What Future for Peace Operations?

Jennifer Welsh and Marie-Joëlle Zahar

Peacekeeping has long been viewed as an example of effective multilateralism and a testament to the international community's capacity to innovate. The original UN Charter does not explicitly mention peacekeeping, but the practice is now hailed as "an essential part of the [UN's] diplomatic toolbox."[1] While popular assessments of UN peacekeeping often draw attention to its alleged failures, there is a high degree of consensus within the academic community that this tool can make a significant contribution to reducing the incidence, spread, and severity of violence in situations of civil war and large-scale political violence—including violence against civilians—as well as increase the duration of peace following the end of a civil war.[2]

Today, however, UN peace operations—which span peacekeeping operations, special political missions, good offices, and mediation initiatives—are facing mounting challenges. Expectations of missions have dramatically risen, leading in some cases to disenchantment with what they can actually deliver. This challenge is further exacerbated by the rise of dis- and misinformation tactics that incite or exploit grievances and undermine the efforts of the UN and its partners to make and build peace. In recent years, the UN's four largest multidimensional peace operations—the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA); the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO); the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA); and the United Nations Mission in South Sudan

Jennifer Welsh, McGill University, Montreal, Quebec, Canada (jennifer.welsh@mcgill.ca)
Marie-Joëlle Zahar, Université de Montréal, Montreal, Quebec, Canada (marie-joelle.zahar@umontreal.ca)

Ethics & International Affairs, 38, no. 4 (2024), pp. 404–417.
© The Author(s), 2025. Published by Cambridge University Press on behalf of Carnegie Council for Ethics in International Affairs. This is an Open Access article, distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution licence (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/), which permits unrestricted re-use, distribution and reproduction, provided the original article is properly cited.
doi:10.1017/S0892679425000012

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0892679425000012 Published online by Cambridge University Press

(UNMISS)[3]—have all faced significant challenges in implementing their mandates. Furthermore, for more than a decade, tensions among permanent members of the UN Security Council (UNSC) have "effectively ruled out the use of peacekeeping as a conflict resolution tool in a number of geopolitically significant conflicts," whether it be in Syria before the Russian intervention (2013–2015) or Eastern Ukraine during the "hot" years of the Donbas war (2017–2018).[4] Rising tensions between countries of the so-called Global South and Global North have also translated into increasing criticisms of peacekeeping, leading some host governments—notably in Mali and the DRC—to push for the closure of UN peacekeeping missions in their countries. UN peace operations thus risk becoming another casualty of intensifying international tensions, great power rivalry, and the erosion of the rules and norms that govern international cooperation.

Against this backdrop, UN Secretary-General António Guterres's 2023 *New Agenda for Peace* has called for "a reflection on the limits and future of peacekeeping."[5] As *A New Agenda* makes clear, the continued need for peace operations is underlined by key features of a more complex conflict environment, all of which make conflicts more protracted and their resolution more difficult. These include the nature of local and regional dynamics, which intersect in complicated ways with the interests of external parties; the fragmentation and proliferation of armed groups; and the presence of terrorist groups operating in multiple regions.[6] When these features are combined with deteriorating conditions for multilateral cooperation, what does the future hold for peace operations?

This roundtable emerged from a discussion at the 2023 annual conference of the International Studies Association in Montreal,[7] in which we gathered a group of scholars and practitioners to reflect on current challenges and opportunities for UN peace operations. In keeping with the goals of *Ethics & International Affairs*, we then encouraged a subset of our participants to assess not only how the landscape is evolving but also what tensions and dilemmas arise for those seeking to support or engage in peacekeeping, and what principles and norms are at stake. Our collective discussion forms part of a larger conversation, initiated by the UN secretary-general's *New Agenda*, both to take stock—seventy-five years after the authorization of the first UN peace operations—and to look forward to how peace operations might contribute to the management and resolution of conflict, and the protection of civilians, in the next decade and beyond.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0892679425000012 Published online by Cambridge University Press

An Evolving Tool

Any consideration of the future of peace operations must be anchored in an assessment of their past. Born during the Cold War and conceived of as an instrument to prevent regional conflicts from escalating into a superpower confrontation, peacekeeping has always adapted to the context in which it is deployed.

During the Cold War, "traditional" peacekeeping was deployed in interstate conflict and depended on the consent of states and restrictions on the use of force by UN Blue Helmets. Focusing on interposition between warring parties and on the implementation and monitoring of ceasefires, these deployments stabilized the battlefield to allow conflict parties to come to the negotiating table. The end of the Cold War provided a stronger consensus and greater willingness to expand peacekeeping's role in managing international peace and security. Peacekeeping evolved into complex "multidimensional" missions designed not only to keep the peace but to increasingly build it, by ensuring the implementation of comprehensive peace agreements in *intrastate*, as well as interstate, conflicts, and assisting in laying the foundations for sustainable peace. In the earlier 1992 *Agenda for Peace*, then–UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali defined peacebuilding as "comprehensive efforts . . . to consolidate peace and advance a sense of confidence and well-being among people." These included "disarming the previously warring parties and the restoration of order, the custody and possible destruction of weapons, repatriating refugees, advisory and training support for security personnel, monitoring elections, advancing efforts to protect human rights, reforming or strengthening governmental institutions and promoting formal and informal processes of political participation."[8]

Soon, however, the difficulties encountered by three important missions—in Somalia, Bosnia, and Rwanda—prompted reflections not only on the limitations of this expanded agenda but also on the underlying rationale for the presence of peacekeepers. In settings where peacekeepers were deployed without the consent of belligerents and where there was no prior agreement on a ceasefire, peacekeeping could neither stabilize the battlefield nor create the conditions for a negotiated settlement. In the face of failures that raised fundamental questions about the very legitimacy of the UN, the organization and its member states had to once again reconsider peacekeeping as a tool in settings where there was "no peace to keep," and where civilians suffered as a result of both conflict-induced humanitarian crises and the strategies and tactics of belligerents

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0892679425000012 Published online by Cambridge University Press

that made them direct targets of violence. In 1999, UNSC Resolution 1265 introduced protection of civilians in armed conflict as a thematic agenda item, and it has since become part of the "regular business" on the Council's agenda. UNSC Resolution 1270 subsequently gave the UN mission in Sierra Leone an explicit mandate, under Chapter VII, "to afford protection to civilians under imminent threat of physical violence."[9]

At the turn of the twenty-first century, the UN would be handed even more tasks and entrusted with administering Kosovo and East Timor, all the while being called on by the Council to deploy in more volatile contexts. In recognition of the fact that in many of these new cases, conflict parties not only did not welcome the UN but also acted as spoilers, the then UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations further developed the notion of "robust peacekeeping," which opened the door to the use of force in defense of a mission's mandate—including, where necessary, the protection of civilians from armed attack. The next test after Sierra Leone came in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), when the UN Organization Mission in Democratic Republic of the Congo, or MONUC (the precursor to today's MONUSCO), was strengthened and reconfigured to better operationalize the protection imperative after the 2003 crisis in Ituri, during which approximately eight thousand civilians were deliberately killed or were the victims of indiscriminate use of force from January 2002 to December 2003.[10] In 2005 and 2006, UN forces in the DRC engaged in some of the most robust kinetic activity in the UN's history in order to fulfill the protection of civilians (POC) mandate. Simultaneously, the Department of Peace Operations developed explicit doctrine and operational guidance on the POC, which set out a broader understanding of protection, emphasizing dialogue, engagement, and the creation of a "protective environment" alongside the task of physical protection, and a set of interlocking roles for military and civilian personnel.[11]

As complex multidimensional missions became the order of the day, the UN sought to integrate the military and civilian dimensions even further in order to leverage the full range of civilian capacities and expertise across the United Nations system. In addition, as the national-level political processes so integral to effective peace operations stalled or fell apart, missions attempted to work more deliberately with local actors and communities through the introduction of community alert networks, community liaison officers, and local peace committees. Initially developed in the DRC, these mechanisms have become part and parcel of the work of the Civil Affairs departments of most peace operations,

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0892679425000012 Published online by Cambridge University Press

not only helping to build and sustain peace at the substate level but also enhancing missions' capacity to prevent and respond to violence against civilians.

Peacekeeping has therefore been all but static over the years. The very shift in terminology, from the narrower "peacekeeping" to the broader "peace operations," reflects these changes, as well as a broader material and ideational evolution in the international system.

Not only have the mandates of peace operations and their objectives changed, their normative underpinnings have also grown and become more clearly articulated. While consent, limited use of force, and impartiality have endured as basic principles of peacekeeping, UN peace operations are not neutral, in that they are founded on the preference for peaceful conflict resolution over the use of violence, and—since the late 1990s—incorporate the POC as one of their core objectives. For the first two decades after the Cold War, the assumptions of "liberal peacebuilding"[12] influenced the normative core of multidimensional peace operations, as democratic governance and respect for human rights were heralded as the key conditions for sustainable peace. And with the adoption of UNSC Resolution 1325 in 2000, norms of inclusion—particularly regarding women—began to make their way into the mandates and practices of peace operations. In more recent years, other principles and normative ideas, including the importance of local legitimacy[13] and local agency in peacebuilding,[14] or the need for "hybridity" between international and local actors,[15] have become central to debates about how peace operations should be structured and managed.

An Imperfect Tool

As UN peace operations tried to adapt to ever more complex and volatile contexts, as well as shifting demands from member states and other peacekeeping stakeholders, concerns grew that transformations in the landscape of conflict were outpacing the organization's ability to respond. In 2015, the High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations issued a report warning of a widening gap between what was being asked of UN peace operations and what they were able to deliver. Its response was to reaffirm the primacy of politics in peace operations, arguing that mandates and missions were too often based on preconceived templates instead of tailored to context, and that military solutions were not aligned with—or in some cases were overshadowing—the political efforts needed to find sustainable solutions to conflicts.[16] Below, we address three of the recurring issues

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0892679425000012 Published online by Cambridge University Press

that have shaped the effectiveness and legitimacy of peace operations: a consistent mismatch between ambitious, often unrealistic mandates and limited resources; a gap between peace operations' POC objective and its implementation in practice; and growing difficulties in honoring the sacrosanct principles of impartiality.

First, in line with the moves to incorporate peacebuilding alongside peacekeeping, the mandates of peace operations expanded beyond military tasks—as illustrated in the expansive definition provided in the 1992 *Agenda for Peace*. Not only was the ever-growing list of tasks difficult to achieve in contexts where the parties' consent was tenuous at best, if not absent, but the resources available to the UN to implement these sprawling mandates were often lacking. For example, MINUSMA and MONUSCO, two of the largest UN multidimensional missions, respectively had 13,289 (as of June 2023) and 14,000 (as of February 2024) military personnel deployed. While these numbers of troops may seem large, a comparison with the number of policemen deployed in a country like France suffices to dispel this impression. France, a stable country, has 150,000 policemen deployed on its territory. Yet, the DRC, a country at war, is three times the size of France, which is, in turn, smaller than the north of Mali. Furthermore, the United States, UN peacekeeping's largest contributor, has capped its funding at 25 percent of the UN peacekeeping budget and has accrued significant arrears amounting to over one billion U.S. dollars.[17]

Second, a set of tensions began to emerge in the implementation of POC mandates. One longstanding issue is whether, in particularly volatile contexts, Blue Helmet units have interpreted their rules of engagement too narrowly, hesitating to put themselves in harm's way to protect civilian populations from the attacks of armed groups. The UN has invested much time and energy into training military units to deliver on the protection mandate, to the extent that many units now see protection as the core objective of the mission, as opposed to one task among many.[18] Nonetheless, the concern about whether the forces of troop-contributing countries have the right "mindset" to use force robustly in the service of protection lingers as a result of instances of alleged inaction, such as in the period of 2014–2015 in the Central African Republic (CAR).[19]

Another uncomfortable tension has arisen in situations where UN forces' supposed "partners" in protection can themselves pose threats to civilians. Acknowledging that UN peace operations increasingly deploy in contexts where UN military and police units interact with non-UN security forces—be they armed groups, state security forces, or parallel counterterrorism forces—the

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0892679425000012 Published online by Cambridge University Press

organization adopted a Human Rights Due Diligence Policy in 2013 to clarify how such collaboration could be compatible with the UN's human rights obligations. More specifically, the policy stipulates that "support by United Nations entities to non-United Nations security forces must be consistent with the Organization's purposes and principles as set out in the Charter of the United Nations and with its obligations under international law to respect, promote and encourage respect for international humanitarian, human rights and refugee law."[20] A related dilemma has surrounded the need for the UN to respect the core operating principle of host-state consent, even as maintaining that consent can in some cases require "soft-pedalling" any confrontation with national authorities with respect to their human rights violations. As Emily Paddon Rhoads highlights in her contribution, some of the UN's efforts to build a protective environment through engagement with the host state have been criticized as inadvertently offering uncritical support to repressive regimes and even as a form of complicity in attacks on civilians or ongoing human rights abuses.

An even more visible tension, or contradiction, relates to the concrete harm that peace operations have brought upon local populations, which stands in stark contrast to the POC mandate. As a prime example, the UN has had to confront and acknowledge sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) by peacekeepers as a system-wide issue. The organization has taken several steps in response, including the development of policies on conduct and discipline, and the establishment of the positions of special coordinator on SEA and victims' rights advocate. Nevertheless, UN data on SEA counted 100 incidents in 2023 and 102 in 2024 in peace operations alone. Given what we know about the underreporting of SEA, these numbers suggest that there remains much more work to do. And while SEA may be the most jarring expression of the gap between theory and practice as concerns POC, it is not the only one. Other manifestations of the gap include the 2010 cholera scandal in Haiti, where the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti, or MINUSTAH, attempted to cover up the fact that Nepali Blue Helmets were the source of a cholera epidemic that infected over eight hundred thousand and killed as many as nine thousand Haitians.

Lastly, UN peace operations have increasingly walked a tightrope regarding one of the three cardinal principles of peacekeeping: impartiality. In the past decade, peace operations mandated to support the extension of state authority have struggled to maintain their impartiality while the governments they were tasked to support displayed limited political will to implement peace agreements, as was the

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0892679425000012 Published online by Cambridge University Press

case in Mali.[21] Meanwhile, in the CAR, MINUSCA's efforts to promote dialogue, as mandated by the UNSC, fed into insurgents' perceptions that UN Blue Helmets were but an arm of a government that was unwilling to engage in discussions with armed groups, and, simultaneously, into government perceptions that the UN was not being decisive enough in its support of state extension. Criticized by governments and insurgents alike, peace operations face a narrowing of the space available for implementation of their mandates.

A similar quandary occurs when the UNSC mandates peace operations to extend state authority, but the state continues to use violence in dealing with civilians. While research has shown that peacekeepers can meaningfully reduce incidents of civilian targeting,[22] the protection effects of peace operations are not equally distributed: a peacekeeping presence primarily enhances the effectiveness of civilian protection against rebel abuse but is less effective in protecting civilians from government forces. This predicament is in large part a function of the structural requirement of maintaining host-state consent for the continuation of a peacekeeping presence, discussed above. But it is particularly acute when UN peace operations are deployed in contexts where state security forces are engaged in counterterrorist operations that do not comply with the UN's Human Rights Due Diligence Policy, as was the case in the final years of MINUSMA's presence in Mali.

As the UN and its member states follow the secretary-general's call to explore alternative and "more nimble" models of peace operations,[23] including assistance to African-led missions in place of a large Blue Helmet footprint, the difficulties with maintaining impartiality are likely to intensify and will be accompanied by unsettling normative dilemmas about whether and how to offer support. Those dilemmas, which John Karlsrud discusses in his roundtable contribution, have been insufficiently explored to date, and will be especially acute for the UN's human rights and humanitarian personnel.

The three issues that we discuss above have had an additional, particularly detrimental consequence for the effectiveness and legitimacy of UN peace operations: they have increased civilians' discontent with and public criticism of missions, with demonstrations against the presence of the UN being held in settings such as the DRC and the CAR. As civilian perceptions of UN peace operations have increasingly been affected by the weaponization of digital communication and social media,[24] strategic communications have become a priority for missions that find themselves seeking not only host-state but also popular consent. As Paddon Rhoads suggests in her contribution, the civilian criticisms of peace

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0892679425000012 Published online by Cambridge University Press

operations have, in turn, emboldened host authorities in their own efforts to "push back" against the UNSC in the mandate renewal process and to exert control of the mission's activities.

The Future(s) of UN Peace Operations

What does the future look like then for UN peace operations, considering the current international environment and the recurring problems faced by multidimensional missions since the end of the Cold War? As part of current reflections on the challenges that we discuss above, the options under discussion in academic and policy circles can be condensed into two main possibilities: (1) a "pragmatic approach to peacekeeping," which entails the abandonment of the ambitious objectives for peace operations, in the name of finding a "lowest common denominator" between proponents and critics of peace operations; or (2) an "adaptative future for peacekeeping," which necessitates proposing and adopting innovative ideas to address some of the recurring criticisms leveled at peace operations. In this section, we discuss how these alternatives fare in addressing the constraints we have identified, while at the same time upholding the principles of peacekeeping and achieving its stated objectives. However the future unfolds, there will remain some foundational normative tensions that will mark the future of peace operations.

Pragmatic Peacekeeping

The secretary-general's *New Agenda for Peace* identifies the full support of the UNSC as one of the requisites for peace operations to continue to serve as a tool of international peace and security. What is the UN to do when the UNSC is divided, as it is at present, by conflict, competition, and deep disagreement among the major powers?

One answer that has emerged in recent policy and academic debates is the notion of "pragmatic peacekeeping," a more limited peacekeeping agenda that prioritizes conflict containment as opposed to resolution.[25] Pragmatic peacekeeping starts from an acknowledgment of the growing difficulty of identifying any common ground—that "lowest common denominator"—particularly among major powers in the UNSC.

In a context where some countries have faulted so-called liberal peacekeeping for its focus on particular normative principles and models of governance, pragmatic peacekeeping is seen as a less intrusive approach that emphasizes humanitarian assistance, political solutions to conflict, and stability. This alternative

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0892679425000012 Published online by Cambridge University Press

works from the premise that there will continue to be a strong need in some instances for international support to effectively counter terrorism or to mount counterinsurgency operations. In situations where UNSC members are unlikely to give the UN a mandate for more intrusive liberal-democratic tasks, missions characterized by a greater and more strategic use of force, and less focus on human rights, might still be established in support of regional and ad hoc coalitions.[26]

At the heart of the pragmatic approach is therefore a focus on partnerships with regional organizations, described by *A New Agenda for Peace* as a critical building block for "networked multilateralism." The Agenda sees partnerships, particularly with the African Union (AU) and subregional organizations, as another way of addressing peace enforcement,[27] given that—unlike the UN—the AU's rules allow for a broader use of force in peace operations. In December 2023, the UNSC opened the door for the AU to access UN funding for this purpose with Resolution 2719.[28]

Should UN peacekeeping move in the direction of pragmatic peace operations, there are important questions to be asked about whether such operations can really be fully "agnostic" about the governance arrangements of the societies hosting such missions.[29] Moreover, the pragmatic approach carries significant implications and risks that need further consideration by member states and other stakeholders. As Paddon Rhoads argues in this roundtable, the regionalization of stabilization and peacekeeping tasks could further marginalize existing UN missions and reduce the UN's political leverage in various conflict contexts. In addition, collaborating with and supporting subnational actors or ad hoc coalitions, especially those established without the involvement of the UNSC, could expose the UN to the possibility of complicity in human rights abuses and violence against civilians, particularly if there are continued difficulties in vetting forces and a lack of transparency. As Karlsrud notes in his contribution, these missions are often "unencumbered with accountability requirements,"[30] raising the question of whether the UN should set out conditions for its provision of material, logistical, and human rights support to non-UN peace operations. The non-missions deployed to date have taken a more circumscribed view of protection, framing it more in terms of harm mitigation and as outside the scope of the mission's core objectives.

Adaptive Peacekeeping

"Adaptive peacekeeping" refers to a range of efforts to address the recurring issues that have plagued peace operations in practice. For some, this is a call to replace

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0892679425000012 Published online by Cambridge University Press

intrusive peacebuilding and stabilization approaches with bottom-up peace work.[31] For others, it is a plea for more sustained, iterative, and inductive learning and adaptation between peace operations and the people and communities affected by conflict.[32]

But is adaptation possible when peace operations are dealing not only with changes in the geopolitical landscape and resurgent assertions of host-state sovereignty but also with the challenges of new technologies? Some scholars have focused on the UN's efforts to use intelligence, previously conceived as a sovereign matter, as "a rigorous approach to gathering information and making forward-looking assessments in the UN context."[33] Discussions at the UN Secretariat have focused on the use of cyber and artificial intelligence as instruments to improve the effectiveness of peace operations in all the dimensions of the mandate.

Victoria Holt approaches adaptation from a different angle, asking whether UN peace operations can not only improve their effectiveness but also strengthen their longer-term legacies in host nations by shifting to greater use of renewable energy. She develops an ethical case for the UN to "walk the talk" of its multilateral diplomacy around combating climate change by transforming its own operations. This would require missions not only to make concerted efforts to reduce their emissions, including by moving away from dependence on fossil fuels, but also to develop a broader strategy to leverage their own need for energy to increase security, strengthen ties to local communities, increase energy access, and support the climate goals of host nations. Holt thus identifies an area of possible innovation in peacekeeping that could not only help missions adapt to the reality of climate change but also contribute to addressing deeper legitimacy deficits by providing a positive energy legacy for countries emerging from conflict.

Back to the Future?

As deliberations on the future of UN peace operations continue, pragmatism and adaptation must not be seen as an either-or choice. Given their traditional connection to the UNSC, peace operations will need to adapt to the constraints of the new multipolar order. Because countries of the Global South have seized upon the recurring challenges of peace operations to question their effectiveness, accuse them of being an instrument of Western interference in their sovereign affairs, and request their withdrawal, it is also important to consider adaptations that may contribute to addressing these criticisms.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0892679425000012 Published online by Cambridge University Press

In his contribution, anchored in his direct practical experience of peace operations, Dirk Druet argues that states' intrusion in and interference with peacekeeping are the new normal. His essay examines three ways that external actors are working in both the physical and digital space to erode missions' legitimacy and manipulate the political space in which they operate, thereby limiting peace operations' effectiveness and the fulfillment of the UN's protection goals. The three ways are states' deployment of parallel security actors, such as private military companies, into mission contexts; states' spread of mis- and disinformation; and threats to the cybersecurity and integrity of UN-owned information. Druet demonstrates how these tactics undermine the underlying conditions for peacekeeping effectiveness by degrading the trust of the local population, restricting missions' freedom of movement and access to reliable information that is critical to anticipating and responding to threats, and offering elites in host-state governments alternative security partners with fewer demands for institutional reform. Given the UN's operating principles, it has limited means to "fight back" against these new forms of interference, raising further questions about the viability of peacekeeping as a tool of international peace and security going forward.

In the *Pact for the Future* adopted by the UN General Assembly in September of 2024, UN member states responded to the secretary-general's call for reflection on peacekeeping by committing to adapt peace operations to better respond to existing challenges and conflict realities.[34] As they discuss the various permutations that could allow UN peace operations to continue as a valuable part of the contemporary conflict management toolbox, policymakers and researchers should not lose sight of the fact that peacekeeping's legitimacy depends on its adherence to some version of its core principles. Host-state consent will remain a must, as will some kind of restriction on when and how force is used. The expectation of civilian populations around the world that the UN stands for protection also means that future peace operations will require the UN to find ways of safeguarding some of the powerful norms that have become associated with peacekeeping along the way. These are the guiding principles that will allow peace operations to uphold the imperative to do no harm; they are also the requirements for these operations to maintain the consent of both the state in which they operate and the broader population who longs for peace.

Notes

[1] António Guterres, *A New Agenda for Peace*, Our Common Agenda Policy Brief 9 (New York: United Nations, July 2023), p. 23, dppa.un.org/en/a-new-agenda-for-peace.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0892679425000012 Published online by Cambridge University Press

[2] Lise Morjé Howard, *Power in Peacekeeping* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2019), ch. 1.
[3] In 2023, these four operations accounted for roughly three-quarters of the annual UN budget for peacekeeping ($6.3 billion).
[4] Richard Gowan, "UN Peacekeeping in a Fragmenting International Order" (remarks, the Geostrategic Environment and International Responses to Conflict roundtable, UN Department of Peace Operations, November 25, 2020), www.crisisgroup.org/global/un-peacekeeping-fragmenting-international-order.
[5] Guterres, *A New Agenda for Peace*, p. 24.
[6] Ibid., p. 5.
[7] The original event was organized by the L'Équipe sur la politique internationale des conflits civils, a Quebec-based research team focusing on the international politics of civil wars.
[8] Boutros Boutros-Ghali, *An Agenda for Peace: Preventive Diplomacy, Peacemaking, and Peace-Keeping; Report of the Secretary-General Pursuant to the Statement Adopted by the Summit Meeting of the Security Council on 31 January 1992*, DPI/1247 (New York: UN Department of Public Information, 1992), p. 36, digitallibrary.un.org/record/145749?ln=en&v=pdf.
[9] United Nations Security Council, Resolution 1270, "The Situation in Sierra Leone," S/RES/1270 (October 22, 1999), p. 3, unscr.com/en/resolutions/1270.
[10] United Nations Security Council, *Special Report on the Events in Ituri, January 2002–December 2003*, S/2004/573 (July 16, 2004).
[11] UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations and Department of Field Support, *DPKO/DFS Operational Concept on the Protection of Civilians in United Nations Peacekeeping Operations* (United Nations, April 2010). See also UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations, *Protection of Civilians: Implementing Guidelines for Military Components of UN Peacekeeping Missions*, ST/DPKO(02)/P96 (New York: United Nations, February 2015); and UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations and Department of Field Support, *Use of Force by Military Components in UN Peacekeeping Operations* (United Nations, February 2020).
[12] Edward Newman, Roland Paris, and Oliver P. Richmond, eds., *New Perspectives on Liberal Peacebuilding* (Tokyo: United Nations University Press, 2009).
[13] Jeni Whalan, "The Local Legitimacy of Peacekeepers," *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding* 11, no. 3 (2017), pp. 306–20.
[14] Roger Mac Ginty, "Where Is the Local? Critical Localism and Peacebuilding," in "The 'Local Turn' in Peacebuilding," special issue, *Third World Quarterly* 36, no. 5 (2015), pp. 840–56.
[15] Cedric de Coning and Lawrence McDonald-Colbert, "Hybridity, Adaptive Peacebuilding and Complexity," in Yuji Uesugi, Anna Deekeling, Sophie Shiori Umeyama, and Lawrence McDonald-Colbert, eds., *Operationalisation of Hybrid Peacebuilding in Asia: From Theory to Practice* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), pp. 37–58.
[16] United Nations General Assembly Security Council, *Report of the High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations on Uniting our Strengths for Peace: Politics, Partnership and People*, A/70/95–S/2015/446 (June 17, 2015), www.globalr2p.org/resources/report-of-the-high-level-independent-panel-on-peace-operations-on-uniting-our-strengths-for-peace-politics-partnership-and-people/.
[17] Luisa Blanchfield, "United Nations Issues: U.S. Funding of U.N. Peace Operations," *In Focus* 10597, Congressional Research Service, April 9, 2024, crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IF/IF10597.
[18] Enhanced training in the POC has been facilitated by the UN General Assembly's decision, in 2013, to create the Office for Peacekeeping Strategic Partnership (OPSP), which is tasked with reviewing peacekeeping missions to identify gaps and emerging challenges that have an impact on the delivery of mandates. As part of its reviews and recommendations, OPSP has sought to create greater consistency across troop-contributing countries in the interpretation of the rules of engagement for uniformed personnel in peace operations, and to share best practices on deterring and neutralizing threats to civilian populations. See United Nations General Assembly, Resolution 67/287, A/RES/67/287 (August 15, 2013).
[19] Evan Cinq-Mars, *The Primacy of Protection: Delivering on the MINUSCA Mandate in the Central African Republic* (Washington D.C.: Center for Civilians in Conflict, 2017).
[20] United Nations General Assembly Security Council, "Identical Letters Dated 25 February 2013 from the Secretary-General Addressed to the President of the General Assembly and to the President of the Security Council," A/67/775–S/2013/110 (March 5, 2013), p. 2, www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/HRBodies/SP/AMeetings/20thsession/IdenticalLetterSG25Feb2013_en.pdf.
[21] Arthur Boutellis and Marie-Joëlle Zahar, *A Process in Search of Peace: Lessons from the Inter-Malian Agreement* (New York: International Peace Institute, June 2017).
[22] Hanne Fjelde, Lisa Hultman, and Desirée Nilsson, "Protection through Presence: UN Peacekeeping and the Costs of Targeting Civilians," *International Organization* 73, no. 1 (Winter 2019), pp. 103–31.
[23] Guterres, *A New Agenda for Peace*, p. 24.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0892679425000012 Published online by Cambridge University Press

[24] See Pernilla Rydén, Sanni Laine, Susanna Ahlfors, et al., "Tackling Mis- and Disinformation: Seven Insights for UN Peace Operations," Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (blog), October 4, 2023, www.sipri.org/commentary/blog/2023/tackling-mis-and-disinformation-seven-insights-un-peace-operations. See also Albert Trithart, *Disinformation against UN Peacekeeping Operations* (New York: International Peace Institute, November 2022), www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/2212_Disinformation-against-UN-Peacekeeping-Ops.pdf.

[25] Caroline Dunton, Marion Laurence, and Gino Vlavonou, "Pragmatic Peacekeeping in a Multipolar Era: Liberal Norms, Practices, and the Future of UN Peace Operations," *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding* 17, no. 3 (2023), pp. 215–34; and Cedric de Coning and Mateja Peter, eds., *United Nations Peace Operations in a Changing Global Order* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).

[26] John Karlsrud, "'Pragmatic Peacekeeping' in Practice: Exit Liberal Peacekeeping, Enter UN Support Missions?," *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding* 17, no. 3 (2023), pp. 258–72.

[27] Guterres, *A New Agenda for Peace*, pp. 14–15.

[28] United Nations Security Council, Resolution 2719, S/RES/2719 (December 21, 2023), documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/n23/420/06/pdf/n2342006.pdf.

[29] Roland Paris, "The Future of UN Peace Operations: Pragmatism, Pluralism or Statism?," *International Affairs*, 100, no. 5 (September 2024), pp. 2153–72. As Paris notes, pragmatism is itself based on the implicit assumption that peacebuilding requires pluralist societies for long-term stability.

[30] John Karlsrud, "UN Peacekeeping and Impartiality: A Fading Relationship," *Ethics & International Affairs* 38, no. 4 (2024).

[31] Kari M. Osland and Mateja Peter, "UN Peace Operations in a Multipolar Order: Building Peace through the Rule of Law and Bottom-Up Approaches," *Contemporary Security Policy* 42, no. 2 (2021), pp. 197–210.

[32] Cedric de Coning, "The Future of UN Peace Operations: Principled Adaptation through Phases of Contraction, Moderation, and Renewal," *Contemporary Security Policy* 42, no. 2 (March 2021), pp. 211–24.

[33] Sarah-Myriam Martin-Brûlé, *Finding the UN Way on Peacekeeping Intelligence* (New York: International Peace Institute, April 2020), p. 20.

[34] See United Nations, Action 21, "We Will Adapt Peace Operations to Better Respond to Existing Challenges and New Realities," in *Pact for the Future, Global Digital Compact, and Declaration on Future Generations*, Summit of the Future Outcome Documents (United Nations, September 2024), p. 22, www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/sotf-pact_for_the_future_adopted.pdf.

Abstract: Long viewed as an example of effective multilateralism, UN peace operations are facing mounting challenges. Transformations in the landscape of conflict are outpacing their ability to respond. Rising expectations of peacekeeping have led to disenchantment with what they can deliver, while dis- and misinformation tactics undermine the efforts of the UN to make and build peace. As UN peace operations risk becoming another casualty of intensifying international tensions, great power rivalry, and the erosion of the rules and norms that govern international cooperation, we consider the future of UN peace operations. In the debate between a "pragmatic" and an "adaptive" approach to peacekeeping, we argue that a fundamental question is the ability of both alternatives to address three recurring issues that have shaped the effectiveness and legitimacy of peace operations: the mismatch between ambitious mandates and limited resources; the gap between the protection of civilians objective and its implementation in practice; and growing difficulties in honoring the principles of impartiality. We argue that policymakers and researchers should not lose sight of the fact that peacekeeping's legitimacy depends on its adherence to some version of host-state consent and some kind of restriction on when and how force is used. The expectation of civilian populations that the UN stands for protection also means that the UN must continue to safeguard some key norms associated with peacekeeping.

Keywords: United Nations, peace operations, multilateralism, *A New Agenda for Peace*, pragmatic peacekeeping, adaptive peacekeeping, protection of civilians, human rights, sexual exploitation and abuse, counterterrorism

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0892679425000012 Published online by Cambridge University Press