

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



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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 upskilling 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.

As experts and commentators speculate on the future of UN policing, it is important to consider how specialized police teams may contribute to that future.

- **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 experience 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.

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

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For the UN Secretariat:

- 1. Organizational arrangements:** UNPD should promote a cultural shift in the way it manages and supports SPTs, clarify the roles and responsibilities of various sections in New York and the Standing Police Capacity in Brindisi, and strengthen coordination and consultation with member states.
- 2. Planning and project design:** UNPD should formalize the conduct and substance of pre-deployment joint assessments for SPTs and institutionalize and clarify the role and composition of steering committees.
- 3. Funding:** The Secretariat should develop mechanisms to allow member states to provide SPTs with more clearly earmarked funding and identify a wider range of funding sources.
- 4. Force generation, recruitment, and administration:** UNPD should diversify participation in SPTs, develop creative modalities for generating SPT personnel and equipment, and streamline and tailor recruitment processes.
- 5. Sustainability:** UNPD should provide guidance to SPTs to ensure that capacity building amounts to more than just “train and equip.” UNPD, SPT leaders, and steering committees should plan for sustainability from the start.
- 6. Monitoring, evaluation, and learning:** The Secretariat and police commissioners should simplify, align, and strengthen monitoring and evaluation requirements, and UNPD should operationalize a knowledge-management system for organizational learning. SPT leaders, police commissioners, and UNPD should also systematize handover processes to retain institutional knowledge.
- 7. Policy and guidance:** UNPD should develop new guidance for SPTs as part of the Strategic Guidance Framework for International Policing.
- 8. 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. Content on SPTs should also be integrated into other training curricula, particularly for senior mission leaders.
- 9. Meeting future needs:** UNPD, member states, and senior mission leaders should broaden the areas of focus of future SPTs, and UNPD and the UN Office of Rule of Law and Security Institutions should develop modalities for multidimensional specialized rule-of-law teams. UNPD should also work with other UN entities to adapt the SPT concept for increased use in special political missions and transitional and non-mission settings.

For UN missions:

- 10. Senior mission leaders** should be more aware of SPTs, develop mission-specific standard operating procedures for SPTs, and leverage SPTs to provide specialist in-mission training.
- 11. SPT leaders and police commissioners** should establish coordination mechanisms, improve and systematize the handover process, and maximize limited resources to achieve more sustainable outcomes.

For UN member states:

- 12. Penholders and other member states in the Security Council and General Assembly** should ensure that mission mandates and budgets enable the use of SPTs.
- 13. Member states** should maintain their focus on the SPT concept and request a secretary-general’s report on UN policing that includes a focus on SPTs and commission a system-wide evaluation of SPTs.
- 14. Contributing countries** should follow through on providing high-quality personnel and adequate funding for SPTs.