



Accountability System for the Protection of Civilians

Office for Peacekeeping Strategic Partnership

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SUMMARY

Under the direction of the under-secretaries-general for peace operations and operational support, the Office for Peacekeeping Strategic Partnership (OPSP) regularly reviews peacekeeping missions to identify gaps that have an impact on the delivery of their mandates.¹ The OPSP has an advisory role, as it provides both under-secretaries-general with holistic, comprehensive, coherent and objective analysis and recommendations on systemic issues.² It conducts both comprehensive and targeted reviews of peacekeeping missions and peacekeeping operations.³ It also makes recommendations to ensure adequate support to uniformed personnel (especially for their safety, security, and welfare), to address systemic issues, and to adopt lessons learned and best practices.⁴

The general assembly initially defined the functions of the OPSP as follows:

1. "Strengthening the peacekeeping partnership by assisting in identifying gaps that have an impact on the delivery of mandates by United Nations peacekeeping missions by making recommendations on systemic issues relating to United Nations peacekeeping operations";
2. "Making recommendations to ensure the safety, security and welfare of, and the Organization's provision of adequate support services to uniformed field personnel";
3. "Working closely with troop- and police-contributing countries and senior leadership, both in the field and at Headquarters"; and
4. "Making recommendations to incorporate lessons learned and best practices from peacekeeping missions into peacekeeping operations."

Informally, the OPSP is often referred to and perceived as the "inspectorate general" of the Department of Peace Operations (DPO), a name that was never formally adopted due to political sensitivities around the notion of an inspectorate body. In its resolution establishing the OPSP, the General Assembly pushed for the OPSP to focus on peacekeeping partnerships and mutual support and stressed the importance of coordination, consultation, and dialogue with troop- and police-contributing countries

¹ UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations and Department of Field Support, "The Functions and Role of the Office for Peacekeeping Strategic Partnership (OPSP)," April 2015.

² In Resolution 67/287, the General Assembly stressed "that the nature and functions of the Office shall remain nonexecutive." UN General Assembly Resolution 67/287 (June 28, 2013), UN Doc. A/RES/67/287.

³ In Resolution 67/287, the General Assembly stressed "that the nature and functions of the Office shall remain nonexecutive." UN General Assembly Resolution 67/287 (June 28, 2013), UN Doc. A/RES/67/287.

⁴ Ibid.

(T/PCCs). Notably, the OPSP is encouraged to work closely with T/PCCs and senior leadership, both in the field and at headquarters.

From March 2018 to February 2020, the OPSP conducted ten reviews and two special investigations.⁵

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RELEVANCE TO THE PROTECTION OF CIVILIANS

The OPSP has considered performance issues impacting the implementation of protection of civilians (POC) mandates in some of its reviews and issued specific recommendations to improve POC efforts.

Examples

The OPSP visited the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) and reviewed the mission's strategy for and approach to the protection of POC sites. Following this visit, UNMISS shifted toward a more mobile posture, enhanced the sharing of peacekeeping-intelligence, and improved its casualty evacuation procedures.

The OPSP visited the UN-AU Mission in Darfur (UNAMID), where it reviewed, among other issues, the way integrated patrols were conducted and issued recommendations related to force domination.

The team also participated in the special investigation into the massacre in Alindao in the Central African Republic (CAR) and reviewed the factors and systemic issues that led to the crisis. It identified the shortcomings of the military, police, and civilian components that contributed to the mission's failure to protect civilians.

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RULES, GUIDELINES, AND METHODOLOGY

Governing rules

Established by the General Assembly through Resolution 67/287 in August 2013, the OPSP was fully operational in December 2013. The Department of Peacekeeping Operations and Department of Field Support adopted an official policy outlining the functions and role of the OPSP in April 2015.

Process and functioning

Recognizing the need for strategic and operational engagement at all levels across UN headquarters and field missions, the UN established the OPSP to ensure that:

⁵ In this timeframe, OPSP conducted reviews of the UN Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF), UN Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP), UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), UN Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO), UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA), UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), UN-African Union Mission in Darfur (UNAMID), and UN Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA).

- Concepts of operations, rules of engagement, mission support plans, and other directives are appropriate;
- Plans, information gathering, and operational activities are integrated;
- Standards are applied;
- Contributions are generated;
- Personnel are trained;
- Logistics requirements are met;
- Medical capabilities are established;
- Welfare measures are in place; and
- Safety and security provisions are enhanced.

Among the major issues it considers are safety, security, and welfare. The OPSP also leads efforts to follow up on the implementation of the action plan on improving the security of peacekeepers.

The OPSP comprises a director, a senior military strategic partnership officer, a senior police strategic partnership officer, a mission support officer, and a team assistant. The OPSP has been reinforced by additional posts seconded by member states or funded by member states' extrabudgetary contributions.

The OPSP aims to visit all peacekeeping missions to assess gaps in implementing mandates as frequently as possible. It designs its annual workplan with anticipated reviews, visits, and reports in response to specific requests but can also undertake ad hoc visits following an incident or special investigation.⁶ From March 2018 to February 2020, it conducted ten reviews and participated in two special investigations.

Upon its return from the field, the OPSP provides a debriefing within one week and a report within six weeks, directed to both under-secretaries-general at UN headquarters. Findings are also shared with the head of the mission under evaluation and with all relevant stakeholders. These under-secretaries-general are the only authorities to endorse the OPSP's recommendations. The integrated operational teams (IOTs) at headquarters are responsible for coordinating the implementation of recommendations, with the assistance of the OPSP. The OPSP also liaises with T/PCCs to discuss the implementation of its recommendations.

⁶ The workplan is shared with the evaluation team of DPO's Policy, Evaluation and Training Division (DPET) and the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS).


The OPSP conducts periodic, independent inspections of all peacekeeping missions and makes direct recommendations to the under-secretaries-general to address gaps in the implementation of mandates. Consequently, the positioning of the OPSP confers it legitimacy and makes it a promising tool to strengthen accountability. Its small and agile team of senior military and police experts has been able to provide concrete recommendations to address operational challenges and performance gaps that were subsequently implemented.

Timing

Regular process	X	The OPSP regularly visits missions for its targeted, crosscutting reviews.
Extraordinary measure after incident	X	The OPSP can also consider extraordinary incidents and lead and participate in ad hoc missions, including special investigations.

Actors and answerability structure

The OPSP reports to the under-secretaries-general for peace operations and operational support. It is often perceived as an independent, expert-level team that can afford to be critical and provide frank assessments. The credibility of the current head of the OPSP (a general who served as a force commander and an SRSG in peacekeeping missions) has been key to ensuring the legitimacy of its reports.⁷ Recommendations are endorsed by both under-secretaries-general, and a follow-up video call is organized every three months with field missions to discuss the implementation of these recommendations. The OPSP pursues a collaborative approach with T/PCCs to address challenges and performance gaps. It engages in regular discussions with contributors and brings their attention to the performance issues it identified during its field visits.

 Held accountable by	Individuals	Unit			Mission	Secretariat	Contributing countries	Security Council/ 5 th Committee	Member states	Population	Other
		Military	Police	Civilian							
Individuals											
Unit/ section/ component	Military					X					
	Police					X					
	Civilian										
Mission											
Secretariat											
Contributing countries						X					
Member states											
Security Council/ 5th Committee											

⁷ The UN General Assembly explicitly requested “the Secretary-General to appoint a Director of the Office who has leadership experience in peacekeeping missions and is from a troop- or police contributing country, taking into account the level of national contributions to peacekeeping operations.” UN General Assembly Resolution 67/287 (August 15, 2013), UN Doc. A/RES/67/287.

Scope and objective

In the past, the OPSP has tended to focus on assessing uniformed personnel, which can limit the relevance and impact of its recommendations for multidimensional, whole-of-mission issues like POC. Recently, however, the OPSP has broadened the scope of its reviews and examined cross-cutting issues. The office is also part of the Policy Working Group at headquarters and actively contributes to the development and revision of policy and guidance.

Because of its structure, however, the OPSP has few resources to conduct in-depth, longitudinal analysis of structural, systemic, or thematic issues and tends to be consumed by mission-specific reviews throughout the year. The absence of a senior civilian staff member who could bring specific expertise on political, civilian, and cross-cutting issues has been a critical limitation to the team's ability to assess multidimensional peacekeeping missions.

Collect best practices and lessons learned	X	As per the General Assembly resolution, the OPSP can make recommendations to incorporate lessons learned and best practices.
Track performance	X	The OPSP regularly visits peacekeeping missions to identify sources of dysfunction and shortcomings in the implementation of mandates.
Establish facts and circumstances	X	In the case of special investigations, the OPSP can contribute to the establishment of facts for a specific incident.
Establish responsibility	X	In the case of special investigations, the OPSP can contribute to the attribution of responsibility for failure.
Identify structural and systemic issues	X	The OPSP regularly visits missions to identify systemic issues, gaps, and factors impacting performance.

Type of accountability

The OPSP enables the UN to ensure performance accountability for uniformed personnel.

Outcome

The OPSP issues a report following its field visits and shares recommendations with both under-secretaries-general, who have the authority to endorse them. The implementation of endorsed recommendations, with specific timelines in certain cases, is supposed to be coordinated by the IOTs with the assistance of the OPSP. The under-secretaries-general participate in follow-up video calls with the missions that were reviewed every two to three months following the endorsement of recommendations. This demonstrates buy-in within the senior leadership of the UN Secretariat and ensures follow-up with the missions until the recommendations are sufficiently implemented.

Recommendations can include corrective measures, depending on the scope of the issues identified by the team. These can address the strategic approach of a mission and the rationale behind the deployment of uniformed capabilities. In UNMISS, for example, the OPSP identified gaps between the mission's general focus on POC sites and the significant level of threats outside POC sites. As reported by DPO, this led to a change of strategic approach by the mission.⁸ OPSP's recommendations can also touch upon operational issues related to a mission's patrolling approach or logistical issues, such as the provision of appropriate bathrooms to facilitate the deployment of female peacekeepers. It can also review the relevance of concepts of operations, rules of engagement, mission plans, coordination structures, and support processes.

Learn	Disseminate and integrate internally	X	As per the General Assembly resolution, the OPSP can make recommendations to incorporate lessons learned and best practices.
	Account for publicly		
Correct	Improve internal processes	X	The OPSP can make recommendations on internal processes, such as coordination or planning mechanisms and staffing structures.
	Inform the selection of personnel	X	The OPSP can make recommendations and observations on pre-deployment training and the operational readiness of T/PCCs.
Sanction	Recommend sanctions	X	The OPSP can recommend the repatriation of a unit; report underperformance to the under-secretaries-general and T/PCCs; and recommend changes in structures, mechanisms, and strategies.
	Establish incentives	X	The OPSP can identify ways to enhance performance (such as through improved support).

⁸ Action for Peacekeeping, "Key Achievements on Performance," December 2019, available at: https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/201912013_a4p_performance_achievements_one_pager_final_update003.pdf.

Independence and impartiality

The OPSP fulfills functions similar to those of an inspectorate general. It is both an internal tool for DPO and an independent oversight body.

The OPSP is generally perceived as impartial and independent. Its strengths reside in its credibility within the system, thanks to its expertise in issues affecting uniformed personnel and the experience of its current head and its senior military and police advisers.

The OPSP often provides bold assessments and recommendations, which can be directed at any T/PCC. Heads of military or police components do not directly report to the OPSP and are not accountable to it. The OPSP is also independent from the Office of Military Affairs (OMA) and the Office of Rule of Law and Security Institutions (OROLSI).⁹

Inclusivity

While the General Assembly has tasked the OPSP with assisting in identifying gaps that have an impact on the delivery of mandates by UN peacekeeping missions as a whole, it has tended to focus on uniformed components given its limited resources and capacity. The UN internal policy formalized this focus by stressing “gaps, systemic issues and emerging challenges affecting the implementation of mandated tasks for uniformed personnel,” though it also refers to a holistic, comprehensive, coherent, and objective view of all the factors contributing to missions’ ability to implement their mandates.

Over the recent years, however, the team has sought to ensure the multidimensional, integrated character of its reviews, and emphasized the importance of comprehensive assessments into all components of peacekeeping operations. As stated by a UN official familiar with OPSP, “The force is nothing in itself.”¹⁰

The OPSP’s ability to comprehensively address POC has been inherently limited by the composition of its team, which did not initially include a civilian with substantive expertise. In the past, civilian staff from other DPO divisions have participated in OPSP reviews in an ad hoc manner. As of September 2020, the creation of a civilian post within the OPSP through extra-budgetary contributions was being considered as a way to fill this gap.

⁹ The General Assembly decided that the office “shall not have an impact on existing command and control arrangements for uniformed personnel, specifically on the responsibilities of force commanders and police commissioners in the field.” UN General Assembly Resolution 67/287 (August 15, 2013), UN Doc. A/RES/67/287.

¹⁰ Interview with DPO official, New York, February 2020.

Transparency

In its early years, the OPSP's reports were seen as lacking transparency, as they remained internal and were only shared with a small number of UN officials.¹¹ As raised by a few DPO officials, this confidentiality undermined the effective sharing of lessons learned within the department.

However, in recent years, the OPSP has sought to reach a broader audience and now shares its reviews with the mission leadership; DPO's OMA and Policy, Evaluation and Training Division; the Police Division; the regional offices of DPO and the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA); DOS; and IOTs.

Follow-up mechanisms

The fact that the OPSP reports to both under-secretaries-general, who regularly discuss its reports with the relevant mission, can help ensure high-level buy-in to its recommendations. However, this direct reporting line to the under-secretaries-general also isolates the OPSP from the rest of DPO and DOS and from missions. In particular, the implementation of its recommendations remains a challenge, despite the IOTs being officially designated as coordinators of implementation. There is a lack of structural arrangements to make sure that recommendations trickle down to the field level and are sustained by all personnel who should contribute to their implementation at the operational and tactical levels.

Possible follow-up mechanisms	X	Recommendations are shared with mission leadership, T/PCCs, and relevant member states for follow-up. The IOT coordinates the implementation of recommendations with the assistance of the OPSP. The OPSP liaises with T/PCCs to establish corrective measures.
Available enforcement measures	X	Both under-secretaries-general have the authority to take decisions following OPSP recommendations, including the repatriation of uniformed personnel.
Transmissibility to other mechanisms	X	Recommendations can be directed to T/PCCs, the Secretariat, or missions. However, formal transmissibility processes have not been put in place to ensure the implementation of these recommendations.

¹¹ Interviews with DPO officials, New York, January–March 2020.