

The Future of Peace Operations (A brief on Challenges Annual Forum – 2022)

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Introduction

UN Secretary-General's report '*Our Common Agenda*¹' called to develop a 'New Agenda for Peace' (NAP) and stressed the need for a 'new effort to agree on more collective security responses and a meaningful set of steps to address the complex challenges the international community faces today'. The Common Agenda includes 12 commitments made during the Declaration on the Commemoration of the UN 75th anniversary. The UN engaged many think tanks, international NGOs, member states, and academicians to provide inputs for the NAP. The NAP is likely to renew the UN efforts to agree on more effective collective security responses, investing in prevention and peacebuilding, and a meaningful set of steps to manage emerging risks, especially in the wake of the Ukrainian conflict.

Challenges Annual Forum for the year 2022 (CAF-22), was **co-hosted by the USI of India with Challenges Forum** on 06 and 07 October 2022 in the premises of USI of India, New Delhi. The Forum is a global partnership of more than 50 peace operations organisations and departments in 24 countries, representing government agencies, peacekeeping training centres, think tanks, and research institutions from all around the world. Members come from the major troop, police, and financial contributing countries, and include the permanent five members of the UNSC. Challenges Forum International Secretariat is hosted by FBA – the Swedish Agency for Peace, Security and Development – on behalf of the Challenges Forum Partnership².

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CAF-22 in New Delhi provided a platform for over 145 partners, policymakers, practitioners, and scholars from 26 different countries around the world. These representatives included civilians, military and police practitioners and collectively generated thoughts and reflections on the future of peace operations. The focus of deliberations was on the NAP initiative and the *Summit of the Future* scheduled to take place in 2024. Hence, this report outlines current trends within global peace and security, as well as the Challenges Forum's partnerships collective, and suggested, inputs to the NAP.³

The report lists the major events, brief discussions, and gives out the key takeaways of the CAF-22.

Proceedings Day 1 (06 October 2022)

The Opening Session. The session was coordinated by Maj Gen PK Goswami, (Retd), Deputy Director General, USI of India; he set the agenda for the session with his welcome remarks. The eminent speakers included Maj Gen BK Sharma, (Retd), Director General (DG), the USI of India and Ms Pernilla Rydén, Director, Challenges Forum International Secretariat (CFIS). The DG USI of India welcomed all delegates to the premises and wished for fruitful discussions. The Director CFIS explained the objectives and sequence of events for the CAF-22. The session was chaired by Mr Per Olsson Fridh, the Chairperson of the Challenges Forum Partner Meeting and Director of the Folke Bernadotte Academy; former Minister for International Development Cooperation in Sweden.

The Inaugural Address. The address was given by Shri Sanjay Verma, Secretary (West), Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India. In his brief talk, he emphasised the emerging role of the UN, the need to include Troop Contributing Countries (TCCs) in the consultations on deployments and the mismatch in mandate and resources.

"It is important that peacekeeping missions are given a clear and realistic mandate, which is also matched equally by the provision of adequate resources [...] Consulting TCCs while reviewing mandates should become a norm".⁴

- Shri Sanjay Verma, Secretary, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India

Keynote Address. In her talk delivered online, Ms Comfort Ero, the ‘President and CEO of the International Crisis Group on Current Global Trends affecting Peace Operations’ addressed the issues of future global security risks and peace opportunities. She spoke about the emerging challenges and requirement of capacity building of the UN and Regional organisations to meet these challenges.

High-level Panel. The panel of eminent speakers deliberated upon the key issues of future peace operations and regional peace and security arrangements. The panel covered future multilateral peace operations and their linkages to regional peace and security arrangements. Most of the panel members agreed that partnerships with regional organisations and sub-organisations could be the future of peace operations. The eminent panellists included Mr Jean-Pierre Lacroix, Under Secretary-General for Peace Operations, United Nations; Ms Elizabeth Spehar, Assistant Secretary-General for Peacebuilding Support, Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, United Nations; and Ms Cynthia Chigwenya, African Youth Ambassador for Peace for Southern Africa, African Union. The discussions were moderated by Mr Ahmed Abdel Latif, Director General, Cairo International Centre for Conflict Resolution, Peacekeeping and Peacebuilding (CCCPA).

“We need to adapt our mindsets to these very flexible, volatile, and unpredictable environments in which we operate in peacekeeping. We need to do this collectively together with our troop and police-contributing countries”⁵

- Jean-Pierre Lacroix, Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations, United Nations

As existing multidimensional peace operations are transitioning out and closing, future peace operations are likely to be smaller in size with “a more limited, but realistic, set of goals”. However, the extent of complex protection challenges in conflict-affected areas indicates that a price will be paid for decreasing the footprint of UN peace operations – the brunt of which will likely be borne by civilians. Challenges Forum participants expressed concern that deploying UN peace operations with a lighter footprint will negatively impact the extent of protection work, especially in terms of the physical protection of civilians.

Working Group Discussions

The participants of the Challenges Annual Forum discussed the Future of Peace Operations through three sub-themes: the Place for Preventive Deployment in Diplomacy, the Protection of Civilians, and Protecting the Protectors.

Place for Preventive Deployments in Diplomacy. The working group was chaired by Ambassador Vijay Thakur Singh (Retd), the Director General, of the Indian Council of World Affairs (ICWA), New Delhi. Other speakers and moderators included Maj Gen (Dr) AK Bardalai (Retd), with a field perspective provided by Judy Hylton, former Senior Adviser to UN Truce Supervision Organisation (UNTSO). Dr Richard Gowen co-authored the ignite paper along with Maj Gen (Dr) AK Bardalai (Retd). The discussions involved a period of great power rivalry and where observer missions are expected to again become more prominent. How can future observer missions help prevent the escalation of a conflict? What should they look like, and how can they best be complemented by diplomatic efforts resolving larger political processes?

The discussions centred on the UN Secretary-General's report on *Our Common Agenda* which noted that investments in prevention and preparedness pay for themselves many times over in the human and financial costs that are spared.⁶ As we engage in the future of peace operations the option of launching UN operations to prevent, rather than react to, the conflict remains important. Many peace operations, including UN Special Political Missions, could contribute to conflict prevention in different ways. Recently, there is a renewed interest in what so-called "one-dimensional missions" – observer operations that are solely or primarily military, without the broad multi-dimensional mandates that have characterised many larger post-Cold War operations – may offer in terms of prevention⁷. "One-dimensional missions" could become more prominent in the years ahead as they are less expensive and less intrusive compared to multi-dimensional operations, and perhaps more importantly, are easier to negotiate in a divided UNSC. The Challenges Forum partnership assessed that in certain contexts, preventive deployments should become one of the instruments in international peace and security as part of a spectrum of peace operations.

Protection of Civilians. After 1999, the Protection of Civilians (PoC) has become the primary mandate of most UN peace operations. The working group session was chaired online by Cassandra Stuart Clark, Senior Advisor, U.S. Department of State. Dr Lotte Vermeij, Senior Expert on Sexual Violence in Conflict and UN Peace Operations, Norwegian Refugee Council had fielded the ignite paper written jointly with Col (Dr) KK Sharma, (Retd). The field perspective to the discussions was provided by Mr Mike Dzakuma, Senior Civil Affairs Officer, UN Mission in the Republic of South Sudan (UNMISS).

The discussions deliberated upon the possibilities of future peace operations with a lighter footprint. Such operational settings require a different approach to the concept of PoC. PoC remains the core objective of the UN as it is key to both the credibility and legitimacy of the organisation. However, implementing PoC mandates is facing growing challenges. Significant progress at the normative level as well as increased attention in the UNSC has however not resulted in better PoC on the ground. Many reports suggest increased violence against civilians in 2021.⁸ Peacekeepers are often deployed in areas where there may be no peace to keep, whilst simultaneously lacking sufficient means to carry out their protection tasks. Extensive PoC mandates have led to unrealistic expectations. As a result, confidence in UN peace operations has decreased, demonstrated by recent violent protests against the UN missions in the Central African Republic, DR Congo, Mali, and South Sudan.⁹ Challenges remain in translating early warning into early action due to a lack of resources or the right mindset to respond and restrictions imposed by the host government that hamper the freedom of movement of UN peace operations. While a proactive, robust mindset and freedom of movement are some of the key requirements for UN peace operations to be able to protect civilians, reviews need to be undertaken on how scarce resources can be best utilised in today's mission settings.

Protection of Peacekeepers. The working group session was chaired by Mr Babu Rahman, Senior Principal Research Analyst, Multilateral Research Group, UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO). The ignite and discussion paper was prepared by Dr Sara Lindberg Bromley, Researcher, Department of Peace and Conflict Research, Uppsala University. The field

perspective for the discussions came from Lt Col Will Meddings, former commander of the Long-Range Reconnaissance Group, UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in Mali (MINUSMA).

With 4280 fatalities of peacekeepers since 1948¹⁰ (1111 due to malicious intent), TCCs have been vocal about keeping their peacekeepers safe and secure whilst implementing their mandates. Mr Stephane Jean, a judicial officer at the Justice and Corrections Service (JCS) of the Office of Rule of Law and Security Institutions (OROLSI) stated that both these entities with the active support of the UN Department of Peace Operations (UNDPO) have worked inside the Department towards operationalising the UN Resolution 2589. As Stephane observed that the JCS, OROSLI, and UNDPO, coordinate strategic and operational support on mandate delivery, strengthening Member States' support, leveraging partnerships, and setting policy priorities in these areas. It supports the work of UNPOs and special political missions as well as other UN entities, to implement the rule of law aspects of their respective mandates.

Attack patterns against peacekeepers need to be analysed by the operational leadership and design better operational responses. This data can be used to improve local perceptions of peacekeepers while improving their safety and security. The participants felt that increased attacks on peacekeepers in field missions are alarming and directly affect their ability to engage with and protect local communities. Deliberate and targeted acts of violence against peace operations have come into focus recently. In addition to improving access to training and equipment, added efforts to track and understand patterns and drivers of attacks also contribute to the safety and security of peace operations and improve the overall mission performance and mandate implementation.¹¹ A more nuanced understanding of both drivers and patterns of attacks on peace operations matters for devising appropriate operational responses and relies on systematically collected and detailed data. As the UN moves towards more data-driven approaches, continued efforts can unlock important insights to inform better operational judgement and decision-making of mission leadership at all levels.

Day 2 (07 October 2022):

Mis- and Dis-information's Impact on Missions. A spotlight presentation was given by Bintou Keita, Special Representative of the Secretary-General in the MONUSCO. The speaker narrated attacks on the peacekeepers in eastern Congo, which were traced back to the disinformation on social media. With the help of video clips of the attacks, the speaker was able to explain how peace operations and their mission leadership can better contain mis- and dis-information risks and better leverage opportunities for strategic communications as part of a whole-of-mission approach. A spotlight presentation from the field was followed by an armchair discussion with questions from the audience.

Mr Francesca Mold, Chief of Strategic Communications, UN Department of Peace Operations spoke about several converging global 'shocks' that are raising the risks for new conflicts as well as exacerbating and re-shaping the existing ones. A global economic decline has contributed to a lack of supply of commodities and subsequent growing inequalities among countries and people. In addition, the effects of climate change, including shifting weather patterns, drought and environmental degradation, have led to unprecedented climate risks for a large number of civilians, including the displacement of populations.¹² These developments result in inequalities and increased risks in many of the most vulnerable countries and conflict-ridden areas of the world. Mis- and disinformation forms a growing threat to peacekeeping. It negatively affects the safety and security of peace operations, as well as their ability to implement mandates effectively. The UNSC has introduced language on mis- and dis-information into the mandates of the four largest peace operations between 2019 and 2022. Challenges in this aspect come for peace operations and mission leadership to better contain mis- and dis-information risks and leverage opportunities for strategic communications as part of a whole-of-mission approach.

Future Perspectives: Towards a New Agenda for Peace. This was an important session, with many eminent participants. The session was moderated by Mr Per Olsson Fridh, Chair, of the Challenges Forum Partner Meeting and Director General of the Folke Bernadotte Academy; former Minister for International Development Cooperation in Sweden. The participants included

Mr Jean-Pierre Lacroix, Under Secretary-General for Peace Operations, UN; Ms Cynthia Chigwenya, African Youth Ambassador for Peace for Southern Africa, African Union; Mr Kano Takehiro, Director General, International Peace Cooperation Headquarters, Cabinet Office, Japan; and Lt. Gen Jasbir Singh Lidder (Retd), Former Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Force Commander of the UN Mission in Sudan (UNMIS).

The focus of presentations and discussions by the panel evolved around CAF-22 collective reflections and outcomes and its contribution to the UN Secretary General's NAP and the Summit of the Future in 2024. The UN Strategy for the Digital Transformation of Peacekeeping is a great start but more training and accompanying human, financial and technological resources are needed to better understand and monitor media landscapes. UN peace operations also need to get better at storytelling and use strategic communications more effectively to counter hostilities.

"The New Agenda for Peace should not be constructed on the idea that we are going to introduce all kinds of new and shiny tools, new institutions, and new processes. I think we roughly have the tools we need, and we need to build on that".¹³

- Elizabeth Spehar, Assistant Secretary-General for Peacebuilding Support, Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, UN

Today the world is facing a growing number of armed conflicts. A total of 56 wars were recorded in 2020, the highest number since 1945. The level of violence and the distribution of risks differ by a region where roughly half of the recorded conflicts are currently located on the African continent.¹⁴ The very nature of conflict is also transforming. There are trends of more protracted intra-state and regional conflicts (involving transnational networks), a multitude of new actors (including private military contractors), rapidly evolving weapons technologies and disruptive digital technologies as well as the use of mis- and dis-information. These developments make it increasingly difficult for international peace operations to understand and address the complex and underlying drivers of conflict.

Plenary: Discussing Key Takeaways with Experts. Leading experts and policymakers reflected on the key working group conclusions and discussed the next steps. The participants included Dr Emily Paddon Rhoads, Associate Professor, Swarthmore College; Dr Yvan Ilunga, Assistant Professor of Political Science and International Relations, Salve Regina University; Ms Flaminia Minelli, Chief Policy, Evaluation and Training Division, UNPOs; Lt Gen Chander Prakash (Retd), former Force Commander, MONUC; with Mr Dawit Yohannes, Senior Researcher, Institute for Security Studies South Africa as a moderator. The key takeaways discussed and collated are given in the table.

CAF22 Key Takeaways¹⁵

- ▶ **Recommitment to UN principles, norms, and values:** In a world of growing polarisation with critical converging threats to international stability, the 'New Agenda for Peace' is vital to re-energise multilateral peace and security and to obligate Member States to uphold the UN Charter.
- ▶ **The primacy of politics:** Sustainable political solutions addressing underlying causes of conflict should continue to be at the core of peace operations. In supporting host states, field missions should be careful not to unintentionally impede incentives for national peace processes.
- ▶ **Flexible and well-resourced peace operations:** More creative and adaptable mandates will allow fit-for-purpose field missions with the operational freedom and flexibility to effectively adjust to fast-evolving threats, needs and contexts. Mandates need to be matched with adequate resources - a severe lack of funds and equipment are directly affecting the performance and credibility of peace operations.
- ▶ **Digital transformation:** Strategic foresight through timely, integrated data and digital technologies will significantly improve the performance as well as the safety and security of peace operations.
- ▶ **Containment of mis- and dis-information:** Better and more skills, tools, and resources are needed to understand digital social media landscapes to avoid growing threats to peace operations. Field missions need to become better in containing mis- and disinformation, and leverage opportunities for strategic communications through storytelling based on everyday efforts of peace operations

- **Partnerships:** Regional organisations and security arrangements play important roles in the maintenance of peace and security. The UN must continue developing effective ways to engage with regional organisations, including on questions of capabilities, financing, but also norms and principles. Given the cross-border nature of many conflicts, regional mandates for peace operations should be considered when needed. UN engagement with *ad hoc* regional security arrangements needs to be based on clear common political objectives.

Official Closing. The closing of the CAF-22 was done by Lt Gen M Fernandez, Director General, Directorate of Staff Duties, Indian Army; Maj Gen BK Sharma, (Retd), Director General, USI of India; and Ms Pernilla Rydén, Director, Challenges Forum International Secretariat (CFIS). The speakers reflected upon the deliberations of the two days and spoke about the shape of UN operations to come. Much has been done over the past years to promote and maintain international peace and security, including through the *Action for Peacekeeping (A4P)*¹⁶ agenda and the reform of the UN Peace and Security Pillar. In many cases, the UN has been resilient in dealing with emerging peace and security challenges and has managed to maintain a minimum degree of cooperation and operational resilience even in challenging contexts, including in Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and Mali. However, the declining number of UN peacekeepers deployed to conflict areas over the past decade (there has been no new UN peacekeeping mission since 2014) is not seen by the Challenges Forum partnership to match the current trends in conflict. Instead, it rather indicates that there will be a larger need for multilateral international peace operations in the near to medium future.

*“There are no shortcuts to international peace and security, peace can only be achieved on the ground, working together with affected countries and their people. It is therefore essential to put the population first and to apply a people-centred approach to peace operations”.*¹⁷

- Ms Pernilla Rydén, Director of the Challenges Forum International Secretariat

Conclusion

The CAF-22 generated useful insights and concrete takeaways on the future of peace operations and the NAP. Throughout the two-day event, partners demonstrated a willingness and positive attitude to make the discussions lively and useful. The deliberations were in multilateral spirits and towards enhancing international peace and security. In an increasingly divided world, with a multitude of volatile risks, it will be key for future peace operations to have the capacity to adapt quickly and flexibly to new environments. Innovative out-of-the-box thinking is crucial to ensure that future peace operations can both prevent and respond to fast-moving situations where possible – and based on clear political objectives – together with regional security arrangements.

Various speakers during the discussions pointed to the fact that the issue of the future of UNPOs will remain high on the agenda in the run-up to the NAP and the Summit of the Future in 2024. The USI of India and the Challenges Forum partnership considered the reflections and takeaways as useful inputs and pointers for future events and strategic consultations when finalising the NAP. This was further deliberated upon in the follow-up Partners Meeting till a formal note for submission to the UNDPO was arrived at.

*“We should take action and see that we are able to re-imagine, and re-look the entire concept of UN Peacekeeping, in a world that is mired with political uncertainties”.*¹⁸

– Maj Gen BK Sharma (Retd) Director General, USI of India

Endnotes

¹ <https://www.un.org/en/content/common-agenda-report/>

² Partnership of Global Actors; <https://challengesforum.org/partners/>

³ Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, New Agenda for Peace, United Nations, <https://dppa.un.org/en/new-agenda-for-peace>.

⁴ https://challengesforum.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/CAF22_report.pdf (p.11)

⁵ Ibid. p.9

⁶ Our Common Agenda-Report of The Secretary-General, United Nations, 2021, <https://www.un.org/en/common-agenda>

⁷ Alexandra Novosseloff, A Comparative Study of Older One-Dimensional UN Peace Operations: Is the Future of UN Peacekeeping Its Past? (EPON/FES, 2022).

⁸ Ninety Per Cent of War-Time Casualties Are Civilians, Speakers Stress, Pressing Security Council to Fulfil Responsibility, Protect Innocent People in Conflicts, United Nations, <https://press.un.org/en/2022/sc14904.doc.htm>

⁹ Sengenya, C. Why We're Protesting Against UN Peacekeepers in Congo. The New Humanitarian 2022, <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news-feature/2022/08/18/DRC-MONUSCO-protests-peacekeeping>

¹⁰ UN Peacekeeping.Total Number of Fatalities. <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/fatalities>

¹¹ Protecting the Protectors, Challenges Forum, <https://www.challengesforum.org/paper/background-paper-protecting-the-protectors/>

¹² Warner, K., Hamza, M., Oliver-Smith, A., Renaud, F. and Julca, A., 2010.Climate change, environmental degradation and migration. *Natural Hazards*, 55(3), pp.689-715.

¹³ https://challengesforum.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/CAF22_report.pdf (p.3)

¹⁴ Strand, H. and Hegre, H., 2021. Trends in Armed Conflict, 1946–2020. *Conflict Trends*, 3, p.4.

¹⁵ From CAF22 Summary Notes

¹⁶ Action for Peacekeeping (A4P), United Nations Peacekeeping, <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/action-for-peacekeeping-a4p>

¹⁷ https://challengesforum.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/CAF22_report.pdf (p. 15).

¹⁸ https://challengesforum.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/CAF22_report.pdf (p. 5)