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Peacekeeping in Nonpermissive Environments: Assessing Troop-Contributing Countries' Perspectives on Capabilities and Mindsets

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Executive Summary

Many peacekeepers are deployed in areas where ongoing armed conflicts or other situations of violence, including attacks against peacekeepers, have constrained their capacity to implement their mandate and protect themselves. This has led some troop-contributing countries (TCCs) to raise concerns about the high-risk environments to which their troops are deployed. One of the most critical issues when deploying troops to nonpermissive environments is ensuring they have the right capabilities and mindset.

Without sufficient capabilities, peacekeepers face a higher risk of death and injury and may struggle to implement their mandate. However, many peacekeepers feel that pre-deployment training does not properly prepare them for deployment to high-risk environments. A related challenge is the lack of adequate enabling capabilities such as air assets. Filling these gaps requires stronger partnerships, particularly among TCCs. However, there are concerns about whether such partnerships are effective in practice when some TCCs are unwilling to share their assets. Moreover, while there are new technologies that could help fill these gaps, some TCCs have concerns about the widespread use of technologies such as unarmed, unmanned aerial vehicles in peacekeeping operations.

In nonpermissive peacekeeping environments, having the right mindset is also critical to peacekeepers' ability to implement their mandates and protect themselves. The mindset of peacekeeping contingents is often predicated on the concepts and attitudes imparted through the training and doctrinal perspective of the TCC that deployed them as well as the mindset of mission leadership. Caveats imposed by TCCs can also have an impact on the mindset of peacekeepers. In addition, the mindset of individual peacekeepers is shaped by their rank and past deployment experience.

These gaps in capabilities and mindsets raise questions around both accountability to and accountability of peacekeepers. Failure to properly train, equip, and support troops being deployed to nonpermissive environments raises questions about whether the UN and TCCs are accountable to peacekeepers. Likewise, it is unclear to what extent peacekeepers should be held accountable for their performance when they have not been provided the proper equipment, training, and mindset.

Introduction

In recent years, multidimensional UN peacekeeping operations have contended with rapidly changing, uncertain, and highly demanding environments. The majority of peacekeepers are deployed in areas where they face weak political institutions or stalled political processes, diminished consent from the host state and local populations, and difficult security situations where there is little or no peace to keep. These include peacekeepers deployed to the UN missions in Mali (MINUSMA), the Central African Republic (MINUSCA), and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), where ongoing armed conflicts or other situations of violence, including intentional attacks against peacekeepers, have constrained the capacity of peacekeepers to implement their mandate.

In the face of this complex threat environment, the UN adopted the Action for Peacekeeping (A4P) initiative and Declaration of Shared Commitments in 2018 and the Action for Peacekeeping Plus (A4P+) priorities in 2021.¹ The aim of these initiatives is to refocus peacekeeping mandates with clear priorities, ensure that forces are better equipped and trained, and focus on the long-term goals of protection, sustainable peace, and coherence with other actors operating in peacekeeping environments.

Despite such efforts, there is still a lack of adequate training, guidance, and resources for peacekeepers to recognize, prevent, and respond to threats. Peacekeepers often find themselves being targeted by armed groups, violent extremists, criminal networks, and other spoilers (see Box 1). This requires them to take decisive action to safeguard themselves and civilian populations. In Mali, especially, peacekeepers are frequently targeted by armed groups. As of January 2023, MINUSMA had

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suffered 169 peacekeeping fatalities due to malicious acts—the most of any mission—followed by the missions in Lebanon (94), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (54), and the Central African Republic (51).² This has led some troop-contributing countries (TCCs) to raise concerns about the high-risk environments to which their troops are deployed and to urge the UN, host countries, and other stakeholders to do more to address the risks facing their troops.

This paper takes stock of TCCs' perspectives on one of the priority areas of A4P+ that is critical to the deployment of troops to nonpermissive peacekeeping contexts: capabilities and mindsets. "Capabilities" refers to the equipment and training peacekeeping personnel need to operate in high-risk contexts and the resources and procedures they require to prevent attacks and to reduce casualties when attacks occur. "Mindsets" refers to the mental preparedness of peacekeeping personnel to confront risks and to take the initiative to prevent and respond to attacks. Without the right capabilities and mindsets, peacekeepers deployed to nonpermissive environments are at greater risk of harm and may struggle to implement their mandate.

This paper interrogates TCCs' perspectives on each of these issues and explores their implications for peacekeeping policy and practice. It also considers how capabilities and mindsets relate to accountability for and accountability of peacekeepers. The goal is not only to deepen understanding of the UN's progress on implementing the A4P+ priorities but, more importantly, to assess the state of play of peacekeeping in nonpermissive environments, drawing on the diverse perspectives of TCCs. The analysis in the paper is based on a review of the extant literature, UN reports, and key informant interviews with representatives of ten

¹ The A4P initiative was launched by UN Secretary-General António Guterres in March 2018 and consists of mutually agreed principles and a Declaration of Shared Commitments endorsed by more than 150 member states to strengthen peacekeeping through collective action by all relevant stakeholders. To accelerate progress on the implementation of A4P and the Declaration of Shared Commitments, the secretary-general launched A4P+ in 2021, which consists of seven priority areas and two cross-cutting themes for 2021–2023.

² Fatalities by malicious acts include attacks on convoys and bases, combat operations, and crimes. UN Peacekeeping, "Stats by Mission Incident Type: Fatalities by Mission and Incident Type up to 31 Jan 2023," available at https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/stats_by_mission_incident_type_4_83_january_2023.pdf.

TCCs from Africa, South America, Asia, and Western Europe.³

Capabilities

Most TCCs emphasize the need for adequate capabilities to fulfill their mandates in nonpermissive environments. Without sufficient capabilities, the risk of death and injury is likely to be high, and the effective implementation of mission mandates may prove challenging. For instance, the 2017

report on “Improving Security of United Nations Peacekeepers” (the “Cruz Report”) found that most of the fatalities in UN missions occurred because personnel were unprepared, with inadequate training and equipment to deter and respond to hostile acts.⁴ The report found that the UN and TCCs should do more to ensure that missions have the necessary capacity and capabilities. Generally, TCCs’ assessments of capabilities center on two key elements: the generation of well-trained personnel; and the provision of requisite equipment and

Box 1: Peacekeeping and counterterrorism

In some cases, peacekeepers operate in contexts where there is a presence of armed groups designated as terrorist by the UN Security Council or by states. This adds to the complexity of ensuring that peacekeepers possess the proper capabilities and mindsets to implement their mandates while also increasing risks to peacekeepers’ safety and security.

While peacekeepers may be authorized to use “all necessary means,” up to and including the use of force, to defend themselves and implement their mandates, they are not authorized to undertake counterterrorism activities. This is based on several landmark reports of the UN, including the 2000 Brahimi Report and the 2015 report of the High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations, as well as the 2008 Capstone Doctrine, which note that peacekeeping operations are not fit to undertake counterterrorism activities as doing so would violate the principle of impartiality.

In some cases, however, UN peacekeepers operate alongside counterterrorism actors. In Mali, for example, MINUSMA has provided logistical, technical, and operational support to counterterrorism operations, including the Joint Force of the G5 Sahel. MINUSMA’s support for and proximity to these counterterrorism actors has increased the risk of attacks on peacekeepers, hampered efforts to protect civilians, and raised questions about the possibility that MINUSMA is a party to the armed conflict in Mali.⁵

Increasingly, debates are emerging around what UN peace operations can and should do in the face of threats from terrorism and violent extremism, but there is still no doctrine or guidance from the UN in this regard.⁶ While some states have advocated for integrating activities aimed at countering and preventing violent extremism (C/PVE) into the work of UN missions, others have cautioned against this. For example, Fionnuala Ní Aoláin, the UN special rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism, has argued that accepting C/PVE into the fold of UN business could lead to the subversion of the UN’s core principles and the objective of sustaining peace and legitimize actions that violate international human rights and humanitarian law.⁷

³ The interviews were conducted with representatives of Bangladesh, Côte d’Ivoire, Germany, Ghana, Italy, Nigeria, Pakistan, Rwanda, Senegal, and Uruguay. They were selected to ensure geographic diversity and to include a range of levels of troop contributors.

⁴ UN Peacekeeping, “Improving Security of United Nations Peacekeepers: We Need to Change the Way We Are Doing Business,” December 19, 2017.

⁵ Namie Di Razza, “Protecting Civilians in the Context of Violent Extremism: The Dilemmas of UN Peacekeeping in Mali,” International Peace Institute, October 2018.

⁶ Naureen Chowdhury Fink and Arthur Boutellis, “Between a Rock and a Hard Place: Counterterrorism and Peacekeeping in the Sahel,” *IPI Global Observatory*, July 20, 2021.

⁷ See: UN General Assembly, *Promotion and Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms while Countering Terrorism—Note by the Secretary-General*; and Agathe Sarfati, Eimer Curtin, and William Lighthart, “Reflecting the UN’s Core Mission in its Counterterrorism Efforts: Interview with Fionnuala Ní Aoláin,” *IPI Global Observatory*, November 30, 2022. See also: Ali Altiok and Jordan Street, “A Fourth Pillar for the United Nations? The Rise of Counter-Terrorism,” *Saferworld*, June 2020.

enabling capabilities, including new technologies, as well as intelligence.

Training of Personnel

TCCs have the primary responsibility for training their personnel. This is done through pre-deployment trainings, usually based on standard UN materials and conducted in accordance with national standards, requirements, and regulations. In most instances, TCCs organize these trainings with support from the Member States Support Team, which is part of the UN Integrated Training Service. It is the duty of the UN to provide policies, standards, and training materials to guide TCCs in the training and capacity building of uniformed contingents before deployment.⁸ The UN also provides in-mission specialized and leadership training for uniformed and civilian personnel, although this is done on a smaller scale and is more challenging than pre-deployment training.⁹

Although the pre-deployment training modules have evolved to reflect the realities of nonpermissive environments, not much has changed in the way TCCs execute these trainings.

Among TCCs, there is general agreement about the importance of pre-deployment and in-mission training to improve the efficiency and performance of personnel. High-quality training enhances the capacities (knowledge, attitudes, and skills) that peacekeepers need to be effective in responding to threats in the area of operation.¹⁰ It can also form and reinforce peacekeepers' mindset prior to deploying. As one respondent stated, "[Pre-deployment training] prepares personnel to adapt quickly to the mission environments and provide useful information on the specific mission context [and] their expected roles and conduct."¹¹

Accordingly, member states have committed to "provide well-trained and well-equipped uniformed personnel and to support the effective development

and delivery of peacekeeping training... [as well as] to support pre-deployment preparations of personnel and capabilities required for effective performance." The secretary-general has also committed to "provide Member States with training materials and standards which match operational requirements."¹²

The operational requirements that trainings need to match have changed as peacekeepers have deployed to less permissive environments. Interviewees emphasized the need for adequate and consistent training on the skills needed to conduct counterinsurgency operations and jungle warfare, counter improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and ambushes, evacuate casualties and perform buddy first-aid, protect bases and convoys, and gather intelligence, as well as basic shooting practice.¹³

However, some respondents indicated that the pre-deployment training in most cases does not properly prepare troops for deployment to high-risk environments.¹⁴ Although

the pre-deployment training modules have evolved to reflect the realities of these environments, not much has changed in the way TCCs execute these trainings. A number of TCCs continue to rely on assumptions, methods, and procedures developed for traditional peacekeeping, where the threat level to peacekeepers is much lower. This is due to factors including inadequate training facilities, insufficient training guidance, and the short duration of pre-deployment trainings.¹⁵ Addressing these shortcomings may require the establishment of national institutions and systems devoted to peacekeeping, as well as the integration of peacekeeping training into national training curricula. Moreover, the UN tends to assume that TCCs have already trained their troops and does not necessarily follow up to

8 These standardized trainings include the Core Pre-Deployment Training Materials (CPTM) and Specialised Training Materials (STMs).

9 For more information, see: UN Peacekeeping Resource Hub, "Functional Training," available at <https://research.un.org/en/peacekeeping-community/functional>.

10 Interview with former Ivorian peacekeeper, August 2022.

11 Interview with Nigerian peacekeeper, August 2022.

12 For more information, see: UN Peacekeeping, "Action for Peacekeeping: Declaration of Shared Commitments," para. 14.

13 Interview with former Nigerian peacekeeper, October 2022.

14 Interview with former Bangladeshi peacekeeper, October 2022.

15 The level of training is also not consistent from unit to unit within each TCC. Therefore, unit rotations make it difficult for the UN to predict the performance of personnel.

guarantee the quality of training or ensure that it is the right training for the particular environment peacekeepers are being deployed to. In-mission trainings tend to be short and one-off so cannot make up for these shortfalls with pre-deployment training.

Beyond training, some respondents suggested that collaboration between experienced TCCs and less experienced ones could help peacekeepers gain knowledge and skills for future deployment. This could include collaboration on the provision of critical enabling capabilities such as aviation, counter-IED capabilities, and medical or engineering support for missions.

Equipment, Enabling Capabilities, and Information

Equipment and enabling capabilities, including new technologies and medical, engineering, logistics, transport, and aviation support, are critical for missions operating in non-permissive settings. Failure to provide these capabilities creates risks for both peacekeepers and civilian populations.¹⁶ Typically, formed military contingents of TCCs arrive at the mission with their own equipment and self-sustainment support services based on the memorandum of understanding they sign with the UN and later get reimbursed under the contingent-owned equipment system.¹⁷

However, many TCCs deploy troops without all the equipment and enablers necessary to sustain themselves and execute the mission mandate. While these shortcomings can partly be attributed to some TCCs' lack of capacity to deploy the requisite tools, it also reflects weaknesses in the UN force generation system. For example, UN headquarters sometimes pressures TCCs to deploy troops even when they lack the requisite tools. One respondent

illustrated how this might limit a mission's capabilities:

Senegal wanted to provide attack helicopters to MINUSCA. After the assessment, we realized that there was a lot of upgrad[ing] that needed to be done before they could deploy to that mission. But because of the pressure on [the Department of Peace Operations] to get a country to provide the troops and equipment for operations in that mission, we had to settle on the "trust" that Senegal would address the identified issues while on [the] ground. Unfortunately, they went to the mission theater and were unable to honor their promise in the first year. The helicopters were sitting on the tarmac, and they couldn't fly because of equipment [deficiencies].¹⁸

Sometimes, the equipment deployed is ill-suited to the operational theater, not replaced when destroyed in attacks, and left poorly maintained until it becomes nonfunctional at the mission.¹⁹ This has often compromised operational effectiveness, undermined the security of personnel, and decreased the deterrence effect of missions.

There are concerns about whether partnerships among TCCs will work effectively in practice when some TCCs are unwilling to share their assets.

To fill these gaps, some TCCs have highlighted the importance of strengthening logistics partnerships among TCCs, the UN, private contractors, and host states. For example, private contractors have, in some cases, provided resources such as vehicles, tents, electrical generators, transportation, facility maintenance and security, and food, water, and fuel. However, recurrent gaps remain, particularly when it comes to more specialized equipment such as attack and utility helicopters, fixed-wing transport aircraft, helicopters with emergency medical teams and basic equipment for intensive medical treatment, and anti-IED vehicles.²⁰

16 See: Marc Jacquand, "Inside the Engine Room: Enabling the Delivery of UN Mandates in Complex Environments," International Peace Institute, July 2019.

17 UN Peacekeeping, "Deployment and Reimbursement," available at <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/deployment-and-reimbursement>.

18 Interview with Nigerian peacekeeper, March 2023.

19 Interview with Pakistani peacekeeper, October 2022.

20 Air assets are critical, including for getting peacekeepers into and out of hot spots faster and allowing them to avoid long logistics or patrolling convoys where they are vulnerable to attacks or IEDs. See: Alexandra Novosseloff, "Keeping Peace from Above: Air Assets in UN Peace Operations," International Peace Institute, October 2017.

Further, there are concerns about whether partnerships among TCCs will work effectively in practice when some TCCs are unwilling to share their assets. For instance, some TCCs, especially the European TCCs that usually provide the advanced operational capabilities needed for mandate implementation in nonpermissive environments like Mali, place limitations on how these capabilities can be used. This can leave other troops, the vast majority of whom are from the Global South, without the enabling capabilities they need.²¹

A typical example was the difficulties encountered in the initial implementation of the All-Sources Information Fusion Unit (ASIFU) in MINUSMA. ASIFU was established in 2014 to assist MINUSMA in gathering and analyzing information to counter asymmetric threats facing mission personnel and the local population. ASIFU initially encountered issues integrating into MINUSMA's structures, as it was created and managed by NATO countries, and only personnel from NATO member states were permitted to access it. The reluctance of NATO countries to provide "the mission leadership with all the required quantitative trend analyses, scenario-based documents, geospatial information-management tools, and network analysis" from ASIFU resulted in difficult working relationships with other mission components.²² Some TCCs even questioned their role in the mission, as ASIFU failed to provide their units the information they needed to prepare for patrols and operations.²³ Accordingly, it is important that TCCs providing niche capabilities integrate these capabilities into mission structures instead of building separate structures.

To reduce deficiencies in capabilities, other respondents called on the UN to consider creating a system to pay part of the annual reimbursement to TCCs for contingent-owned equipment in advance. This could allow them to upgrade their capabilities prior to deploying to missions. However, some of the major financial contributors to peacekeeping

are opposed to this proposal, arguing that it would inhibit the UN's system of financial accountability based on quarterly verifications, even though most TCCs rank high in their compliance with UN rules.

Another dimension of capabilities in missions mentioned by interviewees was the use of new technologies to respond to threats. Over the past decade, peacekeeping missions have increasingly used technology to inform decision making. This includes IED forensic technologies; information and communication tools; unarmed, unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs); and manned aerial systems for monitoring, surveillance, and intelligence gathering.²⁴ These technologies have aided in the delivery of actionable, tactical information on impending threats to guide analysis on the protection of civilians and peacekeeper safety and security in MINUSMA, MONUSCO, MINUSCA, and UNMISS. Many TCCs recognize the value of these technologies in addressing operational gaps in missions due to high expectations around the protection of civilians as well as budgetary and political constraints.

However, interviewees also expressed concerns about the widespread adoption of new technologies in peacekeeping, especially UAVs. The use of UAVs in peacekeeping efforts initially caused concern among some TCCs, including China, Guatemala, Pakistan, Russia, and Rwanda. For instance, Rwanda initially opposed the use of UAVs in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), saying that the DRC should not serve as a testing ground for foreign intelligence technology (though Rwanda ultimately supported the use of UAVs).²⁵ Some interviewees also worried that in the long run, UAVs may reduce the necessity for ground forces. This reflects TCCs' concerns about not only mandate implementation but also their political and financial standing as contributors to UN peacekeeping. Furthermore, there are concerns over the employment of civilian contractors, who are not

21 Interview with former Ghanaian peacekeeper, October 2022.

22 John Karlsrud and Alexandra Novosseloff, "Doing Less with More? The Difficult 'Return' of Western Troop Contributing Countries to United Nations Peacekeeping," Global Governance Institute, February 2020.

23 Olga Abilova and Alexandra Novosseloff, "Demystifying Intelligence in UN Peace Operations: Toward an Organizational Doctrine," International Peace Institute, July 25, 2016.

24 Dirk Druet, "Enhancing the Use of Digital Technology for Integrated Situational Awareness and Peacekeeping-Intelligence," Center for International Peace and Security Studies, April 2021.

25 "Rwanda Opposes Use of Drones in DRC," News24, January 9, 2013; "No Issue with US Drones in DRC: Kagame," IOL, January 21, 2013.

UN peacekeepers, to use UAVs in battle zones, which raises questions about whether the UN is prepared to accept accountability for their actions or conduct.²⁶

Another concern is the ownership of the vast amount of data gathered from UAVs and other technologies and how this data, especially personally identifying information, is stored, shared, and handled, particularly when this technology is contingent-owned. To mitigate these concerns, some interviewees called for procedures or regulations that guarantee that any data obtained with contingent-owned UAVs is UN property.

Mindsets

In the context of peacekeeping, mindset refers to peacekeepers' "beliefs, values and dispositions to act in effective ways in the operational environment to achieve mandated tasks."²⁷ The mindset of peacekeepers can influence how they think, feel, and behave in a wide range of situations, including whether they will act on threats against civilians. The 2017 Cruz Report argued that individual peacekeepers and their units often lack the mindset needed to prevent and respond to attacks. The report further argued that casualties will continue to occur and might even increase unless peacekeepers adopt a proactive operational posture and mission leaders demonstrate "initiative, commitment, and determination to adapt."²⁸ The inability of contingents to change their mindset has put many peacekeepers in harm's way.

In contested security environments, where missions are confronted with external threats and peacekeepers are often the target of attack, having the right mindset can dramatically improve peacekeepers' ability to implement their mandates and

protect themselves. The mindset of peacekeeping contingents is often predicated on the concepts and attitudes imparted through the training and doctrinal perspective of the TCC that deployed them. These, in turn, are shaped by the factors behind the TCC's decision to deploy peacekeepers. These factors include the domestic political context, the philosophy of the national army, institutional politics, and national security. For many TCCs, the most critical aspect of the mindset of their troops being deployed to complex and high-risk environments is for them to be flexible and alert due to the danger of rapidly changing circumstances. In military terms, this is called "situational awareness."²⁹

Beyond situational awareness, TCCs' different expectation for how their troops should behave in mission areas can result in very different mindsets.

In particular, TCCs often have different levels of willingness for their troops to use robust force.³⁰ TCCs in the same region as the host state may be more willing for their peacekeepers to use robust force to promote a safe, secure, and

peaceful neighborhood and to control, suppress, and prevent the spread of violent extremism. This is the case, for example, with the peacekeeping contingents from Côte d'Ivoire and Niger in Mali, where fighting militant jihadist groups is an important national security interest for both countries. Other TCCs without direct national security interests in Mali, on the other hand, may be less willing to have their troops engage in combat operations.

Additionally, the mindset of a peacekeeping contingent reflects the mindset and threat assessment of mission leadership at the unit, sector, and force commander level. Two factors related to leadership are especially important. The first is clear support from commanders for troops to adopt a proactive mindset and engage in robust

In contested security environments, having the right mindset can dramatically improve peacekeepers' ability to implement their mandates and protect themselves.

26 Kasaija Phillip Apuuli, "The Use of Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (Drones) in United Nations Peacekeeping: The Case of the Democratic Republic of Congo," *American Society of International Law Insights* 18, no. 13 (June 13, 2014).

27 See: UN Peacekeeping, "Improving Security of United Nation Peacekeepers."

28 Ibid.

29 Interview with Ghanaian peacekeeper, October 2022.

30 Alex J. Bellamy and Paul D. Williams, "Broadening the Base of United Nations Troop- and Police-Contributing Countries," International Peace Institute, August 2012.

action to prevent and respond to attacks. A lack of clear support for this mindset, especially from mission headquarters, can disincentivize troops from being proactive by making them uncertain of what actions they are authorized to take in fulfilling their mandated tasks.

The second factor is trust between commanders and troops. Many interviewees, especially those from the Global South, emphasized that command is a two-way street, with both commanders and troops sharing responsibility for harmony or strain. To maintain the discipline required to protect peacekeepers and implement mandated tasks, relationships between commanders and subordinates must be based on mutual trust, communication, and respect. As stated by a Nigerian officer, “The decision to take initiative and be proactive in respon[se] to the threat is all about mission command and control relationship. A force commander may have ten battalions in an operation theater but he may only be able to move between two to four battalions because of the relationship and trust between command and the [troops].”³¹ Lack of trust can hinder proactiveness, especially considering that the majority of troops are from Africa, South Asia, and Latin America, whereas mission headquarters are mainly populated with experts from the Global North.

Additionally, the mindset of peacekeepers is shaped by the large number of directives, guidelines, standard operating procedures, manuals, and training materials issued by the UN and TCCs. Peacekeeping contingents confront diverse and complex challenges that require training and education not just in combat but also in areas such as internal security, humanitarian assistance, and civil affairs, each of which may entail different policies and rules of engagement.³² Peacekeeping soldiers thus need to be trained to shift promptly from one operational mode to another without inhibition. Most peacekeeping trainings try to

impart the mindset needed for this adaptability, including self-discipline and initiative. They also try to impart a shared understanding of the mission mandate, peacekeeping doctrine, and rules of engagement. For example, for the average soldier confronted with a threat in an area of operation, the instinct might be to “fire back,” but this might be prohibited in a peacekeeping context.

TCCs also have different military histories, traditions, and philosophies that shape the operational mindset of their troops. For example, troops from NATO countries who garnered experience in Afghanistan or Iraq may come to peacekeeping missions with a distinct mindset.³³ One German officer argued that Western troops are trained and socialized to be more combat-inclined than soldiers from the Global South, who tend to adopt a restrained, calculated, and cautious approach.³⁴ Many interviewees from the Global South disagreed with this assessment, however, arguing that their soldiers have been trained to be combat-ready and that this mindset guides their posturing in mission environments.

Caveats imposed by TCCs can also have an impact on the mindset of peacekeepers. Caveats refer to the reservations TCCs impose on how their troops can operate when assigned to UN peacekeeping operations, often to mitigate the risks they are exposed to. Caveats are controversial, and TCCs such as Ghana, India, and Rwanda have long voiced their support for the UN to adopt a “No National Caveats Policy.” TCCs have the right to set the boundaries within which their troops can operate in a particular theater based on their training and capabilities, provided they declare these boundaries in advance, often through the memorandum of understanding they sign with the UN.³⁵ Some TCCs, however, have used so-called “undeclared caveats” to limit the flexibility to assign their troops to high-risk locations.³⁶ For many other TCCs, these undeclared caveats are a

31 Interview with Rwandan peacekeeper, October 2022.

32 Chiyuki Aoi, Cedric De Coning, and Ramesh Thakur, eds., *Unintended Consequences of Peacekeeping Operations* (New York: United Nations University Press, 2007).

33 John Karlsrud, “The UN at War: Examining the Consequences of Peace-Enforcement Mandates for the UN Peacekeeping Operations in the CAR, the DRC and Mali,” *Third World Quarterly* 36, no. 1 (2015);

34 Interview with former German peacekeeper, September 2022.

35 Interview with Rwandan peacekeeper, October 2022.

36 Jochen Katze and Maral Kashgar, “Legal Challenges in Multinational Military Operations: The Role of National Caveats,” in *The “Legal Pluriverse” Surrounding Multinational Military Operations*, Robin Geiß and Heike Krieger, eds. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

mindset issue because they sometimes lead to inaction, which can compromise the safety and security of peacekeepers who do not have any caveats and can impact the mission's overall performance in fulfilling its mandate.

Beyond the factors that influence mindsets across peacekeeping contingents, various factors influence the mindsets of individual peacekeepers. Some respondents stated that operational experience with previous international deployments can transform the behavior and attitude of individual soldiers. As stated by one respondent, "Whether it is the soldier's first time or not has a huge influence on the way he reacts to situations within the mission environment."³⁷

Relatedly, the rank of a peacekeeper can affect their mindset when they are confronted with a decision-making dilemma. Higher-ranking soldiers are more likely to have the experience, authority, responsibility, and tact needed to be proactive and responsive to wide-ranging threats. As highlighted by a Ghanaian officer,

The officer knows that he is [a] major and in the next four months or one year he is likely to be promoted to a lieutenant colonel. He is aware that things that happened in the mission environment [are] taken so seriously and will count to his promotion or otherwise. That influences greatly the officer's actions or inactions, because he is aware that if he takes any decision or acts in ways that [are] not subscribed [to] by his country, he is likely to suffer the consequences back home.³⁸

What an individual has attained in their career and their future career aspirations can thus influence and guide their actions.

Conclusion: Linking Capabilities and Mindsets to Accountability

While demands on peacekeepers to manage conflict have risen, peacekeepers continue to lack the capabilities and mindsets needed to support the operational demands of contemporary peacekeeping missions. The resulting frustration and fatigue have started to wear down some TCCs with troops deployed to these challenging environments. These gaps in capabilities and mindsets raise questions around both accountability to and accountability of peacekeepers, which are both priority areas within A4P+.

It is unclear to what extent peacekeepers should be held accountable for their performance when they have not been provided the proper equipment, training, and mindset.

Accountability to peacekeepers requires the UN and TCCs to ensure their safety, security, and well-being. Failure to properly train, equip, and support peacekeepers being deployed to

nonpermissive environments thus raises questions about whether the UN and TCCs are upholding this responsibility.

Accountability of peacekeepers requires holding peacekeepers responsible for their performance and actions in areas such as the protection of civilians.³⁹ However, it is unclear to what extent peacekeepers should be held accountable for their performance when they have not been provided the proper equipment, training, and mindset. For example, while some previous reports have documented clear neglect on the part of peacekeepers in implementing their protection mandates,⁴⁰ in other cases, such failures have more to do with lack of vehicles or air assets or inadequate force presence.

³⁷ Interview with former Ghanaian peacekeeper, October 2022.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ On the challenges associated with holding peacekeepers accountable for inaction in protecting civilians, see: Namie Di Razza, "The Accountability System for the Protection of Civilians in UN Peacekeeping," International Peace Institute, December 2020. See also: Yohei Okada and Nigel D. White, "Overcoming the Hurdles to Accountability in UN Peacekeeping: Introduction to the Special Issue," *Journal of International Peacekeeping* 23, no. 3–4.

⁴⁰ See: UN Security Council, Executive Summary of the Independent Special Investigation into the Violence in Juba in 2016 and the Response by the United Nations Mission in South Sudan—Report of the Secretary-General, UN Doc. S/2016/924, November 1, 2016; UN General Assembly, Evaluation of the Implementation and Results of Protection of Civilians Mandates in UN Peacekeeping Operations—Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services, UN Doc. A/68/787, March 7, 2014; Jason K. Stearns, "Can Force Be Useful in the Absence of a Political Strategy? Lessons from the UN Missions to the DR Congo," NYU Center on International Cooperation, December 16, 2015; "Strike over Civilian Massacres Brings DR Congo's East to a Halt," AFP, April 5, 2021.

More broadly, there are questions about what outcomes lie within peacekeepers' control when they are deployed to nonpermissive environments. This points to more fundamental crises facing UN peacekeeping operations, including the rollback of the core principles of consent of the warring parties, impartiality, and the limited use of force.⁴¹ When peacekeeping missions themselves are facing crises of consent and legitimacy, it is unclear how much responsibility TCCs or troops should bear for their failures.

Ultimately, both the UN and TCCs need to bridge this gap between mindsets, capabilities, and accountability. The UN must be clear on what it wants and needs from TCCs deploying troops to nonpermissive environments and support them in ensuring these troops are adequately trained and equipped. TCCs, for their part, must be clear about what they can offer and ensure that they are adequately preparing their troops for the realities of contemporary peacekeeping environments prior to deployment.

⁴¹ Jeni Whalan, *How Peace Operations Work: Power Legitimacy and Effectiveness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013); Karen A. Mingst, Margaret P. Karns, and Alynna J. Lyon, *The United Nations in the 21st Century* (New York: Routledge, 2019).

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