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Action for Peacekeeping: One Year into the Implementation of the Declaration of Shared Commitments

Jake Sherman

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Jake Sherman is Director of IPI's Brian Urquhart Center for Peace Operations.

This publication is based on over thirty interviews with UN officials and diplomats from the Security Council, major troop- and police-contributing countries, and major financial donors to the United Nations. The author would like to thank all of those individuals willing to share their views on Action for Peacekeeping and to acknowledge everyone who provided comments on the draft report, including Daniel Forti and Youssef Mahmoud at IPI and several UN staff.

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Introduction

One year after the Declaration of Shared Commitments, the UN is still trying to transform the political attention generated by the Action for Peacekeeping (A4P) initiative into tangible actions by member states. Since September 2018, 152 member states and four multilateral organizations have signed onto the declaration, which includes forty-five commitments in seven thematic areas: advancing political solutions and implementing the women, peace, and security agenda; strengthening protection; improving safety and security; supporting effective performance and accountability; improving partnerships; strengthening the impact of peacekeeping on sustaining peace; and strengthening conduct.¹

The declaration was intended to rally member states to individually and collectively address urgent challenges facing contemporary peacekeeping operations—from stalled political agreements and peacekeeper casualties to failures to protect civilians and sexual abuse scandals—and to remind them of their responsibilities. It also provides an opportunity for dialogue between the Secretariat, regional and other intergovernmental organizations, and member states—including Security Council members, troop and police contributors, financial contributors, and host governments—on how they can work together to respond to these challenges.

This issue brief aims to take stock of progress by the UN and member states in implementing A4P over the past twelve months and to look at where there is momentum and where additional political attention is needed. There is consensus that A4P has helped reaffirm the value of peacekeeping as a brand, provides a roadmap for incremental improvement, and offers a potential platform for sharing good practices among member states. There is also broad agreement that A4P provides a useful, transparent framework for identifying efforts to improve peacekeeping and creates space to keep talking about progress and challenges within the Secretariat and between the Secretariat and member states.

Yet broad political support for the declaration has not yet translated into concrete action by member states, limiting tangible results for missions on the ground. While the Secretariat has been slow to provide guidance to member states on how to fulfill their joint commitments, neither have member states

¹ Of the forty-five commitments, seven are the responsibility of member states, twelve that of the secretary-general, and twenty-six "shared," requiring action on the part of both the UN and member states. Commitments related to the women, peace, and security agenda, which were included under the theme of politics, were spun out into a distinct theme as part of implementation efforts.

been proactive in living up to their political responsibilities. Moving forward, A4P needs to be more than a package of preexisting UN priorities for peacekeeping; it needs to become a platform through which the secretary-general sets a new approach to strengthening peacekeeping. Doing so will require the secretary-general to engage more with member states—and be more willing to tell them where they are falling short.

Efforts since September 2018

A4P has three components—efforts internal to the UN, those dependent on member states, and those reliant on the combined efforts of the UN, member states, and the multilateral organizations that endorsed the declaration. The Secretariat’s internal A4P efforts largely draw on existing work and therefore demonstrate progress in implementation. Where A4P is lagging is in follow-through on joint commitments and commitments that solely rely on the political will of member states.

INTERNAL EFFORTS BY THE SECRETARIAT

The challenges facing contemporary peacekeeping missions have been well diagnosed, spurring “myriad incremental, technical reforms in the field and at UN headquarters” that “show signs of improving the day-to-day performance of missions.”² The Secretariat has identified eighty-nine internal deliverables aligned with the twelve commitments in the declaration for which the secretary-general is responsible. These deliverables range from ongoing work like reporting on performance and developing budget processes under the new management reforms to concrete outputs like completing the Darfur transition plan and undertaking a cybersecurity assessment of all missions.

The focus at the leadership level is on significant achievements, results, and progress on the A4P priorities so far in 2019. In February, Under-Secretary-General (USG) for Peace Operations

Jean-Pierre Lacroix, USG for Operational Support Atul Khare, and USG for Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance Jan Beagle established a Peacekeeping Task Force to oversee implementation of A4P. The three USGs meet quarterly with assistant secretaries-general and directors of implementing departments and divisions, while team leaders and experts meet on a monthly basis under the leadership of the directors of the offices of Lacroix and Khare. These meetings aim to identify deliverables, review progress, and identify where further attention is needed.³ Progress toward the deliverables is being tracked on a monthly basis through a dashboard on the UN’s internal network, enabling the Secretariat to report, as of July, that work on eighty-three of them is going as planned.⁴

Given the wide range of entities and efforts supporting peacekeeping across the UN system, A4P is generally regarded as a useful tool for packaging them together, thereby increasing transparency and accountability. Previously, the work streams of different Secretariat offices were relatively isolated from one another, often with only senior management having a comprehensive view. Under A4P, however, the eighty-nine deliverables encompass work streams across the Department of Peace Operations (DPO), Department of Operational Support (DOS), Department of Management, Strategy, Policy and Compliance, and Executive Office of the Secretary-General, as well as other offices and departments, including the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Peacebuilding Support Office in the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA). Other Secretariat entities like the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and UN Women have been less involved than intended but are reportedly starting to participate more. In this respect, one of the main benefits of A4P is its establishment of an overarching policy framework and management structure to transparently catalog, organize, track, and report on efforts to improve peacekeeping—from implementation of the Action Plan to Improve the Security of UN

² Ibid.

³ According to one UN official, the USGs have requested that the eighty-nine deliverables be cut down and prioritized. Written communication with UN official, August 30, 2019.

⁴ Interview with UN official, New York, July 3, 2019.

Peacekeepers and strategic force generation to training, triangular cooperation, and the Voluntary Action Plan on Preventing Sexual Exploitation and Abuse.

Progress is measured against the metrics identified by individual work units at headquarters such as the Civil Affairs Team and Conduct and Discipline Unit. These metrics are largely based on outputs such as studies, trainings, or guidance notes rather than impact. As one UN staff member cautioned, “What does ‘50 percent implementation’ mean? In our case, that a paper is half written. Yes, we have metrics—but on outputs, not on impact. It is recreating the [results-based budget].”⁵

Nonetheless, coming at a time of increased focus on the performance of peacekeeping and the development of metrics,⁶ A4P is contributing to conversations within the Secretariat on how to better assess the impact of these headquarters-related work streams. In recent years, the Department of Field Support—since replaced by DOS—has made strides in the use of data-driven analysis and visualizations to monitor and report on the impact of its work, including in reporting to member states. In response to increased pressure from member states in the Security Council and the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations (C34), DPO is now trying to catch up, though it faces greater challenges assessing the impact of substantive work such as the contribution of a peacekeeping mission’s political affairs units or military component to overall mandate implementation. As one DPO official noted, “We’re still lacking indicators to know if we’re making progress and have limited capacity to develop them.”⁷ However, UN officials expressed different views as to why; according to another DPO official, the department has increased data collection and has the necessary capacity but has not prioritized a process for developing indicators amid competing demands.

While some staff described A4P as a roadmap for better peacekeeping, others described it as nothing more than the sum of its parts—an assemblage of useful but non-prioritized work streams. This tension is largely a result of USG Lacroix’s emphasis, from the outset, on implementing the commitments through existing work streams rather than new initiatives.⁸ According to one official, the USG’s aim is to use A4P to get the UN’s own house in order, recognizing that he has considerably more leverage over the Secretariat than over member states. The intent is then to demonstrate to member states the progress made, for example, on preventing sexual exploitation and abuse and peacekeeper fatalities to provide them political capital to take action themselves. Such an approach would appear to be informed by a calculation that while member states are unlikely to hold each other accountable for limited progress, they are sure to hold the Secretariat to account for its commitments.

Yet this approach has led some staff to question whether A4P’s vision is ambitious enough to address the challenges peacekeeping faces today and transformative enough to address the threats it will face in the future. “So much of A4P is about regular business,” noted one former Secretariat official.⁹ These officials voiced concern that DPO leadership is risk-averse in engaging with member states, avoiding policy stances that might run afoul of permanent members of the Security Council or major troop contributors. They see it as a missed opportunity to consult with member states about how these various efforts complement each other and about the future of peacekeeping—whether and how it needs to adapt to contemporary security challenges, new ways of working, and political and financial constraints.

The Secretariat has also struggled to clearly communicate to missions how it expects them to

5 Interview with UN official, New York, June 25, 2019.

6 In September 2018, just a few days before the high-level meeting on Action for Peacekeeping, the Security Council unanimously passed Resolution 2436, which recognizes “the importance of data to inform objective decision-making to improve the performance of United Nations peacekeeping.” The Secretariat is also developing a comprehensive performance assessment system to measure and assess missions’ performance against defined strategic priorities. This work complements other analytic tools on the operational readiness of uniformed personnel. Interviews with UN officials, New York, July 1 and July 23, 2019; interview with diplomat from a permanent member of the Security Council, New York, May 20, 2019; interview with diplomat from a troop-contributing country, New York, July 15, 2019.

7 Interview with UN official, New York, July 3, 2019.

8 Interview with UN officials, New York, July 24 and 25, 2019.

9 Interview with former UN official, New York, August 5, 2019.

contribute to A4P and how it is relevant to their day-to-day work.¹⁰ In February, the USGs met with heads of mission in Berlin to set priorities for implementing A4P and the Action Plan to Improve the Security of UN Peacekeepers and to take stock of recent peace and security and management reforms.¹¹ According to several UN officials present at the meeting, almost across the board, heads of mission pushed back against taking an active role in implementing A4P. They argued that their priorities were their mandates, their strategic plans, delegation of authority and other management reforms, and the action plan. The missions argued that A4P was a political tool for UN headquarters to leverage commitments from member states. Nonetheless, missions continue to face pressure from DPO leadership to report on their A4P priorities and were provided guidance in July on how to align their reporting with A4P themes—“to tell their story from an A4P angle; to highlight gaps that tie in with the declaration, progress, and challenges in meeting the conditions.”¹²

Officials in the Executive Office of the Secretary-General echoed the view that the Secretariat sees A4P as focused on improving how headquarters supports the field; as one observed, “Sometimes people say ‘A4P does nothing for me in my country.’ It isn’t meant to. It’s a high-level agreement between the UN and member states to make the situation better.... It’s about what HQ and member states are doing to address systemic challenges. A4P enables the UN to address the lack of systems that need to be provided to missions by HQ,” for example by “developing a unified database to record and track violations of status of forces agreements by host governments.”¹³

Yet across the integrated operational teams that backstop peacekeeping missions at UN headquarters, staff expressed frustration that while A4P is a successful branding exercise, it has so far failed to leverage meaningful commitments that result in measurable improvements on the ground. They

repeatedly pointed to longer mandates with additional tasks and no new resources (in the case of the mission in the Central African Republic) or new strategic priorities without additional forces to back them up (in the case of the mission in Mali). Integrated operational teams see this as a refutation of A4P by member states—one that has gone without a response from UN leadership. While these teams want DPO leadership to leverage A4P to push member states and call them out when necessary, several UN officials recounted the leadership’s reticence to “be seen to tell member states what they should do.”¹⁴

One DPO official also expressed frustration at how difficult it has been to get the department’s regional divisions to engage on A4P, despite strong support from USG Lacroix. In part, regional divisions’ ability to focus on A4P was overshadowed by the establishment of DPO and DPPA, which replaced the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) and Department of Political Affairs (DPA) on January 1, 2019. The consolidation of the two departments’ regional divisions into a new shared structure resulted in new reporting lines, processes, and work flows that needed to be negotiated, tested, and revised. With the merging of regional staff, some of the new divisions are also led by individuals from the former DPA who are less familiar with peacekeeping and A4P. More significantly, the lack of ownership by the regional divisions speaks to the larger tensions within DPO over who owns A4P, whether it is a technical or political exercise, how ambitious it should be, and how proactively to engage member states on implementation.

Frustrations aside, A4P is a high-visibility branding and communication device that has refocused political attention on peacekeeping at a time when there was a pervading sense within the UN that peacekeeping was in crisis, if not in decline. Repeated protection failures, sexual abuse scandals, high peacekeeper fatalities, and political

10 In November 2018, USG Lacroix and USG Khare solicited views from heads of mission on how they envisioned A4P making a difference on the ground. A similar discussion was held between the then DPKO’s Division of Policy, Evaluation and Training and mission chiefs of staff. According to one UN official, during these initial contacts with the field, missions were not provided with an overarching vision of how they were expected to engage and implement A4P and were not given guidance on how to report on A4P implementation. The Secretariat is reportedly now taking steps to rectify this gap through more intensive follow-up. As outlined below, it has faced a similar challenge with member states.

11 Interview with UN official, New York, July 24, 2019; interview with former UN official, New York, August 5, 2019.

12 Interview with UN official, New York, July 18, 2019.

13 Interview with UN official, New York, July 3, 2019.

14 Interview with UN officials, New York, July 24, 2019; written communication with UN official, August 26, 2019.

and budgetary pressure from key member states fueled a corresponding crisis of morale among peacekeeping staff. Early in his tenure, Secretary-General António Guterres also seemed to signal a turn away from peacekeeping toward conflict prevention.¹⁵ With the reorganization of DPKO into the Department of Peace Operations, the dissolution of the Office of Operations, and an increased focus on “peace operations,” the identity of peacekeeping—one of the most visible faces of the UN—seemed to be at risk.¹⁶ The overwhelming support of member states for the political declaration is credited with demonstrating to the secretary-general the widespread consensus regarding the importance of peacekeeping as a crisis-management tool and convincing him of the need to put his weight behind it.

The Secretariat’s Efforts to Engage Member States

More than 75 percent of UN member states signed the Declaration of Shared Commitments—a strong demonstration of political support for peacekeeping that exceeded expectations within DPKO. This provided the secretary-general the political capital to proactively engage member states on peacekeeping. By rallying the Secretariat’s efforts and member states’ political attention under a single banner, A4P has provided a platform for UN leadership to discuss with member states the difficult issues facing peacekeeping. As one official noted, “A4P gives the UN access to member states in an ongoing way” and has “created space for discussions with less political undertone[s] than other forums where it gets bogged down (e.g., the Security Council, C34, and Fifth Committee).”¹⁷

From the outset, many member states have sought more detailed guidance from the Secretariat on how to implement their collective commitments

under A4P. As DPKO acknowledged in October 2018, one month after the declaration, the broad commitments needed to be translated into concrete actions that the Secretariat and member states could undertake.¹⁸ Some commitments, such as increasing women’s participation, enhancing safety and security, and improving access to training and equipment, draw on established work streams and initiatives with member states.¹⁹ It is proving more difficult, however, for member states to operationalize more strategic—and more ambiguous goals—on supporting political processes and improving protection of civilians. This is particularly difficult for smaller countries that are neither major troop contributors nor elected members of the Security Council.

In November 2018, DPO issued the first of several A4P “one-pagers” identifying priorities and ways in which member states could meet their commitments. Proposals included holding consultations between the Security Council and Fifth Committee to address the gap between mandates and resources, taking action on violations of status of forces agreements, certifying completion of protection-specific pre-deployment training, providing specialized medical and engineering capacities, and joining the Circle of Leadership and Voluntary Compact on Preventing Sexual Exploitation and Abuse.²⁰ Other points were restatements of the commitments from the A4P declaration. While this did not satiate member states’ appetite for more detailed instruction on what was expected of them, it is unclear how many of the signatories were actively pressing the Secretariat to help them live up to their commitments. As one senior UN official noted, “For member states, A4P was an event, not a process.”²¹

Frustrations grew in early 2019 due to the upheaval caused by the secretary-general’s peace and security and management reforms and internal

15 António Guterres, “Remarks at the Special Session on ‘Cooperation for Peace: Tackling the Root Causes of Global Crises,’” World Economic Forum, Davos, Switzerland, January 19, 2017, available at www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/speeches/2017-01-19/secretary-generals-cooperation-peace-remarks.

16 The 2015 High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations argued that the distinction between peacekeeping and special political missions was bureaucratic and dictated more by headquarters than the reality on the ground. By focusing on peacekeeping, A4P may have missed an opportunity to address shared challenges affecting the wider spectrum of UN crisis management.

17 Interview with UN official, New York, July 16, 2019.

18 David Haeri, remarks at the workshop “Delivering on Shared Commitments: A Dialogue between Member States, the UN and Civil Society on Action for Peacekeeping,” New York, October 16, 2018.

19 For example, the Action Plan to Improve the Security of UN Peacekeepers, the Uniformed Gender Parity Strategy, and the Voluntary Compact on Preventing Sexual Exploitation and Abuse.

20 UN DPKO and Department of Field Support, “A4P Implementation” (internal document), November 26, 2018.

21 Interview with UN official, New York, July 3, 2019.

differences within DPO over how ambitious A4P should be. This led to a perception among member states that the Secretariat was slow to capitalize on the momentum of the declaration and unprepared to follow through. DPO staff readily acknowledged that “the first six months of A4P were lost.”²²

By March and April, several member states active in the A4P process were expressing their frustration that the Secretariat had not provided more detailed guidance and was not more actively coordinating the various stakeholders to avoid duplication of efforts.²³ Discussions between the Secretariat and the Group of 10 (G10)—those countries that had been involved in consultations with DPKO on the draft Declaration of Shared Commitments—resulted in a push for the G10 and other interested member states to convene around A4P’s themes to discuss specific actions member states could pledge to take to fulfill their commitments.²⁴ By this point, certain members of the G10 were arguing that A4P needed a broader set of champions, with the G10 shifting to a role as a cross-regional sounding board. This shift was further propelled by changes within the G10. New experts replaced some of the original members, resulting in different views on the way forward, and countries cycled on and off the Security Council (with the Netherlands and Ethiopia leaving and Indonesia joining), shifting influence and priorities within the group.

During a meeting of the Group of Friends of Peace Operations in May, USG Lacroix called on member states that had endorsed the declaration to become “A4P champions” that would lead on specific commitments and “work together with other endorsers to identify a common way forward for implementation of A4P commitments on the Member State side.”²⁵ The role envisioned is that of both convener and implementer. As conveners, champions are supposed to “rally other Member States to take concrete actions” to support the implementation of A4P, including organizing discussions among endorsers, leading field visits to

missions, and sharing lessons and providing advice to others on how to concretize their commitments. As implementers, the champions “would have a track record of support for the particular A4P theme [they chose to lead on], whether through direct participation, material or political support... or expertise.”²⁶ In late June and early July, DPO organized three consultative meetings with member states to enlist their support on the champions initiative. One UN official described these meetings as a critical turning point for getting A4P back on track after its slow start, increasing both engagement by member states with DPO and involvement by entities such as the Office of Rule of Law and Security Institutions and the Peacebuilding Support Office with DPO and DPPA.

A few countries have made specific offers of support under the initiative. The UK, for example, has offered to hold a workshop with other Security Council members on streamlining mandates. The US and Canada have teamed up to strengthen analysis and reporting, the Netherlands is providing training on integrated protection of civilians, and China reaffirmed its support for implementation of the Action Plan to Improve the Security of UN Peacekeepers. Most countries, however, have only specified the theme they will focus on without identifying what they intend to do.²⁷ Moreover, further outreach by the Secretariat and existing champions will be needed to ensure geographic diversity—few African troop contributors have signed on (despite twelve of the top twenty contributors being African), nor have any hosts of large multidimensional missions.

Based on feedback from member states, including several major troop-contributing countries, members of the Security Council, and countries associated with particular thematic issues, there is general support for the champions initiative. As of early September, twenty-two countries have volunteered to be a champion of at least one of A4P’s seven themes; fifteen of these

22 Interview with UN official, New York, July 18, 2019.

23 Interview with diplomat, New York, May 14, 2019.

24 The G10 countries are Bangladesh, Brazil, Côte d’Ivoire, Ethiopia, France, Indonesia, the Netherlands, Rwanda, the UK, and Uruguay.

25 United Nations, “A4P: Member State Implementation,” white paper, May 17, 2019.

26 Ibid.

27 Champions have stepped forward for all seven themes in the declaration. The theme of performance and accountability has attracted the most interest, including from troop- and police-contributing countries and Security Council members; protection and sustaining peace have attracted the least.

have signed up for multiple themes. Nonetheless, there is widespread confusion among these countries as to their role as champions. At least at first, the Secretariat will need to continue to support member states in this process—to help them convene, to facilitate contact with field missions, and to suggest actions under each of the A4P themes. While the areas member states choose to champion are not necessarily the biggest priorities, at this point in the process, it may be more important to demonstrate how the champion role will work, chalk up whatever progress can be made, and build from there.

In July, the Secretariat circulated the first “A4P gap analysis” to member states, identifying “gaps and challenges in the thematic areas of A4P which require the support of Member States to achieve progress against the Declaration of Shared Commitments.”²⁸ Intended as a living document, the gap analysis proposes actions that member states (particularly A4P champions) can take to address these gaps. Many of the proposed actions are time-bound or at least concrete (e.g., supporting the establishment of a police advisory committee to strengthen consultations between peacekeeping stakeholders on mandates, incorporating gender advisers into the military hierarchy of police and troop contributors, conducting pre-deployment training on conflict-related sexual violence, disseminating information on the UN casualty evacuation policy and practicing casualty evaluation procedures during pre-deployment training). But the majority of proposed actions are less tangible (e.g., “work to strengthen coherence within the Security Council to constructively engage in the political process”). On these, member states are likely to continue to struggle, particularly in the absence of sufficient political will.

To enable more structured tracking of A4P, DPO has proposed an implementation dashboard on the public A4P website where endorsers would voluntarily register their pledges and, in principle, track progress over time. The website would help make visible what member states are doing to

implement their A4P commitments and how they are doing it. As one diplomat from a troop-contributing country commented, “It’s *Action* for Peacekeeping—it’s important to know what member states and the UN have actually done.”²⁹ With a planned launch by September 2019, the dashboard would be based on periodic surveys sent to member states.

To prevent the website from being a catalog of outputs (meetings, trainings, deployments, etc.), DPO staff are considering different approaches to assessing the individual and collective impact of member states, while acknowledging this is still a work in progress. Doing so will require further thought on how to define “impact” and who defines it—for example, whether it means positive, verifiable advances in restoring peace and stability in countries hosting peacekeeping operations or steady progress toward mandated strategic objectives despite security and political challenges.

Assessing impact is further complicated by A4P’s extremely broad scope and tendency to be seen as a catch-all for any efforts to improve peacekeeping: for example, peace agreements signed in the Central African Republic and South Sudan in February 2019 and September 2018, respectively, were reported as progress under A4P.³⁰ Such over-attribution could undermine efforts to define what A4P is and what it has achieved. Similarly, several UN staff and diplomats observed that the reduction in peacekeeper fatalities was due to the Action Plan to Improve the Security of UN Peacekeepers, not A4P.³¹ This may miss the point. It does not matter whether the Secretariat’s improved performance, force protection, or medical support is framed as part of A4P or not; what matters is whether performance itself improves and missions are better able to implement their mandates to consolidate peace, save lives, and deter spoilers.

UN staff interviewed stressed the strong political backing for A4P among senior leadership, including the secretary-general and the USG for peace operations. Yet many of the same staff confided that UN leadership has been too cautious

28 United Nations, “Action for Peacekeeping (A4P) Gap Analysis,” July 2019.

29 Interview with official from a troop-contributing country, New York, July 11, 2019.

30 See United Nations, “Overview of the Financing of the United Nations Peacekeeping Operations: Budget Performance for the Period from 1 July 2017 to 30 June 2018 and Budget for the Period from 1 July 2019 to 30 June 2020,” UN Doc. A/73/776, February 28, 2019, para. 10.

31 The Action Plan to Improve the Security of UN Peacekeepers, which was released in January 2018, influenced negotiations on A4P’s sections on performance and on safety and security.

in pushing member states to uphold their commitments—whether by failing to call out or replace troop contributors that perform poorly, submitting to political pressure to appoint people with certain nationalities to senior positions, or remaining silent about the limits of taking on new tasks without additional resources. According to this view, A4P is falling short of its intended purpose to mobilize member states to work together with the Secretariat to address urgent challenges that the Secretariat itself cannot address. Others take a more pragmatic approach, acknowledging that “the UN doesn’t have the leverage to change national positions that don’t support A4P. The Secretariat wouldn’t be effective even if our bosses were willing to use the stick. UN leadership has to balance competing priorities.”³²

MEMBER STATES’ (AND OTHER) EFFORTS

Since the last months of 2018, various fora have been organized to maintain and build on the political momentum created by A4P and to generate ideas for concrete action. These meetings have involved different combinations of member states, civil society, and UN staff. While they have unquestionably sustained attention and discussion on A4P, it is unclear to what extent they have influenced member states or led to concrete actions by Security Council members, troop- and police-contributing countries, financial contributors, or host governments.

In New York, the most consistent forum for dialogue between the UN and member states on A4P has been the Group of Friends of Peace Operations, an informal, cross-regional group co-led by the governments of Ethiopia, Norway, and the Republic of Korea.³³ USG Lacroix has increasingly used the group as a platform to update member states on progress, exchange views, hear their concerns, answer questions, discuss priorities, and communicate steps the Secretariat is taking.³⁴ Other countries have organized standalone meetings on the overall implementation of A4P or

on specific themes, including in the context of Security Council debates and Arria-formula meetings.³⁵

Following a high-level regional meeting in Cairo on “Enhancing the Performance of Peacekeeping Operations,” the government of Egypt and the Cairo International Center for Conflict Resolution developed the Cairo Roadmap, which presented “concrete and actionable recommendations” for implementing A4P.³⁶ The roadmap recommended actions that the UN and member states, including the Security Council, could take to advance political solutions, accountability of civilian and uniformed personnel, provision and support of well-trained and well-equipped uniformed personnel, and support to host governments to build peace.

Similarly, the Challenges Forum, an annual gathering of government officials, UN leaders, civil society, and academic experts on peacekeeping, focused its November 2018 dialogue in Sweden on generating ideas for operationalizing commitments and identifying who should be responsible for implementation. The forum produced over twenty recommendations, ranging from developing mission-wide strategic communication strategies to analyzing drivers of peace alongside conflict dynamics. A subsequent meeting in Montreal in June 2019—billed as an examination of A4P from a field perspective—continued generating ideas for implementing A4P, some of which reflected those raised in previous fora or reform efforts already underway.³⁷

In advance of the UN Peacekeeping Ministerial on Uniformed Capabilities, Performance and Protection in March 2019, three preparatory meetings were organized on A4P themes: one on training and capacity building in Montevideo, one on protection and performance in The Hague, and one on women, peace, and security in Addis Ababa. Although framed around A4P, the meetings aimed to line up pledges for the ministerial, not to identify concrete action on the commitments. At the March

32 Interview with UN official, New York, June 24, 2019.

33 The Republic of Korea provided funding for this issue brief.

34 It was at group of friends meetings that USG Lacroix first introduced the concept of the champions for A4P and their potential focus areas and actions, disseminated the gaps analysis, and announced plans to roll out an A4P implementation dashboard.

35 IPI also hosted several roundtables and discussions with member states, the UN, and civil society to help define next steps for implementation.

36 The Cairo Roadmap provides a framework for how different thematic areas of the declaration interrelate with peacekeeping performance and effectiveness.

37 International Forum for the Challenges of Peace Operations, “Action for Peacekeeping: Strengthening the Effectiveness of Future Peace Operations,” January 2019.

conference, ministers were encouraged to announce progress on relevant A4P commitments alongside pledges of new capabilities. Some of these pledges aligned with commitments under A4P, including training for medical personnel and Francophone police, increased deployment of female officers and soldiers and female engagement teams, and funding for the “light coordination mechanism” to match training and capacity-building providers with countries in need of support.³⁸

The meeting in Cairo, the Challenges Forum, and the peacekeeping ministerial were well-attended, high-profile events that helped generate ideas and sustain political attention on A4P, including in capitals. There is no clear indication, however, that they have directly contributed to or guided member states’ efforts to implement their commitments under the declaration.³⁹ What these meetings do provide is a forum for diverse stakeholders to collectively discuss and, at least in principle, develop a shared understanding of the challenges facing contemporary peacekeeping and the way forward.

The Security Council has twice pronounced itself on A4P. In May 2018, two months after the open debate on peacekeeping where the secretary-general launched A4P, the council agreed a presidential statement noting the secretary-general’s intention “to develop a set of mutually agreed commitments to adapt peacekeeping operations.”⁴⁰ One year later, in May 2019, a second presidential statement welcomed the secretary-general’s efforts to mobilize all partners and stakeholders through A4P but only recognized the added value of the Declaration of Shared Commitments in relation to training and capacity building.⁴¹

A formal endorsement of the declaration by the council has been stymied by political divisions, however. In November 2018, Côte d’Ivoire and the Netherlands circulated a draft resolution on

improving peacekeeping mandates that included language welcoming the Declaration of Shared Commitments and emphasizing the importance of the council’s engagement in political solutions. The draft resolution was intended as a bookend to the March 2018 open debate. It was also intended as a collective expression of the Security Council’s willingness to support the political commitments in the declaration over which it has the most influence, including on mandates and political engagement. During several rounds of negotiation on the draft, the resolution’s co-sponsors attempted to accommodate concerns from China, Russia, and the US, particularly regarding maintenance of the council’s prerogative to decide when and how to respond to threats to international peace and security, the legal status of the declaration, and modalities for its implementation, including the role of the C34. But by mid-December, it was clear the resolution had run out of steam, and with it the council’s appetite to formally endorse the declaration.

The A4P commitments on enhancing political strategies were always going to be the most difficult to tackle and the most dependent on the will of member states, including the five permanent members of the Security Council and other influential states. Nonetheless, more concise, prioritized mandates is one issue where two penholders, the UK and France, are trying to make headway. In Resolution 2472 (2019), the UK reduced the African Union–United Nations Mission in Somalia’s (AMISOM) mandate from fifty-seven operative paragraphs spanning twelve pages to thirty-five operative paragraphs over seven pages—the most significant streamlining for a major peacekeeping operation after several years of calls for clearer mandates.⁴² The recent French text on the mission in Mali in Resolution 2480 (2019) sets out strategic priorities for the mission, including a new focus on a politically led strategy to protect civilians—though the council’s instruction

38 USG Lacroix referenced A4P in his opening statement, connecting the need for specialized capabilities like helicopters, quick-reaction forces, and peacekeeping intelligence capabilities to the overall goal of “reconfiguring missions to be more mobile and more proactive.” Jean-Pierre Lacroix, statement to the UN Peacekeeping Ministerial, New York, March 29, 2019, available at https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/pk-ministerial-usg-dpo-asdelivered_.pdf.

39 In the case of the Cairo Roadmap, both UN staff and some member states expressed wariness about its intent, seeing it as a diplomatic countermove to the US-led focus on performance in the Security Council or, alternatively, as an effort by Egypt to increase its political influence over peacekeeping within Africa.

40 UN Security Council, *Statement by the President of the Security Council*, UN Doc. S/PRST/2018/10, May 14, 2018.

41 UN Security Council, *Statement by the President of the Security Council*, UN Doc. S/PRST/2019/4, May 7, 2019.

42 Interview with diplomat from a permanent member of the Security Council, New York, July 11, 2019; Security Council Resolutions 2431 (2018) and 2472 (2019). For an overview of the issue, see Security Council Report, “Is Christmas Really Over? Improving the Mandating of Peace Operations,” February 22, 2019.

to the mission on how to align resources accordingly is a masterful demonstration of diplomatic equivocation, reflecting differences between France, the UK, and the US.⁴³

Finally, in July, the C34 decided to align the structure of its annual report with A4P.⁴⁴ The change was proposed by Morocco in its role as coordinator of the Non-Aligned Movement—still an influential bloc in General Assembly negotiations on peace and security both due to its sheer number of members (120) and because many of these are major troop and police contributors. This is the first major change to the structure of the C34's report and the first update to its working methods in over a decade, after several recent failed attempts.⁴⁵ The revised structure should enable the C34 to consolidate and streamline recommendations to the Secretariat. More importantly, the change could be a step toward revitalizing the C34 as a forum for member states to discuss and reach consensus on the highest-priority issues facing peacekeeping rather than a yearly exercise in collectively editing the previous year's report.

Conclusion: How to Make A4P Relevant

In February, USG Lacroix, addressing a meeting of the Group of Friends of Peace Operations about A4P, observed, “The momentum could head in two possible directions—one in which the momentum dies out quickly, and the other one in which we sustain the hard-earned momentum for as long as we can to create significant progress in peacekeeping.”⁴⁶ One year on, A4P has not died

out—in large part due to the USG's concerted focus. But it has yet to live up to its potential.

What, then, is the way forward? A4P is caught between its function as a tool to advance ongoing, incremental changes that respond to existing shortcomings and challenges and the continued need for an ambitious vision of the future of peacekeeping. These are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Reducing fatalities, saving civilian lives, producing clearer mandates, increasing the number of women peacekeepers, and shifting to more data-driven performance assessments are all worthwhile goals. But they will not enable today's missions to help countries achieve lasting political settlements and sustainably address increasingly complex drivers of conflict.

A4P provides a useful platform for the secretary-general to engage in dialogue with member states—from Security Council members and financial contributors to troop contributors and host governments—on how to better design, implement, and evaluate peacekeeping operations. This dialogue could focus on how to address fundamental questions and tensions around host-state consent, the limits of force in the face of insurgencies and other asymmetric threats driven by new entrepreneurs of violence, and the doctrinal and reputational implications of providing operational support to non-UN military operations. These and other questions will present themselves with greater insistence as the UN is confronted with new conflicts in an increasingly polarized world where confrontation rather than diplomacy seems to have become the new norm.

43 See Security Council Resolution 2480 (2019), para. 21.

44 The Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations is “the only United Nations forum mandated to review comprehensively the whole question of peacekeeping operations in all their aspects, including measures aimed at enhancing the capacity of the Organization to conduct United Nations peacekeeping operations.” United Nations, *Report of the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations*, UN Doc. A/72/19, 2018, para. 19.

45 Interviews with diplomats, New York, July 8 and 15, 2019.

46 Group of Friends of Peace Operations, meeting note (internal document), February 26, 2019.

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777 United Nations Plaza, New York, NY 10017-3521, USA

TEL +1-212-687-4300 FAX +1-212-983-8246

Freyung 3, 1010 Vienna, Austria

TEL +43-1-533-8881 FAX +43-1-533-8881-11

52-52 Harbour House, Bahrain Financial Harbour

P.O. Box 1467, Manama, Bahrain

www.ipinst.org