

Specialized Police Teams in UN Peace Operations: A Survey of Progress and Challenges

CHARLES T. HUNT



Cover Photo: UN police in MINUSCA hold a training to equip local police academy students in the Central African Republic to prevent gender-based violence. August 7, 2020. UN Photo.

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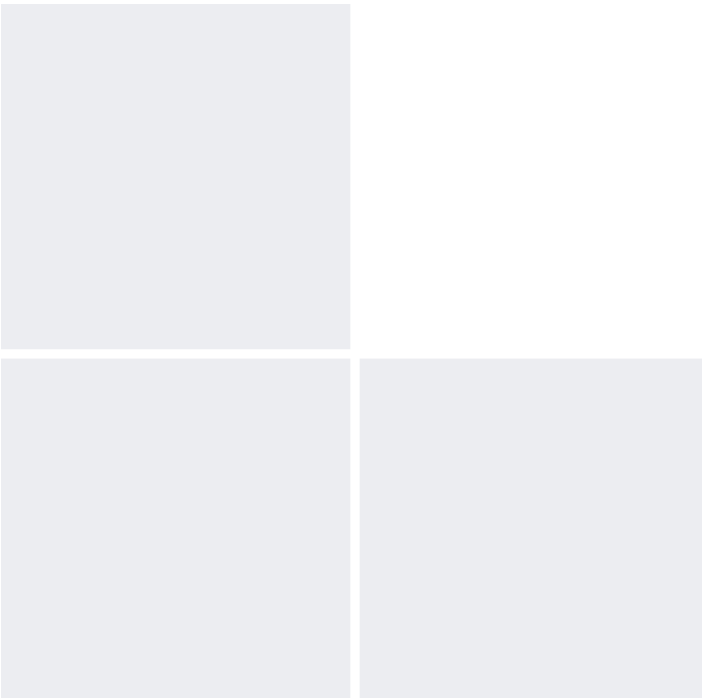
ABOUT THE AUTHORS

CHARLES T. HUNT is Professor of International Relations at RMIT University, Senior Fellow (non-resident) with the United Nations University Centre for Policy Research, and Senior Research Associate at the Institute for Security Studies, Addis Ababa.

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ABBREVIATIONS

CAR	Central African Republic
CPAS	Comprehensive Planning and Performance Assessment System
CP	child protection
CRSV	conflict-related sexual violence
C-34	Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
FPU	formed police unit
IPO	individual police officer
MINUSCA	UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in CAR
MINUSMA	UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali
MINUSTAH	UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti
MONUSCO	UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the DRC
PCC	police-contributing country
POC	protection of civilians
RBB	results-based budgeting
SGBV	sexual and gender-based violence
SPC	Standing Police Capacity
SPT	specialized police team
SRSG	special representative of the secretary-general
UNAMID	UN-AU Mission in Darfur
UNCT	UN country team
UN DFS	UN Department of Field Support
UN DOS	UN Department of Operational Support
UNDP	UN Development Programme
UN DPKO	UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations
UN DPO	UN Department of Peace Operations
UNMISS	UN Mission in South Sudan

UNODC

UN Office on Drugs and Crime

UNPD

UN Police Division

UNPOL

UN police

Executive Summary

Over the past decade and a half, specialized police teams (SPTs) have emerged as an innovative complement to individual police officers (IPOs) and formed police units (FPU) in UN police peacekeeping. In general, SPTs are comprised of police officers and civilian policing experts focused on “skills transfer” and capacity building through technical assistance and advice, training, and mentoring to host-state police in a specific area of police operations or administration.

While it is difficult to judge the impact of SPTs, it is possible to identify several key benefits, strengths, and comparative advantages over IPOs. These include that SPTs

- **Are generally highly capable** and meet high standards in specialized areas of policing;
- **Provide a more coherent and cohesive approach** to police capacity building;
- **Focus on objectives** within a specific area captured in a project-oriented plan;
- **Maximize capabilities** by matching the work of officers to their skill sets;
- **Can be quick to deploy and adaptable** to context-specific needs and challenges;
- **Maintain continuity** by implementing projects that typically run three to five years;
- **Facilitate relationship building** by including officers with a cultural or linguistic affinity with host-state police;
- **Use sustainable capacity-building approaches** such as training of trainers;
- **Provide broader benefits to missions** such as up-skilling other mission personnel, contributing to other mandated priorities, and creating opportunities to address sensitive issues; and
- **Are more attractive to some police-contributing countries** and provide a better experience for police personnel because of their orientation toward results and deployment as a team.

At the same time, several obstacles to greater effectiveness have emerged, including that SPTs

- **Confront high-level tensions** over their development and administration, both within the UN Police Division and between the UN and member states;
- **Experience supply-side issues** due to their reliance on voluntary contributions and shortages of specially trained officers and civilian experts;
- **Are dominated by countries in the Global North**, which can lead them to be seen as “Western” missions within the overall mission;
- **Have inconsistent composition, plans, and modalities** from mission to mission and even among SPTs in the same mission and from phase to phase within the same SPT;
- **Lack sufficient guidance** on key operational aspects;
- **Lack consistent and sufficient funding** and face administrative and budgetary barriers that limit timely access to funding that is available;
- **Are disconnected from broader efforts**, including due to internal divisions and tensions that undermine integration with the rest of the police component, lack of a comprehensive approach that includes the broader criminal justice system, inadequate communication and coordination with the rest of the mission and the UN country team, and poor understanding and support from senior mission leadership;
- **Implement unsustainable programming** that focuses on “quick wins” rather than investment in host states’ long-term capacity to conduct follow-on training; and
- **Often lack adequate frameworks for monitoring and evaluation** and have no processes or structures for organizational learning and knowledge management.

The lessons emerging from the experiences of SPTs to date emphasize the need for innovation around deployment and implementation modalities for this specialized approach to capacity building. At the same time, they highlight the need for greater organizational flexibility and adaptability to empower and maximize the potential of SPTs.

Introduction

Efforts by United Nations police (UNPOL) to support peace and security around the world have evolved significantly over the past three decades. Their mandated tasks have expanded from mentoring and advising of host-state police and other law enforcement bodies to encompass activities such as reforming and reorganizing, strategic planning, institution building, strengthening police capabilities, and safeguarding civilians facing imminent physical harm. Increasingly, these activities aim at addressing gaps in the operational capabilities of security institutions in host states, including by repairing, reconstructing, and reconstituting law enforcement agencies. Member states that do not host UN peace operations are also increasingly drawing on UNPOL to build the capacity of their police and criminal justice institutions.

As the mandate of UN police has evolved, so have the modalities the UN has used to deploy them. For the first fifty years of UN policing, the UN generally deployed individual police officers (IPOs) and formed police units (FPUs). But over the past decade and a half, specialized police teams (SPTs) have emerged as an innovative complement to IPOs and FPUs. SPTs have proven appealing to host states, police-contributing countries (PCCs), and the UN peace operations bureaucracy.¹ For host states, SPTs represent a method of requesting and benefiting from specific policing expertise to address niche national and institutional capacity gaps. For PCCs, they provide personnel (sometimes with attached funding and equipment) focused on delivering on discrete objectives and implementing program-

Over the past decade and a half, specialized police teams have emerged as an innovative complement to IPOs and FPUs.

ming in line with their skill sets.² For the UN Police Division (UNPD), SPTs allow for more flexible responses to specific requests for police development under the umbrella of existing field missions and arrangements instead of complicating the police reform space with additional bilateral programming.

SPTs are still described by many involved in UN policing as “new,” but more than thirteen years after their formal conceptualization, they are now an established tool of UN policing in peace operations. Given the potential opportunities and challenges of using SPTs, a more detailed assessment is warranted. However, up to this point, there has been a lack of academic or policy research on this topic.³

The aim of this policy paper is to understand how SPTs have been used in various UN peace operations environments. The study is based on an extensive desk review of relevant

academic and policy literature, as well as more than thirty interviews with current and former UN personnel and representatives of member states.⁴ The report proceeds in four parts. First, it charts the emergence and evolution of SPTs, noting their expansion in number and focus. Second, the report analyzes the strengths, benefits, and perceived comparative advantages of SPTs compared to other UNPOL deployment modalities. Third, the paper examines the main administrative and operational impediments to the greater effectiveness of SPTs. Finally, the report presents concrete and actionable recommendations for the UN Secretariat, UN field missions, PCCs that may be considering deploying such teams in the future, and other member states.

1 Charles T. Hunt, “Protection through Policing: The Protective Role of UN Police in Peace Operations,” International Peace Institute, February 2020.

2 SPTs have received widespread support from member states in committees such as the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations (C-34). See, for example, the recent C-34 report, which discusses interest in further developing the concept: UN General Assembly, *Report of the Special Committee on Peace Operations: 2023 Substantive Session (New York, 20 February–17 March 2023)*, UN Doc. A/77/19*, May 26, 2023, para. 89.

3 Important exceptions include: Marina Caparini and Kari M. Osland, “MINUSTAH’s Specialized Police Team to Combat Sexual Violence in Haiti,” Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI), July 2016; Marianne Toraasen, “The Future of UN Policing? The Norway-Led Specialized Police Team to Combat Sexual and Gender-Based Violence in Haiti 2010–2019,” Chr. Michelsen Institute, 2021; John Christian Møller, “Norwegian Police as Capacity Builders in Haiti: Experiences from a Specialized Police Team in the United Nations” (unpublished Master’s thesis, Inland Norway University of Applied Sciences, 2016).

4 Relevant literature includes project documents and reports from the various UN missions, reports from the UN Department of Peace Operations (DPO), evaluation reports, and final reports and other documentation from SPT projects. Semi-structured interviews with key informants focused on officials in countries that are or have previously contributed SPTs, officials in host countries, members of SPTs, and other mission personnel, including senior mission leaders and personnel in the various sections of the UN police division, as well as other international policing and peace operations experts. Interviews were conducted in person and remotely between July and December 2023. The author also draws on previous fieldwork in South Sudan, Mali, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), and the Central African Republic (CAR), which included interviews with numerous UNPOL officials and others working on security and justice sector reform in those countries.

These recommendations aim to facilitate organizational learning; support the development of a coherent, shared understanding of SPTs; and bolster efforts to harness the potential of this relatively new and popular model of international policing.

Specialized Police Teams: The Latest Form of International Policing

First deployed in 2010, fifty years after the first police were authorized as part of a UN peace operation, SPTs are the newest form of international police peacekeeping deployment.

Emergence of the Concept

The idea of SPTs emerged from the ad hoc practice of deploying teams of UN police with specialized skills to undertake discrete tasks, which became common in the early- to mid-2000s in countries such as Liberia, Haiti, and Côte d'Ivoire. Despite some similarities, these teams all worked quite differently. Drawing on these experiences and recognizing the need for a more coherent model, several member states, including Norway, pioneered the SPT as a complement to conventional deployment modalities.⁵ This was partly a response to long-standing, widely recognized challenges facing the deployment and performance of IPOs, such as the allocation of roles without regard to skill sets, disparate policing cultures and training approaches, and frequent turnover of personnel.⁶ Member states were also eager to pursue alternative modalities for contributing, equipping, and funding police in peace operations—particularly modalities for earmarking contributions for building the capacity of host-state police.

The first official UN SPT was deployed in 2010 as part of the UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH). Since then, fourteen SPTs have been deployed across five missions, with more than one SPT deploying concurrently in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Mali, South Sudan, and the Central African Republic (CAR) (see Table 1).

Consolidation and Codification

As the number of SPTs increased, the concept became increasingly institutionalized within the UN. The UN Police Division (UNPD), in collaboration with member states in the UN's Strategic Police Advisory Group (SPAG), developed initial proposals for a formal SPT modality tailored to the UN context. UNPD eventually operationalized this modality through its Selection and Recruitment Section and Strategic Policy and Development Section.⁷ In 2012, a delegation of the Security Council visited Haiti and saw the benefits of the SPT model firsthand, leading to high-level praise and an increase in attention from UNPD. That same year, the UN police adviser was vocal about his opinion that SPTs were key to the future of international policing.⁸ This groundswell of support laid the foundations for the increasing codification of SPTs within the UN and its peace operations bureaucracy, reflected in a growing body of formal UN reports, resolutions, and policy documents (see Box 1).

As SPTs have become more prevalent, they have also gained broad-based support. Initially, the concept of SPTs met with some resistance, not least from major PCCs from the Global South that questioned the need for and merits of a new modality. But over time, a wide range of member states have voiced support for the concept in intergovernmental fora, including the Security Council and the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations (C-34), while a small

5 UN Security Council, 9189th Meeting: *United Nations Peacekeeping Operations—Police Commissioners*, UN Doc. S/PV.9189, November 14, 2022, p. 15. See also: Toraasen, "The Future of UN Policing?" p. 11; interviews with former and current police advisers, June–December 2023.

6 William J. Durch and Michelle Ker, "Police in UN Peacekeeping: Improving Selection, Recruitment, and Deployment," International Peace Institute, November 2013; Charles T. Hunt, "Rhetoric Versus Reality in the Rise of Policing in UN Peace Operations: 'More Blue, Less Green?'" *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 73, no. 6 (2019).

7 Interviews with members of the Strategic Police Advisory Group and UNPD, June–December 2023.

8 Interviews with various police advisers, September 2023. Police Adviser Stefan Feller, Police Division/DPKO/UN headquarters, remarks delivered at UNPOL high-level conference, Berlin, 2012.

Table 1. History of specialized police teams⁹

Country	Mission	Focus	PCC(s)	Duration
Haiti	MINUSTAH/ MINUJUSTH	Sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV)	Norway-led Canada	2010–2019
Mali	MINUSMA	Crime scene forensics and evidence management and IED forensics	Norway-led France	2018–2023
		Criminal intelligence	European Gendarmerie Force (including Spain, France, and Italy)	2018–2023
		Community policing	Canada	2022–2023
South Sudan	UNMISS	SGBV	German-led Kenya South Africa	2015–2019
		SGBV and conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV)	Finland-led Norway Sweden Egypt	2019–present
		Urban sustainability	Uganda Kenya	2013–2015
		Diplomatic protection unit	Kenya	2013
		Livestock protection unit	Kenya	2013
DRC	MONUSCO	Serious organized crime (including forensics and investigations)	Sweden	2019–2022
		SGBV	Canada Tanzania Sweden	2019–present
CAR	MINUSCA	SGBV	Sweden Rwanda	2019–present
		Forensics for crime scene management	Spain	2018–present
Sudan	UNITAMS	Community-oriented policing and SGBV	Germany Norway Tunisia Gambia	2020–2023

⁹ This table is based on the best available data. A number of other SPTs have been planned and prepared but not deployed due to changing circumstances on the ground. For example, the outbreak of civil war in South Sudan in 2013 prevented the deployment (and extension) of a number of SPTs within UNMISS.

Box 1. UN reports, resolutions, and policies related to SPTs

- UN General Assembly, *United Nations Police: Report of the Secretary-General*, UN Doc. A/66/615, December 15, 2011, para. 45.
- UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) and Department of Field Support (DFS), “Policy: United Nations Police in Peacekeeping Operations and Special Political Missions,” February 1, 2014, para. 22.
- UN Security Council Resolution 2185 (November 20, 2014), UN Doc. S/RES/2185, para. 14.
- United Nations, “Report of the High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations on Uniting our Strengths for Peace: Politics, Partnerships and People,” June 2015.
- UN Security Council, *Report of the Secretary-General on United Nations Policing*, UN Doc. S/2016/952, November 10, 2016.
- United Nations, “External Review of the Functions, Structure and Capacity of the UN Police Division,” May 2016.
- UN DPKO and DFS, “Guidelines: Police Command in United Nations Peacekeeping Operations and Special Political Missions,” January 1, 2016, para. 68.
- UNPD, “Strategic Guidance Framework for International Police Peacekeeping,” available at <https://police.un.org/en/strategic-guidance-framework-international-policing>.
- UN Security Council Resolution 2382 (November 6, 2017), UN Doc. S/RES/2382.
- UN DPKO and DFS, “Guidelines: The Role of United Nations Police in Protection of Civilians,” August 1, 2017.
- UN Department of Peace Operations (DPO) and Department of Operational Support (DOS), “Guidelines: Specialized Police Teams on Assignment with United Nations Peace Operations,” September 1, 2019.
- UN DPO and DOS, “Standard Operating Procedure (Revised): Assessment for Mission Service of Individual Police Officers,” September 9, 2019.

subset of PCCs has provided significant contributions through this modality.¹⁰ SPTs have also been in high demand among field missions, particularly the big missions in Africa, which are making a growing number of requests for additional (and sometimes multiple) SPTs.¹¹ As noted by Marina Caparini and Kari Osland, SPTs’ growing popularity has reflected “the move towards providing more specialized and targeted international police assistance to support capacity-building.”¹²

While the concept continues to evolve, in general, SPTs are highly technical and project-oriented.

While the concept continues to evolve, in general, SPTs are highly technical and project-oriented, with defined goals, a progression plan, deliverables, human resources management, communications management, and risk management, with possible funding for specific activities. They are generally focused on “skills transfer” through technical assistance and advice, training, and mentoring to host-state police in a specific area of police operations or administration. They tend to be deployed in contexts where UNPOL already

¹⁰ See various statements from member states in Security Council meetings with UN police commissioners: UN Security Council, *8393rd Meeting*, UN Doc. S/PV.8393, November 6, 2018; UN Security Council, *8661st Meeting*, UN Doc. S/PV.8661, November 6, 2019; UN Security Council, *8901st Meeting*, UN Doc. S/PV.8901, November 10, 2021; UN Security Council, *9189th Meeting*, UN Doc. S/PV.9189, November 14, 2022. See also: UN Doc. A/77/19*, para. 89; United Nations, “United Nations Police Need More Specialized Resources to Meet Complex Challenges, Ensure Peacekeeping Success, Briefers Tell Security Council,” press release, November 14, 2023.

¹¹ Interview with former UNPD official, August 2023.

¹² Marina Caparini and Kari Osland, “SGBV Capacity-Building in Peace Operations: Specialized Police Teams,” NUPI, November 2016.

have an important role in strengthening rule-of-law institutions and a dedicated budget for police reform activity. Because SPTs are generally part of the capacity-building and development pillar of a

police component, they contribute to the UN's peacebuilding and sustaining peace efforts (see Box 2).¹³

Box 2. What are specialized police teams?¹⁴

A specialized police team (SPT) is a group of two to fifteen police officers and civilian policing experts with a particular specialty, nominated and seconded by one or more PCCs to serve in a UN field mission.¹⁵ SPTs provide capacity building and operational support to host-state police and law enforcement institutions in specialized functions, including addressing serious organized crime, responding to sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), and community-oriented policing.¹⁶ SPTs have multidimensional expertise to implement discrete projects or tasks in a particular area of police work or administration.

PTs are officially deployed at the request of the UN secretary-general and practically at the request of missions through the relevant police commissioner. The decision to deploy an SPT is based on the mission mandate, the host-state needs assessment, and any specific police development plan in place. The decision is also based on a needs assessment and capacity-gap analysis by the mission and UNPD and a joint analysis by the mission, UNPD, and (ideally) the contributing PCCs. The mission drafts a project document specifying the aims, composition, and timeframe, as well as the terms of reference and a memorandum of understanding (when the SPTs are deployed as contingents with equipment), with support from UNPD and in close coordination with PCCs. Many SPTs have a steering committee that provides advice and assistance to the SPT.¹⁷ SPTs are generally under the leadership of the police component's capacity-building and development pillar. They report to the chief of pillar while remaining under the ultimate control of the police commissioner. They hold legal status as "experts on mission"¹⁸ and are expected to deploy for a minimum of twelve months, with the possibility of an extension up to a maximum of three years.¹⁹ SPTs are deployed under three main modalities:

- Teams of experts (IPOs);
- Teams of experts (IPOs) with contingent-owned equipment or funding from other member states; and
- Contingents of police with contingent-owned equipment or weapons and a memorandum of understanding with the host state.

13 This has been recognized, among others, by C-34, including in its 2023 report (UN Doc. A/77/19*). UN DPKO and DFS, "Policy: United Nations Police in Peacekeeping Operations and Special Political Missions," February 1, 2014, para. 22; UN DPO and DOS, "Guidelines: Specialized Police Teams on Assignment with United Nations Peace Operations," September 1, 2019; UN DPKO and DFS, "Policy: United Nations Police in Peacekeeping Operations and Special Political Missions," February 1, 2014, p. 27; UN DPO and DFS, "Guidelines: Police Administration in United Nations Peacekeeping Operations and Special Political Missions," February 1, 2017, para. 59.

14 UN DPKO and DFS, "Policy: United Nations Police in Peacekeeping Operations and Special Political Missions," para. 22; UN DPO and DOS, "Guidelines: Specialized Police Teams on Assignment with United Nations Peace Operations."

15 A police commissioner can authorize more than fifteen officers or experts in special circumstances. A "civilian policing expert" is a civil servant from a member state's police or other public administration entity with expertise critical for the functioning of a host-state police or other law enforcement agency but not for core policing operational responsibilities.

16 UN DPO and DOS, "Guidelines: Specialized Police Teams on Assignment with United Nations Peace Operations."

17 Steering committees are composed of eight to ten stakeholders, including police or a relevant ministry from the main PCC, UNPD, relevant sections of the mission (e.g., UNPOL, the rule of law section, senior mission leadership), relevant members of the UN country team (e.g., UNDP), and national or local stakeholders and partners (e.g., national law enforcement, the judicial system, civil society organizations).

18 This means SPT members enjoy the privileges and immunities necessary for the independent exercise of their functions as outlined in Article VI of the Convention on Privileges and Immunities of the United Nations and the applicable agreements of the receiving peace operation with the host government (i.e., the status-of-forces agreement [SOFA] or the status-of-mission agreement [SOMA]). UN DPO and DOS, "Guidelines: Specialized Police Teams on Assignment with United Nations Peace Operations," para. 53.

19 UN DPO and DOS, "Policy: Authority, Command and Control in United Nations Peacekeeping Operations," October 25, 2019, para. 49; Ibid.

Strengths, Comparative Advantages, and Benefits of Specialized Police Teams

Multiple studies have pointed to important outputs and positive outcomes of SPTs.²⁰ However, it is notoriously difficult to measure the impact of internationally supported police reform efforts.²¹ This is no different when it comes to SPTs. Consequently, it is difficult to pass judgment on the impact of SPTs, particularly in comparison with similar efforts undertaken by IPOs. It is possible, however, to identify key benefits, strengths, and comparative advantages over the IPO modality, which is the main alternative way of providing capacity-building assistance. This section analyzes ten areas in which SPTs have advantages.

SPTs are generally highly capable and meet higher standards than IPOs in specific, specialized areas of policing.

High-End Capabilities and Specialized Skill Sets

One comparative advantage of SPTs over IPOs is that they are generally highly capable and meet higher standards in specific, specialized areas of policing.²² SPT members tend to be well educated, highly skilled personnel who are trained as specialists and often have a background as instructors or trainers of others. UNPD's recruitment standard operating procedure requires "a minimum of five (5) years of recent work experience in the required operational support and/or capacity-building and development specialized function/s."²³ However, most police deployed to SPTs far exceed this baseline. Some have previously served in another SPT, UN missions, and other international policing engagements, often with more than twenty years'

experience as police officers in a domestic context.²⁴ As one senior mission leader put it, "When we ask for a specialized police team, we are guaranteed that the PCCs will regularly send us the required competence. They will be dedicated, they will be professional."²⁵ This overcomes perennial challenges associated with PCCs sending substandard or mismatched personnel to missions.²⁶

The capabilities and skill sets of SPTs also make them more appealing to host states. In Sudan, for example, national police were far more receptive to the SPT deployed to the UN special political mission (UNITAMS) than they were to the IPOs from UNITAMS or its predecessor, the UN–African Union peacekeeping mission in Darfur (UNAMID). In some instances, national police felt that the IPOs were often not better trained or educated

than they themselves, struggled with the language barrier, and provided training on material they had already covered.²⁷ Interviewees noted that SPTs' expertise can generate more meaningful buy-in and enhance cooperation, fostering trust between UNPOL and host-state police.²⁸

Coherent and Cohesive Approaches

Recruited and sometimes trained in advance as a team, SPTs also provide a more coherent and cohesive approach to police capacity building. Many interviewees noted that this makes sense, as a team approach is fundamental to policing in domestic contexts.²⁹ This team configuration was said to lead to better teamwork and dedication to shared goals, offering a "clear benefit compared to the IPO modality."³⁰

20 These have primarily focused on the SPTs in Haiti. See: Tøraasen, "The Future of UN Policing?"; Caparini and Osland, "MINUSTAH's Specialized Police Team to Combat Sexual Violence in Haiti."

21 Charles T. Hunt, *UN Peace Operations and International Policing: Negotiating Complexity, Assessing Impact and Learning to Learn* (London: Routledge, 2014).

22 Interviews with current police commissioners, December 2023.

23 UN DPO and DOS, "Standard Operating Procedure (Revised): Assessment for Mission Service of Individual Police Officers," September 9, 2019, para. 25.

24 For example, Swedish police have three years of basic training, usually decades of experience, and in some cases, six months of specialist training. Interviews with police commissioner, May 2023; member state police adviser, October 2023; former SPT leader, September 2023.

25 Interview with current police commissioner, May 2023.

26 It is still common for some PCCs to send IPOs who do not meet basic expectations (e.g., proficiency in driving or firearms).

27 Interview with former SPT leader, October 2023.

28 Interviews with member state police adviser, October 2023; current police commissioner, December 2023.

29 Interview with member state police adviser, September 2023.

30 Interviews with Standing Police Capacity (SPC) official, December 2023; SPT leaders in multiple missions, June–December 2023.

Team coherence is further enhanced because SPTs tend to include officers from the same PCC or with a shared policing culture.³¹ As one SPT leader put it, “SPT members from the same or similar policing cultures speak the same operational language.”³² SPT leaders in the field highlighted that this helps establish shared expectations and working modalities, as well as a more seamless and uniform approach to capacity building and advice.³³

Interviewees noted that SPTs’ cohesion was further strengthened when their members had undertaken team-based pre-deployment training including two or more PCCs.³⁴ This happened with Norway and France in preparation for co-deployment as a crime scene management SPT in Mali, with a former member stating that “the fact these officers knew each other already helped them to hit the ground running.”³⁵ Well coordinated SPTs are therefore said to overcome the disparate policing cultures and capacity-building approaches that often beset IPOs.

Concentration on Specific Objectives

Another advantage of SPTs is that they are concentrated on focused objectives within a specific area captured in a project-oriented plan.³⁶ SPTs are not a panacea and cannot solve every problem, but interviewees regularly noted that they can pinpoint particular weaknesses or capacity deficits that are holding back broader capacity development.³⁷ This focused approach can also allow SPTs to achieve tangible results more quickly than IPOs, who are often spread thin and expected to address multiple issues with limited resources and less

cohesion.³⁸

Concentrating on a particular issue (such as sexual and gender-based violence, or SGBV) can also help generate more and more sustained funding for SPT activities—though financing of SPT projects varies dramatically across different PCCs, SPTs, and missions (discussed further below).³⁹ Traditionally, the main resource for police reform is the personnel engaged in capacity building (i.e., IPOs), with little or no additional financing for capacity-building activities and materials. Though not always (or even often) the case, the SPT modality can allow member states to provide additional resources that missions would otherwise be unlikely to receive.⁴⁰ This has the added advantage of allowing member states to support host-state law enforcement agencies under the UN umbrella, which avoids a confusing and sometimes duplicative sea of bilateral initiatives operating outside, in parallel to, and even in competition with UN efforts.

Maximization of Capabilities

The SPT model helps ensure that officers are deployed to work on an area that matches their skill set. This avoids the common scenario where senior mission leaders or police commissioners deploy IPOs in ways that do not harness their expertise. As one interviewee put it, “IPOs may be well trained but not necessarily utilized in posts they are specialized in. This is not the case with SPTs.”⁴¹ SPTs allow PCCs and police personnel to know what they will be doing so they are prepared and resourced accordingly. As another interviewee said, “SPTs are a more effective modality for capacity building and clearly a much better use of deployed resources.”⁴²

The SPT model helps ensure that officers are deployed to work on an area that matches their skill set.

31 Interview with current police commissioner, December 2023.

32 Interview with current SPT leader, December 2023.

33 Interviews with current and former SPT leaders, September–December 2023.

34 This is only possible with the initial deployment.

35 Interview with former member state police adviser and SPT leader, August 2023.

36 Interviews with current police commissioners, December 2023.

37 Interviews with member state police adviser, September 2023; various police commissioners and SPT leaders, June–December 2023.

38 Interviews with member state police adviser, September 2023; multiple SPT leaders, December 2023; former member state police adviser and SPT leader, August 2023.

39 Interview with current SPT leader, December 2023.

40 For example, the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs provided \$1.2 million for a Norwegian-led SPT in Haiti. Interview with former member state police adviser and SPT leader, August 2023.

41 Interview with member state police adviser, October 2023. The same point was made in an interview with current SPT leader, September 2023.

42 Interview with member state police adviser, October 2023.

Flexibility and Adaptability

The SPT modality is also praised for being more flexible and adaptable than other policing modalities. SPTs can be relatively quick to deploy, despite continued challenges and inertia (discussed below).⁴³ Further, many view SPTs as a tool that can be tailored to address a wide range of context-specific needs and challenges. They are also seen as providing more comprehensive support than IPOs, as they can include civilian policing experts to address issues that operational police cannot.⁴⁴

Continuity throughout the Duration of Deployment

SPT projects have typically run for three to five years.⁴⁵ While individual SPT members initially deploy for twelve months, they often end up on mission for at least two years. This longer timeline of deployment and continuity (compared to IPOs) is beneficial for several reasons. First, it reduces the perennial challenge wherein institutional knowledge is repeatedly built and lost and important relationships are repeatedly formed and broken.⁴⁶ Second, more time on the ground gives SPT members a longer-term view of progress and an understanding of earlier phases of the project (e.g., which goals have been met, how things have advanced from the baseline, and sensible ways forward). Third, this continuity improves handover between team members, especially team leaders. It is not unusual, for example, for leaders to be promoted from within SPTs.⁴⁷ Finally, longer timelines allow a particular PCC to be involved

The extended relationships fostered by SPTs lay a foundation of trust that can enable a more cohesive vision and shared objectives.

Greater Sustainability

across different phases of a project, sustaining engagement and buy-in.

Relationship Building through Cultural or Linguistic Affinity

In addition to longer periods of engagement, the inclusion of team members from regional and neighboring countries in SPTs can facilitate relationship building. While SPTs are not required to include such members, they often do, and this is now seen as normal and best practice. These team members often bring cultural awareness, language skills, and context sensitivity that enhances the credibility of SPTs with national and local partners.⁴⁸ This helps build the trust and relationships that effective capacity building depend on.⁴⁹

The continuity of SPTs also makes capacity building more sustainable. While the limited sustainability of police reform efforts remains a challenge for SPTs (as discussed below), their focus on discrete projects and longer timelines make it imperative that they build a handover and sustainability plan into their approach. Several design features of SPTs have helped in this regard.

First, the extended relationships fostered by SPTs lay a foundation of trust that can enable a more cohesive vision and shared objectives. Many interviewees highlighted strong working relationships between SPTs and local counterparts as important to sustainability.⁵⁰ Second, SPTs have used well established approaches to sustainability

⁴³ The deployment of SPTs still requires a complicated process including a needs analysis or assessment, nomination via a note verbale to UN headquarters, and an assessment for mission service.

⁴⁴ Criticisms remain about the extent to which SPTs can adequately address gaps that ultimately require addressing the full criminal justice chain, not just police capacity building.

⁴⁵ Interview with UNPD official, December 2023.

⁴⁶ Interview with current SPT leader, September 2023.

⁴⁷ This happened, for example, in UNMISS. Interview with current SPT leader, September 2023.

⁴⁸ Interviews with member state police adviser, September 2023; current police commissioner, December 2023.

⁴⁹ Interviews with multiple SPT leaders, September–December 2023. For example, a Rwandan officer in MINUSCA with expertise on SGBV (a national priority for domestic police in Rwanda) also brought Francophone language skills and Central African cultural knowledge to a Swedish-led and predominantly Swedish SPT in CAR. Similarly, Tanzanian police have provided Swahili language skills and knowledge of local customary policing approaches to their Canadian colleagues in the SGBV SPT in MONUSCO. In Sudan, the child protection (CP)/SGBV SPT in UNITAMS included three Tunisian and Gambian members who similarly helped bridge between Arabic-speaking counterparts and the majority-German SPT. Conversely, the absence of African members in the Canadian community policing SPT in the mission in Mali (MINUSMA) was identified as a problem, as discussed below. Recruitment for IPOs from neighboring PCCs to join the Canadian team was underway when the mission ended.

⁵⁰ Interviews with multiple SPT leaders and police commissioners, June–December 2023.

such as “training the trainers” (rather than training everyone) and integrating these trainings into the curricula of national police academies.⁵¹ While also used by IPOs, the training-of-trainers approach has been used more extensively by SPTs. This has had some success in providing police academies with the capacity and expertise to take over and roll out trainings more widely, including during recruitment drives.⁵² As noted by one interviewee, “The benefit here is that the message is coming from their own, not from internationals. They can... provide them with what they actually want and need, not something we think they need.”⁵³ Finally, including local partners and stakeholders in SPT steering committees increases sustainability by giving those partners agency and some oversight and helping to generate buy-in and a sense of shared commitment, which is less present in the IPO model.⁵⁴

Broader Benefits for the Mission

SPTs also make several contributions that can benefit senior mission leadership. First, having highly skilled, effective trainers can help build the capacity of other mission personnel. In the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), for example, the SGBV SPT has trained other mission personnel on responding to SGBV when sent around to different field offices.⁵⁵ Similarly, in the DRC, the approach of MONUSCO’s SGBV SPT became the template for IPOs working on SGBV in regions where the SPT was not deployed or active.⁵⁶ The forensics SPT in CAR trained other IPOs on preserving evidence as first responders at crime scenes.⁵⁷ As one senior mission leader said, “I see more and more that we need the really dedicated specialists, because they can also inspire someone; they can maybe train some others.”⁵⁸ In these ways,

SPTs can be a force multiplier for UNPOL and other sections of missions.

Second, SPTs can contribute to other mandated priorities and whole-of-mission objectives, including the protection of civilians (POC); human rights; gender, child, and vulnerable persons protection; and conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) and SGBV.⁵⁹ For instance, by focusing on CRSV and SGBV, SPTs can bolster the mission’s early warning, training, and advisory services to the host-state counterparts that respond to (and sometimes perpetrate) these crimes. This means SPTs can make outsized contributions to cross-cutting agendas such as women, peace, and security.

Third, SPTs can provide an opportunity for missions to address “elephants in the room.” These might include culturally sensitive issues like SGBV or politically sensitive issues like organized crime, violent extremism, and corruption.⁶⁰ SPTs can help generate buy-in from high-level partners within host-state police and other authorities to overcome resistance to these sensitive topics from rank-and-file police officers.⁶¹

Benefits for PCCs and Police Personnel

Several additional benefits make SPTs particularly attractive to some PCCs. Interviewees, particularly from PCCs in the Global North, noted that SPTs’ discrete focus, time-bound nature, and orientation toward results mean that their progress is more easily tracked than that of IPOs. This makes it easier to report on, explain, and justify the contributions of SPTs to ministers in the capitals of Global North PCCs.⁶² As one member-state official

51 Interview with current SPT leader, September 2023.

52 Interviews with SPT leaders across multiple missions, June–December 2023; current police commissioner, December 2023.

53 Interview with current SPT leader, September 2023.

54 Interview with current SPT leader, December 2023.

55 Interview with current police commissioner, May 2023. See also the UNMISS police commissioner comments to the Security Council: UN Security Council, 9475th Meeting, UN Doc. S/PV.9475, November 14, 2023, p. 7.

56 Interview with current police commissioner, December 2023.

57 Interview with MINUSCA forensics SPT leader, September 2023.

58 Interview with current police commissioner, May 2023.

59 Interviews with current police commissioner, May 2023; multiple police advisers in New York, September–December 2023. For further detail on the role of UNPOL in the protection of civilians, see: Charles T. Hunt, “‘To Serve and Protect’: The Changing Roles of Police in the Protection of Civilians in UN Peace Operations,” *Civil Wars* (September 2022).

60 Interview with member state police adviser, October 2023.

61 Interviews with member state police advisers, September 2023.

62 Interviews with member state police advisers, September–October 2023; current SPT leader, December 2023; member state government official, October 2023.

noted, “From a political perspective, we feel like we have more influence and impact compared to the IPO modality.”⁶³ Another said, “We need to make our small contributions in ways that make a real added value. SPTs are perfect for that.”⁶⁴

The SPT configuration also improves the experience of PCCs’ national personnel. First, because they deploy and operate as a team, SPTs can avoid the logistical, safety, and security challenges that arise when a small contingent of IPOs from a particular PCC is split up and deployed across multiple field offices, including offices with serious security concerns.⁶⁵ This not only reassures PCCs about the safety and security of their personnel but has also allowed missions to retain boots on the ground when PCCs might otherwise have withdrawn their contingents. Second, it was emphasized that SPTs provide more “job satisfaction” for personnel, who report more positive experiences due to a clearer sense of purpose and perception of impact than their colleagues deployed as IPOs.⁶⁶ In this way, SPTs offer what some PCCs see as a “win-win-win” scenario for the missions and host countries, PCCs, and individual officers.

Challenges and Impediments to More Effective Specialized Police Teams

While SPTs demonstrate a range of benefits, strengths, and comparative advantages, they have also faced administrative and operational impediments to maximizing their potential. As one interviewee put it, “The main challenges to SPTs are the challenges faced by all UNPOL in missions.”⁶⁷ However, nine impediments are

particularly acute for SPTs.

High-Level Tensions

Several tensions have emerged over the development and administration of SPTs. As SPTs have grown in popularity, there have been differences in opinion within UNPD about how to run and manage them.⁶⁸ Many interviewees highlighted the need to clarify the division of labor between, for example, the Selection and Recruitment Section and Mission Management and Support Section in New York and the Standing Police Capacity (SPC) in Brindisi.⁶⁹

There is also tension between the UN (both UNPD in New York and UNPOL in field missions) and member states. Sometimes the UN’s “top-down” control of SPTs comes at the expense of greater involvement and buy-in from member states, which often operate according to different logics and timeframes. This means the conversation between the UN and member states needs to be continuous, not sporadic, to allow member states to identify requirements, needs, and costs and engage in dialogue with their counterparts in capitals in time to respond to domestic budget cycles rather than UN timelines.⁷⁰ As one former member-state police adviser put it, “The most significant failure is the lack of inclusion of and consultation with member states [regarding] SPTs.”⁷¹

Supply-Side Issues

The reliance on voluntary contributions from individual member states is a perennial challenge to meeting the demand for both IPOs and SPTs.⁷² Problems with recruitment, extension, and transfer have particularly exacerbated this supply issue for SPTs. Interviewees noted, for example, that a rule originally designed for military peacekeepers

63 Interview with member state police adviser, September 2023.

64 Interview with member state police adviser, September 2023.

65 Interview with member state government official, October 2023.

66 Interview with member state government official, October 2023.

67 Interview with current UNPOL official, December 2023.

68 Interviews with former member state police adviser and SPT leader, August 2023; senior UNPD officials, June–December 2023.

69 Interview with former member state police adviser and SPT leader, August 2023.

70 Interview with member state government official, October 2023.

71 Interview with former member state police adviser and SPT leader, August 2023.

72 At the 2021 peacekeeping ministerial in Seoul, no SPTs were pledged. However, the most recent 2023 ministerial in Accra saw new SPTs pledged by Bangladesh, Portugal, and Nepal. See: UN Peacekeeping, “List of Member State Pledges,” December 11, 2023, available at <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/2023-united-nations-peacekeeping-ministerial>. See also: Durch and Ker, “Police in UN Peacekeeping.”

requiring that SPT members are under fifty-five years old at the time of deployment does not make sense in the context of SPTs. To have accrued the specialist skills required for service in SPTs, officers will necessarily be later in their careers. Further, this rule makes it even more difficult to find women SPT members, who often apply for UN roles later in life.⁷³ This predicament limits an already small pool of candidates.

Regarding extensions and transfers, there are shortages of specially trained officers and civilian experts (such as explosives experts from France in Mali and technical forensics experts from Spain in CAR) who meet the criteria for deploying to SPTs (less than fifty-five years old, more than ten years of specialist experience, conversant in multiple languages, etc.).⁷⁴ One interviewee suggested that “[he] was the only one in [his country] meeting these criteria.”⁷⁵ Once found, these team members are difficult to replace. Moreover, interviewees regularly noted that the institutional knowledge and relationships these team members formed during the first year of deployment allowed them to have an outsize impact if their deployments were extended.⁷⁶ It was also stated that the UN could better harness their experience and institutional knowledge if they were easier to transfer between missions during or immediately following the initial deployment period. However, the approval of extensions and transfers is inconsistent. Some PCCs are not willing or able to give approval due to organizational arrangements and funding commitments. Even when PCCs approve, there have been times when the UNPD bureaucracy has been slow to process

The reliance on voluntary contributions from individual member states is a perennial challenge to meeting the demand for both IPOs and SPTs.

paperwork and make decisions in consultation with PCCs, creating problems for individual SPT members and knock-on effects for their home policing agencies.⁷⁷

Dominance by the Global North, Both Perceived and Real

Despite efforts to diversify the composition of SPTs and include members from regional and neighboring countries, SPTs can still be seen as “Western” missions within the overall mission.⁷⁸ The vast majority of SPTs are led by and primarily comprised of members from Global North PCCs—particularly the Nordic countries, Canada, France, and Germany.⁷⁹ This has led to the perception by some

that SPTs are predicated on the idea that Global North police know how to do policing properly—even compared to their IPO colleagues, most of whom come from the Global South—and are given special

status, creating two-tiered missions (see below). This lack of diversity also goes against UN goals for global geographic representation.⁸⁰ Furthermore, it presents practical limitations to working closely with local counterparts on capacity building.⁸¹ Predominantly Global North police often do not have the necessary language skills and cultural knowledge or locally appropriate approaches to capacity building.⁸² For example, it was noted that even French-speaking Canadians struggled with communication and cultural dexterity when posted to Mali.⁸³

For practical reasons, the makeup of SPTs needs to be decided on a case-by-case basis, as some SPTs are more suited to including members from multiple PCCs than others.⁸⁴ It may be less

73 This is particularly true in the Nordic countries, where many SPT members have come from.

74 Interviews with UNPD officials, police commissioners, and team leaders in multiple missions, June–December 2023.

75 Interview with current SPT leader, September 2023.

76 Interview with current police commissioner, December 2023.

77 Interviews with multiple SPT leaders, September 2023.

78 Interview with member state police adviser, September 2023. There were some earlier Global South–led teams, though they preceded the formalization of SPTs (see Table 1).

79 This is in stark contrast to FPU, which are almost exclusively from Global South (Asian and African) PCCs.

80 Interview with member state police adviser, October 2023.

81 Some interviewees also noted that the inclusion of members from the Global South can create its own problems if diverse policing philosophies (such as on SGBV) dilute the benefits mentioned in the previous section. Interviews with member state police adviser, October 2023; former SPT leader, October 2023.

82 Interviews with member state government official, October 2023; current police commissioners, December 2023; New York member state police adviser, September 2023.

83 Interview with former SPT leader, October 2023.

84 For example, cross-border policing is more suited to multi-PCC SPTs, whereas highly technical forensics is less so.

important to prioritize diverse geographic composition for SPTs focused on technical issues such as forensics and crime scene investigations, while those involved in community policing or tackling socially embedded harmful practices such as SGBV would benefit more from regional expertise.⁸⁵

In addition to the readiness of Global North PCCs to contribute, there are also barriers to Global South PCCs deploying SPTs, including low remuneration and the perception that PCCs would need to provide project funding as well as personnel in order to lead an SPT. Interviewees from the Global North reported that PCCs they spoke with from the Global South were often less aware of the concept of SPTs and their benefits and have thus been less supportive than police advisers in New York from the Global North.⁸⁶

Inconsistency across SPTs

As one interviewee put it, “SPT means different things in different missions.”

While SPTs have established some common practices over time, their composition, plans, and modalities still vary dramatically from mission to mission. As one interviewee put it, “SPT means different things in different missions.”⁸⁷ There are even differences between different SPTs in the same mission and from phase to phase within the same SPT. As another interviewee remarked, “The lack of a clear and consistent plan for SPTs can affect their focus, direction, and accountability.”⁸⁸

One area of divergence is the extent to which SPTs are demand- versus supply-driven. This reflects the ambiguity of the process for initiating SPTs. In some instances, the capacity deficit SPTs are addressing has been clearly identified by host-state police authorities, while in others, the initiative has come from the mission itself or from a PCC

committed to providing support in a particular area. While the capacity of host-state authorities to identify their own needs can vary significantly (e.g., in Sudan versus South Sudan), supply-side approaches risk reducing local ownership.⁸⁹

Another discrepancy is the extent and quality of pre-deployment training for SPTs. It was highlighted that “pre-deployment preparation practices are very different across different PCCs.”⁹⁰ Although some member states already have highly regarded training packages on issues such as SGBV and community policing, these are not mandatory or widely accessible. Further, senior UNPOL officials noted that SPTs are often highly trained but not necessarily in UN systems and UN approaches to capacity building or security sector reform. Training in project management skills is also essential (at least for team leaders) but almost entirely absent.⁹¹

Interviewees also raised the issue of the inconsistent presence and role of steering committees. Acknowledged by many as an important facet of SPTs, such committees provide a forum for raising awareness, generating buy-in, and identifying funding opportunities.⁹² However, they are not always part of SPT project proposals and plans. For example, the Canadian SPT in the DRC has a steering committee in place, but the Canadian SPT in Mali did not.⁹³ Where the committees do exist, the composition, frequency, substance, and utility of their meetings vary widely.⁹⁴ Police commissioners have at times been reluctant to accept steering committees due to concerns that they would interfere in the management of UNPOL resources, allow member states to take more control, or bring unwanted attention to the work of the police component.⁹⁵

85 Interview with member state police adviser, September 2023.

86 Interviews with multiple member state police advisers, August–September 2023.

87 Interview with member state police adviser, October 2023.

88 Interview with current SPT leader, December 2023.

89 Interviews with former SPT leader, October 2023; current police commissioner, December 2023.

90 Interview with current SPT leader, September 2023.

91 Interviews with current police commissioners, December 2023.

92 See discussion of steering committee as a way to connect to broader rule-of-law actors and local counterparts.

93 Interview with member state police adviser, September 2023.

94 Interviews with current SPT leader and SPC official, December 2023.

95 Interviews with member state police advisers, June–December 2023; UNPD official, December 2023.

Inadequate Guidance

While primarily technical, extant guidance on SPTs contains important information on administration and recruitment.⁹⁶ However, several interviewees reported that those deploying to the field are sometimes not aware of this guidance or do not learn about it until later in their deployment, particularly if rotating in later in the life of an established SPT.⁹⁷

Moreover, it was repeatedly noted that current guidelines are insufficient and do not assist in standardizing key operational aspects of SPTs, including their core purposes and tasks, organizational structure, command and control and reporting lines, and the involvement of other stakeholders such as UN agencies, funds, and programs.⁹⁸ As one interviewee explained, this has meant a “lack of a uniform way of setting up and managing and closing down SPTs.”⁹⁹ Most SPT leaders interviewed noted that they would benefit from more guidance.¹⁰⁰

Inconsistent, Insufficient, and Inaccessible Funding and Resources

Funding models differ across SPTs, even for teams led by the same PCC in different missions.¹⁰¹ While some degree of flexibility is useful, the lack of a uniform model for funding SPTs can impede implementation and sustainability. Originally, the SPT concept included a lead PCC to provide extrabudgetary funding channeled through the

mission and earmarked for SPT projects (e.g., the Norwegian SPT in Haiti).¹⁰² However, this model has been the exception, not the rule. Some SPTs are funded partly through the mission’s budget line for the police development pillar and partly by the UN Development Programme (UNDP).¹⁰³ In other settings, no additional funding is available beyond the mission’s police development budget.¹⁰⁴ In UNITAMS, for example, it was noted that “we didn’t have any dedicated funding—not from Germany, not from the mission, not from New York. From nowhere!” To overcome these challenges, some SPTs and PCCs have developed workarounds. In some cases, the lead PCC’s embassy in the host country has provided resources bilaterally to SPT leaders to circumvent UN bureaucracy.¹⁰⁵

While some degree of flexibility is useful, the lack of a uniform model for funding SPTs can impede implementation and sustainability.

Even when funding is available, internal mission systems for the procurement and disbursement of funds present administrative and budgetary barriers to accessing

it in a timely manner. These delays have been well documented in the case of the Norwegian-led SPT in Haiti and were repeated in interviews for this study.¹⁰⁶ Interviews with currently serving SPT members revealed that access to funds continues to be beset by delays and obstruction due to “overly bureaucratic processes.”¹⁰⁷ As one team leader explained, “The complex and lengthy procedures for accessing and managing the budget require a lot of paperwork, reporting, and personal expenses ([e.g.] spending one’s own money to do the project and then waiting to be reimbursed).”¹⁰⁸ It was also commonly highlighted that equipment and other resources theoretically provided by the mission

96 UN DPO and DFS, “Guidelines: Specialized Police Teams on Assignment with United Nations Peace Operations.”

97 Interview with former SPT leader, September 2023.

98 Interviews with SPT leaders and police commissioners in multiple missions, June–December 2023.

99 Interview with member state police adviser, October 2023.

100 Interviews with multiple SPT leaders, June–December 2023.

101 For example, Canadian SPTs in the DRC and Mali were funded quite differently. Interview with member state police adviser, September 2023.

102 Interview with UNPD official, December 2023.

103 For example, the MINUSCA forensics SPT. Interview with current SPT leader, September 2023.

104 For example, the MINUSCA SPT, which includes Rwandan officers. Interviews with current police commissioner, December 2023; member state police adviser, September 2023.

105 This was the case with the Swedish-led organized crime team previously in MONUSCO.

106 See: Tøraasen, “The Future of UN Policing?” p. 12; Caparini and Osland, “MINUSTAH’s Specialized Police Team to Combat Sexual Violence in Haiti”; interviews with former member state police adviser and SPT leader, August 2023; current member state police adviser, August 2023; multiple police commissioners, December 2023.

107 Interview with former SPT leader, December 2023.

108 Interview with current SPT leader, December 2023.

(e.g., vehicles, office space with desks, office chairs, laptops with Internet connection, Wi-Fi, radios, and basic materials for training courses such as AV support and printing) were often not forthcoming or timely in practice, leading to wasted time and inefficiencies.¹⁰⁹ As one SPT leader reported, “The absence of adequate and reliable transportation, equipment, and infrastructure hinders the mobility, productivity, and safety of the SPT officers.”¹¹⁰

A lack of sufficient or consistent funding and resources has limited the scope, scale, and quality of SPT projects and activities. This has prevented some SPTs from meeting their targets and achieving their objectives, with implications for sustainability and long-term planning.¹¹¹ These funding difficulties also limit SPTs’ autonomy to operate according to their project plan and have rendered SPT members more vulnerable to redeployment and distraction if they are reliant on general mission funding and processes. Furthermore, SPTs are often reliant on other actors such as UNDP to recognize the value of their work and provide them funding instead of duplicating their efforts, though these actors are supposed to be working in concert under the Global Focal Point for the Rule of Law.¹¹²

Disconnect from Broader UNPOL and Rule-of-Law Efforts

Interviews revealed several areas where the organization and implementation of SPTs’ work was not well aligned with others in the mission and relevant partners due to inadequate integration and coordination.

Internal Mission Divisions and Tensions

Interviewees mentioned that tensions could arise from SPTs being treated differently from the rest of the police component.¹¹³ For instance, some PCCs impose caveats or barriers that limit the redeployment of SPTs to respond to other needs in the mission, which can make police commissioners feel that they cannot fully control the resources at their disposal.¹¹⁴ SPTs also have different and sometimes unclear reporting lines, including directly to PCC capitals.¹¹⁵ When these reporting lines are not well understood, SPTs have been perceived as circumventing conventional chains of command or even being secretive, impinging on their transparency and accountability to the police commissioner.¹¹⁶ While the resulting tensions are relatively easy to iron out, they are still a source of friction within police components.¹¹⁷ The sense that SPTs are comparatively privileged can also generate irritation among other IPOs, who perceive a two-tiered system where better-resourced SPTs undermine the reputation of the rest of the police component among the host-state police.¹¹⁸

More generally, this differentiation can lead to a lack of integration of SPTs with other police in the mission.¹¹⁹ As one respondent described, “An SPT is a mission within a mission, kind of on the side. So it can be frustrating for others in the mission who don’t know exactly what the SPT is doing.”¹²⁰ This can mean that capacity-building approaches differ within the same mission. Perhaps more worryingly, the presence of an SPT focused on a particular area has led to other UN police seeing that particular concern as only the SPT’s responsi-

109 To mitigate this, Canada entirely funds the SPTs it leads in Mali and the DRC, including the purchase of vehicles, separate accommodation, and laptop computers, all outside of UN systems. Interviews with SPT members across multiple missions, June–December 2023; police commissioners in multiple missions, December 2023.

110 Interview with current SPT leader, December 2023.

111 Interviews with former SPT leader, October 2023; current SPT leader, December 2023.

112 Interview with former SPT leader, October 2023.

113 Interviews with police commissioners and senior mission leadership in multiple missions, June–December 2023.

114 Interview with current police commissioner, December 2023.

115 For example, at one point it was unclear whether the SGBV SPT in MONUSCO was reporting to the police commissioner, a sector commander, or the gender unit. Interviews with SPC official, December 2023; current police commissioner, December 2023.

116 Interview with current police commissioner, December 2023.

117 Interviews with current SPT leaders, September 2023; current police commissioner, December 2023.

118 Interviews with police commissioners and IPOs in various missions, June–December 2023.

119 Interviews with current SPT leader, December 2023; current police commissioner, December 2023; SPC official, December 2023.

120 Interview with current SPT leader, September 2023. Similar sentiments were also expressed in interviews with current police commissioner, December 2023; SPC official, December 2023.

bility (as was the case with the SGBV SPT in South Sudan).¹²¹ As one senior mission leader said, “You have to have this balance between the SPTs who are specialized and the good IPOs and FPU around them, because you need all working together.”¹²²

Lack of a Comprehensive Approach

While SPTs have been able to make tangible progress on building the capacity of host-state police in niche areas, interviewees regularly noted that their efforts are not always part of a comprehensive vision for support to the host state. SPTs’ areas of focus have not always been aligned with an overall police development plan to ensure that security sector reform and capacity-building projects are logically sequenced to enable cumulative institutional improvements.¹²³ As widely acknowledged in the literature on police reform, the success of police will inevitably be limited by incommensurate progress in the rest of the criminal justice system. Slow or no progress on judicial reform or rehabilitation of the penal system puts a ceiling on what can be achieved by improving policing.

While the interdependence of policing, justice, and corrections is widely recognized by police professionals, it is less readily promoted or pursued in the UN system.¹²⁴ As a result, SPTs (and police more generally) still tend to get siloed, often as a way of keeping things simple.¹²⁵ Nevertheless, there have been examples of SPTs including other actors from the criminal justice chain in training activities. For example, in the UN missions in Haiti (MINUSTAH and MINUJUSTH), prosecutors and investigative judges took part in elements of the training program and seminars. In South Sudan, the training-of-trainer courses delivered by the SGBV SPT included public prosecutors to promote

Interviewees regularly noted that SPTs’ effectiveness was impeded by inadequate communication channels.

mutual learning.¹²⁶ Where they have functioned well, steering committees have also tended to include representatives of other criminal justice institutions and stakeholders.

Communication and Coordination Difficulties

There are some good examples of SPTs working closely with other parts of missions and other UN agencies, funds, and programs in the UN country team (UNCT). However, interviewees regularly noted that SPTs’ effectiveness was impeded by inadequate communication channels with the rest of the police component, as well as the military component and various civilian sections (including justice and corrections, rule of law, human rights, child protection, and gender). Within missions, a lack of information exchange on shared objectives was cited as a major problem. For instance, one interviewee explained how the SGBV SPT in the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) was not aware of and did not have access to an SGBV database housed in the UNMISS office of the gender adviser until they learned of it through informal discussions.¹²⁷ Such overreliance on informal channels and happenstance to learn important information that could facilitate SPTs’ work and avoid duplication was widely cited as an area for improvement.

It was also noted that poor communication between SPTs and police components and between police components and UN agencies, funds, and programs in the UNCT often led to duplication of efforts, particularly with the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and UNDP but also with other entities such as the International Organization for Migration (IOM).¹²⁸ It was noted that in Sudan, for example, a range of UN entities (UNDP, UNICEF, UN

121 Interview with current SPT leader, September 2023. This is a similar dynamic to that witnessed in the DRC when the arrival of the Force Intervention Brigade (FIB) led other so-called “framework” brigades to view robust protection of civilians as the exclusive domain of the FIB, despite the mandate suggesting otherwise.

122 Interview with current police commissioner, May 2023.

123 Interviews with multiple SPT leaders, June–December 2023.

124 Interview with former member state police adviser and SPT leader, August 2023.

125 Interviews with multiple member state police advisers, September 2023. Examples of changing practice include the UNMISS SGBV SPT’s new plan to include “other national justice chain authorities in addressing SGBV and CRSV.” UNMISS, “UNPOL Specialized Police Team Sexual and Gender-Based Violence and Conflict-Related Sexual Violence PROJECT PLAN (DRAFT), 2023–2024,” on file with author.

126 Interview with current SPT leader, September 2023.

127 Interview with current SPT leader, September 2023.

128 “I’ve seen some horrible examples of poor coordination.” Interview with member state police adviser, October 2023.

Women, and UNITAMS) were “all doing training with the Sudanese Police Force on SGBV, not knowing the others are doing the same thing.”¹²⁹ The same was said to be true of some non-UN entities such as Interpol, which could be a useful partner on issues like transnational organized crime and violent extremism. As one interviewee put it, “There is not ‘One UN’; there are still lots of UNs in field mission settings, and this is a problem for SPTs in particular.”¹³⁰ Interviewees mentioned the need to coordinate workplans and language to align the efforts of SPTs with other actors within and outside of the mission working on police reform and capacity building. SPT steering committees were regularly highlighted as an important forum for communication with key stakeholders that could be better harnessed for this purpose.¹³¹

Poor Understanding by Senior Mission Leadership

When senior mission leaders, including police commissioners, were aware of the objectives, benefits, and unique needs of SPTs, their support was seen as crucial to SPTs’ effectiveness.¹³² However, interviewees involved in SPTs across various mission settings and points in time noted that this understanding and support was sometimes lacking. As one senior mission leader put it, “Misconceptions about the SPT concept are very common.”¹³³ According to one police commissioner, “They might know that we have specialists, but very few people in senior mission leadership know that SPTs exist, never mind what they do.”¹³⁴ Another stakeholder noted that there is a “difference in understanding of [the] SPT concept and

requirements across the different missions.”¹³⁵

Moreover, senior mission leaders have not always requested SPTs based on need or what is best for host countries. Instead, on occasion, special representatives of the secretary-general (SRSGs) and police commissioners have viewed SPTs as a way to obtain extra or retain existing resources for the police component.¹³⁶ Respondents also reported that the project-oriented approach of SPTs is often misunderstood and occasionally resisted or misused by leaders operating in a mission culture that tends to be incident-driven rather than planning-focused, project-oriented, and objectives-driven.¹³⁷ As one respondent put it, “It feels like we

constantly have to be explaining our role and [the] reason for our existence. Quite often we’re seen as just one of the teams here, not as a project.”¹³⁸ When the niche contribution of SPTs is not recognized or valued, SPTs face hurdles to justifying

themselves and getting the internal support required to achieve their objectives.

Examples of more deliberate obstruction were also provided in interviews, including cases where ignorance among senior mission leaders impeded the work of SPTs.¹³⁹ Whether due to lack of awareness or deliberate blocking, this lack of support from senior mission leaders, particularly the police commissioner, is a major challenge to the effectiveness of SPTs. As one member-state police adviser said, “It is essential for the [police commissioner] to see the added value of the SPT for it to be successful.”¹⁴⁰

Whether due to lack of awareness or deliberate blocking, lack of support from senior mission leaders, particularly the police commissioner, is a major challenge to the effectiveness of SPTs.

129 Interview with former SPT leader, October 2023.

130 Interview with SPC official, December 2023.

131 Interviews with multiple SPT leaders and police commissioners, June–December 2023.

132 Interviews with multiple SPT leaders, September–October 2023.

133 Interview with current SPT leader, September 2023.

134 Interview with current police commissioner, December 2023.

135 Interview with member state government official, October 2023.

136 For instance, requesting an extension without creating a new project or setting new targets. Interviews with former and current member state police advisers and multiple SPT leaders, June–December 2023.

137 Interview with former UNPD official, August 2023.

138 Interview with current SPT leader, September 2023.

139 For example, in UNMISS in 2015–2016: “[The] police commissioner was blocking SPT work, not understanding SPT work, and not interested. [They were] only focused on keeping [the] police component running.” Interview with former SPT leader, October 2023.

140 Interview with member state police adviser, September 2023.

This lack of understanding and awareness extends to others in mission management, including important gatekeepers responsible for logistics such as the police component's chief of staff, the mission's chief of staff, and the director of mission support.¹⁴¹ Interviewees recounted cases of offices of the chief of staff denying SPTs certain benefits (such as individually assigned cars), attempting to deploy SPT members as if they were regular IPOs, and imposing arbitrary rules about being present in a designated office building between the hours of 8:00am and 5:00pm.¹⁴² Rigid administrative structures, including delays to processing approvals to go to the field, were also said to impinge on SPTs' ability to work efficiently.¹⁴³ For example, the Spanish forensics SPT in CAR, which needs to go rapidly to crime scenes to preserve evidence, often faces inertia and delays of three days to a week waiting for clearances, which severely hamper its work.

These issues are particularly acute in special political missions, where the police component as a whole has less visibility, making it difficult to get the attention of senior mission leaders (including, at times, the police commissioner). For example, it was noted that the SRSG for UNITAMS only became aware of the SPT because they were from the same country as the SPT leader and serendipitously met and discussed it over drinks at a Christmas party.¹⁴⁴

Sustainability of Programming and Capacity Building

One of the perceived benefits of SPTs discussed above is the continuity they offer by having members deployed for longer than the average duration of IPOs. However, as a project-oriented modality, SPTs are by nature ephemeral and primarily output-oriented. Their work as part of

overall criminal justice sector reform is a longer-term endeavor aimed at changing policing culture and behaviors and increasing public confidence and trust in the police. We know from the literature on police reform that it takes a long time to do this sort of capacity building.¹⁴⁵

The imperative to demonstrate “quick wins” has at times led SPT members to substitute for their local counterparts rather than build their capacity and allow them the time and space to grow and take on responsibility.¹⁴⁶ Further, SPTs do not consistently implement established “best practices.” As one interviewee explained, “Many of the current SPTs are not using modern capacity-building models that prioritize training-of-trainer approaches. Many rely on traditional capacity-building techniques that simply train and equip without building in ownership.”¹⁴⁷

Even when SPTs do prioritize local ownership, challenges remain. For example, senior police officers may take part in specialized training-of-trainer programs primarily for the significant daily subsistence allowances and employment opportunities, not because they intend to deliver any follow-up trainings.¹⁴⁸ Interviewees also noted that in many cases, station commanders are not supportive of these trainings.¹⁴⁹ One team leader said, “In many cases, the sad reality is station commanders are not supportive. They do not understand the importance of on-the-job training and do not give opportunities for those who have been through training-of-trainer programs to deliver courses to their colleagues.”¹⁵⁰ As one interviewee stated, “It is not very sustainable if we just train trainers but they don't have [the] possibility... to actually train anyone unless we are there to support and, of course, we are not to be here forever, so... they would need to be able to do it completely on their own.”¹⁵¹ It was also pointed

141 Interviews with police commissioners and SPT leaders across multiple missions, June–December 2023.

142 Interviews with former member state police adviser and SPT leader, August 2023; current SPT leader, December 2023.

143 Interview with current police commissioner, December 2023.

144 Interview with former SPT member, October 2023.

145 World Bank, “World Development Report 2011: Conflict, Security and Development,” 2011.

146 Interview with current police commissioner, December 2023.

147 Interview with former member state police adviser and SPT leader, August 2023.

148 Interview with current SPT leaders, September–October 2023.

149 Interviews with current SPT leader, December 2023; police commissioners in multiple missions, December 2023.

150 Interview with current SPT leader, September 2023.

151 Interview with former SPT leader, October 2023.

out that hosting training programs at expensive hotels incurs costs that could otherwise be spent on refurbishing and building the capacity of local police training facilities and academies that could make these trainings more sustainable.¹⁵²

These limitations are exacerbated by a lack of continued funding for follow-on programming or follow-up arrangements. Even in Haiti, where SPT projects rolled over many times into new phases, they eventually came to an end without a clear plan for handing over the project or funding to counterparts to sustain the training efforts.¹⁵³ This is a cross-cutting challenge and a potential limitation of the SPT model. SPTs are currently only able to provide simple material support (such as flip-charts, notebooks, and pens) to facilitate training conducted by those who have been through training-of-trainer programs, highlighting the need to consider the role of other partners and donors in making these efforts more sustainable. This challenge is not unique to SPTs, but the rapid improvements in capacity that SPTs often bring about can raise expectations, making the lack of follow-up more acutely felt.

Several respondents also highlighted that SPT projects were sometimes too technical or specialized given the baseline capacity of the host-state police. Interviewees noted, for example, that SPTs tended to be too focused on high-level capacities, such as forensics, that are “nice to have” and sought out by host states but not necessarily the most urgent needs for host-state police, who sometimes lack even the most basic capabilities.¹⁵⁴ As one police adviser put it, “It’s great to think that you’re CSI Miami rather than do the basics.”¹⁵⁵

Phased mission transitions provide an opportunity for SPTs to plan for the transfer of their projects to a follow-on presence to ensure sustainability.¹⁵⁶

Interviewees highlighted that in some instances it could even be useful for SPTs to remain and continue their work after their parent mission withdraws.¹⁵⁷ However, this has rarely been done. For example, referring to the transition from UNAMID to UNITAMS, a senior UNPOL official said, “When it comes to police, there was no transition. The UNITAMS SPT really had to start from scratch. [There was] no contact at all from the [Sudanese national police] at the beginning.”¹⁵⁸ The unsuccessful efforts to transfer the UN mission in Mali’s (MINUSMA) community policing SPT project to UNDP as part of its withdrawal further illustrate these challenges.¹⁵⁹

Shortcomings in Monitoring, Evaluation, and Organizational Learning

SPTs also face several challenges related to monitoring, evaluation, and learning.

Limited and Limiting Monitoring and Evaluation

Compared to capacity-building engagements by IPOs, the project design and results orientation of SPTs can allow for the articulation of more measurable objectives with clearer timelines. This enables clearer results frameworks and more frequent, targeted, and systematized reporting and evaluation, which is often written into project plans.¹⁶⁰ This is especially true in SPTs focused on more technical areas such as forensics.

However, interviewees repeatedly noted that SPT projects still often lack explicit and concrete objectives and relevant indicators to measure change against an established baseline.¹⁶¹ This limits insights into the effectiveness of SPTs’ activities and their theory of change.¹⁶² Interviewees

152 Interviews with current and former SPT leaders, September–October 2023.

153 Toraasen, “The Future of UN Policing?”

154 Interviews with member state police advisers, August–December 2023.

155 Interview with member state police adviser, October 2023.

156 Interview with SPC official, December 2023.

157 Interview with SPC official, December 2023.

158 Interview with former SPT leader, October 2023.

159 Interview with former SPT leader, September 2023. Transferral note on file with author.

160 Reporting obligations include to mission leadership, UNPD, and member states in New York and capitals. Interviews with member state police advisers and UNPOL officials, June–December 2023.

161 Ibid.

162 Interview with SPC official, December 2023.

explained that this also creates perverse incentives for SPT leaders to focus on goals and objectives they know will be measured and have an impact on future funding cycles.¹⁶³ Further, SPT leaders have come under pressure from senior mission leaders to meet results-based budgeting (RBB) targets for the entire mission or police component even if these do not align with the SPT's plans and targets. More broadly, UNPD tends to focus on daily and weekly reports, in addition to the myriad reporting requirements associated with secretary-general reporting, RBB, and the Comprehensive Planning and Performance Assessment System (CPAS), rather than evaluations of long-term impact and to be preoccupied with recruitment and deployment rather than long-term learning.

Absence of Organizational Learning and Knowledge Management

The absence of organizational learning from SPTs' efforts is evident at multiple levels. First, there is no way of ensuring that new SPTs learn from the experiences of previous SPTs focusing on similar areas. Second, there is often little internal sharing of lessons learned between current SPTs in the same mission, sometimes due to a lack of formal mechanisms to do so and sometimes due to a simple lack of awareness. Third, transfer of knowledge between SPTs in different missions rarely happens. For example, there are numerous SPTs focusing on SGBV in different missions, but UNPOL have no knowledge-management hub (either in missions or at headquarters) to share their experiences. To date, knowledge transfer has been ad hoc or reliant on informal national networks in PCCs. For example, interviewees gave examples where PCCs had shared knowledge of the experiences of previous SPTs they had deployed before deploying a new SPT.¹⁶⁴ The absence of an SPT network or

SPT projects still often lack explicit and concrete objectives and relevant indicators to measure change against an established baseline.

“community of practice” to facilitate organizational learning was described as a missed opportunity for the UN and PCCs.¹⁶⁵

Conclusion and Recommendations

The lessons emerging from the experiences of SPTs to date emphasize the need for innovation around deployment and implementation modalities for this specialized approach to capacity building. At the same time, they highlight the need for greater organizational flexibility and adaptability to empower and maximize the potential of SPTs.

As experts and commentators speculate on the future of UN policing, this examination provides insights into how SPTs may contribute to that future.¹⁶⁶ These insights are also timely given the secretary-general's New Agenda for Peace and its

call for “more nimble, adaptable and effective mission models.”¹⁶⁷ The following recommendations for UN headquarters, missions, the Security Council, and contributing member

states are intended to maximize the potential of SPTs going forward.

For the Secretariat

Organizational Arrangements

- **UNPD should promote a cultural shift in the way it manages and supports SPTs.** Leaders in UNPD (in both New York and Brindisi) do not necessarily have project management experience, limiting their ability to guide and advise others. Going forward, UNPD should reorient itself to be more cognizant of and amenable to project-oriented thinking and management and recruit leaders with project management skills to

¹⁶³ Interview with current SPT leader, September 2023.

¹⁶⁴ For example, the Spanish forensics institute has online meetings every three months with former, current, and future SPT members to discuss, reflect, and track progress.

¹⁶⁵ Interviews with SPT leaders in multiple missions, June–December 2023.

¹⁶⁶ This was the focus of a recent leadership retreat for UNPD in Switzerland in February 2024. See also: Charles T. Hunt, “The Future of Police in UN Peace Operations,” UN DPO, 2020; Charles T. Hunt, “International Policing and/as the Future of UN Peace Operations,” in *Multidisciplinary Futures of UN Peace Operations*, Alexander Gilder et al., eds. (Cham: Springer International Publishing), pp. 43–68.

¹⁶⁷ United Nations, “A New Agenda for Peace,” July 2023, p. 24.

create a more supportive environment for SPTs.

- **UNPD should clarify the roles and responsibilities of various sections in New York and the Standing Police Capacity (SPC) in Brindisi.** It will be important to clarify the roles and responsibilities of New York and Brindisi in the creation, administration, and implementation of SPTs to leverage the comparative advantages of each. The various sections of UNPD in New York (particularly the Mission Management and Support Section) and missions should lead on dialogue with member states, recruitment, and the drafting of project plans, in coordination with integrated operational teams as a bridge between the Department of Peace Operations (DPO), Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA), mission management, and others. For its part, the SPC is well-placed to help initiate and establish SPTs, including by responding to requests from missions and host states and conducting pre-deployment training. It is also mandated to assess needs, conduct stakeholder analysis, feed into the initial project plan, and potentially play a role in evaluation. Indeed, the SPC could be the most appropriate location for and facilitator of a “knowledge hub” for SPT-related organizational learning (discussed below). Moreover, the SPC could second a staff member with extensive operational experience and mission knowledge to be part of the start-up phase of new SPTs, helping them integrate into existing structures and UN systems. One instructive precedent is the SGBV SPT in the DRC, which the SPC supported by participating in the planning phase and the first three to six months of deployment and helping to navigate the idiosyncrasies of the UN mission. If Brindisi takes on these responsibilities, it may also be prudent to consider creating an SPT focal point or coordinator in the SPC.
- **UNPD should strengthen coordination and consultation with member states.** To facilitate additional support for SPTs, UNPD needs to enhance dialogue with and increase the agency of member states in their creation and management. Practically speaking, this can be achieved through mechanisms such as the Strategic

Police Advisory Group and C-34. When UNPD is developing project proposals for needs identified by missions, it should also consult relevant PCCs and other member states. Further, UNPD could include representatives of lead PCCs on SPT steering committees to provide them with timely updates and relay issues on the ground.

Planning and Project Design

- **UNPD should formalize the conduct and substance of pre-deployment joint assessments for SPTs.** Joint assessments and fact-finding missions that include the relevant mission, UNPD, the SPC, and potential PCCs help generate broad-based buy-in through shared ownership of project plans, enhance SPTs’ local relevance from the earliest stage, help manage expectations, and speed up the deployment process. These assessments should thus become a default step in pre-deployment planning. While there are benefits of conducting such assessments in person and on the ground, Canada effectively conducted an assessment in the DRC entirely online at the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic, demonstrating that this can also be done virtually.
- **The Secretariat, with support from UNPD’s Strategic Policy and Development Section, should institutionalize and clarify the role and composition of steering committees.** Steering committees play a critical role in raising awareness, generating buy-in from stakeholders, accessing funding sources, and involving SPTs in work outside of the police component. They should thus be mainstreamed across all SPTs and included in project planning. To overcome resistance to steering committees, their terms of reference should be formalized to clarify that their role is to advise and support rather than to steer or direct the police commissioner or hold SPTs to account. Steering committees could also be renamed as “advisory boards” or “reference groups” to avoid the impression that SPTs are steered or managed by some external authority. Further, the composition of all steering committees should be broadened to include a wider range of stakeholders,

including representatives of national judicial and penal systems, local and customary justice systems, and potential sources of funding such as UNDP or international financial institutions, as well as relevant member states. Finally, where not the case, steering committees should meet at least quarterly to ensure the timely and regular communication of key issues affecting SPTs.¹⁶⁸

Funding

- **The Secretariat should develop mechanisms to allow member states to provide SPTs with more clearly earmarked funding.** To ensure their sustainability, SPTs should continue to be funded through mission budgets. However, UN headquarters and UNPD should find ways to encourage and incentivize direct funding from member states.¹⁶⁹ SPTs would benefit from being planned and deployed with earmarked project funding (in addition to the necessary equipment, personnel, and logistics). This could be provided by one or more member states outside of the usual UN mission funding arrangements. Member states should ensure this funding is flexible to avoid perverse situations where an SPT can book an expensive venue to hold training courses but has no budget for pens and notebooks. While this year-to-year extrabudgetary funding can support certain activities, overly relying on such funding could undermine the sustainability of SPTs. Moreover, any changes to funding arrangements must be done in ways that do not preclude or disincentivize Global South PCCs from proposing or contributing SPTs. Consideration should also be given to future scenarios where the assessed peacekeeping budget is not available for conventional UNPOL deployments and SPTs need to be funded through an entirely different mechanism.

- **UNPD should identify pathways to securing and sustaining project funding from a wider range of sources.** SPTs require clearer guidance on how to access funding from UNDP, multi-partner trust funds, international financial institutions, and NGOs.¹⁷⁰ This is particularly important if SPTs are to be used in contexts without large, multidimensional missions and where the assessed peacekeeping budget is thus not available. UNPD should also incentivize Global North PCCs to consider more creative ways of funding SPTs. One option to consider is an additional contributing modality where a member state can provide funds specifically for an SPT, whether to support the SPT in general or to support deployments to the SPT by PCCs in the Global South through blended or partial funding. While Global North PCCs often face administrative barriers to providing funding to support deployments by Global South member states to “their” SPTs, representatives of some PCCs likely to consider such a proposal have described this idea as “extremely useful.”¹⁷¹ Though yet to happen in practice, existing guidance for SPTs already includes provisions for securing funding from international organizations such as multilateral development banks or the European Union, which should be further explored.¹⁷²

Force Generation, Recruitment, and Administration

- **UNPD’s Selection and Recruitment Section should increase measures to diversify participation in SPTs.**¹⁷³ To encourage additional contributions, particularly from Global South PCCs, UNPD should hold more regular information sessions to explain the advantages of SPTs and share good news stories about them, as well as related processes, rules, and guidelines, including in the languages of target

168 The standard number of meetings appears to currently be two per year.

169 The Norwegian-led SPT in Haiti (2010–2019) was the first SPT with its own earmarked funding for programming and was fully funded by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

170 Some of this is available in DPO’s Donor Coordination and Fund Management Manual.

171 Interviews with Global Affairs Canada official, October 2023; Rwandan police adviser in New York, September 2023.

172 UN DPO and DOS, “Guidelines: Specialized Police Teams on Assignment with United Nations Peace Operations.”

173 As called for in a C-34 report: UN Doc. A/77/19*, para. 88.

PCCs. UNPD and major PCCs should also draw more systematically on UNODC's network of regional and country offices that have extensive knowledge of policing and law enforcement in different regions.¹⁷⁴ Further, when inviting nominations, UNPD needs to continue its drive to increase women's participation in SPTs, at a minimum adhering to the targets of the Uniformed Gender Parity Strategy.¹⁷⁵ Likewise, when soliciting nominations and support, UNPD must be mindful of specific language needs (e.g., French, Arabic).

Efforts to diversify SPTs must be balanced with the need to retain their coherence and preserve their comparative advantages. Toward this end, it may be useful for UNPD to put a ceiling on the number of PCCs that can participate in any one SPT. Some propose a maximum of three. Whatever the number, the key is to institutionalize an approach that ensures SPTs are not—and are not perceived as—dominated by Global North PCCs while avoiding the tokenistic inclusion of individual members from the Global South.

- **UNPD's Selection and Recruitment Section should develop and promote creative modalities for generating SPT personnel and equipment.** In addition to creative funding modalities, UNPD could consider innovative approaches to force generation. These innovative approaches could be highlighted ahead of peacekeeping ministerials or pledging conferences to help identify additional sources of SPTs. For example, amendments to the contingent-owned equipment policy could leverage existing provisions in the SPT guidelines to allow countries to provide specialized equipment (e.g., dogs, forensics equipment) to SPTs deployed by other PCCs. Equipment-contributing countries could also donate supplies to SPTs (e.g., vehicles and laptops) with a predetermined plan to transfer these to the host state during mission transitions. A standby arrangement like the one in place for

FPU could also allow for the more rapid deployment of commonly requested teams (e.g., SGBV, crime scene management, community oriented policing). Another option would be to explore using the Light Coordination Mechanism, Peacekeeping Policing Capability Readiness System, and Triangular Partnerships Program specifically for SPTs.

- **UNPD's Selection and Recruitment Section should streamline and tailor the recruitment process for SPT members.** To facilitate the selection of team members, including more women, who are well-suited to meeting the demands of SPT work, UNPD should dispense with certain prerequisites in place for IPOs. This includes removing or changing the rule on members being less than fifty-five years old (e.g., by changing this to a "strong recommendation" rather than a requirement).¹⁷⁶ The rules and terms of reference relating to recruitment should also be relaxed to allow for the unfettered inclusion of civilian experts (e.g., lawyers, database specialists, or dedicated administrative experts to navigate UN bureaucracy).¹⁷⁷ UNPD's Mission Management and Support Section should also ensure missions are aware of SPT-specific rules (e.g., that they do not need to complete a Selection Assistance Team [SAT] test before deployment). The rules and language on extensions and transfers should also be relaxed to better retain and optimize scarce human resources and institutional knowledge.

Sustainability

- **UNPD's Strategic Policy and Development Section should continue to encourage the implementation of existing guidance to ensure that capacity building by SPTs amounts to more than just "train and equip."** To lay the foundations for sustainable police reform and, ultimately, durable peace, SPTs must go beyond "train and equip" approaches

¹⁷⁴ Examples given included Colombia on public order policing and Botswana on forensics. Interviews with member state police adviser, October 2023; SPC official, December 2023.

¹⁷⁵ One interviewee suggested the idea of an all-women SPT for both substantive and symbolic reasons. Interview with member state police adviser, September 2023.

¹⁷⁶ UN DPO and DOS, "Standard Operating Procedure: Assessment for Mission Service of Individual Police Officers," para. 21.

¹⁷⁷ These can currently be deployed only if seconded by PCCs.

to capacity building and place more emphasis on training the trainers. They should also avoid substituting for national counterparts to meet short-term targets, instead allowing counterparts the space and time to take responsibility to ensure national ownership and sustainability. To generate buy-in and ownership beyond formal institutions, SPTs should draw more heavily on local knowledge, collaborate more deeply with national civil society and community-based organizations, and acknowledge the broader network of everyday security and justice providers (including non-state actors that play a role in policing).

- **UNPD, SPT leaders, and steering committees should plan for sustainability from the start.** To facilitate meaningful national ownership of SPT projects and follow-on plans, national authorities should be requested to devise a strategy for sustainability before an SPT is deployed, ideally in the form of a national police development plan including commitments to implement a training program following the delivery of a training-of-trainers package. There should also be more systematic efforts to map out and budget for follow-on programming with key stakeholders (e.g., UNDP, UNODC, major bilateral donors). After an SPT withdraws, any remaining IPOs or relevant UN agencies, funds, or programs should continue to transfer skills as part of their everyday activities. These efforts should also connect to the Peacebuilding Fund, other development partners and banks, and ultimately, the host-state policing agencies themselves (see below).

Performance Assessment, Monitoring and Evaluation, Impact Assessment, Organizational Learning, and Knowledge Management

- **The Secretariat and police commissioners should simplify, align, and strengthen monitoring and evaluation requirements. In**

accordance with the Action for Peacekeeping (A4P) and A4P+ objectives around accountability and performance, reporting obligations should be simplified and harmonized to generate a holistic picture of SPTs' activities, outputs, outcomes, and impacts.¹⁷⁸ Doing so would also help overcome the multiple, disparate, and at times incongruous reporting requirements and assist in communicating the impact of SPTs' work. Using simple technologies such as databases and spreadsheets would enhance some extant practices. There is also potential to leverage the CPAS impact frameworks, which often contain data on missions' impact in thematic areas addressed by SPTs (such as SGBV). The Integrated Peacekeeping Performance and Accountability Framework could also be harnessed. Further, SPT plans should integrate and budget for longer-term monitoring and evaluation by follow-on missions, the UNCT, and other actors as necessary to get a sense of SPTs' long-term impact and sustainability, even if their projects are time-limited and discrete. For example, they could budget for a five-year follow-up evaluation (see recommendations for member states below).

However, existing approaches to monitoring and evaluation will not be enough. Results frameworks need to be based on more comprehensive baseline studies, and indicators of success need to be clearly identified from the start, with the participation of key stakeholders, including local actors.¹⁷⁹ Moreover, monitoring and evaluation should be expanded beyond the technical tracking of project-delivery milestones and linear theories of change, and logframes need to include benchmarks that reflect additional (potentially inadvertent) benefits of SPTs. In other words, monitoring and evaluation should be designed to assess impact more broadly and from different perspectives.¹⁸⁰

- **UNPD (both in New York and Brindisi)**

¹⁷⁸ Some also suggested that this data should be elevated to the level of reports of the secretary-general.

¹⁷⁹ For guidance on this, see: UN DPO, "Manual: Mission-Based Police Planning in Peace Operations," July 2017; Office of Rule of Law and Security Institutions, "Planning Toolkit," UN DPKO, 2012.

¹⁸⁰ Hunt, *UN Peace Operations and International Policing*.

should operationalize a knowledge-management system for organizational learning. The Strategic Guidance Framework for International Policing already requires UNPD to have a comprehensive knowledge-management system for UN policing, yet such a system does not exist for SPTs.¹⁸¹ At headquarters, UNPD can capture and disseminate lessons learned from SPTs in different missions and share new guidance. Upon the completion of SPT projects, final reports should be mandatory and should feed into broader organizational learning. An evaluation by the UN Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) could also be considered to evaluate the concept as a whole and draw lessons about its effectiveness across multiple mission settings.

In addition, UNPD could create more informal opportunities for SPTs to interact, share lessons, and learn from each other in real time. One option would be to create a virtual SPT “community of practice” for team leaders (with a focal point in UNPD’s Strategic Policy and Development Section in New York and knowledge-management experts in the SPC in Brindisi). This community of practice could hold bimonthly or quarterly meetings for members to share experiences, ask questions, and learn from each other (for example, on mission-specific guidelines and standard operating procedures).¹⁸² The monthly virtual meeting of the Serious and Organized Crime Focal Points Network could provide a useful model.¹⁸³ UNPD could also organize biannual virtual meetings for PCCs to reflect on what has worked well and what could be done better, including SPT members who have completed their deployment and can be more candid. Finally, UNPD should consider creating a “knowledge hub” within the SPC in Brindisi and establishing an SPT coordinator role to link effectively between headquarters in New

York, the SPC in Brindisi, and field missions.

- **SPT leaders, police commissioners, and UNPD should systematize handover processes to retain institutional knowledge.** Within SPTs, handover processes should be formalized to improve and mainstream the transfer of institutional memory. This should include storing files on Microsoft SharePoint, conducting proper briefings for new members, and providing updates for current members on developments as they unfold. Such processes are particularly important for SPT leaders. One option would be to require all SPT leaders to write an end-of-assignment report, as is already required of police commissioners and their deputies. Whenever possible, leadership transitions should happen with extensive overlap and handover processes, and consideration should be given to promoting team leaders from within SPTs to retain institutional knowledge.

Policy and Guidance

- **UNPD’s Strategic Policy and Development Section should update, elaborate on, and disseminate new guidance for SPTs as part of the Strategic Guidance Framework for International Policing.** UNPD should improve access to and more effectively disseminate existing SPT guidelines. Further, in line with a recently completed internal review, it should develop a new SPT policy or manual that goes beyond technical and administrative aspects of SPT recruitment and management. This would constitute an important addition to the Strategic Guidance Framework for International Policing and could also benefit other regional organizations such as the African Union (AU) and European Union (EU) that could deploy similar capabilities. This guidance could be further disseminated through the UN Inter-Agency Task Force on Policing.

181 UN DPKO and DFS, “Guidelines: Police Administration in United Nations Peacekeeping Operations and Special Political Missions,” paras. 81–83; UN DPKO and DFS, “Guidelines: Police Command in United Nations Peacekeeping Operations and Special Political Missions,” January 1, 2016. See also: UN DPO and DPPA, “Policy: Knowledge Sharing and Organizational Learning,” 2020.

182 This would be in addition to the quarterly virtual meeting that already happens with SPT leaders from the field, the UNPD SPT coordinator, and interested member states.

183 Virtual network meetings are held monthly, allowing missions to share their initiatives, best practices, and lessons learned from capacity-building activities with host-state counterparts. Another template could be the periodic CPAS focal points meeting.

The new guidance should clarify the purpose of SPTs, provide examples of topics or contexts where they have been effective, and explain when they should or should not be considered. It should provide models for situating SPTs within police components and clarify command-and-control relationships to ensure that SPTs are integrated into police components and fall under the clear command of the police commissioner. Lessons could be drawn from recent attempts to clarify these lines of reporting and command in UNMISS. To increase standardization across SPTs, a new manual could also stipulate the ideal team composition, specify the steering committee's role and format, provide templates for project proposals and plans with concrete targets and clear milestones, and provide guidance on risk assessments and communication strategies. It should also clarify that projects are time-limited, that projects should not be seen as a way to increase the police component's resources, who should initiate requests for SPTs, steps for start-up (including the role of the SPC), the need for pre-deployment training, and the need for a knowledge-management system. Other guidance in the Strategic Guidance Framework for International Policing (e.g., on capacity building) can be cross-referenced as appropriate.¹⁸⁴

This additional guidance for SPTs should not be overly prescriptive or outline working methods, which should be determined by senior mission leaders according to needs. Instead, it should emphasize the need for context-sensitive approaches that give leaders flexibility and discretion—for example, using words like “can” instead of “should.” The specific project proposal should remain the core guidance document for an SPT.¹⁸⁵

Training and Preparation

- **UNPD, in collaboration with the UN**

Integrated Training Service and police peacekeeping training institutions, should develop an SPT-specific pre-deployment training module. While much training material already exists (e.g., on SGBV and child protection), this material is not widely available and could be packaged and disseminated systematically. An SPT-specific training module is also needed. In addition to mission context and SPT roles, this module should cover project-management skills (at least for team leaders) to prepare SPT members for project-oriented work. Any such training packages should be included as part of the UNPOL Training Architecture. One- to two-week pre-deployment training should also be encouraged, with a focus on building team camaraderie and teamwork skills. The three-day joint trainings by Germany and Norway before deploying their SPT to UNITAMS could serve as a useful model.¹⁸⁶

- **UN DPO and DPPA, the Integrated Training Service, and training delivery partners should integrate content on SPTs into other training curricula, particularly for senior mission leaders.** To facilitate alignment between SPTs and IPOs (and, to a lesser extent, FPU) with similar capacity-building mandates, information on SPTs should be integrated into the UN standardized training modules for IPO and FPU recruits. At the leadership level, modules on the purpose of SPTs, how to use them, and what they can do should be added to pre-deployment training for incoming police commissioners and the annual UN police commanders' course. Content on the purpose and needs of SPTs, as well as how to incorporate them into overall strategies and reporting, should also be integrated into the senior mission leadership training packages for force commanders and deputy force commanders, SRSGs and deputy SRSGs, and heads of relevant civilian sections, as well as pre-deployment and in-mission

184 It may also be necessary to update other relevant parts of the Strategic Guidance Framework, such as the 2015 guidelines on police operations and police capacity building and development and potentially the policy on the functions and organization of the SPC. See: UN DPO and DOS, “Policy: Functions and Organization of the United Nations Standing Police Capacity,” August 1, 2021.

185 It is understood that UNPD is in the process of developing technical guidance on SPT operations that may address some of these issues.

186 It may be necessary to find ways to provide financial support for such trainings in Global South PCCs. Otherwise, personnel from the Global South can be left out of these team training initiatives.

training for middle management, including those at the P4/P5 level such as chiefs of staff and directors of mission support.

Harnessing SPTs to Meet Future Needs

- **UNPD, member states, and senior mission leaders should broaden the areas of focus of future SPTs.** UNPD should scope out potential areas where the flexibility and adaptability of SPTs could be useful. These could include areas of emerging need and traditionally off-limits or “too difficult” areas, including non-state policing (drawing on the experiences of local peace and protection committees), public order management, election security and election-related crowd control, protection of natural resources (e.g., livestock, charcoal, gems, gold), and disaster and crisis management. Future SPTs could also focus on multiple areas (e.g., SGBV and community policing in Sudan). Responding to and harnessing new technology (e.g., acoustic devices, electronic vehicle stoppers, advanced taser stun systems) as part of the digital transformation of peacekeeping will also be important to ensure the continued relevance of SPTs as cybercrime and the use of new weaponry (e.g., unmanned aerial vehicles) become more prevalent.
- **UNPD and DPO’s UN Office of Rule of Law and Security Institutions (OROLSI) should develop modalities for multidimensional specialized rule-of-law teams.** Consideration should be given to expanding the scope and diversifying the composition of specialized teams, including by deploying civilian experts in SPTs (e.g., judicial and corrections officers) to bring a more multidimensional approach.¹⁸⁷ The experience of MINUSMA’s “specialized judicial unit” on terrorism and transnational organized crime, including a “specialized investigation brigade” of fifty investigators, may be an example to draw on.¹⁸⁸ Future SPTs could also include other host-state criminal justice actors in their capacity-building activities. The training-of-trainer courses offered by

the SPT in South Sudan, which include public prosecutors to enable mutual learning, are a useful example.

- **UNPD, together with the regional desks in DPO/DPPA and relevant UN agencies, funds, and programs, should adapt the SPT concept for increased use in special political missions and transitional and non-mission settings.** Given the drawdown of several large missions, now is a good time to consider what SPTs can bring to smaller, light-footprint missions. This examination should draw on lessons from the special political missions in Sudan and Haiti, such as the increased need to raise awareness of police activities when police components are small and the reality that special political missions will not always be able to offer sufficient security guarantees for PCCs to feel comfortable contributing.

The potential for SPTs to continue building capacity in areas deemed critical to sustaining peace during transitions between different mission presences should also be further explored. Lessons should be identified from the logistical and resourcing challenges experienced during MINUSMA’s efforts to hand over its community policing SPT project to UNDP and used to inform planning for future transitions, with a particular focus on MONUSCO. Consideration should be given to if and how SPTs might be retained beyond the life of a mission when handover to another UN entity is not feasible or practical.

Further thought should be given to the utility of SPTs in non-mission settings where the level of capacity-building support needed requires longer-term engagement and a bigger team than the SPC has the resources or capability to provide. Consideration should also be given to regional, transboundary SPTs (perhaps deployed in partnership with other organizations such as the AU or EU) to work with multiple host states to address innately transnational issues such as violent extremism and organized crime.

¹⁸⁷ For a discussion of Norway’s previous experience with “chain of justice” teams, see: Marina Caparini, Kari-Marie Kjellstad, and Trine Nikolaisen, “A Stocktaking of Norwegian Engagement in Security Sector Reform,” NUPI, March 2011, pp. 41–42.

¹⁸⁸ UN Security Council, *Report of the Secretary-General on United Nations Policing*, UN Doc. S/2016/952, November 10, 2016, para. 29.

For Missions

- **Senior mission leaders and police commissioners must be more aware of SPTs to be more supportive of them.** Making them responsible for SPTs as “project owners” (as in the 2023–2024 project plan for the SPT in UNMISS) could incentivize buy-in. Thereafter, senior mission leaders and police commissioners should encourage the use of SPTs and do more to raise awareness of them within missions. There is a need for more intra-mission strategic communications on the purpose and activities of SPTs.
- **Senior mission leaders should develop mission-specific standard operating procedures for SPTs.** To enable SPTs to deliver on project plans, they should develop mission-specific standard operating procedures in accordance with existing UN accountability protocols. These procedures should relax the application of existing regulations, provide greater flexibility on working methods and logistics, and delegate budget management to the SPT leader, with special financial rules and a different chain of approval for disbursement of funds and procurement processes.
- **Police commissioners, in collaboration with other mission principals, should establish coordination mechanisms.** Missions should establish arrangements for information sharing to improve communication and coordination across missions (including within police components and with other substantive sections) and between SPTs and other parts of the UN system working on issues of policing, justice, rule of law, human rights, and other specific areas of focus. These arrangements could draw on good practices such as the SGBV SPT in UNMISS getting access to reports from the human rights division, which made its work and reporting more reliable. The Inter-Agency Task Force on Policing, co-chaired by UNODC and DPO, could develop a structured coordination mechanism for police capacity building in peacekeeping operations, special political missions, and non-mission settings to improve communication and alignment between UN field missions, the UNCT, and other key stakeholders (similar to the Global Focal Point for the Rule of Law).
- **Senior mission leaders should leverage SPTs to provide specialist in-mission training.** Where an SPT is focusing on an issue important to others in the mission (for example, SGBV and CRSV), senior mission leaders should use the training capacity of SPTs to upskill other IPOs, FPU, and personnel in other parts of the mission. While it is important not to divert time and resources away from core business, this could be a significant enabler of other mission components and activities.
- **SPT leaders and police commissioners should improve and systematize the handover process.** Missions should find ways to formalize handover between outgoing and incoming SPT members, especially team leaders. These handover processes could draw on good practices from UNITAMS and other missions where there was a period of overlap between outgoing and incoming team leaders.
- **SPT leaders and police commissioners should maximize limited resources to achieve more sustainable outcomes.** In addition to focusing on training-of-trainer approaches, missions should redirect resources currently spent on expensive hotel venues and catering to refurbishing local police training facilities that can be used for future training and ongoing capacity-building efforts.

For Member States

- **Penholders and other member states in the Security Council and General Assembly should ensure that mission mandates and budgets enable the use of SPTs.** Where suitable, council members should mandate police components with personnel ceilings high enough to allow for the greater use of SPTs without impinging on the numbers for FPU and IPO or undermining their work. Moreover, member states in the Fifth Committee should approve mission budgets that reflect and enable these mandated ceilings.

- **Member states should request a secretary-general's report on UN policing, including a focus on SPTs and their impacts on the effectiveness of host-state police.** As suggested by France during the council's meeting with police commissioners in November 2022, the council should request a new report on the activities of UN police that includes a greater focus on SPTs than past reports.¹⁸⁹ The 2016 report, as well as the ensuing Security Council Resolution 2382 (2017), only encouraged member states to provide SPTs and did not specify with what focus or why.¹⁹⁰
- **Member states should commission a system-wide evaluation of SPTs.** Through the Security Council, and with the support of the Strategic Police Advisory Group, member states should initiate and fund an independent, system-wide evaluation of SPTs to assess what has worked and what has not. This was called for in the 2016 review of UNPD but was not undertaken, and there are now more than eight years of additional experience to reflect on. The independent evaluations conducted two years after the conclusion of the Norwegian-led SPT project in Haiti also provide a useful model for individual SPT studies.¹⁹¹
- **Member states should follow through on providing high-quality personnel and adequate funding for SPTs.** Member states that have intimated their interest in deploying personnel to SPTs should translate this interest into practice.¹⁹² When deploying personnel, they should identify capable candidates, give them the necessary pre-deployment training and logistical equipment, and work toward eliminating operational caveats to allow them to be deployed for more than one year. Member states should also consider and commit to alternative modalities for providing resources, including contributing equipment, earmarked funding, or funding for PCCs in the Global South to deploy to SPTs.
- **Member states should maintain their focus on advancing the SPT concept.** Through fora such as the C-34 and the Strategic Police Advisory Group, member states should sustain pressure on UNPD to continue to analyze the impact of SPTs, identify lessons learned, and support the Secretariat on developing guidance.¹⁹³

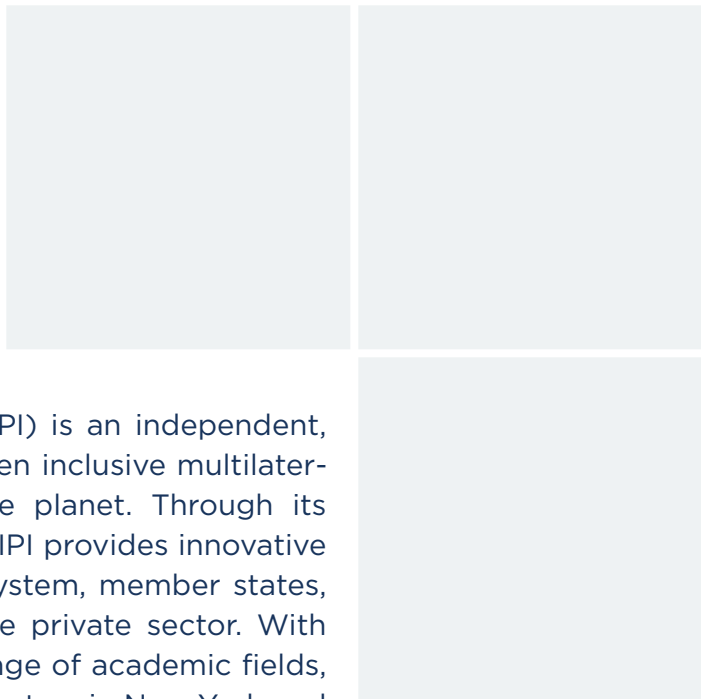
189 UN Doc. S/PV.9189.

190 UN Security Council Resolution 2382 (November 6, 2017), UN Doc. S/RES/2382, preambular paras. and para. 12.

191 See: Tøraasen, "The Future of UN Policing?"

192 See proceedings of Security Council police commissioner meetings over the past five years for examples, including Russia and Poland: UN Security Council, 8393rd Meeting, UN Doc. S/PV.8393, November 6, 2018, pp. 16 and 21.

193 See: UN Doc. A/77/19*, para. 89.



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777 United Nations Plaza
New York, NY 10017-3521
USA
TEL +1-212-687-4300
FAX +1-212-983-8246

51-52 Harbour House
Bahrain Financial Harbour
P.O. Box 1467
Manama, Bahrain
TEL +973-1721-1344