Challenges in International Peace Operations: Strengthening Partnership Peacekeeping

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Introduction

International peace operations have evolved from basic ceasefire monitoring to addressing complex global challenges. Early missions, such as the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO) to monitor the implementation of the Israel-Arab Armistice Agreements, established in May 1948, and the United Nations Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan (UNMOGIP), formed in January 1949, were mandated to monitor and enforce ceasefire agreements between conflicting parties (Ahmed et al., 2021; Dawson, 1987). These missions were primarily tasked with monitoring and reporting, while diplomatic efforts sought peaceful conflict resolution. Comprising military observers and lightly armed personnel, they focused on confidence-building and ceasefire enforcement. Additionally, peacekeepers were predominantly male, and troop-contributing countries were limited.

The United Nations (UN) has long served as a beacon of hope for the world's most vulnerable populations. Despite persistent challenges, it has made significant progress in sustaining this role. Since its first peacekeeping mission, the UN has deployed over 2 million peacekeepers from 125 countries to 71 missions across more than 40 nations, saving countless lives in the process (United Nations Peacekeeping, 2024).

However, the journey of UN peacekeeping has not been without its challenges. As global conflicts have become more complex and multifaceted, UN Peace Operations have had to adapt to an increasingly demanding environment. Today, peacekeeping missions are tasked with a broad range of responsibilities beyond maintaining peace and security. These include facilitating political processes, protecting civilians, disarming combatants, overseeing elections, monitoring human rights, rebuilding infrastructure, and restoring the rule of law.

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The Contemporary Landscape of Global Peacekeeping Operations (POs)

Several significant constraints and challenges mark the environment where the UN and its peacekeeping missions operate today. These factors have shaped the nature and effectiveness of POs, which must now navigate a complex and rapidly evolving global landscape. Since the end of the Cold War, the number of conflict zones has significantly increased. Out of the total 71 missions authorized by the UN, only 23 were launched during the Cold War era (from 1945 to 1991), a span of 46 years. In contrast, the remaining 48 missions have been initiated approximately 33 years since the Cold War ended. Notably no new UN peacekeeping missions have been authorized since 2014, and only 11 remain operational as of the present (Peace Operations Training Institute, 2018; United Nations Peacekeeping, n.d.).

The surge in conflict zones has placed additional demands on the UN's peacekeeping capacity, stretching resources and operational capabilities to their limits. The growing scope of these mandates, described as 'Christmas Tree' by the UNSC, has placed immense pressure on 'traditional' peacekeeping. This shift towards more comprehensive and complex mandates has been further underscored by the 2015 report from then-Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, which declared that the UN had entered an era of *partnership peacekeeping* (United Nations, 2015). This new era highlights the increasing need for collaboration and partnerships in executing Peace Operations.

Concurrently, the UN has faced a reduction in funding and human resources for its POs, primarily due to decreased contributions from member states. The UN peacekeeping budget peaked at 8.3 billion USD in 2014-2015, but by the 2023-2024 fiscal year, it had declined to 6.1 billion USD (United Nations Peacekeeping, n.d., para. 7). This decline in funding is one of the key reasons for the lack of new peacekeeping missions authorized since 2014, besides the closure of a few existing missions.

The global geopolitical landscape has also contributed to the challenges faced by UN peacekeeping efforts. The power contestation among the Permanent Members of the UN Security Council (UNSC; P5) has resulted in significant fragmentation, undermining the strategic decision-making process within the UNSC. This further complicates the UN's ability to respond swiftly and decisively to emerging conflicts.

Moreover, the growing involvement of regional and sub-regional organizations, such as the African Union (AU), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), the G5 Sahel, the European Union (EU), and NATO, has added another layer of complexity. While these organizations can be crucial in addressing regional security concerns, the possibility of conflicting interests among these diverse players cannot be overlooked. Furthermore, the rise of private military companies (e.g., the Wagner Group) challenges UN peacekeeping by introducing well-equipped yet unaccountable actors. Their presence risks undermining UN credibility and complicating mission dynamics.

In addition to these challenges, the threat spectrum has expanded to include terrorist groups, religious extremist organizations, human traffickers, drug cartels, mercenaries, and other destabilizing forces. The use of asymmetric warfare tactics, such as Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs), terrorist attacks, and the exploitation of human shields, has further complicated the security environment. The rise in attacks on peacekeepers is particularly alarming; since the inception of UN peacekeeping, 4,398 peacekeepers have lost their lives in the line of duty. Notably, 2,170 of these casualties occurred between 2004 and 2024, compared to 2,228 from 1948 to 2004, highlighting

the increasing frequency and severity of attacks on peacekeepers (United Nations, 2024).

The adverse effects of climate change, environmental disasters, and degradation have also contributed to the worsening security situation. These factors have led to forced migrations, food security crises, and heightened conflicts, further exacerbating the challenges faced by peacekeeping missions. Additionally, the spread of 'Misinformation, Disinformation, Malinformation and Hate Speech' (MDMH)[2] has disproportionately impacted POs. Negative perceptions about the intentions, operations, and effectiveness of UN missions erode the trust between local populations and UN personnel.

The Role of Partnerships in Contemporary Peacekeeping

While the UN remains the principal actor in global peacekeeping, it has never been the sole peacekeeper. *Partnership peacekeeping* is not a novel concept in which the UN collaborates with various external actors. Over 40% of peacekeeping missions have been non-UN missions, although the UN authorized, endorsed, and supported these operations. This collaborative approach has become essential to modern POs, reflecting the growing complexity of global conflicts and the need for a multifaceted response.

In *partnership peacekeeping*, non-UN elements (typically military forces) engage directly with violent factions to restore stability, creating the necessary conditions for the UN's multidimensional approach to address political, developmental, social, economic, and administrative issues. The complementary nature of these two efforts—military stabilization and comprehensive peacebuilding—has proven effective in many cases, as each component supports and enhances the other's ability to achieve long-term peace and stability in conflict zones. *Partnership peacekeeping* can take several forms, including:

- The contemporaneous deployment of both UN and non-UN forces within the same operational theater, working side by side to achieve common objectives.
- The sequential deployment of UN and non-UN forces, where one follows the other to ensure a seamless transition of responsibilities.
- The UN only provides non-UN partners with technical, financial, and logistical support.

The UN has undertaken numerous POs in partnership with regional organizations, coalitions of states, and individual member states, with varying degrees of success in stabilizing conflict zones. As discussed below, several notable examples of *partnership peacekeeping* illustrate the potential benefits and challenges.

Timor-Leste (1999-2000)

Following intense violence after the 1999 referendum, the UN's political mission, UNAMET, faced significant challenges in maintaining stability. In response, the UN Security Council authorized a multinational force led by Australia, known as INTERFET, to stabilize the situation. INTERFET's swift intervention effectively controlled the violence and created the conditions necessary for a comprehensive UN peacekeeping mission to follow. This sequential deployment allowed for the return,

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[2] For more information on MDMH, please visit:
https://peacekeepingresourcehub.un.org/en/training/rtp/mdmh

reconciliation, and reintegration of former rebels into the society and the conduct of elections, ultimately ensuring the return of normalcy to the country.

Sudan (2007-2011)

The UN-AU hybrid POs in Sudan, known as UNAMID, aimed to address the humanitarian crisis in Darfur. While the mission began with high hopes, it ultimately struggled to achieve its objectives. The contesting legitimacy between the UN and the AU disputes over the mission's mandate undermined its effectiveness. UNAMID highlights the challenges inherent in *partnership peacekeeping*, mainly when there is a lack of explicit coordination and alignment between partners.

Democratic Republic of the Congo (2013-2014)

The deployment of the Force Intervention Brigade (FIB) in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) is another example of *partnership peacekeeping*. The FIB, a UN-backed force composed of troops from South Africa, Tanzania, and Malawi, was tasked with neutralizing armed groups, including the M23 rebel faction. The FIB's success in reducing the presence and capabilities of M23 created much-needed space for political processes to take place. Despite these efforts, the M23 rebel group has resurged, seizing significant territory in North Kivu and aggravating regional instability. This resurgence underscores the limitations of partnership peacekeeping. It highlights the need for comprehensive multidimensional mechanisms, such as the integration of partnership peacekeeping with long-term political and socioeconomic solutions to address the root causes of the conflict.

Somalia (2007-present)

The AU launched the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) to stabilize the country, combat the extremist group Al-Shabaab, and support the establishment of a functioning government. However, AMISOM soon faced severe resource inadequacies. The UN provided critical support to the AU, first through logistical and financial assistance and later through direct support to the Somali government. This partnership has been instrumental in stabilizing Somalia despite the complex and evolving security environment.

Central African Republic (2014-2016)

In response to escalating violence in the Central African Republic (CAR), the UN deployed the Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA). Simultaneously, French Sangaris forces operated under a UN Security Council mandate to provide critical military support. The parallel deployment of these forces over two years significantly reduced violence in the country, demonstrating the effectiveness of *partnership peacekeeping* in addressing complex security challenges.

Assessing the Effectiveness of Partnership Peacekeeping

While substantial research has been conducted on traditional peacekeeping missions, the literature on *partnership peacekeeping* remains relatively limited, although the quality of studies in this area is steadily improving. A closer examination of partnership POs reveals both notable strengths and significant challenges. On the one hand, such partnerships help alleviate the burden on the UN by enabling it to share the load with other actors, thus providing a potential solution to the gridlock often experienced within the UNSC. On the other hand, these partnerships can also threaten the UN's reputation

and credibility in various ways, particularly when coordination and alignment between partners falters.

Partnership peacekeeping has become vital in addressing complex and prolonged conflicts, notably where the UN alone lacks the necessary resources or capacity. One key challenge for peacekeeping partnerships is assessing their effectiveness. The following table identifies key areas for evaluation.

Key Strengths of Partnership Peacekeeping

Partnership peacekeeping has emerged as a crucial strategy in addressing complex and protracted conflicts, particularly in regions where the UN alone may not have the resources or capacity to intervene effectively. The following table outlines the key strengths inherent in the peacekeeping partnership.

Table 1: Strengths of *Partnership Peacekeeping*

1.	*Proximity of Regional & Sub-Regional Forces*	One key advantage of *partnership peacekeeping* is the availability of regional and subregional forces geographically closer to the conflict zone. This proximity enables quicker deployment, which is crucial in addressing emerging crises in a timely manner.
2.	*Reduced Bureaucratic Barriers*	Regional and subregional forces often face fewer bureaucratic obstacles than UN operations, allowing for more rapid mobilization and intervention. This agility is particularly beneficial in high-stakes environments where swift action is required to prevent further escalation of violence.
3.	*Local Knowledge and Contextual Understanding*	Regional forces possess a deeper understanding of the historical, social, and cultural contexts of the conflict. Therefore, local knowledge allows them to tailor their responses more effectively, enhancing the overall effectiveness of the peacekeeping mission.
4.	*Political Influence*	Regional and sub-regional actors can exert significant political influence within their areas of operations. Their familiarity with local governance structures and political dynamics can facilitate diplomatic efforts and contribute to peacebuilding.
5.	*Standardized Training & Motivation*	Regional forces often benefit from relatively standardized training, equipment, and language, which enhances operational cohesion and reduces the risk of misunderstandings during joint missions. Moreover, these forces are typically highly motivated, as they have a vested interest in the stability of their region.
6.	*Complementarity of UN & Non-UN Forces*	When UN and non-UN partners are deployed sequentially or concurrently, they produce favorable outcomes. Non-UN partners, often military-heavy, can quickly respond to violent outbreaks and stabilize the situation, while the UN can focus on addressing

the political, social, and developmental aspects of peacebuilding. This complementary approach enhances the overall effectiveness of the mission, leading to more sustainable peace.

Challenges in Partnership Peacekeeping

Although *partnership peacekeeping* offers numerous advantages regarding resource sharing, local knowledge, and rapid deployment, it also presents significant challenges. These challenges—ranging from the limited long-term effectiveness of non-UN partners to the risks posed to the UN's reputation and operational coherence—highlight the need for careful planning, clear communication, and a shared commitment to the mission's objectives. Addressing these challenges will be crucial to the continued success of *partnership peacekeeping* as a strategy for addressing contemporary global conflicts (see Table 2 below).

Table 2: Challenges in *Partnership Peacekeeping*

1.	*Sustaining Impact of Non-UN Partners*	UN peacekeepers can reduce violence independently, but their effectiveness improves with non-UN partnerships. However, non-UN forces, especially those with a military focus, may struggle to ensure long-term stability.
2.	*Competing Political and Economic Interests*	Competing political and economic interests among regional states and organizations in *partnership peacekeeping* may undermine mission impartiality and complicate adherence to human rights and neutrality principles.
3.	*Potential Risks to the UN's Credibility*	Non-UN partners, particularly those with a more militarized approach, may engage in tactics that negatively affect the image of the UN, hence undermining its credibility as a 'neutral' peacekeeper.
4.	*Security Risks to UN Personnel*	Non-UN partners' actions can jeopardize the security of UN personnel, as excessive force or high-handed tactics may provoke local hostility, endangering peacekeepers.
5.	*Operational Confusion*	The involvement of multiple actors with differing mandates, objectives, and operational cultures can create confusion and inefficiencies. Role ambiguity, miscommunication, and poor coordination between UN and non-UN partners may hinder mission effectiveness.

Enhancing Effectiveness in Partnership Peacekeeping

Despite the challenges posed by geopolitical fragmentation and the issues that have surfaced during various POs, studies consistently affirm that the UN remains the most credible and globally accepted organization capable of conducting multidimensional operations. Similarly, while *partnership peacekeeping* presents some challenges, its benefits largely outweigh its drawbacks. Some of the key areas to focus on are elaborated below:

Table 3: Effectiveness in *Partnership Peacekeeping*

1.	*Global and Regional Leadership Alignment*	Global and regional leaders must acknowledge the gravity of current security challenges, including UN, UNSC, and African Union Peace and Security Council (AUPSC) members. While national interests persist, aligning on shared goals is crucial for effective peacekeeping; establishing robust mechanisms for collaborative and complementary operations is essential. The adoption of UNSC Resolution *2719* marks progress, enabling regional bodies, particularly the AU, to take more decisive action on regional security threats.
2.	*The Volatility of Mission Environments*	Mission areas will likely remain volatile, posing significant risks to peacekeepers and civilians. Effective mandate design, troop deployment, and resource allocation must account for these threats. Ambiguities, overlapping responsibilities, and resource constraints can undermine efficiency and cause partner friction.
3.	*Shift Toward Agile and Coordinated Deployments*	The future of large-scale UN missions remains uncertain, but the shift toward 'smart and well-equipped *partnership peacekeeping* is evident. Effective coordination between regional, non-UN, and UN forces enhances mission success and mitigates operational fragmentation.
4.	*Strengthening the Political Component of Peacekeeping*	Strengthening the political dimension of UN peacekeeping, particularly through the DPPA[3], is essential. Empowering DPPA to collaborate with regional and global partners can enhance conflict prevention by addressing root causes. Greater emphasis on Special Political Missions (SPMs) and proactive diplomatic engagement will be more effective and cost-efficient than post-crisis responses.
5.	*Redefining Success in Peacekeeping*	The notion of 'success' in peacekeeping requires more profound analysis. Research indicates that many missions deemed successful face renewed violence within a decade. Rather than measuring success by immediate stabilization, establishing resilient systems and structures to withstand future challenges should be emphasized.
6.	*Enhancing Training and Coordination*	Standardizing training across troop-contributing countries (TCCs) is crucial for effective peacekeeping. Joint pre-deployment training, especially for commanders and master trainers, enhances interoperability and mission readiness. Regional and international training bodies, guided by the UN ITS, must lead this effort. Additionally, TCCs should adapt training to counter asymmetrical threats in modern POs.

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[3] Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA): https://dppa.un.org/en

7.	*Importance of Local Context*	International organizations often lack the local expertise needed for effective strategy development. Engaging regional organizations and local stakeholders in planning and decision-making is essential. Understanding history, traditions, and culture profoundly ensures that strategies align with the local context.
8.	*Building Repositories of Best Practices*	TCCs, training institutions, and the UN should establish repositories of best practices and lessons learned from past missions. While each mission presents unique challenges, these resources can enhance decision-making, improve personnel safety, and increase mission success by minimizing redundant efforts.
9.	*Leveraging Technological Advancements*	Integrating advanced technology in peace operations is essential for improving intelligence gathering and information sharing. Prioritizing secure, interoperable communication systems ensures clarity and facilitates timely decision-making. Additionally, advanced nations should share counter-IED technology to enhance the safety and well-being of peacekeepers.
10.	*Countering Misinformation in Peacekeeping*	Misinformation on social media significantly threatens peacekeeping efforts, challenging even the most advanced nations engaged in POs. Technologically capable states must take decisive measures to counter social media manipulation. Additionally, stronger legislation may be required to regulate platforms enabling such activities.
11.	*Engaging with Local Communities*	UN and non-UN forces must be trained to engage with local communities consistently. Building trust is vital to effective peacekeeping. Such engagement fosters public confidence and consent, both essential for mission success.
12.	*Evolving Nature of Peacekeeping*	While POs are not combat missions, deployed troops must be equipped to handle inherent threats and uncertainties. With mandates to protect civilians, peacekeepers must respond swiftly and effectively. Effective modern peacekeeping depends on adapting to asymmetric warfare, emphasizing related initiative and innovation.

Conclusion

This paper has examined the evolving dynamics of UN POs, particularly emphasizing *partnership peacekeeping*. It has been argued that rising conflict zones and fragmentation within the UNSC have strained UN peacekeeping since the end of the Cold War. Furthermore, geopolitical divisions among the P5 hinder timely decision-making, necessitating external partnerships. In this context, *partnership peacekeeping* is a 'strategic necessity,' as no single entity can address the complexities of modern POs alone. The growing complexity of global conflicts, alongside the UN's diminishing capacity to address these challenges, underscores the need for collaborative

peacekeeping efforts. As a strategic approach, *partnership peacekeeping* must be recognized as a crucial mechanism for managing contemporary security threats. The discussed cases underscore the critical role of partnerships in addressing the complexities of contemporary conflicts, demonstrating their necessity in stabilizing volatile regions and facilitating the UN's broader peacebuilding agenda.

However, the challenges faced by operations like UNAMID and the FIB in the DRC illustrate the complications that can arise in *partnership peacekeeping*. It has been argued that these challenges often stem from issues such as contested legitimacy, unclear mandates, and the differing priorities and capacities of partners. Therefore, effective *partnership peacekeeping* requires careful planning, clear communication, and a shared understanding of objectives among all actors. While partnerships enhance POs through rapid regional deployments and context-specific responses, they also demand coordinated efforts to mitigate challenges such as operational ambiguities and the potential erosion of the UN's credibility.

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