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Ten Years after HIPPO: Assessing Progress and Charting the Future of UN Peace Operations

JENNA RUSSO, BITANIA TADESSE, and ILIANNA KOTINI

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Cover Photo: UNMISS civil affairs division leads a conflict resolution roundtable discussion at the Gun cattle camp in Marial-bek, April 21, 2015. UNMISS.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

JENNA RUSSO is Director of Research and Head of the Brian Urquhart Center for Peace Operations at IPI.

Email: russo@ipinst.org

BITANIA TADESSE is Policy Specialist for Africa at IPI.

Email: tadesse@ipinst.org

ILIANNA KOTINI is an intern in IPI's Brian Urquhart Center for Peace Operations.

Email: kotini@ipinst.org

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CONTENTS

ABBREVIATIONS

A3	three African members of the Security Council
A4P	Action for Peacekeeping
AMISOM	African Union Mission in Somalia
AU	African Union
C34	Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations
CAR	Central African Republic
CLA	community liaison assistant
CPAS	Comprehensive Planning and Performance Assessment System
DFS	Department of Field Support
DMSPC	Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance
DOS	Department of Operational Support
DPA	Department of Political Affairs
DPKO	Department of Peacekeeping Operations
DPO	Department of Peace Operations
DPPA	Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
EU	European Union
HIPPO	High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations
LAS	League of Arab States
MONUSCO	UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the DRC
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
PBAR	Peacebuilding Architecture Review
PCRS	Peacekeeping Capability Readiness System
POC	protection of civilians
RMR	Regional Monthly Review
SEA	sexual exploitation and abuse
SPM	special political mission
UNAMID	UN–AU Hybrid Operation in Darfur

UNITAMS	UN Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan
UNSOS	UN Support Office in Somalia
UNSOA	UN Support Office for the AU Mission in Somalia
WPS	women, peace, and security

Executive Summary

Ten years after the High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (HIPPO) released its landmark report "Uniting Our Strengths for Peace," UN peace operations face new challenges that test the UN's capacity to adapt to an evolving global landscape. As the UN examines the future of peace operations, it is timely to review the recommendations of the HIPPO report, many of which remain pertinent to today's policy discussions. This report reassesses the findings of the HIPPO report in light of today's peace operations contexts, analyzes where there has and has not been progress, and considers how the HIPPO report can be useful to current discussions.

The HIPPO report called for four "essential shifts" required for realizing the full potential of UN peace operations. Of these shifts, the primacy of politics has gained the most rhetorical traction over the past ten years. However, implementation has been undermined by the lack of viable political processes in many mission contexts, divisions in the Security Council that reduce mission leaders' political leverage, and the UN's declining role in national-level mediation.

While the UN deploys a broad range of mission types, progress working flexibly across the full spectrum of peace operations has been limited by continued departmental divisions within the UN Secretariat. Despite the 2019 reform that created joint regional divisions, territorial attitudes persist between departments, undermining integrated planning. The bifurcation between peacekeeping operations and special political missions remains largely intact, contradicting HIPPO's vision of flexible, adaptive mission deployments.

The UN has made progress in building stronger partnerships, particularly in institutionalizing its relationship with the African Union (AU) through frameworks like Resolution 2719 and regular consultative mechanisms. However, the partnership can be strengthened by deepening collaboration across the conflict cycle. Moreover, increasingly fragmented global and regional politics require more adaptive approaches to managing divisions and sustaining cooperation than envisioned in the HIPPO report.

People-centered approaches have advanced at the operational level, with missions collecting data on local perceptions, expanding the work of their civil affairs components, and institutionalizing community liaison assistants. However, these approaches remain less integrated at higher levels, with the Security Council maintaining a state-centric focus that often prioritizes extending state authority without considering state-society relations.

Overall, today's peace operations operate in a more challenging environment than in 2015, facing a more divided Security Council, severe financial constraints, and questions about the UN's legitimacy. Nonetheless, many of HIPPO's core insights remain relevant, and the findings and recommendations of the HIPPO report can help inform current policy discussions on the future of peace operations:

- **UN80 Initiative:** The secretary-general should articulate a clear vision guided by the New Agenda for Peace and Pact for the Future, ensuring cuts do not compromise the UN's readiness to deploy peace operations or institutional memory.
- **Review on the Future of Peace Operations:** The Secretariat should use this review to identify what forms of peace operations the UN is best positioned to support and the capacities needed to backstop these efforts effectively.
- **Modular Approaches:** The Secretariat should develop frameworks for implementing modular mission designs while ensuring critical areas of work like the protection of civilians, gender, and human rights remain prioritized in streamlined mandates.
- **Peacebuilding and Prevention:** All member states should develop national prevention strategies as called for in the Pact for the Future, and the UN should consider pooling early-warning resources with regional organizations.
- **Political Primacy:** The secretary-general should clarify what the primacy of politics means in contexts without viable peace processes, encompassing politics beyond the signing of a formal agreement at the national level.
- **Advancing Partnerships:** The UN should continue to deepen and further leverage partnerships with a wide range of regional organizations and mechanisms.

Introduction

UN peace operations have regularly adapted to changes in the political and security landscape. Over the last seventy-five years, a wide range of missions and mandates has been developed to respond to evolving conflict dynamics and the political demands of member states. As the world experiences profound shifts across many domains, peace operations' ability to adapt to complex global changes is again being put to the test.

Member states have called on the secretary-general to ensure that UN peace operations remain agile and responsive to such changes, including in the Pact for the Future, which requested the secretary-general to undertake a review on the future of all forms of UN peace operations. This is one of several policy processes aimed at ensuring UN peace operations remain fit for purpose, taking place alongside the 2025 UN Peacebuilding Architecture Review, ongoing efforts to operationalize Security Council Resolution 2719 and enhance the UN–African Union (AU) partnership, the 2025 UN Peacekeeping Ministerial, and the UN80 Initiative, among others. As these processes unfold, it is timely to consider previous reviews of UN peace operations to understand which of their findings and recommendations may remain pertinent.

Over the last two and a half decades, the UN has undertaken several reviews related to peace operations, beginning in 2000 with the "Report of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations," commonly referred to as the Brahimi Report. This report, which was commissioned by former Secretary-General Kofi Annan, sought to reflect and improve on the peacekeeping failures of the 1990s and to meet the demands of the twenty-first century.[1]

In October 2014, nearly fifteen years after the release of the Brahimi Report, the UN was again facing significant challenges in contexts like Mali and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), which were testing the upper limits of peacekeeping. In response, former Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon called for the establishment of a High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (HIPPO) to undertake a "thorough review of United Nations peace operations today and the emerging needs of the future." Over the next six months, the panel undertook in-depth consultations with a wide range of stakeholders, including member states, civil society organizations, think tanks, and UN entities. The findings were published in a June 2015 report entitled "Uniting Our Strengths for Peace: Politics, Partnerships and People," more commonly known as the HIPPO report.[2]

The report proposed four "essential shifts" that the panel saw as necessary to ensure UN peace operations were fit to address the challenges of the future: (1) centering the primacy of politics in mission settings; (2) using the full spectrum of peace operations in a flexible manner to respond to changing needs on the ground; (3) building a stronger, more inclusive peace and security partnership for the future; and (4) making the UN Secretariat more field-focused and UN peace operations more people-centered. In addition to these four essential shifts, the panel put forward 166 recommendations across a range of topics, including leadership, capabilities, partnerships, reform, the protection of civilians, and women, peace, and security.

Following the report's release in 2015, there were efforts to follow up on the implementation of these recommendations. A small team within the office of the secretary-general drafted a report laying out the secretary-general's implementation plan.[3] Member states established the "Friends of HIPPO" group, led by Ethiopia, Norway, and the Republic of Korea, which met regularly to sustain support for the report's recommendations.[4] The Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations (C34) also considered the HIPPO report and the secretary-general's follow-up report and requested the secretary-general to implement appropriate reforms related to peacekeeping. Subsequent reports of the C34 included recommendations that built on the HIPPO report's "renewed focus on the primacy of politics, prevention and mediation, as well as on the need for a stronger

1 UN General Assembly and UN Security Council, *Report of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations*, UN Doc. A/55/305–S/2000/809, August 21, 2000.

2 UN General Assembly and UN Security Council, *Report of the High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations on Uniting Our Strengths for Peace: Politics, Partnership and People*, UN Doc. A/70/95–S/2015/446, June 17, 2015.

3 UN General Assembly and UN Security Council, *The Future of United Nations Peace Operations: Implementation of the Recommendations of the High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations*, UN Doc. A/70/357–S/2015/682, September 2, 2015.

4 The group was later renamed the Group of Friends of Peace Operations and is currently co-chaired by Ethiopia, Norway, and the Republic of Korea.

and more inclusive peace and security partnership and for a more field-focused, people-centered and coherent approach by the United Nations."[5] In response to a proposal from the secretary-general stemming from the report, the General Assembly also approved the first increase in resources dedicated to prevention and good offices in a decade.[6] In addition, several civil society organizations tracked the implementation of the HIPPO report, including the International Peace Institute (IPI), which published a report on the implementation of its recommendations in 2016, providing a visual scorecard to track progress.[7]

> Ten years later, many of the recommendations of the HIPPO report remain pertinent to today's policy discussions.

In the ensuing years, efforts to track the report's recommendations waned, partly due to the change in secretary-general. As the UN finds itself at a crossroads in examining the future of peace operations, it is nevertheless timely to review the recommendations of the HIPPO report, many of which remain pertinent to today's policy discussions. The purpose of this report is to reassess the findings of the HIPPO report in light of today's peace operations contexts; analyze where there has been progress in implementing the recommendations, where progress has stalled, and the implications; and consider how the HIPPO report can be useful to current discussions on the future of peace operations. The findings in this report are based on desk research as well as interviews with some former members of HIPPO, current and former Secretariat personnel, representatives of member states, and other experts, including at a closed-door workshop held at IPI.

Box 1. Composition of HIPPO

When Ban first put forward the idea of conducting the review, he conceived of something more narrowly focused on peacekeeping, stemming from concerns related to the UN missions in Mali and the DRC, as well as the internal displacement crisis in South Sudan. However, at the encouragement of those around him, he quickly expanded the panel's remit to a more comprehensive review encompassing both peacekeeping operations and special political missions (SPMs).[8] However, HIPPO stopped short of including all forms of SPMs, such as monitoring teams and panels of experts—a decision that was criticized by some officials in the UN Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA).[9]

While the initial team of panel members put forward was small, concerns around regional representation and the lack of gender balance led to its expansion. In the end, the panel consisted of sixteen individuals under the leadership of José Ramos-Horta. Many panel members were former mission leaders, but with varied backgrounds and interests. The diversity of the panel contributed to the breadth of the report, as each panel member pushed their own areas of interest, often drawing on their in-mission experience. As noted by one expert involved in the process, "Generally, each one of the panel members wanted to add their bit into the report, and the compromise was to include everything, which is why it ended up so long."[10]

While one former panel member recalled that there was little disagreement within the panel,[11] other interviewees noted that the number of "big personalities" in the room created a tug-of-war over various issues, including the primacy of politics versus people-centered approaches.[12] Because many panel members were senior leaders with extensive field experience, the report was heavily influenced by the personal experiences of the panel members and their opinions on where peace operations should focus their energy.[13]

5 UN General Assembly, *Report of the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations: 2018 Substantive Session*, UN Doc. A/72/19, March 15, 2018.

6 UN General Assembly Resolution 70/248 (January 22, 2016), UN Doc. A/RES/70/248; UN General Assembly, *Revised Estimates Relating to the Report of the Secretary-General on the Future of United Nations Peace Operations: Implementation of the Recommendations of the High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations—Report of the Secretary-General,* UN Doc. A/70/745, February 19, 2016.

7 Arthur Boutellis and Lesley Connolly, "The State of UN Peace Operations Reform: An Implementation Scorecard," International Peace Institute, November 2016.

8 The report's scope does not encompass all SPMs; rather, it includes what are sometimes referred to as "field-based" SPMs but not special envoys, sanctions panels, or monitoring groups.

9 Written feedback from UN official, June 2025.

10 Interview #1, expert, January 2025.

11 Interview #8, former UN official, April 2025.

12 Interview #9, former UN official, April 2025; Interview #1, expert, January 2025.

13 Interview #9, former UN official, April 2025.

Four Essential Shifts

As in previous reviews of peace operations, the HIPPO report's recommendations were a response to various difficulties UN peace operations were facing at the time. In 2015, the number of peacekeepers deployed was at an all-time high, having tripled since the year 2000, with more than 100,000 personnel deployed across sixteen peacekeeping operations. The number of SPMs had also grown, reaching thirty-eight missions in 2015, thirteen of which were field-based missions.[14] In addition to growth in size, some missions had also grown more robust, particularly the mission in the DRC, where the Force Intervention Brigade was mandated to conduct targeted offensive operations against armed groups, and the mission in Mali, where peacekeepers were working alongside counterterrorism actors. The number of contexts that lacked viable political processes was also an issue, with some policymakers expressing concern about "endless missions" that had no clear end state. These and other factors played a large role in shaping the recommendations of the report, as did the composition of the panel, which comprised a diverse, cross-regional group of sixteen senior leaders (see Box 1).

> Of the four essential shifts, the primacy of politics has gained the most rhetorical traction over the past ten years.

Overall, the HIPPO report called for "four essential shifts" that the panel argued "must be embraced... if real progress is to be made and if United Nations peace operations are to realize their potential for better results in the field."[15] Each shift is briefly analyzed below with a focus on why it emerged and how it is understood.

Primacy of Politics

The first essential shift put forward by the panel was that "politics must drive the design and implementation of peace operations," a concept that is more commonly referred to as the "primacy of politics." While the panel did not fully define this term, it juxtaposed the primacy of politics with "military and technical engagements," arguing that "the primacy of politics should be the hallmark of the approach of the UN to the resolution of conflict."[16] While peace operations have always been political endeavors, this shift was proposed in response to the view that some missions were being driven more by the protection of civilians and military approaches to addressing conflict than sustainable political solutions.[17]

The trend toward militarization grew in the post-9/11 period, during which UN peacekeeping was influenced in part by Western approaches to counterterrorism, including NATO's experiences in Afghanistan and Iraq. This gave rise to so-called "stabilization" approaches to peacekeeping in contexts like the DRC, the Central African Republic (CAR), and Mali. While the term "stabilization" is contested within the UN system, it generally refers to efforts to neutralize threats to state authority through military force and institution building rather than political compromise.[18] The concept of political primacy thus pushes against the notion that the military defeat of armed groups and the extension of state authority can be substitutes for negotiations. As one former panel member noted, this concept was also opposed to "the proposition that political settlements are not achievable with 'terrorists.'"[19] The panel argued that "the United Nations must be committed to open and impartial dialogue with all parties."[20]

While the shortcomings of stabilization have been well documented in the literature,[21] the push for the primacy of politics also came from some who were

14 UN General Assembly, *Overall Policy Matters Pertaining to Special Political Missions—Report of the Secretary-General*, UN Doc. A/70/400, September 30, 2015.

15 UN Doc. A/70/95–S/2015/446, para. 37.

16 Ibid., para. 43.

17 Interview #8, former UN official, April 2025; Jenna Russo, "Militarised Peacekeeping: Lessons from the Democratic Republic of the Congo," *Third World Quarterly 42*, no. 12 (2021).

18 Jenna Russo, *Protecting Peace? How the UN's Protection of Civilians Contributes to Peace Processes* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2025).

19 Jean Arnault, "A Background to the Report of the High-Level Panel on Peace Operations," Center on International Cooperation, August 2015.

20 UN Doc. A/70/95–S/2015/446, para. 44.

21 See, for example: David Curran and Charles T. Hunt, "Stabilization at the Expense of Peacebuilding in UN Peacekeeping Operations," *Global Governance* 26, no. 1 (2020); Charles T. Hunt, "All Necessary Means to What Ends? The Unintended Consequences of the 'Robust Turn' in UN Peace Operations," *International Peacekeeping* 24, no. 1 (2017); John Karlsrud, "The UN at War: Examining the Consequences of Peace-Enforcement Mandates for the UN Peacekeeping Operations in the CAR, the DRC and Mali," *Third World Quarterly* 36, no. 1 (2015); Russo, "Militarised Peacekeeping."

wary of the UN's growing focus on the protection of civilians (POC). While few openly contested the importance of POC as a mandated task, it had become the raison d'être for some missions that lacked a political role, leaving these missions without a clear sense of how to sustainably exit the country. Thus, as noted by one individual involved in the process, "Pushing the primacy of politics was a way to relegate POC without saying so out loud."[22]

Of the four essential shifts, the primacy of politics has gained the most rhetorical traction over the past ten years. It was reiterated by member states in the Action for Peacekeeping (A4P) framework and the Declaration of Shared Commitments and is regularly referred to in policy dialogues.[23] However, many of the concerns the panel raised in 2015 remain, with many missions operating in contexts that lack viable political processes. This is exacerbated by the UN's dwindling political leverage in some contexts as a result of disunity in the Security Council, challenges related to host-state consent, crowded mediation spaces, and the UN's broader crisis of legitimacy. (The implementation of the primacy of politics is discussed further below).

Using a Full Spectrum of Peace Operations

By 2015, the UN had a long track record of deploying a broad range of peace operations, from small teams supporting individual envoys to large multidimensional missions. Thus, the recommendation to utilize the full spectrum of peace operations was not based on an insufficient number of models but rather on the need to adapt flexibly across mission types. UN peace operations were led by two different departments in 2015, with most SPMs led by the Department of Political Affairs (DPA) and peacekeeping operations led by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO). However, this bifurcation undermined the flexible use of the tools the Secretariat had available. As noted by the panel, "Disputes about bureaucratic boundaries, the limits of budgets and definitional debates have slowly eclipsed the true purpose of the enterprise: to provide the most relevant and appropriately configured peace operations to help prevent and resolve armed conflicts and sustain peace."[24]

While the HIPPO report detailed what a potential restructuring could achieve, it did not provide specific models for reforming the Secretariat; these reforms were proposed later through a separate process and were eventually implemented, in part, by Ban's successor, António Guterres. The panel also recommended embracing the term "peace operations" to capture the full range of missions the UN may deploy and move away from the bifurcation between peacekeeping operations and special political missions. The panel further pointed to the need to consider new tools, including "lighter missions that are less costly and more readily deployable than heavier mission templates."[25] While in reality, both peacekeeping operations and SPMs have deployed in a range of configurations and sizes, these recommendations continue to permeate policy discussions, in particular given shortcomings in the implementation of Guterres's 2019 reform of the peace and security pillar and the continued bifurcation between peacekeeping operations and SPMs (discussed further below).

Building Stronger Partnerships

The third essential shift called for in the HIPPO report was the deepening of partnerships with regional actors in managing and responding to conflicts. The partnership pillar of the HIPPO report was primarily informed by the UN's cooperation with the African Union (AU) in responding to conflicts on the African continent. The HIPPO report came out at a time when there was increased recognition of the AU's role in partnering with the UN on peace operations. By 2015, the UN–AU partnership was already characterized by the development and use of unique and innovative mechanisms that set precedents for further joint action. UN support to the AU Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) through the UN Support Office in Somalia (UNSOS) and its predecessor, the UN Support Office for the AU Mission in Somalia (UNSOA), was a unique partnership modality in a

22 Interview #1, expert, January 2025.

23 United Nations, "Action for Peacekeeping: Declaration of Shared Commitments on UN Peacekeeping Operations," March 2018; United Nations, "Action for Peacekeeping + Priorities for 2021–2023," March 2021.

24 UN Doc. A/70/95–S/2015/446, para. 49.

25 Ibid., para. 51.

context of peace enforcement.[26] Other partnership modalities included sequenced deployments, such as the re-hatting of African-led missions in Mali and CAR to UN-led missions, and the UN–AU Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID). Each of these modalities contributed to the broadening of partnerships in peace operations settings.

The HIPPO report contributed to further shifting the UN–AU partnership from these earlier approaches, where the UN viewed its partnership with the AU primarily from a capacity-building perspective, toward a recognition of "the political salience and legitimate political footing of the AU," as noted by one expert.[27] The AU welcomed the inclusion of its priorities in HIPPO's recommendations, particularly the renewed focus on the findings of the AU–UN Panel on Modalities for Support to AU Peacekeeping Operations (the Prodi Report), including on the financing of Security Council–authorized, AU-led peace support operations.[28] Nevertheless, some also criticized this emphasis on financing at the expense of broader areas of partnership.[29]

The HIPPO report's recommendations on strengthening partnerships were underpinned by an optimistic assumption that divisions at the global level would not necessarily impede effective cooperation at the regional level.

The HIPPO report's recommendations on strengthening partnerships were underpinned by an optimistic assumption that divisions at the global level would not necessarily impede effective cooperation at the regional level. However, over the past decade, political dynamics have shifted, including in Africa. Regional politics have become increasingly impacted by global rivalries, with polarization and competition among external actors interfering in the agendas of regional organizations. This requires a more realistic approach to partnerships on peace operations between the UN and regional organizations.[30]

People-Centered Approaches

HIPPO's inclusion of people-centered approaches as the final essential shift highlights the influence of panel members who felt that state-centric political processes needed to be balanced with inclusive responses and local ownership. Even though many peace operations operate in contexts where local dynamics are drivers of conflict, the Security Council often focuses predominantly on national-level dynamics. This in part reflects a faulty assumption that extending state authority will automatically yield peace dividends for civilians, despite evidence to the contrary.[31] The importance of state authority to consolidating peace notwithstanding, people-centered approaches seek to balance state-focused initiatives with community engagement and local ownership.

Thus, the panel called for the Secretariat to become more field-focused and for "renewed resolve on the part of United Nations peace operations personnel to engage with, serve and protect the people they have been mandated to assist." People-centered approaches also entail a shift in how missions' effectiveness is assessed, with the panel calling for the measurement of "the impact the operation has on the everyday lives of the people it is meant to protect and support."[32]

Implementation of the HIPPO Recommendations

While it is beyond the scope of this paper to analyze all 166 recommendations from the HIPPO report, this section provides a broad overview of progress across eleven thematic areas. The areas below are

26 UNSOA was the first field mission led by DFS. See: Paul D. Williams, "The United Nations Support Office Model: Lessons from Somalia," International Peace Institute, September 2024.

27 Interview #19, expert, April 2025.

28 AU Peace and Security Council, *Report of the Chairperson of the Commission on Follow-Up Steps on the Common African Position on the Review of the United Nations Peace Operations*, AU Doc. PSC/AHG/3. (DXLVII), September 25, 2015.

29 Interview #16, UN official, April 2025.

30 Written feedback from UN official, June 2025.

31 Youssef Mahmoud, "People-Centered Approaches to Peace: At Cross Roads Between Geopolitics, Norms, and Practice," in *United Nations Peace Operations in a Changing Global Order*, Cedric de Coning and Mateja Peter, eds. (Palgrave McMillan, 2019).

32 UN Doc. A/70/95–S/2015/446, para. 37(d).

based on IPI's 2016 scorecard report, which organized the recommendations under nine themes. In addition to these nine, this report adds two additional categories on the protection of civilians (POC) and on mission planning and mandating. This report does not provide detail on every thematic area of the HIPPO recommendations, such as strategic communications, technology and innovation, or human rights, though their progress has been covered in previous reports by IPI and other organizations.[33]

Prevention and Sustaining Peace

The HIPPO report called for "prevention and mediation to be brought back to the fore." However, prevention was not a primary focus of the report, as some considered it to be beyond the panel's remit. As one UN official involved in the process noted, "Prevention fell a bit because inside the house people felt it was a peace operations review, not [a review] of prevention." Prevention was also already a focus of the 2015 Peacebuilding Architecture Review (PBAR), which "took the prevention wind out of the HIPPO report."[34] However, others viewed the HIPPO review and the PBAR as parallel processes that had limited impact on one another.[35]

The UN still lacks a unified framework for collectively supporting national and local prevention initiatives and setting clear expectations for its role in this area.

The HIPPO report recognized that conflict prevention and sustaining peace require system-wide engagement and coordinated action at both the headquarters and the field levels. Ten years later, however, the UN still lacks a unified framework for collectively supporting national and local prevention initiatives and setting clear expectations for its role in this area.[36] One notable shift since the HIPPO report has been the growing focus on prevention at the national level. This shift is reflected in Guterres's 2023 report on "A New Agenda for Peace" and the Pact for the Future, which call for the development of national prevention strategies and position prevention as primarily a national responsibility, with international actors playing a supportive role.[37] However, uncertainty remains over what these national prevention strategies will mean in practice.[38]

The UN has also continued focusing on prevention at the regional level, particularly as security threats increasingly transcend borders. As part of its recommendations for enhancing preventive diplomacy within the peace operations spectrum, HIPPO recommended strengthening regional offices. Regional offices can play a critical role in flagging potential risks and keeping the Security Council informed in contexts where peace operations have not been deployed or have drawn down.[39] The UN currently has three regional political offices, in Central Africa, West Africa and the Sahel, and Central Asia, as well as regional envoys in the Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes Region. While the situation varies across regions, some of these regional offices and missions have not always collaborated to their full potential, partly due to lack of clarity on roles and responsibilities and personality differences among senior leaders.[40] The HIPPO report recommended the creation of additional regional offices in North Africa and West Asia, a proposal that was further endorsed by the secretary-general, but these were never established, in part due to resistance from states in the region. There were also concerns that the mandates of these offices would overlap with those of other UN offices

33 See, for example: Kseniya Oksamytna, "Public Information and Strategic Communications in Peace Operations," in *Handbook on Peacekeeping and International Relations*, Han Dorussen, ed. (Elgar, 2022); Jake Sherman and Albert Trithart, "Strategic Communications in UN Peace Operations: From an Afterthought to an Operational Necessity," International Peace Institute, August 2021; Charles T. Hunt et al., "UN Peace Operations and Human Rights: A Thematic Study," Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, 2024; Agathe Sarfati, "New Technologies and the Protection of Civilians in UN Peace Operations," International Peace Institute, September 2023.

34 Interview #9, former UN official, April 2025.

35 Written feedback from UN official, June 2025.

36 Céline Monnier, "Towards Effective Prevention: A Strategic Approach to Addressing the Underlying Causes of Violence and the UN's Role, Consideration for the Peacebuilding Architecture Review," Center on International Cooperation, March 2025.

37 United Nations, "Our Common Agenda Policy Brief 9: A New Agenda for Peace," July 2023; UN General Assembly Resolution 79/1 (September 22, 2024), UN Doc. A/RES/79/1.

38 Céline Monnier and Vincenza Scherrer, "Building on What Exists: Demystifying National Prevention Strategies," Center on International Cooperation, October 2024.

39 Security Council Report, "In Hindsight: The Security Council and Conflict Prevention," February 2024.

40 Russo, "Militarised Peacekeeping."

or missions operating in the region, including the UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East.[41]

Although not explicitly recommended by HIPPO, a notable development on prevention in the Secretariat has been the introduction of Regional Monthly Reviews (RMRs). These build on the earlier Regional Quarterly Reviews established under the Human Rights Up Front initiative as a response to failed prevention in contexts where the UN did not have a political presence, particularly the UN's experience in Sri Lanka. Established in 2017 and incorporated into the newly established Executive Committee and Deputies Committee, RMRs serve as an early-warning mechanism. They aim to facilitate comprehensive system-wide analysis, enhance coordination between UN headquarters entities and country teams, and scan risks in countries that have not yet entered into crisis. Through the mechanism, "countries that are not on the front line of crisis are brought into the highest levels of decision-making," with the goal of facilitating early action.[42] While the RMRs have helped provide early warning of crises to senior UN officials, they have sometimes served mainly as a mechanism for exchanging information.[43] One UN official noted that more needs to be done to spur early action, which is often inhibited by lack of resources, among other things.[44]

In the area of preventive diplomacy, the HIPPO report emphasized the role of the Security Council and the Secretariat in engaging in conflicts early instead of after armed conflict has broken out. It called on the Security Council to "increase its monitoring of emerging issues and expand its dialogue with the Secretariat on how best to support prevention and mediation efforts."[45] However, as one interviewee noted, "There wasn't much the report said that was really realistic. We had tried some of these things before, for example, having [the Secretariat's informal 'horizon scanning'] briefings to the Security Council."[46] Despite the efforts of some elected members in the Security Council, horizon scanning and situational awareness briefings by the Secretariat continued to be contentious due to concerns over national sovereignty. As a former UN official commented "It's clear that [prevention] will never be done through the Security Council…. [It] can instead be undertaken through the secretary-general's good offices and work led by DPPA."[47] Nonetheless, Security Council members have explored informal avenues to overcome the limitations of formal sessions. The so-called "sofa talks" initiated in 2019 allowed Security Council members to hold informal convenings with no agenda, though they were discontinued following the COVID-19 pandemic. The secretary-general's lunch meetings with council members are another avenue for bringing issues to the council's attention in a discreet manner.[48]

Primacy of Politics

While the primacy of politics has remained at the center of discourse on peace operations over the last ten years, referenced regularly by member states and in policy frameworks, implementation has been mixed.[49] As noted above, HIPPO's recommendation on the primacy of politics stemmed primarily from the panel's concern over some peacekeeping missions toeing the line between peacekeeping and peace enforcement, particularly in Mali and the DRC, as well as the increased focus on the protection of civilians. Thus, it was targeted at peacekeeping operations more than SPMs; as one DPPA official noted, "We wouldn't deploy a [special political] mission if we didn't have some type of a political role."[50]

In line with the first of the A4P+ priorities launched by Guterres in 2021, peacekeeping missions have overall strengthened their "collective coherence behind a political strategy." According to the Department of Peace Operations' (DPO) 2024 progress report on the implementation of

41 Written feedback from UN official, June 2025.

42 Interview #4, expert, March 2025.

43 Written feedback from UN official, June 2025.

44 Meeting with UN official, February 2025.

45 UN Doc. A/70/95–S/2015/446, para. 72.

46 Interview #9, former UN official, April 2025.

47 Interview #8, former UN official, April 2025.

48 Security Council Report, "In Hindsight: The Security Council and Conflict Prevention."

49 Jenna Russo and Ralph Mamiya, "The Primacy of Politics and the Protection of Civilians in UN Peacekeeping," International Peace Institute, December 2022.

50 Interview #13, UN official, April 2025.

A4P+, six UN missions (including the former mission in Mali) had developed clearly articulated political strategies, while the remaining ceasefire observer missions "contribute to creating a conducive environment to achieving political solutions."[51] This is an improvement from previous analyses, which found that missions' political strategies often only lived in the minds of the special representatives of the secretary-general and remained disconnected from mission concepts and the work of various mission components.[52]

At the same time, missions have often been deployed to contexts where there is significant ongoing conflict or where the UN's role in the formal political process is marginal. This is counter to the panel's recommendation that the UN "should lead or play a leading role in political efforts" wherever it has a mission on the ground to ensure that the success of the mission is not undermined.[53] The lack of an ongoing national-level political process does not necessarily preclude a mission from playing a political role. Missions can also support local-level political processes or undertake activities to build trust or lay the groundwork for a future process. However, in some contexts the lack of a political process has led the UN to prioritize POC and other tasks that lack a clear end state, which some have critiqued as leading to "endless missions."[54] Further, focusing on the extension of state authority and institution building in the absence of an inclusive political process has been shown to inadvertently enable authoritarianism.[55] Some interviewees also pointed to the lack of political ambition on the part of the secretary-general, who, despite his initial commitment to prioritize prevention, has not actively sought out opportunities to use his good offices.[56]

HIPPO forecast that missions would continue being tasked with conflict management, in which case they would likely "struggle to achieve the forward momentum associated with success in multidimensional operations."[57] This prediction has been borne out, particularly in peacekeeping settings, as few, if any, current peacekeeping missions are operating in contexts with viable national-level political processes. Despite the panel's caution that such contexts would require a distinct understanding of mission success, missions' inability to significantly reduce levels of violence or spur peace has undermined trust in them and in some cases tarnished the UN's reputation more broadly.

In some contexts, the lack of a political process has led the UN to prioritize the protection of civilians and other tasks that lack a clear end state.

The primacy of politics has also been damaged by divisions in the Security Council, which undermine mission leaders' political leverage with their host-state counterparts. In addition to the lack of unanimity among council members on some mission mandates, missions in contexts such as Mali and CAR have faced anti-UN disinformation fomented by Russia, among others.[58] The presence of the Wagner Group has also undercut the missions' efforts in these two contexts, and geopolitics played a major role in undermining the mission in Mali, leading to its eventual expulsion.[59]

Despite the panel's caution against militarized approaches to peacekeeping, the trend toward peace enforcement has continued. This can be seen in the rhetoric of some host states and the narrow framing of the UN–AU partnership, which focuses more on the AU's role as a military actor than as a political or strategic partner.[60] This trend has been

51 UN DPO, "Action for Peacekeeping+, Fourth Progress Report," January 2024.

52 Adam Day et al., "The Political Practice of Peacekeeping: How Strategies for Peace Operations are Developed and Implemented," United Nations University Centre for Policy Research, September 2020; Russo, *Protecting Peace?*

53 UN Doc. A/70/95–S/2015/446, para. 47.

54 Adam Day and Charles T. Hunt, "Distractions, Distortions and Dilemmas: The Externalities of Protecting Civilians in United Nations Peacekeeping," *Civil Wars* 24, no. 1 (2021).

55 Sarah von Billerbeck et al., *UN Peacekeepers as Enablers of Host State Authoritarianism?* (Oxford University Press, 2025).

56 Interview #13, UN official, April 2025; interview #14, UN official, April 2025.

57 UN Doc. A/70/95–S/2015/446, para. 15.

58 Albert Trithart, "Disinformation against UN Peacekeeping Operations," International Peace Institute, November 2022.

59 Arthur Boutellis, *The UN Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA): Peacekeeping Caught in the Geopolitical Crossfire* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2024). Russia has subsequently transitioned the Wagner Group into the Africa Corps.

60 Jenna Russo, "The 2025 UN Peacekeeping Ministerial: How to Do Less with Less," *IPI Global Observatory*, May 29, 2025; Bitania Tadesse, "Resolution 2719 on Hold: Implications for the AU–UN Partnership," *IPI Global Observatory*, June 3, 2025.

driven in part by the rise of violent extremism in some contexts and host states' growing demand for more offensive military responses to security crises. While the New Agenda for Peace and the Pact for the Future reiterate the importance of ensuring military interventions are connected to political strategies, this can be difficult to do in practice, in part because military interventions can change the calculus of warring parties and disincentivize them from engaging politically.[61]

Mission Planning and Mandating

The HIPPO report put forward several recommendations around mission planning, including for the Secretariat to establish a small strategic analysis and planning capacity, which would report to the secretary-general. This recommendation was initially implemented with the creation of a Strategic Monitoring and Evaluation Unit within the Executive Office of the Secretary-General. However, its potential was never fully realized, and it quickly became burdened with less strategic tasks, partly due to DPO and DPPA's resistance to shifting planning from their regional desks to the Executive Office of the Secretary-General.[62]

Most interviewees remained critical of ongoing departmental divisions and the disconnect between planning and the regional desks.

The 2019 reform of the peace and security pillar was also intended to strengthen integrated planning capacity between DPO and DPPA. However, once again, "internal resistance prevailed," with each department desiring to "retain control," and proposals to establish a single dedicated planning capacity for the peace and security pillar failed to get traction.[63] One official from DPPA argued that the creation of shared regional divisions has improved integrated planning, stating that "the perception that proposals are driven by the departments they come from is not really an issue anymore."[64] However, most interviewees remained critical of ongoing departmental divisions and the disconnect between planning and the regional desks that have stronger contextual knowledge.

HIPPO also recommended changes to the council's mandating practice, proposing the use of "sequenced and prioritized mandates as a regular practice." The panel suggested a two-stage mandating process that would require the secretary-general to provide the Security Council with priority tasks following a mission's first six months of deployment. Shortly after the release of the HIPPO report, the council issued a presidential statement committing to "consider sequenced and phased mandates where appropriate."[65] The practice of two-stage mandates was not a new idea, as it had previously been recommended in the Brahimi Report and reiterated in the "New Horizons" report.[66] It had also been used in multiple contexts, including Mali, CAR, and South Sudan. However, no additional missions have gone through the two-stage process since the HIPPO report as no additional missions have been deployed.

While many mission mandates now list strategic priorities, they often fail to achieve HIPPO's recommendation to have "fewer priorities [and] fewer tasks." For example, the 2024 mandate for the UN mission in the DRC (MONUSCO) lists two strategic priorities for the mission and a set of tasks listed in order of priority. In this sense, the mandate is clear and prioritized.[67] However, not all mission mandates are structured in this way, and many missions, including MONUSCO, continue to be mandated to conduct a litany of activities that test the bounds of their available resources and capacities. There are multiple reasons for this, including the interest of various Secretariat departments and council members in including specific tasks in mandates, a rigid Fifth Committee that makes it difficult to scale capacities up or down, and the recognition that sustaining peace requires a

61 Russo, "Militarised Peacekeeping."

62 Ian Martin, "Lessons from the High-Level Panel's 2015 Review for the Future of Peace Operations," *IPI Global Observatory*, September 30, 2020; Interview #5, UN official, April 2025.

63 Marc Jacquand, "UN Reform and Mission Planning: Too Great Expectations?" International Peace Institute, November 2020.

64 Interview #13, UN official, April 2025.

65 UN Security Council, *Statement by the President of the Security Council*, UN Doc. S/PRST/2015/22, November 25, 2015.

66 UN Doc. A/55/305–S/2000/809; Department of Peacekeeping Operations and Department of Field Support, "A New Partnership Agenda: Charting a New Horizon for UN Peacekeeping," July 2009.

67 UN Security Council Resolution 2765 (December 20, 2024), UN Doc. S/RES/2765.

comprehensive set of tasks beyond the signing of a peace agreement. As interest in deploying missions with narrower mandates has grown, member states will have to consider how to overcome these barriers (discussed further below).

Protection of Civilians

The HIPPO report came at an interesting moment for the protection of civilians. On the one hand, POC had become well institutionalized within the organization by 2015, and the idea that peacekeepers should "open the gates" to those in need of imminent protection was accepted among most UN officials and policymakers. On the other hand, peacekeeping was still plagued by reports of underperformance on POC, including cases where peacekeepers feasibly had the means to protect civilians but were unwilling to take the requisite actions to do so.[68] Some had also come to see POC as placing missions at odds with host states, in particular in contexts where the state was among the perpetrators of violence, making issues related to access and consent more difficult to manage.

Thus, the panel stressed the moral responsibility of the UN to protect civilians and the urgency of peacekeepers doing "everything in their power" to carry this out.[69] At the same time, and as noted earlier, it expressed concerns about peacekeeping's turn toward militarization and made the case that unarmed strategies "must be at the forefront" of UN efforts to protect civilians.[70] These unarmed strategies include a range of tasks that fall under the first and third pillars of POC, including providing advice to host-state authorities, using good offices, monitoring and reporting on human rights, supporting security sector reform, and assisting humanitarian actors.[71] When these strategies fail, and civilians are under imminent threat, the panel noted that peacekeepers with a mandate to use force have an obligation to protect civilians wherever they are deployed. It further stressed that national constraints and failure to follow orders must not be tolerated.

One official reflected that POC efforts by peacekeepers have improved over the past ten years, in part due to the development of further policies, guidelines, and training, which have helped to refine practices and shift the mindsets of peacekeepers.[72] Research confirms the positive impact that peacekeepers have had on protecting civilians. Even though peacekeepers operate in some of the most difficult contexts, their presence is correlated with a decrease in civilian casualties.[73] Missions have also shifted toward "whole-of-mission" approaches, stressed in multiple POC policies, which integrate approaches by military, police, and civilian components, including in support of the "unarmed" tasks specified by the panel.[74]

> Recent changes in the geopolitical landscape increasingly inhibit peacekeepers' actions to protect civilians.

Despite these improvements, more recent changes in the geopolitical landscape increasingly inhibit peacekeepers' actions to protect civilians. UN officials noted that mission leaders are sometimes reluctant to engage in more proactive protection postures that could provoke backlash from host-state authorities.[75] Host-state authorities also regularly impose constraints that violate status of forces agreements. One UN official noted, "We have to ask permission even to drive down a road. That didn't used to be the case.… We've succumbed to so many of these constraints." The official further noted that perpetrators are now "less scared of us," as missions have lost political leverage due to weaker backing from the Security Council, undermining their ability to pose a credible deterrent.[76]

68 UN General Assembly, *Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services: Evaluation of the Implementation and Results of Protection of Civilians Mandates in United Nations Peacekeeping Operations*, UN Doc. A/68/787, March 7, 2014; Russo, *Protecting Peace?*

69 UN Doc. A/70/95–S/2015/446, para. 83.

70 Ibid., para. 86.

71 UN DPO, "Policy: The Protection of Civilians in United Nations Peacekeeping," 2023.

72 Interview #15, UN official, April 2025.

73 UN DPO, "25 Years of Protecting Civilians through UN Peacekeeping: Taking Stock and Looking Forward," October 2024; Hanne Fjelde, Lisa Hultman, and Desirée Nilsson, "Protection through Presence: UN Peacekeeping and the Costs of Targeting Civilians," *International Organization* 73, no. 1 (2019).

74 Alexander Gilder, "How Useful Are the UN's Broad Protection of Civilian Mandates?" *IPI Global Observatory*, January 18, 2023.

75 Closed-door workshop with UN peace operations officials, October 22, 2024; Interview #15, UN official, April 2025.

76 Interview #15, UN official, April 2025.

The role of SPMs in supporting protection remains less clear and elicits considerable debate, including among UN officials. Only two SPMs have had explicit mandates to support protection efforts: the missions in Sudan (UNITAMS) and Afghanistan (UNAMA). Some officials in DPPA are reticent for SPM mandates to explicitly refer to protection or POC to avoid raising expectations about their ability to provide protection and due to the fear that member states may try to use SPMs to do peacekeeping tasks "on the cheap."[77] UNITAMS provided difficult lessons in this regard, as it was unable to play the type of protection role UNAMID had, counter to expectations on the part of local communities. At the same time, SPMs can play a critical role supporting protection, including through monitoring and reporting, capacity building, and conflict mediation.[78] However, the lack of clear policy or guidance from DPPA on its role in supporting protection has limited SPMs' effectiveness in this area.[79]

Partnerships

As noted above, the HIPPO report articulated a vision for enhanced global and regional cooperation, with a particular emphasis on Africa. It advocated for the UN to deepen its partnerships with regional and subregional organizations to leverage "their comparative advantages in responding to emerging crises while sustaining support to long-running ones."[80]

Since the release of the HIPPO report, various mechanisms have been put in place to further institutionalize the UN's partnership with the AU on peace and security. The Joint UN–AU Framework for Enhanced Partnership in Peace and Security was signed in 2017 at the inaugural annual AU–UN conference between the UN secretary-general and the AU Commission chairperson. This was followed by the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding on UN–AU Partnership in Peacebuilding.[81] These provided the policy framework for enhanced and more institutionalized cooperation on peace and security.[82] The role of the AU and subregional organizations also featured prominently in the New Agenda for Peace, which called for "a new generation of peace enforcement missions and counter-terrorism operations, led by African partners."[83] However, this focus on peace enforcement risks relegating African organizations to the role of military service providers and diminishing the political and strategic aspects of the partnership.

Security Council Resolution 2719 marked a significant milestone in the UN–AU partnership, despite some concerns that it has disproportionately focused the partnership on financing peace operations over broader collaboration across the conflict cycle.[84] The resolution, which enables AU-led peace support operations to receive up to 75 percent of their funding from UN assessed contributions on a case-by-case basis, was a breakthrough following years of negotiation since the agenda was first officially tabled by the AU in 2007.[85] However, the process required to apply Resolution 2719 is cumbersome, with one former UN official describing the resolution as "valuable as a symbolic representation of the partnership [yet] totally unworkable as an actual mechanism to support operations."[86] Applying the resolution requires consultations between the AU chairperson and the UN secretary-general, the assessment of a potential case, and deliberations within the AU Peace and Security Council prior to even submitting the proposal to the UN Security Council. Further, as demonstrated by the recent case of the AU Support and Stabilization Mission in Somalia,

77 Interview #13, UN official, April 2025; Interview #14, UN official, April 2025.

78 Dirk Druet, "United Nations Special Political Missions and Protection: A Principled Approach for Research and Policymaking," International Peace Institute, July 2021.

79 Julie Gregory, "Civilian Protection in Sudan: Emerging Lessons from UNITAMS," Stimson Center, October 2024.

80 UN Doc. A/70/95–S/2015/446, para. 53.

81 United Nations, "Joint Communique on United Nations–African Union Memorandum of Understanding on Peacebuilding," September 18, 2017.

82 In addition to its annual consultation with the UN Security Council, the AU Peace and Security Council has also been meeting annually with the UN Peacebuilding Commission since 2018. For details, see: Security Council Report, "The Peacebuilding Commission at 20: Progress Challenges and the Road Ahead," March 2025.

83 United Nations, "Our Common Agenda Policy Brief 9: A New Agenda for Peace," p. 26.

84 Interview #16, UN official, April 2025.

85 African Union, *Decision on the Activities of the Peace and Security Council of the African Union and the State of Peace and Security in Africa*, AU Doc. Assembly/AU/Dec.145 (VIII), January 29–30, 2007.

86 Interview #2, former UN official, March 2025.

such proposals may not be easily accepted or approved by council members.

The process leading up to the adoption of Resolution 2719 also demonstrated some of the differences between New York and Addis Ababa on critical aspects of the resolution, particularly on provisions related to burden sharing.[87] The African members of the Security Council (the A3), whose influence has steadily increased, played a decisive role in its adoption even when it required "going against Addis to achieve a long-term objective by following the spirit and not the letter of AU communiqués."[88] The A3 will continue to have a critical role in the implementation of the resolution and in other aspects of the partnership. As a bridge between Addis Ababa and New York, they will be instrumental in helping the AU navigate its evolving relationship with the Security Council, particularly at a time when this partnership is being reshaped by wider changes within the UN and the multilateral system.

The partnership between the UN and the AU is anchored in shared experiences and institutionalized cooperation, including regular consultations and meetings. Nonetheless, it is increasingly clear that these established practices are no longer adequate to effectively address the complex and evolving landscape of conflicts and crises on the continent. Both institutions are navigating increasingly fragmented global and regional politics, requiring a more adaptive approach to managing divisions and sustaining multilateral cooperation.

The other regional organization that featured in the HIPPO report is the League of Arab States (LAS). The secretary-general's follow-up report endorsed HIPPO's recommendation for the establishment of a UN liaison office to the LAS. This office was established in 2019 in Cairo with the mandate to deepen collaboration between the UN and the LAS on peace and security. The two organizations have maintained regular engagement, including through Security Council consultations. However, shifting geopolitical dynamics, the challenges of managing conflicts in the region, and the competing interests of Security Council members have complicated the relationship. These developments further raise the importance of the liaison office's role in managing divisions and fostering cooperation.[89]

People-Centered Approaches

While the HIPPO report did not fully define what it meant by "people-centered approaches" to peace operations, it recommended that missions "maintain the closest possible interaction with communities" and develop community engagement strategies in cooperation with UN country teams, national staff, and local actors.[90] It also recommended that missions regularly commission independent surveys on local perceptions of the mission and progress toward mission objectives. Subsequent reports of the C34 have echoed these recommendations, recognizing "the need for more people-centered peacekeeping, including through local-level analysis and planning that draws on more strategic engagement with communities and an understanding of local perceptions and priorities."[91]

Since 2015, some missions have begun collecting data on local perceptions, including the UN missions in South Sudan, the DRC, and CAR (the UN mission in Lebanon had already been conducting an annual perception survey since 2007). Data has often been collected in partnership with other institutions such as the UN Development Programme (UNDP) and the Harvard Humanitarian Initiative in the DRC and CAR. Surveys inquire on topics such as respondents' confidence in the mission, sense of security, and satisfaction with mission communications, as well as the effectiveness of the mission in completing core tasks of its mandate.[92] While information from these surveys provides useful feedback that can inform a mission's approach, there is no formal procedure for undertaking perception surveys or incorporating data into

87 Tsion Hagos and Solomon Dersso, "A Landmark UN Resolution on the Financing of AU-Led Peace Support Operations (PSOs) Faces Uncertain Reception in Addis Ababa," *Ideas Indaba*, December 22, 2023.

88 Interview #19, expert, April 2025.

89 Security Council Report, "Cooperation between the UN and the League of Arab States," February 2022.

90 UN Doc. A/70/95–S/2015/446, para. 156.

91 UN Doc. A/72/19, para. 165.

92 For more details on local perceptions and data collection practices, see: Albert Trithart, "Local Perceptions of UN Peacekeeping: A Look at the Data," International Peace Institute, September 2023.

mission planning and strategies. Further, missions do not currently incorporate local perception data into the Comprehensive Planning and Performance Assessment System (CPAS), which is the primary tool missions use to assess their impact and inform future planning.[93] This is a missed opportunity to ensure that mission evaluations include feedback from host communities.

The role of civil affairs components within multidimensional missions has also grown in the last ten years. Not only can civil affairs components support local conflict resolution and peacebuilding efforts, but they can also work to ensure local perspectives "trickle up" to the national and international levels. Nevertheless, the extent to which this happens in practice is uneven, depending on the willingness of leaders to receive this information and incorporate it into national-level strategies.

In addition to civil affairs, other mission components are also involved in people-centered activities, including human rights components, which help empower populations to access and exercise their rights. Uniformed components have also worked to improve their interaction with host communities, including through all-women or mixed-gender engagement teams, which seek to improve missions' interaction with women community members.[94] Embedding community liaison assistants (CLAs) with UN military contingents has also helped uniformed peacekeepers engage with local communities, given that CLAs are national staff and thus have deep knowledge of local dynamics. While the use of CLAs started in 2008, prior to the HIPPO report, they have since become institutionalized across all large UN peacekeeping operations and have been cited as a critical bridge between UN troops and local communities.[95]

While missions have not comprehensively taken up HIPPO's recommendation to develop "community engagement strategies," the UN did produce a Practice Note on Community Engagement in 2018, which aimed to help mission staff identify shared goals between "track 1 stakeholders" (government authorities and parties to the peace process), local communities, and the UN mission.[96] However, only MONUSCO has developed a mission-specific strategy for engaging with civil society, in 2016.

Overall, peacekeepers working at the local level often undertake people-centered activities, including support to local dialogue, quick-impact projects, POC, and other peacebuilding initiatives. As noted by one interviewee, "Below the level of New York and mission leadership, peacekeepers are very people-centered. If you go into the field and ask any peacekeeper what they are supposed to be doing, they will talk about people-centered ideas."[97] However, these approaches are less integrated at higher levels, including within the Security Council, which remains state-centric and often prioritizes the restoration and extension of state authority without due consideration for state-society relations, which can be critical for the success of peacebuilding.[98]

Peacekeepers working at the local level often undertake people-centered activities, including support to local dialogue, quick-impact projects, the protection of civilians, and other peacebuilding initiatives.

Women, Peace, and Security

The HIPPO report outlined four recommendations related to the implementation of the women, peace, and security (WPS) agenda. Shortly after the publication of the report, the Security Council reiterated these recommendations in Resolution 2242.[99] In the past ten years, all four recommendations have gained traction at the normative level and have mostly been incorporated into the language of mission mandates.

93 Daniel Forti, "UN Peacekeeping and CPAS: An Experiment in Performance Assessment and Mission Planning," International Peace Institute, October 2022.

94 Gretchen Baldwin, "From Female Engagement Teams to Engagement Platoons: The Evolution of Gendered Community Engagement in UN Peace Operations," International Peace Institute, November 2021.

95 Allard Duursma and Jenna Russo, "The Primacy of Politics at the Local Level in UN Peace Operations," International Peace Institute, February 2025.

96 Department of Peacekeeping Operations and Department of Field Support, *Peacekeeping Practice Note: Community Engagement*, March 2018

97 Interview 15, UN official, April 2025.

98 Cedric De Coning, John Karlsrud, and Paul Troost, "Towards More People-Centric Peace Operations: From 'Extension of State Authority' to 'Strengthening Inclusive State-Society Relations,'" *Stability: International Journal of Security and Development* 4, no. 1 (2015).

99 UN Security Council Resolution 2242 (October 13, 2015), UN Doc. S/RES/2242.

The HIPPO report's first recommendation on WPS was to increase gender-sensitive analysis throughout the mission lifecycle. Since 2015, missions have improved their gender-sensitive analysis. Notably, the latest version of the UN's Gender-Responsive UN Peacekeeping Operations Policy, adopted in 2024, requires that "gender-responsive conflict analysis, disaggregated gender data, indicators and gender language, as guided by gender expertise, inform and are reflected in all stages of mandate implementation."[100] However, the extent to which this analysis has impacted missions' work is unclear, particularly in the context of mission drawdowns, when WPS considerations may be sidelined, leaving women at increased risk.[101]

HIPPO also called for missions to integrate gender advisers and gender expertise into all functional components. All multidimensional missions now have senior gender advisers situated in the office of the special representative of the secretary-general or the head of mission.[102] However, challenges remain when it comes to integrating gender expertise across all functional components. Some missions, including in the DRC and Cyprus, have cited positive examples of engaging senior gender advisers throughout mission planning. Yet one UN official noted that the level of engagement varies depending on the political and security context and individual personalities.[103] Further, even in situations where senior gender advisers are invited to mission leadership meetings, they are not always given the space to provide input and expertise.[104]

While there has been progress on implementing the report's recommendations on gender, it has been unequal, inconsistent, or slow.

The third recommendation was for increased coordination between UN Women and DPO/DPPA so that missions have "full access to policy, substantive, and technical support from UN Women" on implementation of the WPS commitments. Coordination between these entities has increased, according to one UN official.[105] However, it is not formalized, as recommended in the Global Study on the Implementation of Security Council Resolution 1325.[106] Therefore, coordination does not always occur in practice and can vary widely depending on the context and individual personalities.

Finally, to promote accountability for WPS, the HIPPO report recommended that all compacts between heads of missions and the secretary-general include performance indicators relating to gender.[107] These compacts identify strategic goals and standardized objectives against which each senior leader must report each year.[108] This recommendation has been implemented, as all senior leaders of peacekeeping operations and SPMs now have WPS-related commitments in their compacts."[109] However, these commitments are often "formulaic, vague, or focused exclusively on parity targets" and do not necessarily translate into concrete action.[110]

Overall, while there has been progress on implementing the report's recommendations on gender, it has been unequal, inconsistent, or slow. Often, the extent to which these recommendations have been implemented depends on individual initiative and can vary greatly from one mission to another. Further, the HIPPO report missed the opportunity to incorporate more ambitious recommendations on a range of issues related to

100 Erica Gaston, "Process Lessons Learned in Yemen's National Dialogue," United States Institute of Peace, February 2014.

101 UN Security Council, *Identical Letters Dated 30 July 2024 from the Permanent Representative of Sierra Leone to the United Nations Addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council*, UN Doc. S/2024/573, July 31, 2024.

102 UN Peacekeeping, "Women, Peace and Security," available at https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/women-peace-and-security-0; Interview #15, UN official, April 2025.

103 Interview #11, UN official, April 2025.

104 Closed-door workshop at IPI, April 9, 2025.

105 Interview #12, UN official, April 2025.

106 UN Women, "Women, Peace and Security and the UN Security Council," in *A Global Study on the Implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325* (UN Women, 2015).

107 UN Doc. A/70/95–S/2015/446, para. 80.

108 UN Department of Management, "The Essential Guidebook for Senior Leaders of the United Nations Secretariat," October 2017.

109 Interview #12, UN official, April 2025.

110 Sarah Smith, "Gender-Responsive Leadership in UN Peace Operations: The Path to a Transformative Approach?" International Peace Institute, February 2022, p. 7.

WPS, including direct engagement with women in civil society, the meaningful participation of women and girls, funding, or accountability measures to ensure the implementation of WPS commitments. While many of these topics were suggested during the panel's consultations, they were not included in the final report.[111]

Capabilities and Performance

As noted above, the HIPPO report was written at the peak of peace operations deployments and thus included recommendations to more rapidly generate necessary troops and capabilities to support potentially large mission deployments. In response, DPO created the Peacekeeping Capability Readiness System (PCRS) in 2016, which replaced the UN Standby Arrangements System. The PCRS, which is managed by the Strategic Force Generation and Capability Planning Cell, aims to achieve "a greater degree of readiness and predictability for the selection of military and police units" and a "more sustained, efficient, and collaborative approach between the Secretariat and Member States."[112] According to one UN official, the creation of the PCRS represented a "major improvement" in the UN's ability to thoroughly assess and more quickly deploy units that are adequately prepared in line with UN standards. It also allows the UN to replace under-performing units and has positioned the organization "light years ahead" of where it used to be.[113]

In addition to generating troops more quickly, the UN can now access more specialized capabilities. The Secretariat publishes a quarterly paper on uniformed capability requirements, where it highlights the types of emerging capabilities needed so that member states can plan ahead. The UN Peacekeeping Ministerials have also helped to generate capabilities. The ministerials were convened to follow up on the Leaders' Summit on Peacekeeping in September 2015, which took place soon after the HIPPO report's release.[114] Since the first ministerial in London in 2016, six such events have been convened, generating hundreds of pledges from member states to generate high-performing and specialized capabilities, expand training and capacity building, and extend partnerships. One DPO official described these events as "central" to boosting capabilities and performance, particularly in their early stages. While some interlocutors expressed reservations over whether the ministerials are still imperative given changes to the peacekeeping landscape, another official expressed their continued utility in generating political support within capitals.[115]

> Accountability for allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse remains low, with many investigations pending.

While the UN can deploy troops more quickly than before, there are still sometimes delays because it can be difficult for missions to absorb incoming capabilities as quickly as they can be deployed. Further challenges stem from the UN's inability to mobilize the requisite aviation assets, especially helicopter units. Apart from these units being in short supply in most militaries, helicopters also do not qualify as "major equipment" within the contingent-owned equipment reimbursement scheme, and member states are thus less incentivized to contribute this much-needed capability.[116]

The need to enhance the accountability of peacekeepers is another area that has received more attention since the HIPPO report. This theme is echoed in A4P and A4P+, the latter of which commits to "step up our efforts to regularly assess our performance, recognize outstanding performance and seek remedial measures for insufficient performance."[117] In 2018, the C34 built on HIPPO's recommendations, requesting the development of an "integrated performance policy framework,"

111 Written feedback from former UN official, April 2025.

112 UN DPO and UN DOS, "Peacekeeping Capability Readiness System (PCRS) Guidelines," August 2023.

113 Interview #6, UN official, April 2025.

114 The first such event was a "Leaders' Summit" convened by Ban Ki-moon and former US President Barack Obama. In 2016 and 2017, the events were titled "UN Peacekeeping Defence Ministerials." Beginning in 2019, the title changed to "UN Peacekeeping Ministerial Conference."

115 Interview #6, UN official, April 2025; Interview #2, former UN official, March 2025.

116 UN General Assembly, *Manual on Policies and Procedures Concerning the Reimbursement and Control of Contingent-Owned Equipment of Troop/Police Contributors Participating in Field Missions*, UN Doc. A/78/87, August 23, 2023.

117 United Nations, "Action for Peacekeeping + Priorities for 2021–2023," p. 6.

which was further echoed by the Security Council.[118] This led to the creation of the Integrated Peacekeeping Performance and Accountability Framework, which brings together all of the UN's policies, guidance, and tools on performance and accountability.[119]

To support more systematic evaluations of uniformed peacekeepers, the Secretariat established the Military Performance Evaluation Team and the Selection Recruitment Section for military and police, respectively, as well as evaluation tools for military units and formed police units. Information from evaluations and other sources is discussed at a monthly performance evaluation meeting with the under-secretary-general for peace operations and senior officials from the Department of Operational Support (DOS) and Department for Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance (DMSPC). During these meetings, necessary remedial measures are discussed, up to the level of replacing underperforming units. One official noted that underperformance is less of a challenge than previously, likely in part as a result of these efforts, in addition to the shrinking number of deployments, which allows the Secretariat to be more selective in who it deploys.

At the same time, Secretariat leaders remain reluctant to repatriate units (though they have done so in some cases), even in cases of sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA), due to political sensitivities with the contributing countries.[120] There is also a gap when it comes to the quality and capability of officers, some of whom should "never have deployed," according to one UN official. Yet there is no mechanism to recall unqualified staff officers, which is an issue that the UN Office of Military Affairs is working to address.[121] The only mechanism for evaluating the performance of civilian staff remains the standard "e-pass" evaluation system, which generally has not been effective at addressing underperformance.

On SEA, the HIPPO report highlighted the need for robust measures to strengthen accountability, such as suspending payments to contributing countries whose personnel are implicated in SEA allegations and urging member states with jurisdiction over personnel subject to SEA allegations to pursue immediate and vigorous investigation and prosecution.[122] Combating SEA has been a priority for the current secretary-general.[123] In 2017, he appointed the first victims' rights advocate with a mandate to integrate a victim-centered approach into UN SEA policies and to strengthen the support the UN provides to victims.[124] The ClearCheck database was established the following year to provide a centralized mechanism that allows the UN to track and avoid rehiring individuals facing previous allegations of serious misconduct.[125]

Despite these measures, SEA remains a serious issue, with 100 allegations against UN peacekeepers reported in 2023 and 102 in 2024—the highest number since 2016.[126] The majority of these allegations implicated uniformed personnel.[127] Accountability for these allegations remains low, with many investigations pending.[128] While one

118 UN Security Council, *Statement by the President of the Security Council*, UN Doc. S/PRST/2018/4, January 31, 2018; UN Security Council Resolution 2436 (September 21, 2018), UN Doc. S/RES/2436, p. 3.

119 The Integrated Peacekeeping Performance and Accountability Framework is a living document that comprises four elements: (1) mandates and other intergovernmental guidance; (2) policies, guidance, and standards (including personnel and unit selection); (3) methodologies and tools for performance assessment; and (4) accountability and remedial measures and incentives.

120 Interview #6, UN official, April 2025.

121 Written feedback from UN official, June 2025.

122 Boutellis and Connolly, "The State of UN Peace Operations Reform," p. 12; UN Doc. A/70/95–S/2015/446, para. 291.

123 United Nations, "Fact Sheet on the Secretary-General's Initiatives to Prevent and Respond to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse," May 22, 2019; Phoebe Donnelly, Dyan Mazurana, and Evyn Papworth, "Blue on Blue: Investigating Sexual Abuse of Peacekeepers," International Peace Institute, April 2022, p. 21.

124 UN Office of the Victim's Rights Advocate, "Fact Sheet," 2021.

125 Phoebe Donnelly and Evyn Papworth, "Connecting Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and Sexual Harassment in UN Peace Operations," International Peace Institute, December 2024, p. 13; Interview #10, expert, April 2025.

126 UN General Assembly, *Special Measures for Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse—Report of the Secretary-General*, UN Doc. A/78/774, February 14, 2024, para. 65. The increase in reports over the last two years could also be due to a higher willingness to report SEA incidents than before, possibly due to the implementation of the zero-tolerance policy.

127 Of the 100 allegations reported in 2023, 67 implicated military personnel, 7 implicated police personnel, and 25 implicated civilian personnel. In 2024, the total number of allegations reported increased to 102, of which 51 implicated military personnel, 13 implicated police personnel, and 38 implicated civilian personnel. United Nations, "Conduct in UN Field Missions," accessed June 23, 2025, available at https://conduct.unmissions.org/sea-data-introduction.

128 Of the 100 reported allegations from 2023, 49 cases are still pending. For 2022, 31 of 79 cases are still pending. Many cases are listed as pending due to missing information on the results of an investigation. Apart from two pending cases involving civilian personnel in 2022 and 2023, respectively, the remaining pending cases involve military or police personnel and include a note that additional information is required from the relevant contributing country. In the case of a substantiated claim involving military or police personnel, a case could also remain pending as the UN waits to hear what type of remedial action is being taken by the contributing country, which is not under the auspices of the UN. Ibid.

UN official noted that communication between the UN and troop- and police-contributing countries on remedial action has improved, less than half of substantiated claims result in the perpetrator going to jail. Nearly 15 percent of substantiated claims related to uniformed personnel resulted in contributing countries imposing no penalty, dismissing the case, or only imposing a financial penalty.[129]

The UN and contributing countries remain hesitant to implement accountability measures such as the dismissal of mission leaders or repatriation of contingents.[130] Instead, the UN has focused more on training to prevent SEA. While predeployment SEA trainings have been shown to be effective in changing uniformed peacekeepers' attitudes toward SEA, they also face limitations.[131] One expert also suggested that SEA training for mission leaders is not sufficient, particularly when these leaders have little experience with similar incidents in their previous careers.[132] The limited progress on preventing SEA and holding perpetrators accountable since the HIPPO report indicates that more needs to be done to internalize and implement the UN's zero-tolerance policy.

Leadership

The HIPPO report recognized the quality of leadership as one of "the most crucial factors in the success or failure of UN peace operations."[133] The report identified shortcomings with the process of selecting senior leaders, the lack of equitable gender and geographic representation among senior leaders, weak performance management, and insufficient training and preparation provided to leaders to effectively operate in "increasingly volatile environments."[134] It recommended a shift toward a recruitment processes based on merit and expertise, improved gender and geographic representation, "360 degree" appraisals, and professional induction programs.

Effective leadership of UN peace operations has proven difficult to operationalize.[135] When it comes to merit-based selection, for example, dynamics among member states and decision-making by the secretary-general continue to undercut progress.[136] As a result, many of the same critiques laid out in the HIPPO report were echoed in the recent DPO independent study on "The Future of Peacekeeping." The study notes the need to use a merit-based selection process, to ensure that mission leaders undergo obligatory, tailored, and dynamic inductions and briefing programs, and to provide leaders continued access to mentoring, mental health support, and the opportunity to network with other UN leaders.[137]

Nevertheless, some progress has been made in implementing the panel's recommendations. The proportion of women leaders in UN missions, including heads of mission and deputy heads of mission, has increased from approximately 20 percent in 2015 to 36 percent in 2024.[138] A mentorship program is now available, and training is provided not only for current mission leaders but also for those in the leadership pipeline.[139] This training has also evolved to more specifically address the skills needed to lead a UN peace operation and to provide case studies and reference materials that mission leaders can use in the field.[140]

However, some have indicated that training remains inadequate in preparing mission leaders for the realities of the field and should be more attuned to the unique circumstances of each

129 Ibid.

130 Magnus Lundgren, Kseniya Oksamytna, and Vincenzo Bove, "Politics or Performance? Leadership Accountability in UN Peacekeeping," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 66, no. 1 (2022), p. 52.

131 Phoebe Donnelly, Sabrina Karim, DeAnne Roark, and Muhibbur Rahman, "Training on Sexual Exploitation and Abuse for Uniformed Peacekeepers: Effectiveness and Limitations," International Peace Institute, July 2025.

132 Interview #10, expert, April 2025.

133 UN Doc. A/70/95–S/2015/446, para. 268.

134 Ibid., paras. 268–278.

135 Challenges Forum, "Considerations for Mission Leadership in UN Peace Operations," May 2021, p. 8.

136 Interview #8, former UN official, April 2025; Interview #4, expert, March 2025; Interview #10, expert, April 2025; Kseniya Oksamytna, Vincenzo Bove, and Magnus Lundgren, "Peacekeeping Bosses Should be Chosen by the UN and Not the Paymasters," *PassBlue*, July 7, 2020.

137 United Nations, "The Future of Peacekeeping, New Models and Related Capabilities," October 2024, p. 40.

138 UN Security Council, *Women and Peace and Security—Report of the Secretary-General*, UN Doc. S/2024/671, September 24, 2024, para. 93.

139 Interview #4, expert, March 2025; Interview #8, former UN official, April 2025; Interview #9, former UN official, April 2025.

140 Interview #10, expert, April 2025.

mission. In addition, more could be done to facilitate connections among mission leaders.[141] Despite the steps taken since the HIPPO report, the quality of leadership remains a challenge.

Field Support

The HIPPO report observed that field support was too headquarters-centric, depending on policies and administrative procedures that were not designed for the dynamic and complex environments where missions operate. As a result, numerous exceptions to these procedures were required, and there were "significant transaction costs between different Headquarters departments and missions."[142] The panel's recommendations therefore focused on empowering the Department of Field Support (DFS) with "full delegated authorities to support the administration of field-focused policies and procedures."[143] The report also emphasized the need to make field support services more agile and responsive, including by allowing heads of missions greater authority to manage their staff and resources to meet the missions' changing demands. The report also called for greater accountability, including for resource management.[144] The under-secretary-general of DFS echoed these recommendations in 2016, highlighting the importance of aligning "the responsibility for results with the authority to make decisions in order to ensure greater transparency and accountability" to member states.[145]

> Views vary as to whether the expanded delegation of authority has gone too far or not far enough.

This led to two major reforms in 2019. The first was the creation of the Department of Operational Support (DOS) and Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance (DMSPC), which replaced DFS and the Department of Management. This was intended to address the structural issues that resulted from the Department of Management delegating all support for peace operations to DFS. Whereas DFS was exclusively responsible for supporting peace operations, DOS provides operational support to all UN Secretariat entities, including regional commissions and resident coordinators.[146]

Several shortcomings have emerged during the six years since this reform was implemented. DOS is less connected to peace operations than its predecessor, while its expanded mandate to support the entire Secretariat has led some to observe that its capacity is spread too thin.[147] Previously, peacekeeping missions had DFS officers embedded in integrated operational teams at headquarters, which connected them more directly to operational support, though SPMs have never had this type of embedded capacity.[148] Under the current structure, DOS only has six support officers embedded in DPO in New York, while missions without integrated operational teams have less access to support capacity.[149] DOS's mandate to support the entire Secretariat, rather than just peace operations, inevitably means that it has to manage more "clients" than DFS dealt with. In practice, this has led to concerns that DOS is unable to provide adequate and focused support to field operations.

The second reform was the expanded delegation of authority to heads of entities.[150] This was intended as a solution to the previous centralization of authority, which did not allow heads of mission to respond to the dynamic nature of mission contexts. The expanded delegation of authority allows heads of mission the flexibility to shift approved funding to meet changing operational priorities without seeking approval from headquarters, within limits.

141 Interview #10, expert, April 2025; United Nations, "The Future of Peacekeeping, New Models and Related Capabilities," p. 40.

142 UN Doc. A/70/95–S/2015/446, para. 317.

143 Ibid., para. 323.

144 Ibid., paras. 320, 323.

145 UN Under-Secretary General for Peacekeeping Operations, statement to the Fourth Committee, New York, October 20, 2016.

146 Wolfgang Weiszegger, "Implementing the UN Management Reform: Progress and Implications for Peace Operations," International Peace Institute, July 2020, p. 5.

147 Weiszegger, "Implementing the UN Management Reform"; Interview #5, UN official, April 2025.

148 Weiszegger, "Implementing the UN Management Reform," p. 7.

149 Interview #17, UN official, May 2025.

150 Per the updated delegation of authority bulletin, heads of entity include "the head of a department or an office, including an office away from Headquarters; the head of a special political or peacekeeping mission; the head of a regional commission; a resident or regional coordinator; or the head of any other unit tasked with programmed activities." See: UN Secretariat, *Delegation of Authority in the Administration of the Staff Regulations and Rules and the Financial Regulations and Rules—Secretary-General's Bulletin*, UN Doc. ST/SGB/2019/2, December 17, 2018.

Further, missions now directly submit their budgets to the UN controller, and the Fifth Committee hears directly from heads of mission about their resource requirements. Prior to this, the budgets prepared by missions were reviewed by DFS and DPKO before being submitted to the controller.[151]

Views vary as to whether the expanded delegation of authority has gone too far or not far enough. Some view the limitations on heads of entities shifting funds between budget groups as defeating the purpose of empowering the field.[152] Others argue that the delegation of authority goes too far beyond the delegation of administrative and managerial decision-making originally envisaged and that a more detailed approach to exceptions from headquarters-centric rules was needed.[153] Though the delegation of authority may have made the budgeting process more efficient, some have also noted that excluding DOS and DPO entirely has created a disconnect.[154]

Another concern is that the disconnect between missions and headquarters resulting from the expanded delegation of authority has negatively impacted the planning and implementation of innovations across mission settings. There is a tradeoff between missions having the autonomy to tailor processes to their own unique settings and the ability to scale good practices across multiple contexts. For example, when using the Sage system, which allows missions to log incidents and activities, missions dictate the taxonomies and input the data as they see fit. The different approaches used by missions have made it difficult to conduct cross-mission analysis.[155] It is also harder to implement standardized systems across all peace operations. For example, the Secretariat has faced extensive delays in rolling out enterprise systems such as the Unite Aware platform, which integrates data sources from across a mission to support decision-making. The delegation of authority also reduces the Secretariat's oversight of sensitive technologies such as surveillance systems, which could have political and ethical impacts beyond the mission area.[156]

As UN officials continue learning how best to utilize the expanded delegation of authority, many of them stressed the importance of preserving the administrative gains resulting from these reforms. The issues highlighted above are partly due to the limitations of the 2019 reforms, which were unable to effectively address existing problems in part because they were intended to be cost-neutral and not to affect any posts.[157] It has been suggested that a strategic discussion is needed on the evolving practice of field support offices, taking advantage of the review of peace operations requested by member states in the Pact for the Future.[158]

Finances and Restructuring

The HIPPO report recommended developing options to restructure the peace and security architecture "with a view to strengthening leadership and management and to removing compartmentalized mindsets at headquarters."[159] It observed that departmental in-fighting and duplicative efforts hampered the success of UN peace operations. It also recommended the creation of an additional deputy secretary-general position for peace and security and the establishment of a single peace operations account to finance all peace operations.[160]

These recommendations were among the most ambitious changes suggested by the HIPPO report. After considering a range of options, in 2017, the secretary-general proposed restructuring the peace and security pillar as part of his broader reform initiative. His aim was to bring together UN capacities "around a single political-operational

151 Weiszegger, "Implementing the UN Management Reform," p. 8; Interview #17, UN official, May 2025.

152 Weiszegger, "Implementing the UN Management Reform," p. 3.

153 Closed-door roundtable at IPI, May 7, 2025.

154 Interview #17, UN official, May 2025.

155 Interview #4, expert, March 2025; Agathe Sarfati, "New Technologies and the Protection of Civilians in UN Peace Operations," International Peace Institute, September 2023, p. 5.

156 Interview #4, expert, March 2025.

157 Interview #2, former UN official, March 2025; Interview #5, UN official, April 2025.

158 Interview #18, UN official, May 2025.

159 UN Doc. A/70/95–S/2015/446, para. 341.

160 Ibid., para. 343.

structure with regional responsibilities and [to facilitate] the integration of peacebuilding across the pillar."[161] The proposed reform included replacing DPA and DPKO with two newly created departments—the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA) and the Department of Peace Operations (DPO), which were ultimately established in 2019.

Two significant changes came out of the reform. The first was the decision to situate the Peacebuilding Support Office within DPPA to better "manage tools across the peace continuum."[162] The second was the establishment of three joint DPO/DPPA regional divisions headed by assistant secretaries-general with dual reporting lines to the two under-secretaries-general. This entailed merging the regional divisions that previously sat separately in DPKO and DPA, with the aim of improving coherence and integrated planning between the two departments.[163]

While interviewees indicated that the joint regional divisions had improved coherence and coordination between the departments, this reform fell short of the HIPPO report's more ambitious proposals. In particular, the panel's recommendation to bring all missions under a single continuum of peace operations was not implemented, nor were all peacekeeping operations and field-based SPMs brought under the leadership of DPO, as proposed by the secretary-general.[164] In the end, significant pushback from senior leaders within the Secretariat and some member states quashed the effort. Thus, many of the divisions that prompted HIPPO's recommendations in 2015 remain to this day.

The panel's recommendation to bring all missions under a single continuum of peace operations was not implemented.

At the same time, a more ambitious reform in line with HIPPO's proposal may have run into difficulties of its own. First, putting so-called "field-based SPMs" under the same department as peacekeeping operations would not have put all missions on a single spectrum or under a single department lead, as it would have left out other forms of SPMs such as envoys and monitoring mechanisms. In other words, there would still have been a separation along the spectrum, just at a different point. Second, it is not clear what falls within the category of a "field-based SPMs." While observers often point to examples like the larger SPMs in Afghanistan and Haiti, many SPMs would be harder to categorize, including, for example, the UN regional offices or the mission in Syria, which is headquartered in Geneva but has a presence in Damascus and Gaziantep. While this could have been solved by having a single department manage the entire spectrum of peacekeeping operations and SPMs, this was a red line for some senior leaders. Nevertheless, such a merger has been proposed as an option under the current UN80 reform initiative, discussed further below.

While most interviewees, including former panel members and UN officials, expressed regret for the lack of implementation of the proposed merger, not all interviewees agreed on the extent to which the existing structures are detrimental to the UN's work. Some officials argued in favor of maintaining a distinction between peacekeeping operations and SPMs, noting the important distinction between missions that have uniformed personnel and those that do not. Further, one official noted that putting "everything in the same box" could incentivize the Security Council to deploy lighter and cheaper missions rather than paying for larger missions with uniformed components, to the detriment of contexts that may require a more robust presence.[165]

Other interviewees, including officials from DPO, were more critical of the current arrangement and the inability of DPO and DPPA to work fluidly together. Several interviewees cited the lack of positive collaboration between the two departments, which continues to be driven by territorial attitudes that stem from leadership and trickle

161 United Nations, "Vision of the UN Peace and Security Pillar," 2017, available at https://reform.un.org/sites/reform.un.org/files/vision_of_the_un_peace_and_security_pillar.pdf.

162 Universal Rights Group, "UN Peace and Security Reform: An Update," June 11, 2019.

163 Ibid.

164 UN General Assembly, *Restructuring of the United Nations Peace and Security Pillar—Report of the Secretary-General*, UN Doc. A/72/525, October 13, 2017.

165 Interview #13, UN official, April 2025.

down to permeate the broader Secretariat culture.[166] This territorialism has also inhibited effective planning.[167] One official noted that departmental leaders continue to protect their leadership for certain countries, undermining efforts to ensure planning is driven by an objective assessment of a country's needs rather than turf wars or arbitrary distinctions between peacekeeping operations and SPMs.[168]

Relatedly, the recommendations to create an additional deputy secretary-general position for peace and security and a single peace operations account were never taken up as part of the 2019 reform. Currently, peacekeeping operations are financed out of the peacekeeping budget (with each mission having its own budget account), while SPMs are financed out of the general budget. A single peace operations account could allow for more fluidity and flexibility in peace operation planning.[169] Alternatively, it has also been suggested that this could be achieved by providing further flexibility in the SPM budget process and aligning it with the budget cycle for peacekeeping operations.[170]

Conclusion and Recommendations

Ten years ago, HIPPO identified key challenges facing peace operations, including the increasing complexity of conflicts, the lack of peace to keep, inadequate resources, and a widening gap between expectations and what missions can realistically deliver. While these challenges remain, missions today face additional obstacles, including a more divided Security Council, severe financial constraints, and the UN's waning legitimacy. Policymakers have initiated several processes to strengthen the UN's response to these challenges, including the review on the future of all forms of UN peace operations mandated by the Pact for the Future, the 2025 Peacebuilding Architecture Review, efforts to strengthen the UN–AU partnership, and the UN80 Initiative. There are several entry points for the findings and recommendations of the HIPPO report to help inform these current policy discussions on the future of peace operations.

Shaping a New Vision to Guide the UN80 Initiative

The secretary-general recently launched the UN80 Initiative in response to the financial crisis facing the UN. Branding the initiative as an effort to ensure the UN is more effective, nimble, and fit to address current and future challenges, the secretary-general has suggested significant reforms as well as cuts, including the elimination of 20 percent of posts across the UN Secretariat, including in DPO and DPPA.

While few would argue with the need for serious efforts to respond to the UN's current crises, including cost-cutting measures and broader reform, thus far the secretary-general has not provided a strategic vision for reform to guide the proposed cuts. Thus, the cuts have been widely perceived as arbitrary and lacking a coherent strategy, and many have pointed out that reducing the budget still leaves a large funding shortfall if the US does not pay its assessed contributions. Within the peace and security pillar, the New Agenda for Peace and the Pact for the Future could serve as a basis for such a vision. While neither proposes specific actions on UN reform, they could serve as a guide from which to derive such proposals.

Given the potential scope of UN80, the role of member states will be critical, as many of the proposals, including cuts or relocations of posts, will need to go through the General Assembly. While the reform process is likely to carry over into the term of the next secretary-general and be a major consideration in the selection process, it is critical that it start off on the right track by aiming toward not just a smaller UN but a clear vision of what a smaller UN can achieve, including through its peace operations.

166 Interview #5, UN official, April 3, 2025; Interview #8, former UN official, April 2025; Interview #15, UN official, April 2025; Interview #17, UN official, May 2025; Interview #18, UN official, May 2025.

167 Interview #5, UN official, April 2025; Jacquand, "UN Reform and Mission Planning."

168 Written feedback from UN official, June 2025.

169 Interview #5, UN official, April 2025.

170 Interview #13, UN official, April 2025.

Recommendations:

- The secretary-general, guided by member states, should articulate a clear vision to steer the UN80 Initiative. The New Agenda for Peace and the Pact for the Future can provide a strong foundation for this vision, which should precede any major reform or cuts.
- While recognizing the need to ensure the Secretariat is appropriately sized relative to current demand and financial constraints, the secretary-general and member states should ensure that any cuts to staffing do not put at risk the UN's readiness to deploy a broad range of peace operations or its institutional memory on peace operations.

Review on the Future of Peace Operations

Another initiative that could shape the reform of the peace and security pillar is the review on the future of all forms of UN peace operations mandated in the Pact for the Future. The secretary-general has already indicated that the review will work "hand-in-hand" with the UN80 Initiative.[171] While some interviewees were skeptical of the usefulness of the review, given how close it is coming to the end of the secretary-general's term, it could be a useful guide to UN80 and future reform efforts, particularly if it identifies the UN's unique added value vis-à-vis other partners in implementing or backstopping critical peace operations tasks. Given the current geopolitical environment, which makes it difficult to estimate the precise direction that peace operations may take in the future, the review may be more valuable if it attempts to articulate what types of peace operations the UN is well placed to support and under what circumstances, as well as the types of capacities it needs within the Secretariat to backstop these efforts.

The review on the future of peace operations could be a useful guide to UN80 and future reform efforts, particularly if it identifies the UN's unique added value vis-à-vis other partners.

This review is particularly important given the pressure to make cuts, which run the risk of gutting essential parts of the system needed to establish new missions, maintain institutional memory, and effectively backstop existing missions. When looking at the range of security crises across the globe, different contexts may require a range of interventions, including policing, the protection of civilians, electoral support, ceasefire monitoring and observation, and security sector reform.[172] Thus, even if the mandate of a single mission remains narrow, the UN will need to maintain the capacity to support and backstop a broad range of prevention, peacekeeping, and peacebuilding tasks. Articulating how this can be done, even with a potentially slimmed down and more efficient Secretariat, could be a key contribution of the review.

Recommendations

- The Secretariat should use the review on the future of all forms of UN peace operations to articulate what forms of peace operations the UN is well placed to support and under what circumstances, the types of missions that may be needed given various threat environments, and the types of capacities the Secretariat needs to backstop these efforts.
- To balance the perspectives and interests of the Secretariat, the review should consider not only feedback from within the UN but also data and analysis from external experts from a cross-regional group of institutions.

Implementing Modular Approaches to Peace Operations

So-called "modular approaches" to peace operations have gained momentum over the past year, in particular as a result of DPO's 2024 independent study on the future of peace operations. The premise of this approach is that mandated sets of tasks can be used like building blocks to form more targeted mandates and that a range of modalities are available to work with partners in these and other areas. Not only could this help achieve member states' call for more agile and tailored approaches, as articulated in the Pact

171 UN Secretary-General, remarks to the Ministerial Meeting on the Future of Peacekeeping, Berlin, May 13, 2025.
172 United Nations, "The Future of Peacekeeping, New Models and Related Capabilities."

for the Future, but it could also alleviate some of the financial and political barriers faced by missions with more ambitious or multidimensional mandates.

Modular approaches to peace operations hold potential, including in facilitating a networked approach to multilateralism and enhancing partnerships. However, more needs to be done both operationally and politically to ensure the feasibility of flexible approaches to mandating and implementing peace operations. At least three major hurdles stand in the way: a divided Security Council that would likely struggle to agree to regular adjustments to mission mandates; the Fifth Committee's cumbersome resourcing process that makes it difficult for missions to scale up or down in response to changes in the operating environment; and the difficulty of coordinating a broader range of actors to work toward common peacekeeping and peacebuilding objectives. The potential benefits of modular approaches may be enough to motivate actors to overcome these challenges, but policymakers will need to be clear-eyed about the difficulties of doing so.

Recommendations

- The Secretariat should articulate how to implement modular approaches to peace operations, drawing on current and previous examples, including how to ensure that tasks not included within a mission's mandate are adequately and sustainably financed and that all partners are working toward a common objective, using different modalities for collaboration.
- Member states should ensure that critical areas of work like the protection of civilians, gender, and human rights remain prioritized in streamlined mandates.

Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace

As member states engage in negotiations on the 2025 Peacebuilding Architecture Review, several key issues related to peace operations and the HIPPO report are expected to come to the fore. These include mission transitions, the need to strengthen the link between peacekeeping and peacebuilding, and the development of national prevention strategies. In addition, efforts to enhance the Peacebuilding Commission's role in prevention—both by supporting national governments in designing and implementing these strategies and by advising the Security Council—will be a central focus.[173]

Similar recommendations have been put forward in the secretary-general's New Agenda for Peace, and member states have reaffirmed their commitment to developing national prevention strategies in the Pact for the Future. These nationally led initiatives would not only facilitate conflict prevention efforts but also help overcome some of the internal barriers within the UN system, particularly those related to situational awareness and early warning. Moreover, the adoption of national prevention strategies by all countries underscores that prevention is universal and no nation is immune from violence.[174]

Recommendations

- As called for in the Pact for the Future, all member states should develop national prevention strategies, which would help prevent conflict and overcome some of the barriers within the UN system that impede situational awareness and early warning.
- To enhance joint prevention efforts with regional organizations, the UN can consider pooling early-warning resources in a shared operational center. This center could benefit from the advanced regional early-warning systems that already exist in some regions, including East and West Africa.

What of Political Primacy?

As policymakers chart a path forward for peace operations, member states need to consider what political role they want the UN to play and how to facilitate this. Efforts to ensure the primacy of politics continue to face multiple challenges, few of

173 Lauren McGowan and Ilianna Kotini, "Two Decades and Four Reviews Later: What Comes Next for the UN Peacebuilding Architecture? *IPI Global Observatory*, January 9, 2025.

174 Céline Monnier et al., "What Can the Peacebuilding Commission Do to Support National Prevention Strategies?" Center on International Cooperation, November 2024.

which relate to better planning or processes at the mission level. As discussed above, HIPPO recommended that peace operations be deployed to support clear political solutions and that when the momentum behind peace falters, member states should help mobilize renewed political efforts to keep these processes on track. Yet many current missions are deployed to contexts with ongoing hostilities and without a viable peace process, and member states have proven unwilling or unable to provide the political leverage needed to support such processes. Given the trajectory of geopolitics and divisions within the Security Council, this challenge is unlikely to be resolved in the near future.

While holding to the ideal that missions be deployed to support clear political processes, policymakers should consider what to do when such processes are absent. In some contexts, policymakers have preferred maintaining a mission presence to protect civilians, monitor and report on human rights violations, and maintain a level of stability in case a political process should materialize. However, in contexts like the DRC, this can lead to an "endless mission" that is unable to sustainably transfer its tasks to national and local partners. In such cases, and as noted by HIPPO, policymakers will need to consider how to measure success, which will look different than in contexts that are advancing a peace process.

While holding to the ideal that missions be deployed to support clear political processes, policymakers should consider what to do when such processes are absent.

More broadly, the UN's role in political and mediation processes has waned, particularly at the national and regional levels, undermining HIPPO's recommendation that the UN only deploy missions to contexts where it is playing a leading role. The UN's declining political role is the result of a confluence of factors and is unlikely to reverse in the short term. However, multiple panel members interviewed reiterated their commitment to this recommendation, noting that it would be difficult for peace operations to support the implementation of agreements they have not helped craft.[175]

Recommendation:

- The secretary-general should articulate what is meant by the primacy of politics and how it applies to missions in contexts without a viable political process. This understanding of the primacy of politics should encompass politics beyond the signing of a formal agreement, including processes at the subnational, regional, and international levels.[176]

Advancing Partnerships

To navigate the current fragmented geopolitical landscape, the UN needs to embrace a more ambitious approach to partnerships than that envisioned in the HIPPO report. This would allow the UN to draw on its normative independence and expertise while leveraging the proximity of regional organizations to the crises it is aiming to address.

The UN-AU partnership, which is one of the UN's most institutionalized and long-standing areas of cooperation, has been anchored in a robust policy framework and consolidated through regular consultations at the technical and political levels over the years. However, for the partnership to advance, consensus on broad principles needs to be translated into concrete agreements on how to respond collaboratively to specific conflicts and crises. The UN and AU should therefore undertake joint efforts drawing on the full range of available tools across the entire spectrum of peace and security activities. While the financing of AU-led peace support operations has dominated the partnership agenda, both organizations also need to focus on prevention and mediation, recognizing their fundamentally political role.

Although HIPPO primarily focused on the UN's partnership with the AU, the UN should continue to deepen and further leverage partnerships with a wide range of regional organizations and mechanisms, including those outside of Africa, to

175 Interview #8, former UN official, April 2025; Interview #20, former UN official, March 2025.

176 Duursma and Russo, "The Primacy of Politics at the Local Level in UN Peace Operations."

embrace the networked multilateralism envisioned in the New Agenda for Peace. For example, one of the UN's strategic partnerships has been with the European Union (EU), which has deployed a variety of missions under its Common Security and Defence Policy. EU missions address a wide range of issues, such as cybersecurity, maritime security, and ceasefire monitoring mechanisms, and many of them demonstrate the adaptability and flexibility articulated in DPO's recent report on the future of peacekeeping.

Recommendations:

- UN member states and regional organizations should reflect on how subsidiarity is understood and applied in the current global security and political landscape, including how regional bodies establish security mechanisms and the implications of this for the UN's primary responsibility to maintain international peace and security. Clarifying these dynamics is essential to fostering coherent, complementary approaches that can reinforce the multilateral system.
- The UN Secretariat should incorporate lessons from contexts where UN peace operations have operated in parallel to partner-led missions into its ongoing review of peace operations.

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IPI
INTERNATIONAL PEACE INSTITUTE

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