advantage. In contentious times, where the credibility, legitimacy and effectiveness of different tools is being questioned, applying them in accordance with their respective comparative strengths is key.

As logistically complex and politically sensitive undertakings, peace operations require some standardisation ranging from organisational structures to how different tasks are approached and to the type of personnel and equipment member states are asked to contribute. This has led to considerations around new peace operations models that make use of modular approaches. New modular approaches offer an opportunity to finally make a reality long-standing recommendations on integrating the "full range of civilian capacities and expertise across the United Nations system and its partners," such as the Secretary-General reiterated in his New Agenda for Peace.

Modular approaches demand progress on institutional integration and on structural changes.

Based on the fundamental principle that form should follow function, current thinking proposes a collection of building blocks which can be assembled to meet the needs of a specific political and conflict context.[9] While there may be stand-alone peace operations, it is more likely that a host of actors from the UN system, other international organisations or national partners, will take charge of different parts of the puzzle. By more clearly differentiating blocks and identifying their primary thrust, these proposals make it easier to assess which actor offers a comparative advantage in implementing it.

Still, the need for strategic coherence and politically guided operations suggests that the mandate that the Security Council bestows on a peace operation should provide the strategic framework for marshalling and organising different contributions.

9 As put forward in the independent study by El-Ghassim Wane, Paul D. Williams and Ai Kihara-Hunt on *The Future of Peacekeeping, New Models, and Related Capabilities* (October 2024) or in Eugene Chen's report on *A New Vision for Peace Operations* (October 2024).

→ **What do we need to succeed?**

Modular approaches require **member state commitment and ability** to provide political support, financial and personnel resources and to deploy capacities flexibly in a variety of frameworks and deployment settings. Moreover, modular approaches demand **progress on institutional integration**, including adjustments in planning processes to avert "path dependencies" and on structural changes that allow the use of resources in different settings. A **review of comparative advantages** is an essential step towards streamlining a system which at present incentivises actors to expand their activities to ensure sustained funding, resulting in duplicate and competing capacities. Most importantly and perhaps intangibly, leadership and a **change in mindset** should together provide strategic support for integration. For a modular peace operation to be authorised, there is ultimately a need for **leadership in the Security Council** that leaves room for innovation as well as provides sustained political backing.

Peacebuilding – linking peace operations with a cross-cutting agenda

<div style="color:orange">Call to Action **2**</div>

The term "post conflict peacebuilding" was first defined in the 1992 Agenda for Peace as "action to identify and support structures which will tend to strengthen and solidify peace in order to avoid a relapse into conflict." Since then, its understanding has been broadened to encompass the entire conflict cycle from prevention to post-conflict support. The inclusion of peacebuilding tasks into the mandates of peace operations since the early 1990s – expanding their responsibilities beyond the more static ceasefire monitoring and creation of buffer zones – was one of the most significant adaptations peace operations underwent since their inception. Multidimensional peace operations uniting both peacekeeping and peacebuilding functions – often under a robust mandate – became the preferred model for stabilising post-conflict and fragile states in the post-cold war era.

The potential of embedding peace operations more fully in a peacebuilding agenda is yet to be fully unlocked.

Policy has evolved significantly since the 1990s. Nevertheless, the potential of embedding peace operations more fully in a peacebuilding agenda is yet to be fully unlocked. Both the Secretary-General's New Agenda for Peace and the Pact for the Future call for concrete measures to strengthen peacebuilding.

Peacebuilding as a task is to be distinguished from the institutional structures put in place to promote it and drive its implementation across the UN system. The so-called Peacebuilding Architecture created in 2005 – 2006 consists of a political member state body, the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC), a financing tool (the Peacebuilding Fund, PBF) and a secretariat – the Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO). In the Pact for the Future, the PBC is highlighted as a framework for building and sustaining peace as well as mobilising requisite financing. With the upcoming Peacebuilding Architecture Review, there is a real opportunity to advance structural reforms which would strengthen the PBC's political and advisory role, especially vis-à-vis the Security Council, as well as its convening and coordinating power. It is also an opportunity to anchor the understanding of peacebuilding as a system-wide, cross-cutting responsibility more firmly in the UN system.

The Peacebuilding Architecture Review is a real opportunity to advance structural reforms to strengthen the PBC's political and advisory role, as well as its convening and coordinating power.

Three decades of peacebuilding policy development

September 2024 — **Pact for the Future** adopted by UN member states at the Summit of the Future

June 2023 — **A New Agenda for Peace** (Policy Brief No. 9) follows Secretary General's Our Common Agenda (A/75/982, 2021)

August 2021 — In **Our Common Agenda** (A/75/982) the Secretary-General describes his vision for an inclusive, networked and effective multilateralism that draws on all the tools in the UN system.

February 2019 — **OECD DAC Recommendation on the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus** (updated 2021)

May 2018 — **Pathways for Peace:** Joint UN-World Bank study calls for investment in inclusive and sustainable development as key to preventing crisis.

April 2016 — **Twin resolutions on Sustaining Peace** adopted by Security Council (S/RES/2282) and General Assembly (A/RES/70/262)

December 2015 — **Youth, Peace and Security Agenda** (S/RES/2250)

June 2015 — **HIPPO Report:** Report of the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations

September 2015 — **2030 Agenda & Sustainable Development Goals**

February 2011 — Report of the independent review on **civilian capacity in the aftermath of conflict** (S/2011/85)

March 2008 — **Capstone Doctrine:** United Nations Peacekeeping Operations Principles and Guidelines

December 2005 — **Twin resolutions in Security Council** (S/RES/1645) and **General Assembly** (A/RES/60/180) create the **Peacebuilding Commission** and in 2006 the **Peacebuilding Fund** (A/RES/60/287)

December 2004 — **A more secure world: our shared responsibility. Report of the High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change** (A/59/565, A/59/565/Corr.1) notes the importance of prevention and peacebuilding in light of complex threats and suggests the establishment of the peacebuilding architecture.

October 2000 — **Women, Peace and Security Agenda** (S/RES/1325)

August 2000 — **Brahimi Report** (S/2000/809): Report of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations

1992/1995 — **Secretary-General's An Agenda for Peace** (S/24111) and **Supplement to An Agenda for Peace** (S/1995/1)

Timeline years: 2024, 2023, 2022, 2021, 2020, 2019, 2018, 2017, 2016, 2015, 2014, 2013, 2012, 2011, 2010, 2009, 2008, 2007, 2006, 2005, 2004, 2003, 2002, 2001, 2000, 1992/1995

The Pact:
Member states renew their commitment to multilateral crisis management, calling for better-calibrated responses and picking up the New Agenda's recommendation to strengthen peacebuilding.

Twin resolutions II:
Report of the Advisory Group of Experts on the Review of the UN's Peacebuilding Architecture' (2015) endorses concept of sustaining peace and peacebuilding as a process needed before, during and after conflict.

Cross-cutting policy on YPS:
First international policy framework to recognise the positive role young people play in preventing and resolving conflict, countering violent extremism and building peace. Followed by The Missing Peace. Independent Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security and UN SC Resolution 2419 (2018).

Twin resolutions I:
Follows the 2005 World Summit in September 2005, which introduces the notion of 'human security' in its outcome document (A/RES/60/1) and lays the foundation for the peacebuilding architecture.

Cross-cutting policy on WPS:
UN SC Resolution 1325 reaffirms role of women in preventing and resolving conflicts, including in peacebuilding, along four pillars: participation of women, gender-responsive crisis prevention, protection from gender-based violence, and gender-responsive emergency aid and reconstruction.

© ZIF 2024

The New Agenda particularly urged the Security Council to seek the advice of the PBC on the linkages between the mandates of peace operations and peacebuilding tasks. In times when the Security Council appears distracted at best, the PBC can advocate for greater attention, sustained engagement and funding, and political support. This can be particularly important when peace operations transition and/or exit and conflict areas risk falling off the global radar. In addition, the PBC's convening role allows it to address cross-cutting themes and cross-pillar issues, and to bridge peace and development agendas. In tying strands together at the political and operational level and fostering closer collaboration, it can deliver more sustainable impact and help safeguard the achievements of a peace operation. A key part of reforms would be greater alignment of political and financial instruments, including regional organisations and international financial institutions, to better mobilise and manage resources for peacebuilding.

A key part of reforms would be greater alignment of political and financial instruments to better mobilise and manage resources for peacebuilding.

→ **What do we need to succeed?**

To realise the potential of embedding peace operations in a broader peacebuilding agenda, certain factors need to be in place:

Continuity needs to be facilitated by **predictable and flexible funding.** In light of decreasing overseas development aid, the fact that the General Assembly granted the PBF access to assessed contributions in December 2023 and allocated an initial 50 million USD for activities in 2025 (A/RES/78/257) was a welcome step forward. Given that the PBF 2020–2024 strategy envisaged 1.5 billion USD over the coming five-year period, this appears to be a modest beginning, but a remarkable shift nonetheless. Still, significant funding for transitions and peacebuilding during and in the aftermath of crises will also have to come from other sources.

Peacebuilding also needs to develop **stronger links to protection.** While peacebuilding tools cannot play a role in physical protection, they could be more involved in building host-state institutions and protection mechanisms including at the local level – processes that generally exceed the lifespan of a peace operation.

None of this will be possible without a **shift of mindset globally**, within the UN and among member states including host and donor countries to understand peacebuilding as a collective responsibility that cuts across the whole UN system and its member states – and can ultimately make the world more secure for everyone.

Call to Action

3

Localisation – anchoring peace at the community level

Peace Operations have traditionally been state-focused and have often struggled to engage at the local level in a way that allows for local ownership, local agency and self-organisation. This is despite the fact that the role of local-level actors has been at the core of various policy and conceptual debates with frequent calls for "local ownership" and "people-centred" or "locally-led" approaches.

Localised approaches have proven to be extremely effective, including in crises where local actors constitute the first responders. A prominent example for what might be possible if this approach is fully utilised, are Sudan's so called "emergency response rooms." These local initiatives and networks developed during the 2018 revolution, have adapted since the war started in April 2023 and are implementing highly decentralised humanitarian, resilience and social cohesion efforts. Including in areas of active combat, where international actors often lack access, they provide meals for neighbourhoods through "community kitchens," receive the displaced and support survivors of conflict-related sexual violence.

> Localised approaches have proven to be extremely effective, including in crises where local actors constitute the first responders.

Within the UN, successive peace operations and peacebuilding reviews, reports and reform processes have highlighted that local actors need to be at the centre of efforts aimed to prevent or end violent conflict and to sustain peace.[10] Localisation debates in the humanitarian and development spheres,[11] too, especially the localisation commitments of the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit's "Grand Bargain," informed peacebuilding policy, as did conceptual debates around the HDP-Nexus.[12] All these policy developments are largely based on the same key insights:

· That local actors know best what their communities need and often have the required access;

· That the social cohesion required for a sustainable peace must be firmly anchored at the local level;

· That for too long, local actors have primarily been seen as "beneficiaries" which, in turn, undermined their agency.

Localisation thus requires shifting (a) decision-making power, (b) agency, (c) funding and (d) responsibility to local actors. Despite the prospect of increased efficiency, impact and sustainability, localisation has only partially been translated into practice.

→ What do we need to succeed?

Multilateral efforts to building and sustaining peace need to be **more focused on, aware of and operationally present at the local level**. In part, this is an issue of physical presence. Multilateral efforts often remain thinly spread in the regions and at subnational level – a problem that is frequently compounded during transitions when a sizeable peace operation is leaving. This has several consequences: It becomes more difficult to combine efforts aimed at strengthening state institutions and structures with strong community engagement focused on social cohesion, peaceful coexistence and local-level governance and to build the local capacities required to prevent conflict and sustain peace. It also complicates efforts to improve relations between communities in regions with intercommunal violence, often a primary driver of conflict-related fatalities.

10 See, for example, the 2006 UN Peacekeeping Doctrine, the 2015 Report of the High-level Independent Panel on Peace, the Secretary-General's 2018 report on peacebuilding and sustaining peace, PBSO's 2020 system-wide agreed community engagement guidelines, or the 2022 PBSO thematic review on local peacebuilding.

11 A comprehensive analysis and overview can be found in Thania Paffenholz, Philip Poppelreuter, Nicholas Ross; Toward a Third Local Turn: Identifying and Addressing Obstacles to Localization in Peacebuilding. *Negotiation Journal* 2023; 39 (4): 349–375.

12 The 2019 *DAC Recommendation on the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus* provides guidance on localisation and adherent's practice (UN and DAC) is regularly reviewed.

Shifts in agency, decision-making power and funding require a **fundamentally new partnership between international and local actors**, where the latter are seen as agents rather than beneficiaries. How to support local peacebuilding and peace-builders, even when the government – e.g. following an unconstitutional change of government – does not support or even opposes this work is one of the key questions when promoting localised approaches and the partnerships that carry them.

Such a new partnership must be underpinned by **change in multilateral and national processes** so that these enable locally anchored, people-centred assessment, planning/programming and implementation, strong and inclusive community engagement and partnerships with local peacebuilders, networks and constituencies. Tools include capacity building, area-based approaches and mechanisms that incorporate local expertise and agency early on in planning processes.

Increased **funding directly to the grassroots**, i.e. to the people and networks making a difference in communities on the ground, is a central part of localisation. Current funding mechanisms need to become more flexible, so that they allow more funds to flow to the local level, such as the emergency response rooms in Sudan. This, however, does not fit easily with the distribution channels and accountability requirements for international funds which often set impossibly high thresholds for local actors in all areas – humanitarian, peacebuilding or development. Breaking this pattern requires collective risk-taking and open conversations between local actors, peace operations, UN Agencies, Funds and Programmes and the donor community.

Increased funding directly to the grassroots is a central part of localisation.

Climate and peace – finding common ground

Call to Action 4

Climate change is never the sole cause of conflict, but it clearly impacts conflict dynamics. It raises the likelihood of conflict by weakening food and human security and escalating competition for natural resources. In conflict-affected regions, climate shocks intensify the severity of violence. By 2040, the frequency of multiple climate-related hazards is anticipated to increase, particularly in the Americas, West-Central Africa, and Southeast Asia. The number of countries facing extreme climate-related shocks is projected to rise significantly: from 3 to 65 in the next fifteen years.

Climate change raises the likelihood of conflict by weakening food and human security and driving competition for natural resources.

For more than a decade, the United Nations has been looking into climate and environmental security in the context of peace operations and crisis management. From "Greening the Blue Helmets" to a Climate Security Mechanism and the deployment of climate advisers in almost every UN field presence – the UN has not only taken a lead on this issue in crisis management but mainstreamed it into conflict analysis, knowledge management, capacity development and technical support.
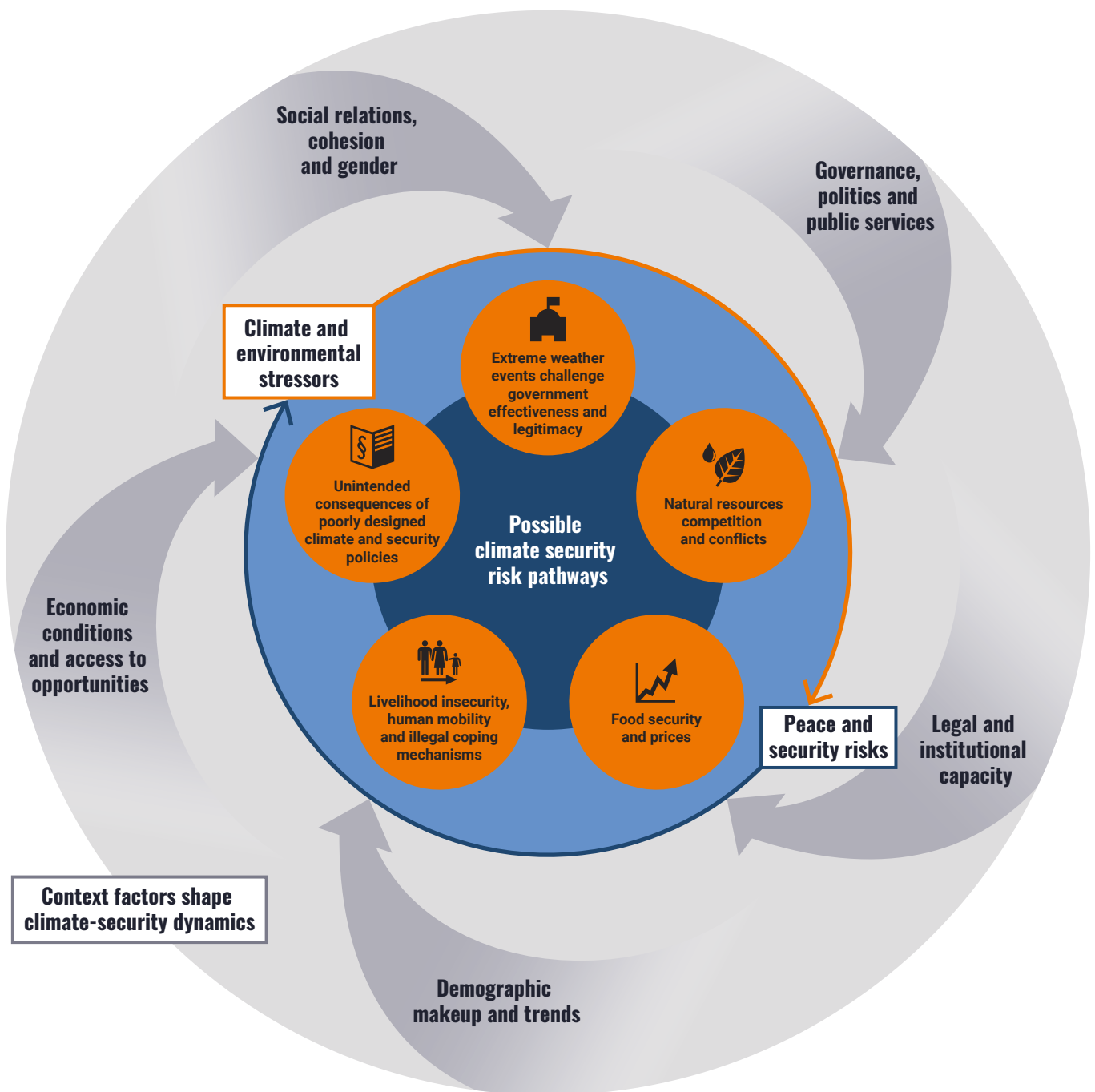
Even with multilateralism under stress, and the UN Security Council deeply divided, this new level of awareness, expertise and structures within the UN offer a unique opportunity for the organisation's work to prevent and resolve conflicts. There is a recognition that the role that peace operations play in addressing the conflict-related dimensions of climate change harbours significant potential for sustaining peace.

Elements of the climate security assessment approach

Social relations, cohesion and gender

Governance, politics and public services

Climate and environmental stressors

Extreme weather events challenge government effectiveness and legitimacy

Unintended consequences of poorly designed climate and security policies

Natural resources competition and conflicts

Possible climate security risk pathways

Economic conditions and access to opportunities

Livelihood insecurity, human mobility and illegal coping mechanisms

Food security and prices

Peace and security risks

Legal and institutional capacity

Context factors shape climate-security dynamics

Demographic makeup and trends

© adelphi, adapted by ZIF

Discussions during COP29 showed that the focus is shifting away from contested multilateral formats towards deeper regional partnerships and growing support of regional organisations. This is reflected in the UN's partnerships with a host of regional organisations on climate, peace and security, including the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the European Union (EU), the League of Arab States (LAS), the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) and the African Union (AU).

There is also scope for the Peacebuilding Commission and the Peacebuilding Fund to engage further by supporting and funding climate security measures in conflict contexts or as a preventive tool. Bilateral engagement, too, is critical for confidence building, particularly given current levels of geopolitical distrust. A prominent example of transboundary water cooperation outside of any other diplomatic engagement is that between Turkey and Armenia.

Finally, climate and environmental security measures can become an entry point for environmental peacebuilding[13] at the local level, as examples from South Sudan, Afghanistan or Somalia show. For instance, the UN mission in Somalia (UNSOM – since November 2024 UNTMIS) has been implementing a people-centred approach in climate and environmental security for more than four years. This has included bringing communities together that have historically been in conflict with one another to create natural resource sharing agreements.

Climate security approaches must shift from being reactive and responsive towards more proactive and anticipatory initiatives.

Climate-related security risks are expected to increase significantly in the coming years and decades. To mitigate the worst impacts, approaches must shift from being primarily reactive and responsive towards more proactive and anticipatory initiatives that emphasise prevention, resilience building and broader support for sustainable development. Climate security considerations need to be integrated into all relevant strategic and policy frameworks, such as national prevention plans, climate change action plans, peace strategies, stabilisation frameworks, and sectoral policies in areas such as water, livelihoods and agriculture, and energy.

→ What do we need to succeed?

To achieve this, peace operations and crisis management instruments should enhance analysis, research and data collection to provide **more localised and contextual insights** into how climate-related security risks unfold and how they might be addressed. Climate security measures should leverage the potential of a more **tech-savvy younger generation** to drive rapid innovation and development.

Finally, realising the potential of climate security as an entry-point requires substantial engagement with **civil society** to ensure effective implementation on the ground. This involves leveraging their networks and implementation frameworks and using their local knowledge and analytical expertise to form **impactful partnerships** that address climate security risks.

13 The core idea behind Environmental Peacebuilding is that environmental challenges, resource scarcity, and the effects of climate change can be utilised as a platform for dialogue and cooperation between stakeholders.

Call to Action **5**

AI and tech – harnessing emerging technologies for peace

The United Nations stands on the cusp of an unprecedented opportunity to reshape peace operations through emerging technologies. AI remote sensing, blockchain, quantum and other cutting-edge technologies promise unique advancements for monitoring ceasefires, improving early warning, enabling inclusive dialogue and strengthening peacebuilding efforts. In his ambitious UN 2.0 agenda, the UN Secretary-General argued that the UN must not just react to technological advancements but proactively embed innovation, data analytics, strategic foresight, and behavioural science into its core framework.

In 2021, the UN Department of Peace Operations (DPO) rolled out the Strategy for the Digital Transformation of UN Peacekeeping, which aims to harness digital tools to improve mandate delivery and enhance the safety and security of peacekeepers. The strategy emphasises fostering innovation, optimising the use of both current and emerging technologies, understanding risks to peacekeepers and mandate implementation, and ensuring the responsible use of digital tools. Simultaneously, the UN Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA) is spearheading initiatives that leverage AI and data analytics to advance conflict prevention and resolution and develop more effective peacebuilding strategies.

A comprehensive embrace of AI and other cutting-edge technologies could help build a more resilient peace operations infrastructure.

A comprehensive embrace of AI and other cutting-edge technologies could position the UN to build a more resilient peace operations infrastructure – one that not only better protects civilians and peacekeepers but also contributes to sustainable peace by ensuring that peace operations remain impactful and capable of addressing the dynamic challenges in global crises.

Emerging technologies offer transformative opportunities for enhancing the operational security of UN peace operations. AI-enabled systems can play a critical role in defending UN bases by providing real-time threat detection, identifying suspicious activities, and analysing patterns to predict potential risks. By integrating these technologies, peace operations can respond proactively to evolving threats, ensuring greater safety for personnel in high-risk environments.

AI-driven fact-checking and debunking systems enhance the accuracy and impact of the UN's narratives, strengthening its role as a trusted actor.

The use of technology in information integrity and strategic communications can help to detect and counter disinformation. AI and advanced analytics can be leveraged to monitor the information environment, analyse the spread of disinformation and identify vulnerabilities in the UN's messaging strategies. These tools can also support the development, targeting, and dissemination of effective communication campaigns. Additionally, AI-driven fact-checking and debunking systems enhance the accuracy and impact of the UN's narratives, strengthening its role as a trusted actor in peace operations.

→ **What do we need to succeed?**

To harness these opportunities fully, the UN need to continue prioritising **robust data management processes and structures**. This involves not only collecting and analysing data but also linking them closely with planning and decision-making processes. Standardising data collection, analysis and information management across peace operations is essential, as is **skilled personnel** and the systematic use of data to inform strategies and operations.

Public-private partnerships and collaborations with academic institutions are pivotal: They not only bridge resource gaps but also ensure that the UN can keep pace with technological advancements and foster innovation while upholding the principles of transparency and accountability.

While strategic frameworks like the UN 2.0 agenda demonstrate a commitment to leveraging innovation, progress is hindered by institutional resistance to change, outdated practices and fundamental challenges such as the lack of proper information storage and sharing systems. **Addressing these barriers** will be critical to fully realising the transformative potential of AI and other cutting-edge technologies, ensuring that peace operations are equipped to meet the evolving challenges of global security and stability.

4. Outlook for 2025

As we enter 2025, it is clear that the trends described are likely to persist – if not to intensify even further. Fast-paced change keeps unfolding on the world stage. The 53-year-old rule of the Assad family in Syria crumbling over the course of a week is just one example. Perhaps not surprisingly, some have already called on the United Nations to begin planning for an international peace operation of some kind or another in support of a stable and peaceful transition in Syria.

Whatever the feasibility of a UN peace operation in Syria, it appears that many consider multilateral crisis management, and specifically UN operations, one possible avenue for overcoming the growing discrepancies described in this study: more conflicts, fewer peace agreements; more attacks on civilians, less accountability for perpetrators; more humanitarian needs, less funding. The UN will surely be called upon to address a range of the many global risks in 2025. Crises and armed conflict, whether in Ukraine, Sudan, the Middle East or elsewhere, rank high on the agenda. The next decade of multilateral crisis management will no doubt require a well-sorted and versatile toolbox.

Given their proven ability to bring stability to conflict-affected countries, multilateral crisis management efforts – including peace operations – are so much more than just exercises in charity. They are about providing security, protecting vulnerable populations and preserving regional stability. They benefit not only host countries and their neighbours, but the entire international community. For these efforts to continue and remain effective in rapidly evolving circumstances, they must continue to adapt to the mounting challenges.

We have identified five concrete opportunities to strengthen one specific multilateral instrument: UN peace operations. Member states have only recently re-committed to the principle of multilateralism in the Pact for the Future. Now it is time to live up to those pledges and make progress towards the promise of the UN Charter to "unite our strength to maintain international peace and security".

www.zif-berlin.org