Study

New challenges for UN peacekeeping

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Summary

Peace missions are an important instrument of international conflict resolution. Peacekeeping operations cover a broad spectrum, ranging from ceasefire monitoring to state-building. Peace operations will continue to have to deal with old and familiar problems in the 21st century. But will political, technological, conflict-relevant and environmental developments bring new challenges?

Institutional and legal framework of UN missions

The goal of the Charter of the United Nations (UN) is to ensure world peace and international security. Although peacekeeping is not explicitly provided for in the Charter, it has become an important instrument for achieving this goal. Chapter VI of the Charter deals with peaceful settlement of disputes, while Chapter VII contains provisions on "action with respect to threats to the peace, breaches of the peace, and acts of aggression". In the event of a conflict, diplomatic means of conflict resolution as per Chapter VI will be sought first. If attempts to find a political solution fail, the Security Council, upon request of individual states or the UN Secretary-General, will declare a breach of the peace in accordance with Article 39 and adopt non-military (Articles 40–41) or military enforcement measures (Article 42) in a legally binding resolution. The Security Council's invocation of Chapter VII provides the legal basis for its actions and can be understood as an expression of its determination to enforce the prohibition of the use of force in accordance with Article 2 (4). The tasks of each mission depend on the nature of the conflict to be resolved and the specific challenges involved. In addition, the positions of the permanent Security Council members towards the individual parties to the conflict or other national interests often play an important role as they determine whether the Security Council adopts a resolution at all and define the scope, duration, objectives and nature of any mission on the basis of consensual and viable decisions.

There are two possible ways of organising peace missions mandated by the Security Council. One such way is for the Security Council to task the Secretary-General and the Department of Peace Operations (DPO). They finance operations from the UN special budget, organise resources provided by the member states (personnel, equipment and infrastructure), and manage the mandated mission. This is usually a lengthy process but more cost-effective in the long run. The other way is for the Security Council to authorise a group of willing nations (informal ad hoc alliances of states or a coalition of the willing) or an international organisation (such as the EU, NATO or the African Union) to conduct the mandated peace mission. Chapter VIII of the Charter explicitly provides for the involvement of regional organisations in maintaining international security, provided that their activities are consistent with the purposes and principles set out in Chapter I of the Charter. This study focuses on new challenges associated with the first way of organising peace missions.

The conceptual framework of UN peacekeeping missions

The aim of UN peace missions is to curb the spread of violence, enforce the protection of human rights, prevent conflicts from escalating, and ensure fundamental security and stability in crisis regions. The purpose, task spectrum and complexity of missions have changed considerably over the years. There has also been an increase in the commissioning of international organisations, especially since 1990. In conceptual terms, peace missions entail a wide spectrum of measures and approaches which may be complementary and at times overlap. These measures and approaches are aimed at establishing or maintaining world peace and international security (see Figure 1). Chapter VI provides

diplomatic and confidence-building measures as well as mechanisms for the early detection of crises, which are initially used to prevent inter-state and intra-state conflicts from escalating. Where a conflict is already in progress, peacemaking aims to initiate negotiations between the parties to the conflict under the auspices of the UN or regional mediators and to thus resolve the conflict using diplomatic means with the consent of the parties to the conflict. If a conflict cannot be resolved with diplomatic means, the UN Security Council may, on the basis of Chapter VII, adopt peace enforcement measures and instruct states or international organisations to terminate a conflict by means of military enforcement measures. Fundamentally, a distinction must therefore be made between strategic peace enforcement on the basis of a resolution (to create the conditions for a peacekeeping mission) and the tactical use of military means (to achieve the mandate objectives of an already ongoing peacekeeping mission). The consent of the parties to the conflict is not required for the former, but for the latter it often forms part of the accepted mandate. When the hostilities have ceased, peacekeeping missions will attempt to achieve peaceful conditions and to create the foundations for normalising relations between the parties to the conflict. In conceptual terms, peacekeeping is thus the first step toward post-conflict regulation and aims at preventing the resurgence of conflict.

There are some overlap and grey areas between peacekeeping and peacebuilding, which is a complex process involving military, police, legal, development policy and civil society elements. As a result, the boundaries between conflict prevention, peacemaking, peace enforcement, peacekeeping, and peacebuilding become increasingly blurred as contemporary peace operations are rarely limited to one specific type of activity.

From traditional to multidimensional peacekeeping
Traditional peacekeeping missions focus on establishing physical separation between two warring parties, which may be internationally recognised states that have consented to the presence of peacekeepers. In such operations, Blue Helmets may monitor compliance with cease-fire agreements, occupy positions along borders and demarcation lines, and monitor demilitarised zones. The idea is to separate the conflict parties in order to lay the foundations for lasting peace. This form of peacekeeping is suitable for inter-state conflict settlement. A classic example of this type of operation was the *United Nations Emergency Force* (UNEF) after the Suez crisis in 1956. Wars of independence, secessions, civil wars, and the founding of new states in the wake of decolonisation as well as the higher frequency of intra-state and transnational conflicts associated with such events warranted a transformation of the conventional state-centric model of peacekeeping. The trend toward
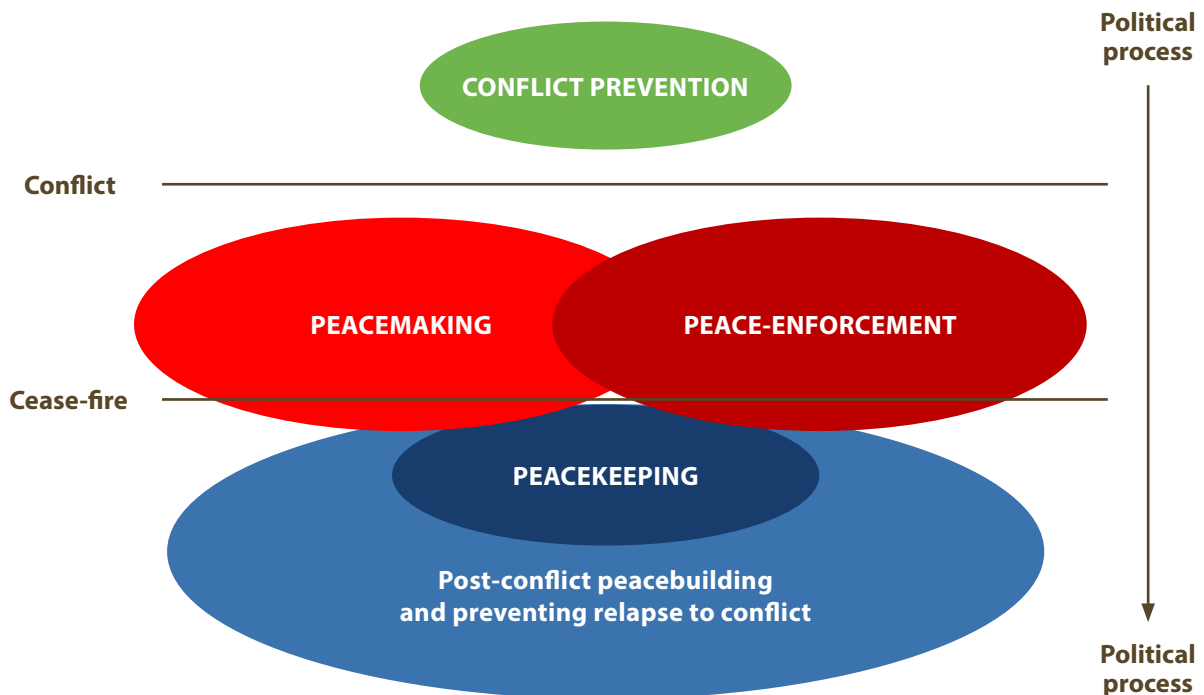

Fig. 1   Conceptual framework of UN peacekeeping operation. Author-specific figure. Source: "United Nations Peacekeeping Operations: Principles and Guidelines (2008)", peacekeeping.un.org.

more non-state conflict parties and more complex conflict constellations involving more than two parties made it necessary to expand traditional peacekeeping to include peacemaking and peacebuilding components. In addition to separating conflict parties and monitoring ceasefires, the focus was now on the implementation of complex, multidimensional peace agreements, most often following civil wars. New tasks such as the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration of armed forces and militias as well as structural reforms of the security sector in the countries of deployment extended the task spectrum of peacekeeping to include non-military post-conflict settlement tasks. Such measures are supported by civilian institutions in the crisis area, judicial and political reforms, and urgently needed material, financial or humanitarian aid. Such measures too require the consent of the different parties, although usually they are not both state actors. In addition to conventional military tasks, peacekeeping forces also assume various humanitarian and civilian tasks. The aim is to resolve the underlying causes of conflict for the long term in order to permanently move away from a state of war towards a new peace order. Current examples of this type of operation are the *United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in Mali* (MINUSMA) and the *United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in the Central African Republic* (MINUSCA).

As peacekeeping missions were often confronted with a renewed escalation of conflict intensities or had to deal with ceasefire violations or circumvention of peace treaties, more robust mandates developed over successive multidimensional missions and assigned a more active role to peacekeeping forces. In addition to the entire spectrum of tasks covered by conventional peacekeeping (securing ceasefires and providing support to implement peace agreements), such robust missions mainly include tasks aimed at protecting the civilian population. They are also aimed at stabilising important population centres, helping to restore state authority, supporting the political process as well as political, legal and economic reforms, and protecting human rights. Robust and multidimensional missions can also involve providing support to secure humanitarian aid, securing and supporting the organisation of elections, and protecting cultural institutions, if necessary through the use of military force.

Successful peacekeeping missions are followed by what we refer to as delegated peace missions, in which the United Nations gradually delegate various peacebuilding and peacekeeping tasks to local and regional organisations. Perhaps the best-known example of such delegated peacebuilding is the role played by the UN and NATO in Bosnia from the mid-1990s onwards. NATO took over the lead from the *United Nations Protection Force* (UNPROFOR), replacing it in 1995 with the *Implementation Force* (IFOR), which was in turn replaced by the *Stabilisation Force* (SFOR). Between 1995 and 2002, the UN continued to perform non-military tasks, focusing on the reconciliation of the different ethnic groups, the establishment of inclusive state structures, the processing of war crimes, and the creation of social, economic and political foundations to avoid further conflicts. Since 2005, with its *European Union Force in BiH* (EUFORBIH), the EU has led the peacebuilding efforts of the international community. The aim is to sustainably promote the political reconciliation process by establishing constitutional structures and protecting minorities as well as through economic recovery and conflict management.
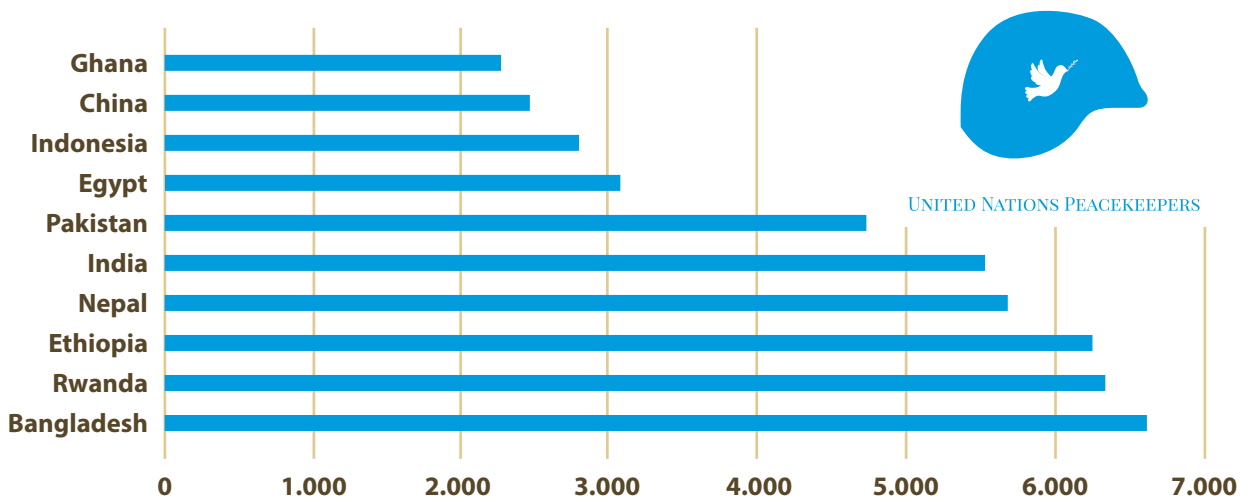

UNITED NATIONS PEACEKEEPERS

Fig. 2   Main providers of UN peacekeeping personnel. Chart based on: Uniformed Personnel Contributing Countries by Ranking, peacekeeping.un.org (2021). | Illustration: GlebGleb/shutterstock.com

Common peacekeeping problems

Peace missions must always adapt to changing conflict patterns, political realities and operational requirements. Contemporary mandates are highly complex and cover a broad spectrum of measures and programmes that extend beyond the conventional role of a neutral mediator. What is more, decision-making and operational specifics are highly politicised. This results in numerous internal and external problems. Self-made problems, such as a lack of political or material support from member states, have accompanied peace missions from the start. The UN special budget is notoriously underfunded for peace missions, for example. Furthermore, the need for a consensual adoption of a resolution by the permanent members in the Security Council often means that peace missions only pursue limited goals and are subject to major restrictions. The particular interests of the permanent members have thus reduced the chances of success of mandated missions from the start or have entirely prevented peace operations from taking place at all. As a result, operations in which a permanent member of the Security Council is a party to the conflict have been – and still are – virtually impossible. In addition, the willingness of permanent members of the Security Council to participate in UN-led missions is decreasing in favour of self-led missions, some of which are conducted without a UN mandate. With the exception of China, which is a permanent member of the Security Council and is heavily involved in peacekeeping missions, the majority of countries providing UN Blue Helmets are thus located in the Global South (see Fig. 2) and their equipment is often outdated and their training inadequate, especially in the field of civil-military cooperation or when it comes to assuming civilian and sovereign tasks.

External problems mainly stem from new forms of conflict. Conflict parties sometimes have close ties to organised crime networks. This requires peace troops to have not only military and civilian-humanitarian capabilities but also legal and policing capabilities to resolve conflicts. Emerging war economies in which the cost-benefit analysis of the participating actors still favours a continuation of conflict make it difficult to press ahead with a political reconciliation process, to guarantee human security, and to achieve economic stabilisation. What is more, the proliferation of war weapons increases the capabilities of non-cooperative actors to the point that it sometimes becomes necessary to use more intensive military means to implement mandates, which in most cases are unavailable, however. As a result, Blue Helmets are also increasingly becoming the direct target of military or terrorist attacks. The aim of these attacks often is to discredit the international operation in order to provoke countermeasures that fall outside the framework of the mandate. Misconduct of UN peace troops, such as involvement with local crime or sexual abuse committed by peacekeepers, is also exploited to delegitimise missions in the media. Further risks arise when conflict dynamics expose the original mandates as insufficient. For one thing, efforts to reorient the operation may fail due to a lack of consensus in the Security Council. This would result in an already ongoing peace mission being faced with an impossible challenge due to inadequate funds or mandated powers. For another thing, peace missions too depend on political support and public acceptance and are subject to casualty aversion. Internal political pressure in the member states can therefore result in the peace mission being aborted because of casualties or a lack of positive effects.

New peacekeeping challenges

Alongside well-known problems and their exacerbation, the future is also expected to bring new challenges. These challenges will arise from new forms of conflict, climate change, hybrid threats, and the positions of and relations between permanent members of the Security Council.

New forms of conflict

Many conflicts are fought by non-state actors. As a result, the conventional kind of inter-state peacekeeping that is state-centric and focuses on separating the conflicting parties is hardly applicable. Multidimensional peacekeeping and peacebuilding are also faced with the same complex counterinsurgency and civil war scenarios that make it difficult to achieve military victory in asymmetric conflicts against non-cooperative actors. What is more, asymmetric multiparty conflicts, in which a state faces several non-state groups that are in a civil war at the same time, often undermine the achievements and stabilisation efforts of multidimensional peace missions. Future forms of conflict that, unlike in the Cold War era, are increasingly fought along religious, ethnic and identitarian lines rather than along ideological, political and social lines, will require even more robust mandates. More robust mandates also include the need to further reconsider the traditional military passivity and defensive character of UN forces. The one-dimensional military component of peacekeeping operations and its focus on land forces must also be reconsidered without abandoning the principles of peacekeeping. Against radical and non-cooperative actors, UN forces too must be able to react flexibly to conflict dynamics. In addition to integrating and reconciling conflict parties that are willing to negotiate, radical, non-integrable conflict parties must be fought with military force. The use of military force at the tactical level requires more robust mandates and the ability of peacekeeping forces to assume the role of a party to the conflict. A combination of multi-dimensionality (in terms of military-civilian components) with multi-domain operation components (MDO; multi-domain: air, land, sea, space, cyber) in the sense of JIMP (joint, interagency, multinational and public) can broaden the capability spectrum of peacekeepers. It would also optimise the harmonisation of civilian and military components and inter-institutional coordination.

Fig. 3 *Rwandan military personnel with the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID) perform a short-range patrol in Northern Darfur. Sudan, October 12, 2009.* | Photo: UN Photo/Olivier Chassot, source: https://www.flickr.com/un_photo/

More robust mandates and complex conflict dynamics also make it necessary to rethink the training of armed forces intended for such operations. In traditional peacekeeping, military units are generally suited to separating conflict parties and, to a lesser degree, to assuming police tasks such as site protection. Training currently focuses on physically defeating similarly organised armed formations. With domestic conflicts, this type of training is limited in its applicability to counterinsurgency, anti-terror or peace operations. This is because, firstly, most countries, especially Germany, have not developed their own counterinsurgency doctrine (neither supply- nor demand-oriented [1]) and, secondly, existing approaches are not applied equally by all nations involved. Although such counter-terrorism operations are not usually intended to be part of peace missions, it is likely that these capabilities will be necessary in future operations to enforce a mandate. The equipment of the armed forces involved must also be adapted more closely to the prevailing conflict dynamics. Peacekeeping missions rarely have civil-military command and control coordination or sufficient MDO elements. In such cases, it therefore becomes necessary to request resources, personnel and capabilities outside the mandate from parallel missions. This makes it difficult not only to implement the mandate but also to protect one's own forces.

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[1] Supply or search-and-destroy strategies involve the use of military means to subdue insurgents and focus on a purely military approach. Demand or hearts-and-minds strategies, on the other hand, look at counterinsurgency as a primarily political approach that accepts the insurgents' demands as legitimate. Demand strategies thus require an analysis of whether the insurgents' demands are legitimate and feasible and of how they can be taken into consideration in the peacekeeping process.

Fig. 4 *A MONUSCO APC (armoured personnel carrier) is greeted by local residents near the front line in the Beni region where the UN is backing the FARDC (Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo) in an operation against ADF (Allied Democratic Forces) militia, March 13 2014.* |
Photo: UN Photo/Sylvain Liechti, source: https://www.flickr.com/un_photo/

**Relations between permanent members
of the Security Council**

Given the diverging preferences between the West, Russia and China, greater disagreement over the objectives of future peace missions is to be expected. This would result in fewer and weaker mandates, while the aspects of good governance and conflict resolution would be further watered down by the competition between democratic and authoritarian UN countries. UN mission failures would be used by regional major powers to establish their own conflict resolution operations as an antithesis. What is more, Russia, for example, already employs semi-private security companies in crisis areas, some of which have objectives that run counter to those of simultaneous UN missions and lead to political competition for the favour of the government of the host nation. Transnational enterprises, whose main interest is to gain access to raw material sources, are also involved in conflicts as an extended arm of countries with conflicting interests and can impede the objectives of UN missions. The aim of such activities is to enforce diametrically opposed interests and thus to discredit the peace efforts of the international community. The danger of UN missions being delegitimised will become more likely in future due to regional powers going it alone in grey areas of international law or due to Security Council blockades. UN missions have failed in the past as a result of the conflicting positions of Security Council members. If this trend continues, there is a risk that the UN might lose its role as the primary international peacekeeping organisation.

**Climate change, proliferation and
disruptive technologies**

Operations will also become more complex in combination with other issues such as climate change or technological disruptions[2]. The expected implications of climate change for security policy, for example, will mean that peace operations may have to involve more humanitarian crisis management and disaster control tasks than ever before. Future mandates will factor in climate change and its effects on the relevant area of operations. As a result, climate challenges will come to play an important role in the reform projects of multidimensional peace missions. As a result, peacekeepers must also be trained in civil-military cooperation for natural disasters and humanitarian crises and carry suitable equipment. There is also a need to improve, standardise and coordinate the training of peacekeepers in the field of disaster relief and coordination with local and external civilian actors.

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2   See "The security-policy effects of digitisation: Future forms of conflict and conflict management", Metis Study No. 1 (February 2018); "Increasing competition for resources", Metis Study No. 9 (November 2018); "Every tenth of a degree counts", Metis Interview No. 1 (May 2019).

Regions of fragile statehood will be the dominant operational scenario in the coming years. Hybrid threats and disruptive technologies will further complicate future challenges as countries involved in peace missions can be dragged into conflicts more directly by hybrid attacks (e.g. cyber attacks or the actions of the diaspora of a conflict party). The resilience of civilian and military forces in the operational area must thus be increased, as must that of the sending state's civilian society to disinformation, cyber attacks, terror attacks and targeted subversion relating to the conflict. The success of future peace missions will increasingly depend on the level of resilience on the "home front". To achieve this resilience, there needs to be greater exchange between military leadership on the ground, political decision-makers at home, and civil society actors. The aim should be to establish the security challenges of a peace mission as an integral part of social discourse. Future UN missions will also require cyber and information components that counter disinformation campaigns in the countries of deployment and thus strengthen the establishment of civilian structures. Future peace missions must also be prepared for the influence of extended proliferation. Non-cooperative actors already have at their disposal a broad spectrum of war weapons and technologies that make it more difficult to protect peacekeeping forces and ruin the achievements of peace missions. In future, the use of commercial drones for reconnoitring and fighting UN forces will increase. The technological complexity of improvised explosive devices is also constantly evolving. Cyber attacks are likely on logistic centres, state institutions, and civilian and military facilities that will be essential for successful multidimensional operations. A similar increase in capabilities for non-cooperative, mostly non-state actors, very much like what happened in the wake of uncontrolled proliferation of Soviet weapon systems in the early 1990s, can thus be expected in future.

**Strengthening civil-military
cooperation in peacekeeping**

Since state institutions in operational areas are often eroded, if any exist at all, successful conflict resolution will have to be transformed into a form of cross-generational state-building. The success of such operations will depend on the willingness of the international community and the nations involved to conduct costly operations over several decades. Particularly in democracies with short legislative periods and high casualty aversion, it is therefore essential that peace missions are supported over several periods of government regardless of particular domestic political preferences, since peacebuilding efforts of state-building can only be completed successfully on the basis of sustainable operations. This will lead to lengthy debates in national parliaments and international bodies about the sustainability of peace operations as a means of conflict resolution and about the right time for peacekeeping to

transition to peacebuilding and state-building. Given the global increase in state fragility, most future operations will likely require the entire spectrum of governmental services to be provided or re-established as part of the operation while conflicts are still ongoing or only recently settled. For this to succeed, current multidimensional operations will have to be reformed.

State-centric peacekeeping will have to be expanded to include components of civil society. The interagency comprehensive approach at the national level will have to be expanded nationally to include a whole-of-society approach. Greater involvement of civil society actors at all levels could thus better compensate for limited state sovereignty in the operational regions and complement international efforts.

At the international level, it is also necessary to link this with a stronger "society of states" approach, in which, on the basis of common interests and values, all participating states feel consciously committed to a common set of rules in their relations with each other and play a part in the work of common institutions. While some previous mandates already provide for such aspects, they primarily pursue a state-centric top-down approach. Local and international civil society actors, although currently considered a source of stability, are understood only as an augmentation of government stabilisation efforts in the crisis-hit country. Peace missions do not pursue a bottom-up approach. What is more, local civil society actors, who are commonly regarded as opposition, are often exposed to reprisals by local government and seldom come under the explicit protection of UN Blue Helmets. Direct contact between such civil society actors and the civilian or military component of ongoing UN missions is usually marginal. Protecting such actors from the officially supported government would make it easier to solve the underlying causes of conflict.

The situation is similar when it comes to the contributions of internationally active NGOs. Although their contributions are listed in mandates, there is a lack of mission-specific and operation-specific coordinating bodies for civil-military coordination with NGOs working in the area of operations. UN forces often do not know where and to what extent NGOs operate in the crisis area and can therefore only ensure their protection to a limited extent. NGOs often refuse to seek direct coordination or cooperation with the UN mission or government. By defining minimum standards for NGOs to participate in peace operations, be it mission-specifically or directly in the DPO network, and registering them with a UN coordination source, at least those NGOs that are willing to cooperate could be better integrated into the tasks of the mandate and their protection by peace forces could be improved. Similar coordination challenges must also be pursued in the cooperation between international organisations so as to strengthen inter-institutional coordination and promote synergies.

For this to happen, further measures are necessary for the training of civilian personnel and UN forces. To this end, Germany could have the existing Bundeswehr United Nations Training Centre accredited by the UN and made available to all nations involved in a relevant operation. Existing training programmes for military observers and civilian hostile environment awareness training courses should be expanded to include courses on humanitarian aid, civil-military cooperation, aspects of intercultural communication, human security, interagency cooperation and courses on coordination with international organisations, host nations and NGOs. Courses should also be opened up to the armed forces and civilian personnel of the host nations. Training content for multinational peacekeeping units or host nation armed forces should focus on standardisation, interoperability and coordination with civilian forces in order to strengthen both the multinational coordination of armed forces and the interaction between civilian and military forces in multidimensional missions. Training content for civilian personnel of the UN mission, the host nation and NGOs should focus on civil-military coordination, inter-institutional cooperation, and intercultural communication.

Recommended action for possible contributions by the Bundeswehr

Current and future challenges point to the need for fundamental reform and expansion of existing peacekeeping approaches. In view of current and future challenges in peacekeeping, the following approaches and recommendations for action could be put forward and implemented by the Bundeswehr in any reorientation of peacekeeping.

Reform of peacekeeping operations

- Robust peace enforcement and peacekeeping should be able to precede peace consolidation and state-building missions.
- The mandate should factor in a clear separation between peace enforcement on the strategic level and military enforcement measures on the tactical level.
- The capability to take tactical military enforcement measures within the framework of the mandate must be ensured by providing adequate and sustainable military assets.
- Intensification of the peacekeeping phases, both in terms of time and materiel, should already be integrated in the initial mandate, i.e. missions should not be limited in advance in terms of time, personnel or equipment, and augmentation contingents and funds should be planned in advance.
- Mandates should provide for the involvement of local and international civil society actors and regulate their coordination with civilian and military UN contingents to distribute tasks in a specific way so as to avoid duplicating and wasting efforts between the international community and NGOs. To this end, a mission-specific

Fig. 5 *A UN helicopter from the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) delivers electoral material to a mountainous region outside Port-au-Prince, Haiti for the second round of the senatorial elections.* | Photo: UN Photo/Logan Abassi, source: https://www.flickr.com/un_photo/

civil-military cooperation (CIMIC) and JIMP component must be established.

Reinforcing UN peacekeeping and adapting it to conflict types

- Future peacekeeping missions are multi-domain operations and should therefore comprise military air, land, sea, space and cyber components and precisely define their coordination with and contributions to civilian elements.
- UN missions should all use the same civil-military operational command and control systems to ensure that all participating contingents are involved in exchanging information and preparing an operational picture for decision support.
- Germany should consider creating a national counterinsurgency doctrine for peace operations or derive a mission-specific doctrine from the mandate.
- Discussing the use of reconnaissance and armed drones, satellite reconnaissance, cyber warfare and anti-disinformation capabilities should not be taboo.

Training of peacekeeping contingents

- More than ever, contingents need to be trained for potential counterinsurgency measures. The aim is not only to actively fight non-cooperative actors in order to protect friendly forces but also to protect the civilian population.
- In addition to counterinsurgency, contingents must cover civil-military cooperation, multinational coordination, civil society cooperation, and intercultural training.
- Germany and the Bundeswehr could use the Bundeswehr United Nations Training Centre to offer mission-specific training for peacekeepers, civilian personnel and host nation contingents.

UN peacekeeping, state and international cooperation

- The comprehensive approach should be reinforced on a national level and expanded to include a whole-of-society approach, which should be linked with international organisations to implement a society-of-states approach.
- States and organisations that are not directly involved should support those states that are with technology and knowledge transfer from the sidelines so that complex mandates can be carried out by a greater number of states.
- Establishing lessons learnt and lessons identified between organisations involved in peace missions will improve inter-institutional organisation and cooperation with the host nation (e.g. by establishing a Peacekeeping Coordination Council between the EU and the African Union).

UN peacekeeping and civil society cooperation

- Local civil society actors and organisations should explicitly be placed under the protection of the peacekeepers.
- The general coordination agency for NGOs in the DPO should be established and expanded.
- Mission-specific coordination points should be established for local actors and for national and international NGOs.

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