Host-Country Consent in UN Peacekeeping

By Julie Gregory & Lisa Sharland

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Cover photo: MINURSO personnel consult a map as they drive through vast desert areas in Smara, Western Sahara. UN Photo/Martine Perret.

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

A4P........................ Action for Peacekeeping
A4P+..................... Action for Peacekeeping Plus
AU.......................... African Union
C-34....................... Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations
CAR........................ Central African Republic
CPC........................ Community Protection Committee
DRC........................ Democratic Republic of the Congo
IGAD...................... Intergovernmental Authority on Development
JVMM.................... Joint Verification and Monitoring Mechanism
LAF........................ Lebanese Armed Forces
MINURSO.......... United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara
MINUSCA.......... United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission
         in the Central African Republic
MINUSMA......... United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali
MONUSCO........ United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic
         Republic of the Congo
POC........................ Protection of Civilians
SAGE...................... Situational Awareness Geospatial Enterprise
SOFA...................... Status of Forces Agreement
SOI......................... Sharing of Information
SOMA.................... Status of Mission Agreement
SRSG...................... Special Representative to the Secretary-General
UAS........................ Uncrewed aircraft systems
UNDOF................ United Nations Disengagement Observer Force
UNFICYP............ United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus
UNIFIL................. United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon
UNISFA............... United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei
UNMIK................ United Nations Mission in Kosovo
UNMISS.............. United Nations Mission in the Republic of South Sudan
UNMOGIP......... United Nations Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan
UNPOL................ UN Police
UNTSO................ United Nations Truce Supervision Organization

Executive Summary and Recommendations

Strategic consent for UN peacekeeping is facing multiple challenges due to diverging views and expectations between host-countries and the Security Council about the role and limits of peacekeeping. Key factors driving current tensions include the rising politicization and instrumentalization of consent by conflict parties; the perceived ineffectiveness of UN peacekeeping in responding to asymmetrical conflict threats and preventing violence against civilians; the increasing desire for security-focused and regionally led approaches; the questioning of UN authority and geopolitical power imbalances within the Security Council; pushback against the legacy of colonialism; and the rapid proliferation of mis- and disinformation perpetuating anti-UN sentiment among civilian populations. In stabilization contexts, host-states are using their state sovereignty to push back against the political authority of the Security Council and peacekeeping missions, as they strive for greater oversight of how and where missions operate. Conflict parties in more traditional peacekeeping settings have also quietly limited the UN's operating space to the degree where missions struggle to engage in meaningful progress toward a political solution, and have become the caretaker of frozen conflicts or unresolved border disputes.

Today peacekeeping missions operate with incomplete cooperation from host-states and other conflict parties, which often derives from fractured or conditional consent. Limited cooperation fundamentally undermines the ability of missions to deliver on their mandates. This also creates an environment where missions are diminished in their capacity to respond to urgent threats to civilians and ensure the safety and security of peacekeepers. Key operational and tactical impediments to mandate implementation across peacekeeping include freedom of movement restrictions, threats to peacekeepers, limited communication, delay or rejection of visa approvals, imposition of undue taxes and fines, and bureaucratic hurdles.

What consent is and how to maintain it over time also remains inadequately understood by UN member states, the Secretariat, and peacekeeping missions. Although consent is presumed across the life of a mission, relations with host-governments and other conflict parties naturally ebb and flow over time, with deterioration of host-country consent often occurring in response to contextual shifts, changes in relations with host-authorities, mismatches in expectations, or perceived ineffectiveness of the mission. Greater clarity and exchange are needed around how this fundamental principle of peacekeeping translates into practice in different contexts and how its deterioration impacts the effectiveness of peacekeeping. These divisions prompt the need for further consideration about the role and limits of UN peacekeeping and its comparative strengths, as called for in the Secretary-General's New Agenda for Peace.

There remains much scope for the Security Council, Secretariat, and peacekeeping missions to enhance cooperation and more genuinely engage with host-governments and host-communities. In turn, host-governments must live up to their primary responsibility to protect civilians, enforce the safety, privileges, and immunities of the UN, and create the

conditions for peacekeeping to be successful in the short and long term. Building on previous research by the Stimson Center, this report draws on an in-depth examination of consent in six diverse mission contexts to examine why consent has deteriorated in different mission settings, explore the impact of this deterioration on the ability of missions to implement their mandates, and identify clear limits and challenges to host-country cooperation.

To foster consent for peacekeeping, this report makes the following recommendations to the Security Council, Secretariat, peacekeeping missions, and host-governments.

For the Security Council and its member states:

▷ **Establish a memorandum of understanding** prior to the initial peacekeeping mandate that confirms the consent of conflict parties and describes the mission's core purpose, intended duration, and possible priority tasks.

▷ **Take action to maintain host-country consent throughout the entirety of a mission's deployment,** including by inviting regular discussion with conflict parties and civil society representatives through Council briefings and informal consultations. As part of each mandate renewal process, penholders should outline when and how they will seek input from the host-state(s) as part of each mandate renewal process.

▷ **Call upon member states,** including those in the region and police- and troop-contributing countries, to develop joint messaging and exert political leverage when conflict parties obstruct the mission and its activities.

▷ **Facilitate informal dialogue on consent-related issues** and the limits of peacekeeping, such as through an Arria-formula meeting or the Working Group on Peacekeeping Operations. Peacekeeping mission withdrawal discussions should occur when there is imminent risk of the UN becoming a bystander to or implicated in atrocities, when risks to peacekeeper safety and security cannot be effectively mitigated, or when there is no material progress toward identifying a political solution.

For the Secretariat:

▷ **Adopt a proactive communication strategy** with UN member states on challenges and obstructions facing peacekeeping missions. UN leadership should also regularly engage with conflict parties, reinforcing the political authority of mission leaders and supporting through good offices as needed.

▷ **Establish internal guidance setting out guardrails on the types of obstructions** that should be immediately called to the Security Council's attention, such as through a closed-door briefing or white note.

▷ **Strengthen reporting to the Security Council,** including by strengthening impartial reporting practices, clarifying reporting terminology, and describing SOFA violation incidents in the Secretary-General's reports. For outstanding violations, the Secretariat should notify the Council of ongoing efforts to resolve them.

For Peacekeeping Missions:

▷ **Foster working relations** with all conflict parties and communicate regularly about what the mission can and cannot do.

▷ **Sensitize government officials, security, forces and civilians** on the UN Charter, the SOFA/SOMA, the principles and purpose of peacekeeping, and the mission's mandated activities through trainings, media engagement (e.g., radio, social media), and dissemination of printed documents in local languages.

▷ **Introduce mission-wide standard operating procedures** informed by Secretariat guidance for verifying, responding to, and reporting all types of SOFA violations.

▷ **Develop mechanisms for host-communities to provide feedback on mission activities and perceptions**, such as by establishing dedicated forums for exchange with the mission or by funding independent perception surveys. Engage host-populations in the implementation of mandated activities to reinforce buy-in, build local capacity, and preserve peace gains, where possible and appropriate.

For Host-Governments:

▷ **Institute a whole-of-government policy of cooperation** with UN peacekeeping that enables the mission full freedom to implement mandated activities and move about its areas of operation. This policy could establish a high-level dialogue mechanism for exchange with the mission and outline government processes for resolving cooperation issues at operational and tactical levels.

▷ **Publicly and continuously confirm support** for the mission across all areas of government, including at the highest political levels. Enforce accountability for actors that impede mandate implementation or threaten to harm the mission, including by holding bilateral security partners to account for actions that contravene international humanitarian and human rights laws or the SOFA signed by the host-state.

▷ **Ensure that mission representation in New York** has both the substantive expertise and decision-making power to effectively inform and advise the mandate renewal process, including at the expert level.

Abdoulaye Diop, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of Mali, addresses the Security Council meeting on the situation in Mali in June 2023, requesting MINUSMA´s withdrawal. UN Photo/Loey Felipe.

Introduction

The Malian transitional authorities request for MINUSMA to withdraw in June 2023 highlighted the limits of UN peacekeeping when it comes to host-country consent.[1] Even the strongest supporters of the mission on the Security Council were forced to acquiesce and agree to the mission's immediate transition given the direct nature of the request from the Malian Foreign Minister in New York. These recent events have highlighted what distinguishes UN peacekeeping from most other forms of international military interventions and peace enforcement missions—namely, that peacekeeping missions deploy with the consent of the parties to the conflict. This has been the case ever since the deployment of the first UN peacekeeping mission in 1948, where military observers were unarmed and reliant on the parties to guarantee their protection in carrying out their mandate. Although the nature of peacekeeping has evolved significantly in the 75 years since then—with most missions following the Cold War deploying armed uniformed components with protection of civilian and enforcement mandates under Chapter VII of the Charter—consent of the parties remains one of the three core peacekeeping principles.[2]

Since the Cold War, the Security Council has authorized a range of peacekeeping missions with complex multidimensional mandates, including stabilization missions that require close cooperation with the host-authorities to undertake security sector reform and joint operations, among other mandated tasks. Despite the necessity for cooperation, missions have faced a growing number of obstructions from host-governments, with missions' political authority, freedom of movement, and ability to use force increasingly undermined. Host-governments have become comfortable opposing or disagreeing with the UN publicly rather than in private, with peacekeeping missions facing greater risk that operational and tactical obstructions will be further instrumentalized. Divisions in the Security Council among the permanent five (P5) have also provided host-authorities with leverage for their position, particularly when it comes to opposing certain aspects of mission mandates focused on human rights or protection of civilians. These developments have prompted the need for further consideration about the limits of peacekeeping and its comparative strengths, which was most recently echoed in the Secretary-General's New Agenda for Peace.[3]

The UN and its member states have attempted to address some of these challenges previously through efforts to improve host-country cooperation. The Declaration of Shared Commitments on UN Peacekeeping Operations and the Action for Peacekeeping Plus (A4P+) initiative identify cooperation with host-countries as a priority focus.[4] Furthermore, the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations (C-34) has stressed the need for cooperation between host-governments and missions "to support a common understanding of the United Nations mandate and capacities."[5] However, efforts to strengthen cooperation have been constrained by the divisions within the Security Council and in mission settings, where peacekeepers are dependent on host-authorities for their ability to carry out their mandates.

For the purposes of this paper, we have focused on "host-country consent" (rather than "host-government consent" or "host-state consent")[6] to refer to permission or acquiescence of the main conflict parties to the deployment of a peacekeeping mission; willingness to allow the mission to implement its mandate; and acceptance by host-populations of that mission.[7] While this report includes a focus on the "strategic consent" required to deploy and maintain a peacekeeping mission, it also explores the role and impact of "local consent" from host populations.[8] Assessing and understanding these dynamics is important, as a lack of local support may be exploited by belligerents or utilized by host-authorities to undermine cooperation with the peacekeeping mission. It is worth noting, however, that not all conflict actors may be included in UN-supported peace processes, as a result of Security Council dynamics or issues of perceived legitimacy—which inherently limits a wider uptake of consent in practice. Nonetheless, this report acknowledges that consent should be built at multiple levels and may be most resilient when inclusive of a diversity of actors, including civilians. While it is outside the scope of this paper to comprehensively assess local acceptance of current UN peacekeeping missions, good practices by missions are explored where possible.

Notably, the challenges relating to consent are not isolated to multidimensional peacekeeping mission contexts. Many long-established "traditional" peacekeeping missions with a mandate to focus on third-party ceasefire monitoring and to serve as an interposing force between two parties while seeking political solutions—such as those in Cyprus and Western Sahara—are also facing a range of challenges.[9] Nonetheless, most of the recent literature and analysis on consent in the context of peacekeeping tends to focus on the larger multidimensional missions, in part due to the more volatile nature of those conflicts and related threats to peacekeepers and civilians.[10] As a result, there is limited analysis and comparison in other peacekeeping settings of how to strategically prevent and address the erosion of consent, including for longer-standing missions and interim security forces. Similarly, research has focused nearly exclusively on host-state consent, with minimal exploration of consent of other conflict parties. This has left peacekeeping missions with limited guidance on the nature of consent or how to manage it over the life span of a mission, making it easier to fall in the trap of responding reactively to consent deterioration.

This paper aims to address these gaps through an in-depth examination of diverse peacekeeping contexts, building on the analysis of a 2018 Stimson report on *U.N. Peacekeeping and Host-State Consent* by Sofía Sebastián and Aditi Gorur.[11] Drawing on interviews with a range of peacekeeping mission personnel and practitioners, it examines *why* consent has deteriorated in several current mission contexts and explores the *impact* of this deterioration on the ability of missions to implement their mandates. It then identifies examples of good peacekeeping practices for fostering cooperation between the UN and the main parties to the conflict, in order to build constructive engagement and maintain consent. This report also identifies clear limits and challenges to host-country cooperation. Such understanding is particularly important when considering the future direction of UN peace operations and the comparative advantages of different models of peace operations.

Methodology

This report is based on in-depth research carried out by the Stimson Center since March 2021, drawing on a combination of desktop research and semi-structured interviews. Stimson analyzed consent dynamics and trends across UN peacekeeping, focusing on six contemporary mission settings that collectively represent the wide cross-range of peacekeeping missions currently in operation. These missions include the large multidimensional missions in the Central African Republic (CAR) and South Sudan, security-focused peacekeeping missions with a Protection of Civilians (POC) mandate in Abyei and Lebanon, and long-standing missions in Cyprus and Western Sahara.

We conducted 55 virtual interviews with 63 stakeholders: 34 peacekeeping mission leaders and personnel in the six case study countries, 16 member state representatives and diplomats, two representatives of non-state parties, six UN Secretariat officials, and five peacekeeping academics and practitioners. All interview data in the report has been anonymized because of the sensitive nature of the discussions. While this report acknowledges and explores that non-state conflict parties and host-communities hold an important role in promoting and supporting cooperation with peacekeeping missions, capacity and travel constraints meant that exchanges with such actors were limited.

The research was further informed by an off-the-record roundtable in New York in May 2022 on how to bridge the gap between the principle and practice of consent in peacekeeping.[12] The workshop was co-hosted with the Permanent Missions of Australia, Ghana, Indonesia, and the United Kingdom to the UN and attended by UN member states (including host-state and Security Council representatives) and UN Secretariat officials.

Jean-Pierre Lacroix (second from right at table), Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations, meets with community leaders in Bria during his trip to the CAR in 2019.

CHAPTER 1:

Consent in the Context of UN Peacekeeping

Consent of the parties is a pillar of peacekeeping—alongside impartiality and "non-use of force except in self-defense and defense of the mandate."[13] These three principles—often referred to as the "holy trinity" of peacekeeping—have guided the deployment of UN peacekeeping missions for more than 70 years.[14] The principles distinguish peacekeeping from other forms of international intervention (e.g., peace enforcement) and seek to prevent the UN from becoming a party to the conflict. Their importance was most recently reaffirmed by the 2015 *Report of the High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations*, which acknowledged that peacekeeping must "continuously seek to build consent to the United Nations' role and presence through an impartial posture."[15]

There have been various interpretations of what is meant by the term "consent of the parties" in peacekeeping guidance and literature.[16] The United Nations Peacekeeping Operations Principles and Guidelines, also known as the Capstone Doctrine, defines consent as "a commitment by the parties to a political process and their acceptance of a peacekeeping operation mandated to support that process."[17] The term parties is therein qualified as "the main parties to the conflict";[18] however, other UN documents have described consent as deriving from "local parties"[19] or "critical parties."[20] Given the ambiguity of this terminology, the UN has tended to prioritize the consent of the host-state in "recognition of their sovereign rights to control their territories."[21]

Different Peacekeeping Scenarios and Consent Implications

The nature of consent differs by peacekeeping settings, with each mission having its own tensions and challenges to consider. This paper consequently identifies three peacekeeping scenarios and the consent dynamics that have evolved:

▷ **Conflict between multiple UN member states.**

This scenario often involves territorial disputes and occurs when two or more parties are UN-recognized member states. Peacekeeping missions in these contexts include some of the long-standing "observe, monitor, and report" peacekeeping missions—which were deployed before the peacekeeping principles were codified (e.g., UNTSO, UNMOGIP)— and more recent missions like UNISFA (in Abyei). A few of the older peacekeeping missions within this scenario type have mandates that do not require renewal by the Security Council (e.g., UNTSO, UNMOGIP). In this context, consent must be formally obtained from all host-UN member states, with the SOFA/SOMA providing evidence of the host-states' agreement to the presence of a peacekeeping mission. Parties in this scenario generally have similar political leverage.

▷ **Conflict between UN member states and non-recognized states.**

In this scenario, the UN has deployed under Chapter VI of the Charter with the goal of seeking a political solution and resolving territorial disputes between one party that has UN membership and is recognized as a sovereign country, and another that seeks to be recognized as a legitimate state. Current peacekeeping missions that fall into this category include MINURSO (in Western Sahara) and UNFICYP (Cyprus). In this situation, the UN-recognized state generally has greater leverage and international support, reflecting an existing power imbalance between the parties. Consent for the mission is formally obtained from the recognized state, with a SOFA/SOMA agreed between the UN Secretariat and host-state. The consent of the non-recognized state is not formally requested by the Security Council, though they may be consulted as part of the authorization and deployment process. These missions have often deployed for long periods within entrenched conflicts; the UN-recognized state is usually in no rush for the mission to fully implement its mandate, as it often benefits from the lack of a political resolution. Failure to make progress in resolving the conflict may bring into question the mission's impartiality and erode consent, particularly by the party that is seeking international legitimacy and recognition as a sovereign state.

▷ **Intra-state conflict.**

Multidimensional peacekeeping missions (e.g., MINUSCA, MINUSMA, MONUSCO, UNMISS) have deployed into intra-state conflicts over the last two decades, with the Council often invoking Chapter VII explicitly. The missions focus on political and electoral processes; protection of civilians, human rights, and peacebuilding activities; and supporting humanitarian access. Historically, consent has focused solely on the host-state in such contexts. The other parties to the conflict (e.g., armed groups) may not be accepted internationally as politically legitimate, with the implication that their consent is not sought. Missions in this scenario can struggle to maintain their independence from the host-state, a stance that can undermine perceptions of the UN's impartiality. This is a particular challenge for stabilization missions that have the explicit task of helping to restore state authority. Challenges to consent usually arise when the UN protects civilians perceived by the state as belonging to the "opposition" or attempts to investigate human rights violations perpetrated by state actors. Over time, these missions' mandates may come into conflict with the political interests of the host-government.

Table 1. Peacekeeping Mission Scenarios and Consent Implications

Scenario	Current Peacekeeping Missions[22]	Consent Implications
Conflict between multiple UN member states	UNTSO, UNMOGIP, UNDOF, UNIFIL, UNISFA	Formal consent sought from multiple host-states.
Conflict between UN member states and non-UN-recognized states	UNFICYP, MINURSO	Formal consent sought from UN-recognized host-state. Informal or "goodwill" consent may be sought from other main parties.
Intra-state conflict	MINUSCA, MINUSMA, MONUSCO, UNMISS	Formal consent sought from UN-recognized host-state. Informal or "goodwill" consent may be sought from other main parties.

Challenges and Tensions Relating to Consent

Stimson's research found differences in views among UN stakeholders on the conceptual nature of consent. This included several tensions and misconceptions that impact how consent is managed in practice.

Strategic Versus Local Consent

Within the peacekeeping literature and among senior mission leadership, "consent of the parties" was routinely interpreted to mean "host-state consent." This is problematic given its prevalence across a range of mission settings. In the context of traditional or legacy missions that have existed for decades and where peacekeepers are deployed to reach a political settlement or agreement between two or more parties (e.g., UNFICYP, MINURSO), a host-government may dislike it when a peacekeeping mission treats the various parties to the conflict equally and impartially, preferring instead that the mission give priority or preference to their side. As one interviewee expressed, "impartiality is always misunderstood; they [the host-state] think we are stepping on their sovereignty."[23]

But such assumptions regarding consent are also increasingly problematic in the context of newer multidimensional missions. As a representative of a non-state conflict party stated, "consent of all parties is a must for success in peacekeeping, but it's yet to be accepted by the UN in practice."[24] One reason the term "host-state consent" is favored is that it avoids speaking to complicated questions about the legitimacy of other conflict actors, and in some instances, a transitional government. Conflict parties are also far from homogenous, and willing cooperation with a mission may differ at various levels of government and within other conflict parties.[25]

In many mission settings, peacekeeping has grappled to manage relationships with a range of non-state actors and armed groups that have not formally been part of peace processes, but that are nonetheless important interlocutors to any efforts to resolve the conflict and improve the security situation. In some mission settings, such as Mali, these actors may provide some limited forms of governance and protection to the civilian population in the absence of the ability of the host-government to extend their authority. This puts missions in a difficult position, as the host-government assumes it is the only legitimate actor, but missions are aware of the need to engage a range of actors and stakeholders to support the implementation of their mandate. Furthermore, as one expert confirmed, consent within host-governments is rarely uniform, meaning that missions "often try to rely on a few friends in government."[26]

The role of host-communities is of particular importance in contexts where host-state authority remains incomplete.[27] Although missions work hard to promote acceptance and cooperation of host-populations through "community engagement" activities, interviewees stated that there exists no need for a formal community consent-seeking mechanism. When host-populations begin questioning the effectiveness and ongoing purpose of a mission,

however, it can have significant consequences on the mission. As one example, mass civilian protests in the eastern parts of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) in 2022 led the host-government to issue a letter to the Security Council, announcing its plans to re-assess the agreed timetable for the mission's departure in response to the "deep displeasure" of the Congolese people with the mission.[28]

The management of strategic host-state consent in contexts where host-state security forces may be perpetrating violence against civilians remains a challenging scenario for peacekeeping missions. Failures by the mission to address security concerns or protect civilians can undermine popular consent. The stabilization mandates of several missions also mean they are often working alongside and intervening on the side of the host-authorities, which may call into question their impartiality, particularly if the host-state or their proxies is engaging in human rights violations. The UN Department of Peace Operation's Protection of Civilians policy directs peacekeepers to intervene even when the "threat is from elements of host state security forces or their proxies,"[29] but acknowledges that this may affect strategic consent to the mission.

Consent to Deployment Versus the Mandate

There remains a lack of clarity about what demonstrates evidence of consent, specifically whether the mandate or the SOFA/SOMA is of primary importance. Most peacekeeping personnel interviewed described consent as agreement to the presence of an international peacekeeping mission and to the priorities set by the original mandate. Many of those interviewed also pointed to the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) or Status of Mission Agreement (SOMA)[30] as demonstrative of host-state consent; however, the SOFA/SOMA presumes consent in the first place and is distinct from the act of consent in terms of timing, signatories, and content.[31] A few individuals mentioned that consent is also predicated on a common vision for a desired end-state.

However, expectations regarding *what* consent means may evolve over time. Mandate renewals increasingly present a dilemma, as it is unclear how engaged host-states should be involved in that process (if at all). At the outset of a mission, the host-state may have consented to the physical deployment of a peacekeeping mission and agreed to the terms of the SOFA. Given the frequent requirement for expediency in deploying a mission in these circumstances, there may be less interest or concern in the mandate that is developed, given the priority to get the mission deployed. After a mission has been deployed for some time, and there are grievances about aspects of the way the mission is carrying out its mandate, expectations about engaging in the mandate renewal process may change.

Increasingly, host-states expect that they will be engaged and consulted in the development of mandate provisions, reflecting the desire for cooperation between host-countries and peacekeeping missions. At the same time, however, the Security Council must consider

a range of different stakeholders and "cannot be beholden to the host-state for receiving its approval on all aspects of the mandate."[32] The Council also can mandate activities that the host-state may not support to protect civilians (e.g., protection of civilians belonging to the perceived opposition) or to ensure the safety and security of personnel (e.g., arms embargoes). In Abyei, for instance, Sudan and South Sudan have not supported proposals to expand the mission's scope of work, such as by installing a civilian deputy head of mission to facilitate political dialogue or establishing a Political Affairs section.[33] The mission has thus remained disconnected from any political process, conveniently allowing the host-states to benefit from the stability of a peacekeeping mission while postponing having to deal with resolving the conflict. In Mali, the government's desire to re-imagine and limit the scope of the MINUSMA mandate was made clear to the Security Council when the Malian representative to the UN officially complained that their key concerns had been "simply ignored" in the drafting of the 2022 mandate, and that they would not implement key human rights provisions in the mandate or support the mission's full freedom of movement.[34]

A further challenge is that the Security Council is not viewed by all countries as an inclusive or representative body, with the penholder system consolidating power in France, the United Kingdom, and the United States (P3) to negotiate and draft mandates for missions. The role and expectations of UN-recognized host-states (let alone parties to the conflict) are unclear, based on unspoken rules and conventions. At the same time, host-states may have unrealistic expectations about what a UN peacekeeping mission can do or how it complies with the principles that govern its deployment, creating an inherent tension in the mandating process. This has been compounded recently with some Security Council members claiming that the views of host-states have not been adequately integrated into renewed mandates.[35]

Managing Consent throughout Mission Lifecycle

There are a variety of perspectives on how consent should be viewed across the life span of a peacekeeping mission. Institutionally, consent is presumed throughout the duration of a deployment.[36] The vast majority of those interviewed, however, saw consent of host-country interlocutors as an active, fluid element that may fluctuate over time in response to political considerations and contextual changes. While there is evidence that consent for peacekeeping is usually strongest at the outset (even though some parties may acquiesce to its presence reluctantly or under duress),[37] changes in the conflict, shifts in political interests, and diverging expectations over time may cause a gap to emerge between what the mission is mandated to do and what host-country interlocutors would like it to do.

Most current UN peacekeeping missions have been deployed for over a decade, with half deployed more than three decades.[38] Consequently, several UN peacekeeping missions have struggled to maintain the cooperation of host-governments and the acceptance of host-communities, with their overall effectiveness thus called into question. The mere presence

of a peacekeeping mission for years on end may be a sign of ineffectiveness to the host-population. These views may be exacerbated by disinformation campaigns targeted against the peacekeeping missions or the actions of other international or bilateral security actors.

The contemporary challenge for UN peacekeeping missions is navigating the different restrictions and obstacles imposed by host-governments while also seeking to maintain consent for the ongoing deployment of the mission. As Ian Johnstone notes, "The challenge is often to find the right balance between consent and coercion, a fault line in the contemporary debate on peacekeeping."[39] The risks remain high, particularly within current mission environments where the threats to civilians and personnel are significant. A mission's lessened political authority and battle against continuous restrictions can constitute death by a thousand cuts and may represent de facto withdrawal of consent[40] or, worse, mean that the UN has become complicit in the conflict. Missions often stay despite these restrictions because of the imperative to offer protection to the civilian population; host-governments also want them to stay to support the political economy they have created, particularly if a transition plan has yet to be put in place.

The Geopolitics and Politicization of Consent

Efforts to manage the relationship with host-countries and foster ongoing strategic consent for peacekeeping missions have become increasingly challenging in a range of mission settings as a result of geopolitical divisions inside and outside of the Security Council.

Geopolitical divisions within the Security Council and lack of unanimity on peacekeeping mission mandates (see Annex 1) have provided leverage to host-authorities, empowering host-states to push back directly against the Council. Such responses have included advocating for and against specific priorities for the mandate, issuing complaints about the penholder and selected civil society briefers, and seeking greater influence over the peacekeeping mission's role in-country. Russia and China, as well as some elected members of the Council, have sought to demonstrate solidarity with host-governments through the strategic use of abstentions on mandate renewals, even when the requests being made may be at odds with the role of peacekeeping missions. They have justified these abstentions by claiming peacekeeping is impeding state sovereignty by seeking unrestricted freedom of operation and movement, particularly on human rights and protection of civilian activities. In June 2022, for instance, both China and Russia abstained on MINUSMA's mandate based on its human rights provisions, which they termed "excessive" and "intrusive," arguably emboldening the host-state to declare that it would not support implementation of those provisions.[41] China and Russia used similar justification to explain their abstention on UNMISS's 2022 mandate, which Russia stated read like "a Human Rights Council document."[42] And in March 2023, both abstained again on UNMISS's mandate based on the "very broad freedom of action" the mandate called for on the protection of civilians.[43]

Nonetheless, host-authorities have legitimate claims to a more substantive role in the mandate discussions and for greater inclusivity at the negotiating table. For too long, Council mandating processes and penholder practices have been dominated by the P3,[44] with limited opportunities for influence by elected members, including the three African members of the Council (A3). While processes have started to enable more consultation with host-authorities and encourage other Council members to engage in co-penholdership, it may have come too late for genuine dialogue in some mission contexts. Furthermore, even where there is dialogue, it may be undermined by geopolitical divisions in the Council.

Some host-states, like CAR, DRC, and Mali, have increasingly expressed preference for "security" to be a primary focus of peacekeeping. Host-states would like missions to adopt a more mobile posture and engage in offensive patrols and actions against terrorist and non-state armed groups. The Malian transitional authorities vocalized this as a top concern for the mission's continued operation in-country;[45] inability to reach agreement with the UN on this was as a major sticking point for the host-government and contributed to their rationale for requesting the mission's departure.[46] Similarly, the CAR authorities relayed to the Council in November 2022 that the mission has not been able to address ongoing insecurity where deployed, as its "effectiveness on the ground is not apparent owing to the ongoing activity of armed groups."[47]

The desire for a more securitized approach is also reflected in the increasing array of security actors deployed in mission settings. This is not a new development, as peacekeeping missions have operated alongside a host of security actors in the past. However, it is presenting an increasing challenge where these actors are abusing human rights and obstructing the operation of missions. Some of these security actors—such as Wagner Group—have a demonstrated history of committing human rights abuses.[48] In some instances they have also blocked the UN's freedom of movement, including through the introduction of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and anti-tank mines.[49] These actions raise questions about the responsibilities of host-authorities when agreeing to the deployment of a peacekeeping mission, and present a dilemma for the Security Council when assessing whether missions are becoming complicit in these abuses, particularly in stabilization contexts where they are supporting efforts to extend state authority.

Strategic disinformation is also increasing in peacekeeping contexts.[50] In MONUSCO, there is evidence of sophisticated campaigns outside of the country perpetuating false claims about how the mission is exploiting natural resources to support foreign troops.[51] In Mali and the CAR, the growth in disinformation increased with the deployment of Russian mercenaries in-country, with evidence that the Wagner group has undermined popular perception of the mission through the spread of disinformation.[52] And in Lebanon, the mission has also had to tackle mis- and disinformation targeting the mission, which has been spread by the media and Hezbollah.[53] The spread of falsified information undermines the work of missions and has been utilized by some host-authorities to support their domestic political interests, particularly during electoral cycles and transition processes (e.g., the DRC) or to shore up

support following unconstitutional coups (e.g., Mali). It has also enabled host-authorities to garner greater national support in their efforts to push back against peacekeeping missions, even if missions may be delivering gains at the local level for host populations. This dilemma for peacekeeping missions has been compounded by the limited public support afforded to UN peacekeeping by Secretary-General Guterres, who has expressed doubts about the effectiveness of the blue helmets as a crisis management tool.[54]

With peacekeeping at an inflection point, these wider geopolitical tensions and the tenuous nature of consent and cooperation in several mission settings present significant challenges. Several host-countries have started to turn to bilateral forces (e.g., Rwanda in CAR) and subregional forces (e.g., East African Community Regional Force in DRC) to meet their security needs, often operating alongside the UN. The potential for UN-assessed funds to be applied to African Union–led regional and subregional missions may open discussion about how the UN outsources peacekeeping and peace enforcement operations in contexts where UN peacekeeping may be less suitable. Consequently, host-governments are likely to have an increasing range of choices to support their political interests, meaning they may have less use for UN peacekeeping with its various "pre-conditions" relating to impartiality and human rights. Such developments prompt the need for serious dialogue on the limits of peacekeeping and on the role of the UN in not only securing consent for diverse types of peacekeeping missions, but also setting expectations for stakeholders' roles and obligations.[55]

UNFICYP peacekeepers monitor the situation in the buffer zone. UN Photo/Luboš Podhorský.

The Impact of Obstructions and Limited Cooperation

Strategic tensions or concerns about a peacekeeping mission's role often impact cooperation at strategic, operational, and tactical levels. Low or conditional cooperation can lead to obstruction of mandated activities and targeting of peacekeeping personnel, which runs counter to the SOFA/SOMA agreed to by the UN-recognized host-state(s).

SOFA/SOMA violations have been a long-standing issue of concern across peacekeeping, as they constitute a direct infringement on the privileges, immunities, and concessions granted to the mission by the UN-recognized host-state. The Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations (C-34) has highlighted the danger and obstructive nature of these violations.[56] Violations range from attacks on or detainment of UN personnel; harm or seizure of UN property and assets; restrictions on freedom of movement; delays or rejection of visa applications; illegal taxation; and additional bureaucratic requirements. An egregious violation or buildup of violations can (but does not always) indicate worsening relations between the host-country interlocutor in question and the mission. However, if relations worsen over time, it becomes more probable that consent will decline as well.

BOX 1. DIFFERENT TYPES OF OBSTRUCTIONS BY HOST-GOVERNMENTS AND PARTIES TO THE CONFLICT

Restricted movement on ground

- Access denials—uniformed patrolling and human rights monitoring
- Delays at checkpoints
- Stopping or taxing delivery of UN food, supplies, or equipment
- Civilians blocking or objecting to mission presence in area

Restricted movement by air

- Instrumentalization of flight safety assurances
- Denial of nighttime flights, or medical/casualty evacuation

Harm (or threat to harm) UN

- Attacks on peacekeepers
- Detainment of UN personnel
- Civilian protests targeting UN personnel, facilities, or assets
- Hate speech or disinformation that incites violence against the mission

Delays in approving visas

- Preventing UN personnel or peacekeepers from entering operation area through delay or rejection of visa request

Limiting communication

- Blocking coordination or dialogue
- Requiring all communication go through one actor

Bureaucratic regulations

- Introducing additional verification or coordination processes
- Inhibiting interaction with other parties

Restricted freedom of movement remains the most cited obstruction (and SOFA/SOMA violation) across peacekeeping. Reduced freedom of movement usually manifests as access denials (most cited by military components), checkpoint delays/obstructions, regulation of aerial movement, and blocking transport of UN equipment, supplies, and humanitarian containers.

ISSUE IN CONTEXT: RESTRICTIONS ON FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT IN SOUTH SUDAN (UNMISS)

Restricted freedom of movement has been a long-standing issue for UNMISS. For example, between 2017 and 2021, visa delays or denials were reported in 14 Secretary-General reports; within the same timeframe, the mission experienced over 715 distinct restrictions on operational movement, with a significant portion impeding mandated activities, particularly protection of civilians and human rights activities.

In early 2020, the South Sudan People's Defence Forces Joint Verification and Monitoring Mechanism (JVMM) introduced a new regulation requiring that the mission submit Sharing of Information (SOI) notices and flight safety assurance documents to JVMM concerning the movement of UNMISS's ground forces and its air capacity. Though the government presented SOIs as a tool to promote its awareness of UNMISS's movement, SOIs have since turned into a de facto form of government authorization. In practice, if the mission does not obtain a stamp of acknowledgement on official letterhead pertaining to its planned ground and air operations, it will not be allowed to proceed by those on the ground.[57] The Secretary-General reported in 2021 that the government authorized security forces to block mission personnel that had not informed the JVMM of their plans.[58] Delayed acknowledgment of SOI notices contributed to increases in UNMISS movement restrictions throughout 2020 and early 2021, and again in the first half of 2023 (see Chart 1). In the words of one peacekeeping personnel, "we have become slaves to the SOIs...we can't deploy whenever and wherever is required to carry out the mandate."[59]

CHART 1. INCIDENTS RESTRICTING UNMISS'S FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT (FEBRUARY 2020–MAY 2023)

Chart: Stimson Center. Source: UN Secretary-General reports on the Situation in South Sudan.
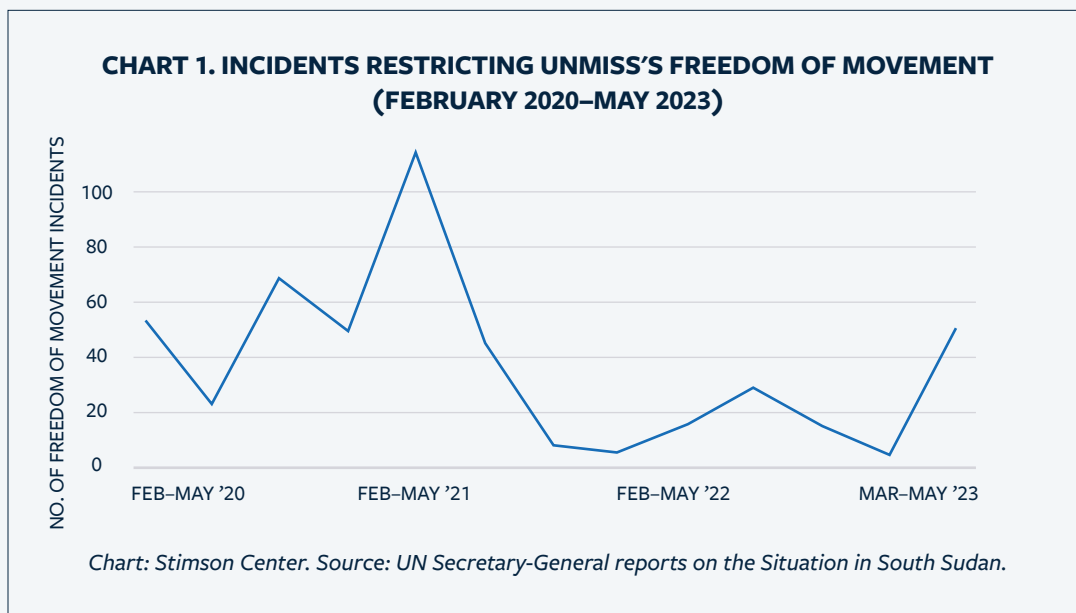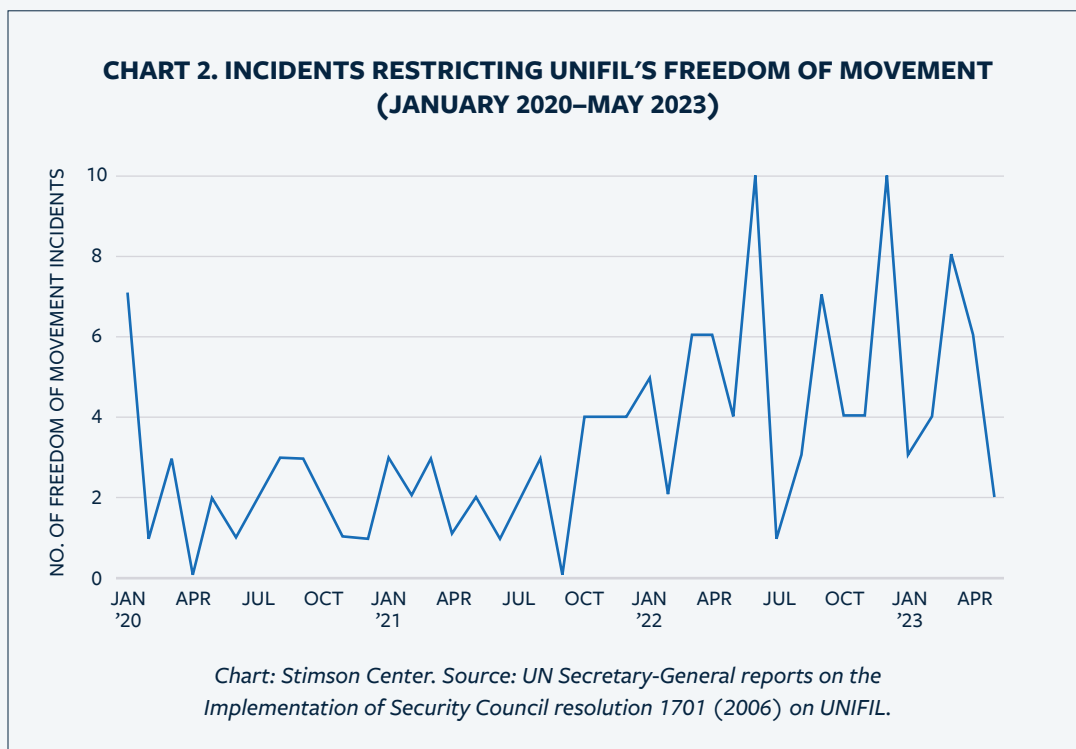
Peacekeepers with the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) patrol the village of Terekeka in South Sudan in 2021. UN Photo/Gregório Cunha.

Access denials tend to occur most often in relation to uniformed patrolling activities (e.g., site inspections or patrolling in hotspot areas) and human rights monitoring and investigation. Denials can result from lack of trust, desire to hide incriminating evidence or press a military advantage, lack of advance knowledge of movements, or disconnect in communication with the capital. And even when access denials do not occur, UN mission personnel can face significant delay at checkpoints, with this most frequently cited by those in South Sudan and Abyei. Commonly cited reasons for delays include the checkpoint officers' lack of awareness of the UN's privileges and immunities, lack of prior authorization from commanding officers to let the UN pass, or requirement of a bribe.[60] Other barriers can include lack of proper office space to complete approval, lack of phone or reliable means of communication, and not working on weekends.[61]

ISSUE IN CONTEXT: ACCESS DENIALS IN LEBANON (UNIFIL)

Within their area of operations in southern Lebanon, UNIFIL is regularly denied access when patrolling and conducting site investigations, with reported access denials generally higher across 2022 compared to the same periods in recent years (see Chart 2). The Lebanese government requires UNIFIL to coordinate its day-to-day operations in southern Lebanon with the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF), including non-joint activities.[62] Furthermore, the government defers all operational decisions to the LAF, making the latter's cooperation of key importance.

LAF has repeatedly denied the mission access to specific areas for years, citing political reasons or the need to respect private property.[63] For these reasons, as of June 2022, the mission remains unable to identify where the military capabilities of Hezbollah are located or prevent the use of unauthorized weapons.[64] The LAF continues to deny the mission full access to key points of interest, including tunnels crossing underneath the Blue Line, four unauthorized firing ranges, and a number of Green without Borders sites. These denials hinder the mission's daily monitoring of the Blue Line and completion of outstanding investigations.[65]

CHART 2. INCIDENTS RESTRICTING UNIFIL'S FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT (JANUARY 2020–MAY 2023)

Chart: Stimson Center. Source: UN Secretary-General reports on the Implementation of Security Council resolution 1701 (2006) on UNIFIL.

When the LAF is not present during mission operations (which occurs around 80% of the time because of LAF's low force capacity),[66] troops are routinely harassed and stopped by Hezbollah, with most of the cases reportedly the result of not wanting the mission to observe or interfere in their activities.[67] Reasons given for access denials on the ground usually involve "hypothetical private property." In the words of a mission representative, "private property is one of the nightmares for us."[68]

The **use of air assets and capabilities** by peacekeeping missions is becoming increasingly contested. Restricted access to the air domain can hinder mission mobility, such as by preventing troop rotations, limiting movement within or outside the area of operations, and slowing the transport of mission equipment and supplies. It can also impede mission self-protection efforts by limiting situational awareness, preventing aerial protection for supply convoys, and delaying timely aerial medical and casualty evacuations.[69] Restricted freedom of movement can also weaken the mission's ability to implement its mandate, including as relates to protecting civilians, conducting human rights investigations, and supporting the delivery of humanitarian assistance.

Across peacekeeping, host-authorities have effectively restricted air movement by limiting access to airfields, grounding flights, imposing night flight restrictions, denying flight safety assurances, and regulating the use of uncrewed aerial systems (UAS). In Abyei, for example, Sudan's long-standing refusal to grant UNISFA access to the Athony airstrip restricts the mission's ability to conduct medical or casualty evacuations[70] and means that most of the mission's logistical and operational movements remain restricted to the ground.[71] Local authorities also restrict mission use of air assets, with UNISFA, for instance, repeatedly denied permission to perform an aerial medical evacuation out of Aweil North County in September 2021, leading to the death of a peacekeeper in Gok Machar.[72] And in Mali, the repeated denial of intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance flights limited the mission's situational awareness.[73]

ISSUE IN CONTEXT: AIR ACCESS RESTRICTIONS IN THE CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC (MINUSCA)

MINUSCA has faced restricted access to the air domain on several fronts in recent years. The CAR government did not allow the mission to fly at night, directly impacting the safety and security of peacekeepers and preventing pilots from maintaining their night-flight certificates.[74] The issue came to the Security Council's attention in October 2022 when the restrictions delayed the evacuation of peacekeepers hit by an explosive ordnance while on patrol, contributing to the death of three Bangladeshi peacekeepers.[75] Following statements by some Council members denouncing the restrictions[76] and continued engagement on the issue by mission leadership, the government agreed to lift the restrictions for medical and casualty evacuations in early 2023.[77] Similarly, in early 2023, several Council members raised the issue of the Wagner Group using jamming devices, preventing the mission from using its air assets and scrambling its satellite communications.[78]

Another key issue in CAR has been the use of UAS. On 3 February 2023, the Minister of National Defence and Reconstruction of the Army suspended all UAS flights in-country, except for those conducted by national forces, following an alleged attack on "other security personnel" by a UAS.[79] By June 2023, the government lifted this restriction; however, it continues to seek control over the mission's use of unmanned aircraft systems by requiring notification of all UAS flights.[80]

Another significant challenge caused by host-country actors on the ground is **harm to (or threats to harm) UN peacekeepers, mission facilities, and assets**, including vehicles and equipment. Though direct attacks on UN mission personnel or facilities tend to be rare, they do occur. In Cyprus, the security forces of the self-declared Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus used bulldozers to displace cement blockades and UN trucks put in place to prevent unauthorized road construction within the eastern part of the buffer zone in mid-August 2023, injuring three peacekeepers in the process.[81] In another high-profile case in November 2021, the Presidential Guard in the CAR opened fire without warning on a UN-marked bus, injuring ten unarmed Egyptian peacekeepers.[82] This incident provoked significant distrust between the mission and government, causing a breakdown in dialogue at the highest levels and contributing to a change in mission leadership.[83] Peacekeepers also suffer deliberate attacks from a range of non-state armed groups,[84] with most attacks committed by non-state armed actors, rather than by host-authorities.

Harm to peacekeepers may additionally occur through disinformation, which can result in physical harm if used to incite violence. Groups that benefit from unstable contexts, such as Hezbollah and the Wagner Group, have demonstrated a strategic use of disinformation on social media to undermine positive perceptions of the UN. This has included personalized attacks against senior mission leadership or against the mission at large, and the mischaracterization of situations that prey on existing fears.[85] In one high-profile case in the CAR, four French peacekeepers were detained at the Bangui airport on charges of seeking to assassinate the president—a clear case of disinformation, with the only connection being their presence at the airport at the same time as the president was there.[86] In a few contexts, false rumors that the UN is supplying opposition groups with arms and supplies have contributed to threats of violence against peacekeepers or to the mischaracterization of UN containers carrying equipment for uniformed personnel, effectively preventing or delaying mission action.[87]

Delays in approving visa applications. Host-states can strategically prevent UN personnel and uniformed components from entering the country (and thereby carrying out their mandated activities) through the delay or rejection of visa applications. In Abyei, for example, Sudan has yet to approve visas for three formed police units and 107 individual police officers, severely detracting from the mission's ability to deliver on its rule-of-law mandate.[88] The Security Council's repeated call for monitoring of human rights violations in Abyei has been effectively obstructed by Sudan's apparent unwillingness to permit the deployment of human rights officers.[89] In the absence of dedicated expertise, UNISFA has focused on mainstreaming human rights in its work by providing human rights and gender-specific trainings to mission staff, and in March 2023 bringing in a "liaison officer" to take on some human rights functions.[90]

Limiting communication. Reducing or blocking communication, particularly at the political level, can greatly undermine positive relations, breed distrust and suspicion, and limit the capacity of the mission to carry out its mandate. As concerns UNIFIL, Israel has yet to enable the creation of a Tel Aviv liaison office for the mission, despite agreeing to it in 2008.[91] Establishing such an office would go a long way in promoting political dialogue between the parties[92] and reinforce perceptions of the UN's impartiality in managing the conflict, including among Lebanese host-communities.

A peacekeeping mission can also face a tricky (and downhill) situation when a conflict party tries to limit the mission's communication with their own or other conflict parties. One tactic that has been used by host-authorities is the appointment of an individual focal point for the mission—as in Western Sahara[93]—providing the mission with only one avenue for communication and coordination.

ISSUE IN CONTEXT: LIMITING COMMUNICATION IN WESTERN SAHARA (MINURSO)

Morocco imposes limitations on MINURSO's communication with Moroccan government officials and civil society. Aligned with its narrow interpretation of MINURSO's mandate, Morocco only grants the mission access to interlocutors specifically required for MINURSO to monitor the cessation of hostilities between Morocco and the Polisario Front. In practice, this means that on the Moroccan side MINURSO only communicates with the Royal Moroccan Armed Forces and one government representative.[94]

Furthermore, the government of Morocco does not allow the mission to engage with civil society or local governance in Morocco-controlled territory.[95] This directly violates the provision in MINURSO's mandate for the conflict parties to enable the mission's "free interaction with all interlocutors,"[96] which the Council has called for since 2012. In practice, this communication barrier preempts any discussion of MINURSO facilitating a referendum on the future of Western Sahara, since the mission cannot engage with civilian populations in Morocco-controlled areas. As one interviewee stated, the notion of consent in the Western Saharan context is pushed very far by the parties, "where they interpret consent as meaning 'you [MINURSO] have to meet our expectation of what you will do.'"[97]

Bureaucratic regulations. Host-authorities sometimes assert their sovereignty or power through the introduction of bureaucratic regulations, taxes, or fees. For example, in Western Sahara, the government of Morocco has only approved the use of one UN-branded license plate, requiring all other UN vehicles to use a Moroccan license plate. This restriction directly contravenes the privileges granted to the mission by the 1991 Status of Mission Agreement.[98]

In other peacekeeping contexts, host-governments have imposed undue taxes or fees on the mission as a way to generate additional revenue for the state. For instance, on 1 June 2022, South Sudan's customs divisions announced an "accreditation permit" that requires the mission to pay $250 per cargo imported; in response, UNMISS issued a demarche to the government[99] and continues to engage with the government on resolving it.[100]

El-Ghassim Wane (second from left), SRSG and Head of MINUSMA, visits the Ménaka region in Mali, together with officials from the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) and the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). UN Photo/Harandane Dicko.

CHAPTER 3:

Good Practices and Lessons from the Field

Over the years, peacekeeping missions have developed many good practices for promoting and maintaining host-country consent. This section provides the first-known collection of such practices across the six case study missions. And while these good practices may not be able to fully stop mission obstructions or dispel geopolitical challenges that constrain the mission, they can be helpful in chipping away at the edges.

Evidence from interviews suggests that the role of senior mission leaders in promoting consent is of utmost importance. Further, mission strategies that contribute to cooperative relationships between missions and host-countries include 1) cultivating strong working relations at strategic levels, 2) preventing and responding to SOFA/SOMA violations, and 3) engaging communities in support of mandated activities.

Communication by Senior Mission Leaders

From the outset of a mission, senior mission leaders set the tone for how a peacekeeping mission will co-exist and engage with host-country interlocutors and the surrounding environment. Mission leadership report most success in managing consent when they focus on cultivating a strong working relationship with host-country counterparts, carefully balancing time and attention between the host-state(s) and other parties to the conflict.

In maintaining strong relations with host-country interlocutors, mission leaders stressed the importance of frequent and informal communication. In most contexts, mission leadership reported meeting regularly with host-government counterparts, such as on a weekly or monthly basis. Consistent communication helps support two-way communication and cooperation. In comparison, less routine communication practices can result in the loss of institutional knowledge and relationships, as staff and leadership rotate in and out of mission.[101]

Informal communication (e.g., texting or phone calls) is used to address emerging developments, with several senior mission leaders noting daily exchanges with host-government counterparts.[102] Proactive communication is particularly important; as one Secretariat official said, "if people are not hearing from you, there may be the potential for mistrust to develop due to silence or hearing misinformation, and you are not there to correct it."[103]

Mission leaders highlighted that the primary objective of communication, following the development of a good working relationship, should be to engage host-country interlocutors in implementing the mission's mandate. Several noted the importance of giving public credit and recognition to host-governments when deserved. And even when the host-government may not actively support mandated activities, such as the monitoring and reporting of human rights abuses, it is important that the opportunity for communication be present. For instance, a common practice is for missions to circulate a copy of a forthcoming human rights report to the host-government about a week prior to its publication. This practice leaves space to annex a response from the host-state, while enabling the mission to maintain its impartiality and implement robust reporting methodologies.[104]

GOOD PRACTICE IN CONTEXT: FACILITATING DIALOGUE IN CYPRUS (UNFICYP)

UNFICYP facilitates the meeting of technical committees, bringing together prominent Greek and Turkish Cypriot civil society leaders to discuss issues of mutual concern. The technical committees focus on diverse thematic issues, including crime, crisis management, civilian crossings across ceasefire lines, and gender equality.[105]

Furthermore, as Acting Head of the Office of the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Cyprus, the Special Representative to the Secretary-General (SRSG) engages the lead negotiators for the Republic of Cyprus and the self-declared Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus in weekly meetings. These meetings allow for direct communication between the parties, enabling trust-building and discussion of ongoing developments in the absence of formal talks.[106] These informal meetings also remain the only forum where the governments work together, particularly in the absence of direct military contact.

One senior mission leader noted the importance of communicating out the mission's boundaries, as "it cannot be host-government collaboration at all costs."[107] Becoming too close to certain leaders or officials in host-governments can also imperil the mission and cloud the judgement of senior mission leaders when it comes to managing the relationship and communicating fault-lines to UN headquarters.[108]

Mission leaders should also ensure that productive working relations are established with non-state conflict parties, and that mission personnel do not view dialoguing or engaging other parties in support of the mandate as taboo, as tends to be the case across

peacekeeping. In practice, host-governments tend to receive more time and attention from senior mission leaders, especially in stabilization missions where the mission is mandated to support the extension of state authority. It is also not unusual for the host-state to attempt to monitor or indirectly limit the mission's level of engagement with other conflict parties. In the case of South Sudan, the government's unwillingness to provide UNMISS flight safety assurances to territory held by opposition groups serves as a de facto way to limit the mission's engagement with them.[109] In other contexts, the use of independent and secure communication channels, like WhatsApp and Signal,[110] helps prevent the host-government from monitoring or opposing mission interactions with other parties to the conflict.

Several senior mission leaders also reported significant utility and success in engaging bilateral representation—both from the region and beyond—in developing a strategic and coordinated approach to engaging parties.[111] For example, the SRSG for South Sudan leads a monthly diplomatic forum with the African Union (AU), Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), Troika, and other UN member states with representation in-country. In these meetings, the SRSG briefs delegates on emerging developments, discusses joint messaging, and coordinates action. This forum is further supported by a weekly mission briefing of Troika ambassadors (with AU and European Union ambassadors often present), and a political affairs working group where the mission, AU, IGAD, and the Reconstituted Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission coordinate host-government engagement.[112]

Addressing SOFA/SOMA Violations

In discussions with peacekeeping personnel, SOFA/SOMA violations are the most cited obstacle to host-country cooperation. Besides the immediate obstruction of the mission, SOFA/SOMA violations can have a chilling effect over time. A buildup of violations disincentivizes mission personnel from undertaking activities or trying to gain access to places where they may be blocked. This form of self-censure can result in the appearance of fewer obstructions by the government, when in reality the situation remains unchanged.

In many contexts, however, the impact of SOFA/SOMA violations appears not to be fully understood across missions, given missions' lack of comprehensive monitoring and reporting on such violations. When asked about SOFA violations, some mission personnel automatically re-interpreted the term to mean restrictions on movement (e.g., access denials) or attacks against peacekeepers, implying a continued need to ensure that personnel are aware of the full range of possible violations.

It is important to note that some mission personnel—particularly among uniformed components—mistakenly attribute the SOFA/SOMA as the source of consent for the mission. This conflation has caused some elements within host-governments to seek to renegotiate the SOFA/SOMA, as occurred in the CAR and Lebanon.[113] However, calls to renegotiate the SOFA/SOMA could contribute to consent deterioration over time, as the

UN is unlikely to reopen negotiations on an agreed SOFA/SOMA since it could erode the privileges and immunities that allow the mission to operate.

As SOFA/SOMA violations differ across contexts and over time, missions have each adopted their own unique approach to addressing and preventing violations—with some standout good practices.

LESSONS FROM THE FIELD

▷ **Prevent:** Disseminate information about the mission mandate and SOFA/SOMA, including through public communications and sensitization campaigns and trainings.

▷ **Monitor:** Internally track violations to the SOFA/SOMA using Situational Awareness Geospatial Enterprise (SAGE), strengthening understanding across the mission about the nature of violations and their impact.

▷ **Respond:** Establish coordination mechanism(s) with host-state(s) to resolve SOFA/SOMA violations and maintain communication with other conflict parties to address cooperation issues.

▷ **Report:** Track and report on SOFA/SOMA violations to the Security Council.

Both the missions in the CAR and South Sudan report conducting sensitization and training initiatives in recent years to prevent SOFA violations, though such practices were put on hold during the pandemic. Participants include state and local government officials, police, and security forces, in both urban and rural areas.[114] As one peacekeeper suggested, sensitization campaigns could be adopted across peacekeeping to expand awareness of the mission's mandate and prevent tactical-level blockages, such as on commonly misunderstood issues like taxation and importation.[115]
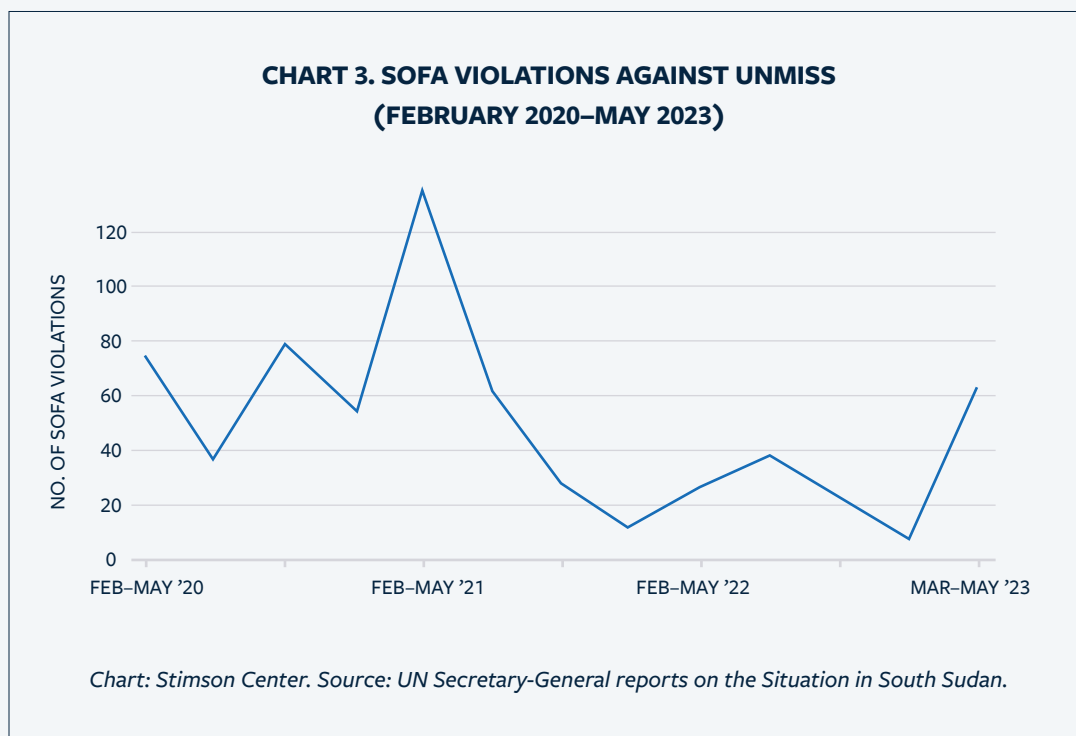
In the context of South Sudan, investigation and verification that a SOFA violation occurred was cited as a vital step undertaken by the force prior to reporting it to the legal affairs division. When speaking about access denials, one peacekeeper reported, "Sometimes the problem is with us, not with those denying us access. We are not hiding things from mission leadership. There needs to be an investigation to see if it really was an access denial or not..."[116] This step may be particularly relevant for uniformed contingents, who tend to have less knowledge of UN procedures and practices because of their short time in mission.

In current practice, missions often flag SOFA violations to the host-state through a note verbale. In the context of MINUSCA, a weekly meeting is held at the technical level between the Chief of Legal Affairs and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to discuss violations. For issues not resolved there, the discussion is escalated to the SRSG's weekly meeting with the host-state's senior leadership. According to one mission representative, "the principle here is to resolve... locally because it is the most efficient."[117] In most contexts, when a bad SOFA violation occurs (e.g., attack or detainment of personnel), the matter is immediately escalated to senior mission leadership.

GOOD PRACTICE IN CONTEXT: HIGH-LEVEL COORDINATION MECHANISM IN SOUTH SUDAN (UNMISS)

In South Sudan, a monthly high-level coordination mechanism between UNMISS and the government was developed in July 2021[118] at the suggestion of the government and has been widely credited for reducing SOFA violations in the months that followed (see Chart 3). From the outset, this mechanism provided a needed venue for dialogue and trust-building, helping to combat outstanding mistrust of the mission.[119]

Co-chaired by South Sudan's Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs and UNMISS's Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Political Affairs, the mechanism enjoys senior participation from both the mission (e.g., Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General/Resident Coordinator/ Humanitarian Coordinator, Force Commander, Police Commissioner, Head of Mission Support, etc.) and the host-government (e.g., Chief of Defense Force, Head of National Police, Chair of Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration Commission, etc.). The mechanism covers issues relating to customs, visas, and freedom of movement, as well as discussion of UNMISS operations. With both UNMISS and the government contributing to the agenda for each meeting,[120] the strength of the mechanism appears to be its egalitarian approach and focus on collaboration and problem-solving.

CHART 3. SOFA VIOLATIONS AGAINST UNMISS (FEBRUARY 2020–MAY 2023)

NO. OF SOFA VIOLATIONS

120
100
80
60
40
20
0

FEB–MAY '20   FEB–MAY '21   FEB–MAY '22   MAR–MAY '23

Chart: Stimson Center. Source: UN Secretary-General reports on the Situation in South Sudan.

This discussion forum has helped reduce blockages to UNMISS' operations and transport of assets in country, including facilitating agreement on coordination guidelines with JVMM on the mission's movement in-country.[121] According to a mission representative, uniformed patrols were previously facing about a 45% denial rate; as of August 2022, access denials were reportedly down to 4-5%, a significant improvement.[122]

SOFA/SOMA violations are internally recorded and reported to the Security Council at the discretion of mission leadership and the Secretariat. Several missions (e.g., MINUSCA, UNMISS) record and monitor violations in SAGE,[123] thereafter reporting violations within the UN Secretary-General reports, usually on freedom of movement issues. In one context, a mission representative reported a reduced number of violations, as "the government realized that the referral of SOFA violations to the UN Security Council was more harmful…" than local resolution.[124] While each incident may not be significant, an accumulation of incidents may point to the need for higher-level action.

Meaningfully Engaging Communities

When civilian populations support the presence of UN peacekeeping, missions can more effectively implement their mandates, contribute to sustainable peace, and ensure the safety and security of peacekeepers. It is thus in peacekeeping's interest for missions to meaningfully engage communities. The role of civil affairs sections is particularly pivotal in subnational engagement and community outreach, serving as a mission's direct link to local authorities and communities, as well as supporting local dialogue, community alert systems, and restoration of government authority. Similarly, national community liaison assistants and language assistants hold a pivotal role in helping missions navigate local languages, customs, and practices.

COMMUNICATING WITH COMMUNITIES

Mission personnel cited communication with host-communities as one of the most important factors for promoting local acceptance. Most personnel highlighted the continued need for missions to improve how they *share* information with communities, including as relates to the following: the principles of peacekeeping,[125] the mission's mandate (what are its priority activities?), the mission's presence (where is mission presence focused and why?), and the SOFA/SOMA (what are the rights, privileges, and immunities of the mission?). The medium of radio was also reported as useful for strengthening local knowledge about the mission, providing unbiased information, and preventing the spread of rumors and misinformation.[126] Making accurate information about peacekeeping readily available is essential, as civilians are "generally in favor of whatever information is available," since they usually are not in a position to verify the veracity of the information.[127]

Listening to and soliciting feedback from host-communities is just as essential. Mission personnel emphasized engaging with community, religious and traditional leaders, and marginalized populations (such as internally displaced persons, women, and youth) about their needs and vision for the community. In the words of one individual, "they need to see the process as their own... if you see peace as an ownership issue, then people want to be a part of it."[128]

In this way, missions can better manage local expectations and combat mis- and disinformation, which 44% of peacekeepers report as having a critical or severe impact on mandate implementation.[129] The commissioning of independent perception surveys could further strengthen mission awareness of local support.[130]

ENGAGEMENT IN MISSION ACTIVITIES

Missions tend to experience strong community acceptance and support when there are opportunities for them to engage in the implementation of mandated activities, when safe to do so. Enabling communities to contribute to mission activities helps secure buy-in, reinforces local agency and capacity, and better ensures the longevity of the mission's impact. Examples of activities include establishing civilian associations to help facilitate two-way communication with the mission; raising awareness of human rights; facilitating community dialogue about harmful customary laws and traditional practices; and providing skill-building trainings (e.g., on public speaking, self-defense classes, unarmed protection) to promote a protective environment.[131]

GOOD PRACTICE IN CONTEXT: COMMUNITY PROTECTION COMMITTEE IN ABYEI (UNISFA)

In Abyei, UN Police (UNPOL) works to implement its Protection of Civilians mandate by training and supporting local communities in unarmed protection. Because of the lack of a functional police service in the Abyei Area (and an insufficient number of UN police officers and no formed police units in mission),[132] UNPOL innovated the mechanism of unarmed Community Protection Committees (CPC).[133] The CPC consists of community volunteers who work to promote a secure environment in Abyei, including on protection of civilians and enforcement of the rule of law. UNPOL works with traditional leaders and the local administration to identify volunteers in the community. They then provide them with basic police training (including on investigation, report writing, detainee rights, search of suspects, and initiative-taking policing), and support the daily functioning of 53 CPC stations and one joint protection committee station through co-location and regular visits.[134]

In June 2022, the mission expanded the CPC to the Northern Sector of Abyei—a historic moment, as UNISFA was hitherto unable to access this sector. This event serves as a positive indicator of the Misseriya community's increased acceptance of UNISFA. The mission also plans on further supporting the work of the CPC by connecting it to traditional courts in the area.[135]

PRIORITIZING COMMUNITY IMPACT

Missions with a force presence report significant success in engaging host-communities via force acceptance activities, including Civil-Military Cooperation, Quick Impact Projects, and dual-benefit development projects. In contexts where the civilian population does not initially welcome the mission, the provision of goods and assets that enhance the capacity or resilience of communities (e.g., motors for water pumps, tractors for farming, reusable face masks) can help facilitate initial connections.[136] While many tout the benefits of Quick Impact Projects, some cite their long-term benefit as negligible or as promoting a transactional relationship. In the case of Lebanon, for instance, communities compare the assistance outputs of peacekeepers from different countries, giving preferential treatment to those with greater resources at their disposal.[137]

Activities that directly serve both the mission mandate and the needs of the community appear to have longer-lasting success. In Abyei, UNISFA prioritized road improvement projects for force mobility on streets where it would have the greatest possible benefit to the community, such as repaving the main road going to the market or digging channels for water runoff near a school. In the words of one mission personnel, "becoming relevant to the community in ways other than keeping the peace has certainly helped a lot."[138]

UN Photo/Ariana Lindquist.

CHAPTER 4:

Opportunities to Strengthen Host-Country Consent

While peacekeeping missions maintain the lead in managing the UN's relations with host-country interlocutors in context, the Security Council and Secretariat are similarly essential to the preservation of strategic consent over time. Too often, peacekeeping missions are left on their own to manage challenges that result from fluctuations in host-country consent. A preferred approach would be to view consent management as requiring regular and mutually re-enforcing interventions by the Security Council, mission, and Secretariat—with each responsible for taking action to promote host-country consent.

	Roles and Responsibilities in Managing Consent
Security Council	• Consults and confirms consent from host-state (and other conflict parties when possible) prior to authorization • Ensures principles of peacekeeping upheld and affirms political support for mission through drafting and adoption of mandate • Convenes public and private consultations and briefings to monitor progress and respond to incidents • Issues Security Council products (e.g., press statements) to condemn, welcome or compel action by actors on the ground
Secretariat	• Conducts strategic and technical field assessments prior to authorization • Manages timely force generation and hiring of personnel • Advises mission on emerging challenges • Liaises with UN member state representatives as needed • Coordinates input into and publishes Secretary-General's reports on progress made by parties
Peacekeeping Mission	• Establishes and cultivates working relations with conflict parties • Implements mandated activities as directed by the Security Council • Problem-solves SOFA/SOMA violations with host-state • Conducts outreach to communities to understand their perceptions and manage expectations about the mission

Host-Governments and Other Conflict Parties	• Affirms support for mission deployment and mandate implementation • Upholds obligations of the SOFA/SOMA and enforces international humanitarian and human rights laws • Manages public expectations about the role of the peacekeeping mission and dispels related disinformation • Shares input and feedback about mission mandate with the Security Council

Security Council

The Security Council by design holds foremost responsibility for consulting with the conflict parties and obtaining consent prior to a mission's deployment; ensuring that the principles of peacekeeping are applied effectively throughout the life span of a mission; and holding conflict parties (including host-states) responsible for cooperating with peacekeeping missions. In practice, however, the Council has generally left the management of host-country consent to senior mission leadership and to some extent, the Secretariat, following the mission's deployment. And while the Council is right to stay out of the day-to-day management of mission relations, a fully hands-off approach increases the risk that consent will deteriorate over time.

Senior mission leadership should not be expected to play both good and bad cop, nor do they wield the political capital or leverage to do so effectively. Thus, the Council can and should do more to re-enforce consent throughout a mission's life span. There is otherwise a significant risk that host-governments and host-populations will further limit cooperation and escalate obstruction of missions, reducing the political authority of the Council and rendering the UN less relevant in supporting the resolution of conflict.

OBTAINING CONSENT

No guidance currently exists on how the UN Security Council should seek consent from the main conflict parties prior to deployment or how to maintain it across a mission's life span. The 2015 *Report of the High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations* acknowledges that there may be "practical obstacles" to securing the consent of non-state conflict parties given the plurality of actors and asymmetrical nature of modern conflict. Overall, consent is easier to determine in contexts where the conflict parties hold similar political leverage and military capabilities, such as in the context of a civil war, ceasefire, or peace agreement between states.[139]

The Security Council can thus choose how to seek consent for a peace operation, informed by initial consultations and a technical field assessment carried out by the Secretariat. Anecdotal evidence suggests that most pre-deployment consultations focus on ensuring the political consent of the host-state(s)—engaging other parties minimally or not at all. This

practice has led to the prevalent perception that the consent of non-state armed groups "can be damned."[140]

And though it is not within the tradition of peacekeeping to seek the consent of non-state conflict parties, it would be useful for the Council to understand beforehand whether non-state conflict parties and civilian communities would be supportive of a UN peace operation, and what challenges the operation may otherwise face.

Prior to authorizing a peace operation, the Council should also establish a memorandum of understanding (MoU)[141] with the main conflict parties. An MoU should serve to codify political consent and outline key points of agreement, including the intended core purpose and objectives of the mission. The MoU could include substantive parameters for the mission's deployment, safeguarding against the UN being forced into a compromising situation following deployment. Alternatively, a five- or ten-year sunset clause could be included where peacekeeping's engagement is intended to be limited. Such a clause could serve as a motivator for conflict parties to commit to meaningful progress, avoiding dependency and unrealistic expectations about the role of the peace operation.

The MoU could further outline the potential range of peacekeeping activities that the Council could decide to mandate over the course of the mission, ideally giving the Council greater flexibility to adapt the mission over time based on realities on the ground. This exercise would also serve as an important stress test for conflict parties' cooperation with the UN and establish a paper trail for future reference. Additionally, it could go a long way in preventing political friction and deadlock within the Council, as the MoU could be used as a roadmap for drafting the peace operation's mandate.

BUILDING AND MAINTAINING CONSENT

After deployment, Council briefings and the mandate renewal process provide key opportunities for the Security Council to communicate directly with the host-state and other conflict parties and ensure host-country cooperation with the mission. As part of the mandating process, it is considered a good practice that penholders consult with host-states (and other conflict parties when possible) on expected changes early on in the process. In the words of one expert, "the more you engage, the more you will generate consent."[142]

How or when penholders consult host-states and other conflict parties, however, remains up to the discretion of each expert holding the pen.[143] This ad hoc approach has led to a lack of clarity about how and when host-states can provide input on the mandate,[144] as well as to different approaches adopted by penholders. In the last few years, the CAR, Mali, and South Sudan have each criticized the respective penholders' approach on their files (i.e., France and the United States) for insufficient consideration of the government's priorities and proposals from other Council members in the drafted mandate.[145]

Penholders should clearly lay out expectations for the host-state's possible engagement in the mandating process well ahead of time, including when and how they can provide input. This could allow host-states to set aside the necessary time and capacity to provide meaningful and timely input, as well as for penholders to have sufficient time to consider their points prior to circulating a draft mandate to other members of the Council. Furthermore, this practice could build greater trust at the expert level and lessen the likelihood that penholders may be surprised by host-state feedback later in the process. As Council consultations begin, the penholder should also remain in frequent contact with the host-state representative, sharing general points of discussion. Once the host-state feedback is received, it could be helpful for penholders to circulate it alongside the proposed draft, to ensure that all Council members have access to the same information and that the host-state cannot solely blame the penholder if requests are not incorporated into the mandate.

Overall, experts cite unity of the Council as a key factor in enabling host-country consent.[146] At present, the Council regularly uses technical rollovers to preserve gains when Council unity or host-country support remains tenuous. This strategy, however, must be undertaken carefully, as it risks communicating that the Council lacks the political will to take new, decisive action. Other actions that may be preferrable could include requesting the Secretary-General to engage the parties through good offices; increasing the frequency or rigor of mission reporting requirements; conducting a Council mission visit; introducing co-penholders on the file;[147] and shortening mission mandates. In most cases, more communication, rather than less, will promote greater mutual understanding and help hold parties responsible for their actions. Outside of the mandating process, the Council should regularly re-enforce host-country cooperation by collectively acknowledging the contributions of the host-state(s) and other conflict parties in response to positive developments.

In contrast, when the conflict parties exhibit limited cooperation or impose undue obstructions on the mission, the Council should act to address the issue(s) and prevent further deterioration. In such cases, Council and regional member states should stand ready to apply diplomatic pressure as needed, and the Council should clearly communicate expectations about the role and limits of the deployed UN peacekeeping mission. Member states with embassies on the ground (including Council members, troop- and police-contributing countries, and neighboring states) should seek to share information, develop joint messaging among the diplomatic community, and engage the host-state in bilateral discussions or collectively as part of a diplomatic demarche. They can also alert regional entities to key obstructions, and issue public statements condemning obstructions to leverage public pressure.

While there clearly remains room for improvement in how the Council can re-enforce host-country consent, the Council should not seek to maintain it regardless of the cost. This is particularly true when maintaining consent would negatively and routinely impact mandate implementation, such as by limiting the scope of protection of civilian activities, denying access for the monitoring and reporting of human rights violations, or hindering the safe delivery of humanitarian assistance. The Security Council must exercise principled action, meaning that they should not abide by actions that impinge on the UN's impartiality or right to use force with a Chapter VII mandate, or increase the likelihood of the UN becoming a bystander to atrocities or a party to the conflict.

In some cases, the least worst option may be for the Council to withdraw a peacekeeping mission. The Council should consider this when the UN is at imminent risk of becoming a bystander to mass human rights violations and violence against civilians and cannot take effective action to help counter or prevent it. Another such case is when the risks to the safety and security of UN peacekeepers become so significant that the presence of the mission can no longer be justified. Similarly, the Council should evaluate the trajectory of a UN peace operation when conflict parties are no longer meaningfully working toward a political solution. The Council and regional organizations could also consider alternatives to a peacekeeping mission—such as a UN peace enforcement operation—particularly where there are significant and escalating threats against civilians. However, this is unlikely to gain support in the Council, and would demonstrate a complete deterioration of the relationship with the host-authorities.

To further understanding of the limitations of peacekeeping and such consent-related issues, a thematic conversation on the principles and limits of peacekeeping could take place in the Working Group on Peacekeeping Operations or be called for by individual Council member states in the form of an Arria-formula meeting. Such discussions would be particularly timely given that these issues were raised in the Secretary-General's New Agenda for Peace.

Secretariat

The Secretariat similarly plays an essential role in supporting the regular operations and activities of a mission. As one UN staff member relayed, it serves as "a sort of think tank and advisor to missions"[148] through the provision of policy support and guidance and backstopping by the Integrated Operational Teams.

Some mission personnel advanced that it can be useful to escalate issues to the Secretariat in New York when they cannot be resolved locally, with the Secretariat informally dialoguing with the UN-recognized host-state(s), Security Council member states, and troop- and police-contributing countries to try to identify a solution.[149] In the words of one UN staff

member, "it's a lot of informal building of relationships and information sharing with representatives...the informal path is usually our first choice."[150]

COMMUNICATING WITH MEMBER STATE REPRESENTATIVES

Interviewees, however, noted that Integrated Operational Teams tend to be responsive, rather than proactive, in their communication with member states—an organizational characteristic stemming from member states' historical discouragement of the Secretariat reaching out.[151] Initiating greater engagement with relevant representatives in New York, however, could help address challenges facing peacekeeping prior to an issue implosion or pile-up. "Good cooperation management," as one UN staff member stated, "is about having consistent exchange of info at all levels, even when they [member states] don't ask for it."[152]

When a crisis emerges or when the mission is not able to make progress on its own, Secretariat leadership should be expected to intervene diplomatically in support of the mission, facilitating discussions and exerting pressure as needed. High-level interventions can help mitigate and resolve issues before they become bigger ones. For example, when the Lebanese Armed Forces denied UNIFIL helicopter flights in 2021, Under-Secretary-General LaCroix's direct engagements at the ambassadorial level led to the issue's efficient resolution.[153]

Similarly, it is the responsibility of UN leadership to intervene when conflict parties routinely obstruct or fail to cooperate in the implementation of a mission's mandate. Letting obstructions go on unresolved for years at a time will lessen the political authority of the mission and cause consent to weaken. The UN Secretary-General, the Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations, and special envoys should thus remain in active and open discussion with host-authorities and other conflict parties, calling upon support from member states in the region and regional organizations as needed.

COMMUNICATING WITH THE SECURITY COUNCIL

Member state representatives interviewed also advocated for more proactive communication to the Security Council on emerging developments. The Secretariat should alert the Council to egregious issues by initiating a closed-door briefing or producing a white note. Several Security Council member states reported the recent innovation of white notes as a good practice, with one citing the January 2022 white note on the use of jamming instruments by the Wagner Group in the CAR as particularly helpful.[154]

To support strengthened communication, the Secretariat should consider the establishment of internal guidance on when the Secretariat should brief the Council, including in response to host-country obstructions. Specific guardrails could relate to egregious incidents perpetuated by host-authorities, such as attack of peacekeepers, declaration

of mission personnel as persona non grata, or partnering with a bilateral security partner that has a demonstrated record of violating international humanitarian and human rights laws. Guardrails could also be put in place to prevent or address the buildup of significant obstructions over time, such as on host-state inaction to issue visas for UN personnel; access denials relating to the protection of civilians and human rights activities; stalled implementation of a political process or a peace agreement; and freedom of movement restrictions that impact the safety and security of peacekeepers (e.g., restrictions that inhibit aerial medical or casualty evacuation).

Similarly, the Secretariat could provide guidance, such as through a non-paper, on the parameters for peacekeeping, outlining what peacekeeping missions can and cannot do. This would not only be a useful tool for Council members but could give mission leaders greater authority in their discussions with host-governments and conflict parties, as well as be used to combat misinformation about peacekeeping.

PUBLIC COMMUNICATIONS

The UN must continue to adapt how it engages the public on peacekeeping. Public and press statements by Secretariat leadership, as well as engagement on social media, are essential for communicating accurate information and demonstrating that peacekeeping is backed at the highest levels of the UN. And while bad news (e.g., attacks on civilians or peacekeepers) tends to be the primary focus of such remarks, it is just as important for Secretariat leadership to highlight progress, give credit, and reiterate their support of peace processes. For instance, local outlets reported on the Secretary-General's pledge of the UN's "full support to the peace and stability of South Sudan" in September 2021.[155]

SECRETARY-GENERAL REPORTS[156]

UN peacekeeping personnel most frequently cited the Secretary-General's country reports when discussing Secretariat support of peacekeeping. Peacekeeping personnel report that conflict parties pay close attention to the report contents, seeking to be portrayed favorably in them. Member state representatives and mission personnel, however, called for improvements to the Secretary-General's reports.

UN member states and peacekeeping personnel frequently reported frustration with the standard tone, language, and content of the Secretary-General reports. Several interviewed argued that the Secretariat should adopt more of a journalistic format, giving UN documents substantive headlines and listing significant developments up front. One mission personnel urged that honesty "be the first principle across the UN as an organization," stating that the UN's preference for confidentiality, both in the field and at headquarters in New York, means that clear attribution of incidents is limited or sometimes non-existent. In several cases,

mission personnel also reported that severe impediments to mission activities were only included in the Secretary-General reports years after they first began or upon their resolution.

Leaving key actors or incidents out of the Secretary-General's reports (e.g., human rights violations, attacks on peacekeepers, or SOFA/SOMA violations) creates the unhelpful impression that attribution or inclusion of an incident in the report is a political act. Greater standardization of reporting practices could thus help to reinforce impartiality and reduce backlash from member states in the longer term.

REPORTING ON SOFA/SOMA VIOLATIONS

The Secretariat is creating a platform to record, vet, and track violations through SAGE to strengthen reporting on SOFA/SOMA violations.[157] This initiative is in direct response to C-34 recommendations in 2020 and 2021[158] and corresponds to A4P+ deliverables.[159] The Secretariat also proposed an extra-budgetary project to develop a supporting training module for peacekeeping personnel,[160] which would go a long way in ensuring that personnel understand the full range and possible implications of SOFA/SOMA violations.

Once deployed, the Secretariat's violation tracking mechanism could streamline and centralize the data collection process and enable more standard reporting to the Security Council. At present, the Council requires only seven out of 12 peacekeeping missions to report regularly on violations, including freedom of movement issues or obstructions to mandate implementation (see Annex 2 for mandate language and mission reporting practices). Among these missions, reporting practices in the Secretary-General reports vary widely, preventing the cross-cutting analysis of data and trends.

Firstly, the amount of data provided by each mission varies significantly. UNMISS offers the most detailed quantitative reporting—providing data on totals for SOFA violations and on freedom of movement issues, accompanied by qualitative explanations for egregious issues. In comparison, MINUSCA reports the total number of SOFA violations, and UNIFIL reports on access to locations of interest and freedom of movement incidents. And even in the exemplary case of UNMISS, the type of detail contained in each report can differ significantly, with different reporting tendencies around attribution, provision of location, and numbers reported by month versus for the full reporting period.

Secondly, missions take diverse approaches to where and how they integrate SOFA/SOMA violation data into the reports, which creates an added barrier to identifying the data within each country report. Practices include creating a stand-alone section for it (e.g., MINUSCA, UNMISS); incorporating data into subsections on mission capacities, safety and security, or challenges to operations (e.g., MINURSO, UNISFA); providing data in an annex (e.g., UNIFIL); or inserting references throughout the report (e.g., UNFICYP, UNDOF).

Thirdly, terminology used to describe violations differs across reports. All missions (except MINUSCA and UNMISS) tend to avoid classifying issues as SOFA/SOMA violations, except in the most problematic of cases. This practice is counterproductive, as it prevents cross-cutting analysis of violations and can lead to the politicization of the Secretary-General reports. Most missions instead refer to specific subtypes of violations, such as freedom of movement issues, visa delays or denials, and imposition of undue taxes or fines. While specificity promotes understanding of the nature of violations, some terminology remains poorly defined, such as "access denials" or "security incidents,"[161] which can lead to data inconsistencies and unclear interpretation.

Interpretation of violations is further complicated by the tendency for Secretary-General reports to provide quantitative data with minimal qualitative descriptors.[162] When presented alongside quantitative information, qualitative data enables comprehension of the severity and nature of the problem. It should also ideally include ongoing efforts to resolve the situation.

Host-Governments and Other Conflict Parties

As the recipient and beneficiary of a UN peacekeeping mission, conflict parties hold primary responsibility for ensuring productive communication and cooperation with the mission. As members of the United Nations, host-states bear responsibility for ensuring that the safety and security and privileges and immunities of the UN are upheld across their territory, as outlined in the SOFA/SOMA.

Host-states must hold themselves and their bilateral partners accountable for actions that contravene international humanitarian or human rights law, run contrary to the SOFA/SOMA signed by the host-state, or impede the mission from implementing its mandate. Host-states could also better enable cooperation with the mission across government departments by adopting a formal policy of cooperation with the mission. Host-governments have a primary role to play in managing the public's expectations of the mission and facilitating its acceptance. State authorities should use strategic communications (e.g., on social media, radio, and television) to inform host-populations about the purpose and mandate of the mission, including what it can and cannot do. It should also sensitize them to the protections, privileges, and immunities of the United Nations required by the SOFA/SOMA, the UN Charter, and relevant international conventions.

Furthermore, public statements of support for the mission should be made regularly at the highest political levels (e.g., by the head(s) of state, minister of foreign affairs, and minister of defense), acknowledging the positive work of the mission and condemning actions that hinder or harm. As one interviewee stated, "it's great that you say nice things on the phone to us privately, but we need for that to be public. First, don't attack the mission, but ideally speak in support of it."[163]

In New York, host-states should ensure that their permanent mission to the UN has the capacity, substantive expertise, and decision-making power to dynamically contribute to the process. Some expressed concern that several host-state permanent missions in New York do not have the necessary institutional knowledge of what peacekeeping can and cannot do, or surge capacity to provide timely and realistic feedback on proposed changes to the mandate.[164] Host-states typically maintain small numbers of staff at permanent missions to the UN because of lesser resources, some with as few as four or five personnel. This is a substantial gap that could slow down or derail peacekeeping negotiation processes. It is thus incumbent on host-states to ensure that their permanent missions are 1) led by representatives who have the knowledge and political clout to inform their government's position on peacekeeping, and 2) remain sufficiently staffed to allow for advocacy and interaction with the UN Security Council and relevant troop- and police-contributing member states.

Host-states may also benefit from an increased profile by engaging with forums outside of the Security Council, as they do not often have the same visibility as troop- and police-contributing countries in conversations about peacekeeping reform. This could include participating more substantively in the annual C-34 substantive session.

Conclusion

Peacekeeping missions cannot operate effectively when host-country interlocutors oppose their presence or mandate. An ongoing lack of cooperation and, in some instances, outright obstruction is having dire impacts on the safety and security of peacekeepers, mission performance (particularly in carrying out protection of civilians and human rights activities), and capacity to satisfactorily contribute to efforts to build and sustain peace. Obstructions such as inaction on granting visas, limited communication, application of bureaucratic regulations, and freedom of movement restrictions, by ground and by air, continue to serve as the greatest obstacles.

Peacekeeping missions already work diligently to build and maintain positive working relations with host-country interlocutors, particularly with host-governments, as they serve as an enabling actor. Good practices featured in this report show that peacekeeping missions can adjust the nature of relationships with host-country counterparts through open communication by senior mission leaders, working with host-governments to address and prevent SOFA/SOMA violations, and prioritizing community engagement across sections. Other actors, including host-governments, the Secretariat, and the Security Council, can and should do more to re-enforce cooperation across the life span of a mission. Host-governments must engage in more public support of the mission, adopt a more flexible approach in coordinating with missions, and prioritize the protection of civilians above all else.

But above all, it is the responsibility of the Security Council to ensure that peacekeeping remains principled and effective in nature, and that there is political pushback when host-authorities are not cooperating with or obstructing missions. Yet the Security Council often defers this responsibility to the peacekeeping mission or struggles to reach a consensus position as a result of differing views about mission mandate priorities. This lack of unanimity in the Council results in mixed messaging to host-authorities and parties to the conflict, requiring that the mission play both good and bad cop as the situation merits. Such a laissez-faire approach is no longer serving the best interests of peacekeeping, as host-governments become more vocal in opposing aspects of the mandate or obstructing mission activities. The Security Council should thus seek to enhance communication with host-country interlocutors, including pre-deployment and as part of mandate renewals. It should seek to be more inclusive in its mandating processes, with penholders communicating their approach to interested parties and consulting widely. At the same time, the Council, backed

by troop-contributing countries and the Secretariat, must also communicate expectations about the role of deployed peacekeeping missions, its limits, and the circumstances in which it is no longer viable. The Secretary-General's call to address the issue of peace enforcement and consider the limits of what peacekeeping offers through the New Agenda for Peace is an opportunity to further understanding on these issues.

Seventy-five years on since the deployment of the first UN peacekeeping mission, it is critical that peacekeeping missions are focused on carrying out their mandate to facilitate political processes and protect civilians. UN missions take risks every day. When they are blocked or threatened, the Council needs to give them their strongest backing and make clear to host-nations and parties to the conflict their responsibility to abide by their original agreement or call the mission back. That action will bolster future success and reveal when a mission faces a changing political calculation by their hosts or finds itself in an untenable situation. If that is the case, transparency and public understanding of that dilemma will help both the UN and nations see what may be needed instead.

Abstentions on Peacekeeping Mandates (2015–2022)*

	MINUSCA	MINUSMA	MONUSCO	UNMISS	MINURSO
2022	China, Gabon, Russia	China, Russia		China, Russia	Kenya, Russia
2021	Russia (March); China, Russia (November)				Russia, Tunisia
2020			Russia		Russia, South Africa
2019				Russia	Russia, South Africa (April and October)
2018	China, Russia				China, Ethiopia, Russia (April); Bolivia, Ethiopia, Russia (October)
2017					
2016				China, Egypt, Russia, Venezuela	Angola, New Zealand, Russia Uruguay and Venezuela voted against resolution
2015				Russia, Venezuela (October and December)	

Only current peacekeeping missions (as of January 2023) where Council members abstained from voting on the mandate are included in the table. Notably, there were also abstentions on resolutions to renew the mandate for the peacekeeping mission in Haiti – the United Nations Mission for Justice Support in Haiti (MINUJUSTH) – from China and Russia in 2018, and Russia and the Dominican Republic in 2019.

ANNEX 2:

Reporting on SOFA/SOMA Violations

Peacekeeping Mission	Requests for UN Secretary-General to report on SOFA/SOMA violations	Mandate language on reporting violations	Reporting in UN Secretary-General reports
MINUSCA	Yes	Requested reporting on "**violations of the Status of Forces Agreement** and follow up on efforts to hold perpetrators accountable, including through joint investigations, as well as attacks, provocations and incitement to hatred and violence and disinformation campaigns against MINUSCA" (S/RES/2659, Nov. 2022, para. 58 [a])	Subsections on "Status-of-forces agreement" and "Safety and security of United Nations personnel."
MINUSMA	Yes	Requested reporting on "...**all instances of interference with MINUSMA's activities** by all actors, including **violations of the SOFA**, denied flight authorizations, attacks, provocations and incitement to hatred and violence and disinformation and misinformation campaigns against MINUSMA..." (S/RES/2640, June 2022, para. 57 [iv])[165]	Subsections on "Freedom of movement, including for intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance assets critical for the safety and security of peacekeepers" and "Ability to implement the entirety of the Security Council mandate, including its human rights provisions."[166]
MONUSCO	No	Not applicable (S/RES/2666, Dec. 2022)	Section on "Safety and security of United Nations personnel." No characterization of harm to personnel as SOFA violations.
UNMISS	Yes	"Requests the Secretary-General to continue to **report violations of the SOFA** or obstructions to UNMISS **on a monthly basis**" (S/RES/2677, March 2023, para. 29)	Section on "Violations of the status-of-forces agreement, international humanitarian law and security of United Nations personnel."
MINURSO	No	Not applicable (S/RES/2654, Oct. 2022)	Restrictions addressed under section on "Challenges to the Operations of the Mission."
UNDOF	Yes—though not characterized as SOFA violations	"...urges prompt reporting by the Secretary-General to the Security Council and troop-contributing countries of **any actions that impede UNDOF's ability to fulfil its mandate**;" (S/RES/2689, June 2023, para. 6)	References to restrictions on movement incorporated in individual paragraphs.

Peacekeeping Mission	Requests for UN Secretary-General to report on SOFA/SOMA violations	Mandate language on reporting violations	Reporting in UN Secretary-General reports
UNFICYP	Yes—though not characterized as SOFA violations	"…continues to request the Secretary-General to report to the Security Council and troop- and police-contributing countries any actions that impede UNFICYP's ability to fulfil its mandate, … as well as the **safety, security, access and freedom of movement of UNFICYP personnel**, and all instances of **interference with UNFICYP's activities** across the island by all actors and efforts to hold perpetrators of such actions accountable, as applicable…" (S/RES/2674, Jan. 2023, para. 12)	References to restrictions on movement incorporated in individual paragraphs.
UNIFIL	Report on attacks against mission and freedom of movement restrictions—though not characterized as SOFA violations	"…requests the Secretary-General to report to the Council, within a reasonable timeframe, when such incidents **[attacks on UNIFIL and its personnel]** occur as well as, when appropriate, on the follow-up of the related pending investigations;" (S/RES/2650, Aug. 2022, para. 15) Requests reporting "…on restrictions to **UNIFIL's freedom of movement**, including details concerning requests submitted by UNIFIL to the Lebanese authorities and any additional steps taken by UNIFIL, attacks, provocations and incitement to hatred and violence and disinformation and misinformation campaigns against UNIFIL," (S/RES/2650, Aug. 2022, para. 30)	Annex on "Restriction of the freedom of access and movement" of the mission. References to restrictions on movement also incorporated in main body of report.
UNISFA	Report on specific types of violations and other impediments—though not characterized as SOFA violations	Requested reporting on "…progress with the increase in police, appointment of a civilian Deputy Head of Mission, usage of Athony airport, and the issuance of visas to support implementation of the mandate, …" (S/RES/2609, Dec. 2021, para. 34)[167]	Subsection on "Freedom of movement violations." Personnel restrictions addressed under section on "Administrative aspects and mission support."
UNMIK	No	Not applicable	No
UNMOGIP	No	Not applicable	No regular reporting by the Secretary-General
UNTSO	No	Not applicable	No regular reporting by the Secretary-General

Endnotes

1   Though MINUSMA was not a case study for this report, we include references to MINUSMA's experience as an active peacekeeping mission throughout, given the relevance and implications of the Malian transitional authorities withdrawing consent for the mission in June 2023.

2   The other two principles are impartiality and "non-use of force except in self-defence and defence of the mandate." See UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations and UN Department of Field Support, *United Nations Peacekeeping Operations: Principles and Guidelines* (referred to hereafter as the Capstone Doctrine), 2008, https://police.un.org/sites/default/files/capstone_eng.pdf, 31.

3   United Nations, *Our Common Agenda Policy Brief 9: A New Agenda for Peace*, July 2023, https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/our-common-agenda-policy-brief-new-agenda-for-peace-en.pdf, 24.

4   The Declaration of Shared Commitments on UN Peacekeeping Operations, shared by the UN Secretary-General in August 2018 under the Action for Peacekeeping (A4P) agenda and endorsed by 154 countries, includes a commitment by host-governments to "cooperate with peacekeeping operations in the pursuit of Security Council mandates, including facilitating access, and [to] recognize national responsibilities related to the safety and security of peacekeepers." The A4P+ initiative further identifies cooperation with host-countries as a priority focus for 2021-2023, with one of seven systemic priorities including "Cooperation with Host Countries." United Nations, Declaration of Shared Commitments on UN Peacekeeping Operations, 2018, https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/a4p-declaration-en.pdf; UN Department of Peace Operations, "Action for Peacekeeping+ Plan," 2021, https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/action_for_peacekeeping_plan.pdf.

5   UN General Assembly, *Report of the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations: 2023 substantive session*, A/77/19, 17 March 2023, para. 52.

6   The term "host-state" is used throughout this report to refer to UN member states that host peacekeeping missions, while "host-governments" and "host-authorities" are used interchangeably to refer to the governing bodies in place where peacekeeping missions deploy. "Host-authorities" may be used in some contexts to refer to both UN member states and non-UN-recognized governing authorities.

7   The Capstone Doctrine acknowledges that simply because "the main parties have given their consent to deployment of a United Nations peacekeeping operation does not necessarily imply or guarantee there will be consent at the local level." See Capstone Doctrine, 32.

8   Spoilers to the conflict can undermine the ability of peacekeeping missions to implement their mandate. The Capstone Doctrine acknowledges that missions require the necessary resources to "manage situations where there is an absence or breakdown of local consent." Ibid., 33.

9   For further analysis, see Alexandra Novosseloff, *A Comparative Study of Older One-Dimensional UN Peace Operations: Is the Future of Peacekeeping Its Past?*, Effectiveness of Peace Operations Network, April 2022, https://effectivepeaceops.net/publication/a-comparative-study-of-older-one-dimensional-un-peace-operations/.

10   For a further exploration of existing literature, see Sofía Sebastián and Aditi Gorur, *U.N. Peacekeeping & Host-State Consent: How Missions Navigate Relationships with Governments*, Stimson Center, 2018, https://www.stimson.org/wp-content/files/file-attachments/UN-PeacekeepingAndHostStateConsent.pdf, 14.

11   Ibid.

12   "Host-Country Consent in UN Peacekeeping: Bridging the Gap Between Principle and Practice," Stimson Center, September 8, 2022, https://www.stimson.org/2022/host-country-consent-in-un-peacekeeping-bridging-the-gap-between-principle-and-practice/.

13   Capstone Doctrine, 31.

14   Ibid.

15   UN General Assembly and Security Council, *Report of the High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations on Uniting Our Strengths for Peace: Politics, Partnership and People*, A/70/95-S/2015/446, https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/795940?ln=en, 46.

16   For instance, Sofía Sebastián and Aditi Gorur define consent as: 1) acquiescence to the presence of a peacekeeping mission, 2) acceptance of the mission's mandate, and 3) commitment to the political process that the mission is intended to support. Sebastián and Gorur, *U.N. Peacekeeping and Host-State Consent*, 19.

17   Capstone Doctrine, 31. The Capstone Doctrine was issued by the UN Secretariat in 2008 and intended as a foundation guidance document on UN peacekeeping.

18   Ibid.

19   UN General Assembly and Security Council, *Report of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations*, A/55/305-S/2000/809, 21 August 2000, https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/a_55_305_e_brahimi_report.pdf, ix.

20   United Nations, *Our Common Agenda Policy Brief 9,* 24.

21   See Sebastián and Gorur, *U.N. Peacekeeping and Host-State Consent*, 11.

22   UNMIK in Kosovo is not listed in the table. Though Kosovo has had its statehood recognized by many countries, it is not a UN member state and thus cannot be classified as an "intra-state'" conflict, which would be the closest scenario. UNMIK is focused on supporting internal political dialogue within the territory.

23   Virtual interview with mission official, June 2022.

24   Virtual interview with a non-state conflict party, April 2022.

25   For further discussion of engagement with diverse peacekeeping stakeholders, see Ian Johnstone, "Managing Consent: The New Variable?," in Cedric de Coning, Andreas Øien Stensland, and Thierry Tardy (eds.), *Beyond the 'New Horizon'. Proceedings from the UN Peacekeeping Future Challenges Seminar Geneva, 23-24 June 2010,* Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, 2010, 33-34.

26   Virtual interview with peacekeeping scholar, October 2021.

27   Anjali Dayal, "A Crisis of Consent in UN Peace Operations," *The Global Observatory,* 2 August 2022, https://theglobalobservatory.org/2022/08/a-crisis-of-consent-in-un-peace-operations/.

28   UN Security Council, *Annex to the letter dated 1 September 2022 from the Permanent Representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council*, S/2022/664, 12 September 2022, 4.

29   UN Department of Peace Operations, *The Protection of Civilians in United Nations Peacekeeping Policy,* Ref. 2023.05, 1 May 2023, para. 56.

30   A SOFA/SOMA is a legal agreement that describes the position of foreign military forces and civilian personnel in a host-country. It outlines the rights and obligations of the mission and host-state, while also providing the former with specific privileges and immunities that allow it to operate safely and expeditiously. A SOFA is used in a mission setting where military force is deployed; in comparison, a SOMA is utilized when a mission does not maintain such force.

31   See Sebastián and Gorur, *U.N. Peacekeeping and Host-State Consent*, 16.

32   "Host-Country Consent in UN Peacekeeping," Stimson Center.

33   Virtual interviews with UNISFA officials in January 2022 and UN officials in April 2022; UN Security Council, *Resolution 2609 (2021),* S/RES/2609, Dec. 2021, para. 34.

34   UN Security Council, 9082nd Meeting, S/PV.9082, 29 June 2022, 7. The Malian government's response to the strategic internal review in early 2023 further demonstrated a range of mismatched expectations about what MINUSMA could achieve in terms of security; its role as a peacekeeping mission versus a peace enforcement operation; and the centrality of human rights and protection of civilians to its mandate (which Mali was opposed to). See Government of Mali, "Priorities and expectations of the Government of Mali for the Strategic Review of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali," in the *Internal Review of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali: Report of the Secretary-General,* S/2023/36, UN Security Council, 16 January 2023.

35   China and Russia, for instance, justified their abstention on MINUSCA's 2022 mandate renewal on the claim that the adopted mandate did not sufficiently address host-state priorities, including in supporting the state in extending its authority in newly regained territory. See UN Security Council, 9190th Meeting, S.PV/9190, 14 November 2022, 6.

36   Virtual interview with UN official, May 2022.

37   Sebastián and Gorur, *U.N. Peacekeeping and Host-State Consent*, 13.

38   Of the 12 UN peacekeeping missions operating in 2023, the longest has been deployed for 75 years (UNTSO) and the shortest for 9.5 years (MINUSCA). Most of the current peacekeeping missions have been deployed for two decades or more. See UN Department of Peace Operations, "List of Peacekeeping Operations 1948-2020," 2020, https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/un_peacekeeping_operation_list_3_2.pdf.

39   Ian Johnstone, "Managing Consent: The New Variable?," in Cedric de Coning, Andreas Øien Stensland, and Thierry Tardy (eds.), *Beyond the 'New Horizon'. Proceedings from the UN Peacekeeping Future Challenges Seminar Geneva, 23-24 June 2010,* Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, 2010, 26.

40   Ibid., 36.

41 UN Security Council, 9082nd Meeting.

42 UN Security Council, 8994th Meeting, S/PV.8994, 15 March 2022, 3.

43 UN Security Council, 9281st Meeting, S/PV.9281, 15 March 2023, 3.

44 Julie Gregory, "Sharing the Pen in the UN Security Council: A Win for Inclusive Multilateralism?," *The Global Observatory,* 7 April 2023, https://theglobalobservatory.org/2023/04/sharing-the-pen-un-security-council-inclusive-multilateralism/.

45 Government of Mali, "Priorities and expectations…" in the *Internal Review of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali: Report of the Secretary-General*, S/2023/36, UN Security Council, 16 January 2023, 23.

46 UN Security Council, "Annex to the letter dated 21 June 2023 from the Permanent Representative of Mali to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council," S/2023/463, 29 June 2023, 2.

47 UN Security Council, 9190th Meeting, 9.

48 *Wagner Group Operations in Africa: Civilian Targeting Trends in the Central African Republic and Mali,* Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project, 30 August 2022, https://acleddata.com/2022/08/30/wagner-group-operations-in-africa-civilian-targeting-trends-in-the-central-african-republic-and-mali/.

49 Virtual interview with mission official, June 2022. Although such security actors may not be party to the SOFA, their relationship with the host-authorities raises questions about the host-government's responsibilities in relation to the mission. Host-governments have routinely selected a range of different security partners to support their efforts at security sector reform and as an exercise of their sovereignty. However, the presence of actors (such as Wagner) may violate the terms of the SOFA under government auspices undermines the terms in which the peacekeeping mission was deployed and reflects another obstruction to the mission and its mandate.

50 Albert Trihart, *Disinformation Against UN Peacekeeping Operations,* International Peace Institute, November 2022, https://www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/2212_Disinformation-against-UN-Peacekeeping-Ops.pdf.

51 Trihart, *Disinformation Against UN Peacekeeping Operations*, 4.

52 *Wagner Group Operations in Africa*, ACLED, 30 August 2022.

53 UN Department of Peace Operations, "Statement attributable to the UNIFIL Spokesperson's office," 12 September 2022, https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/statement-attributable-to-unifil-spokespersons-office; virtual interviews with mission officials, October 2021.

54 Richard Gowan, "Explaining the UN Secretary-General's Cautious Crisis Diplomacy," *International Crisis Group*, 5 May 2021, https://www.crisisgroup.org/global/explaining-un-secretary-generals-cautious-crisis-diplomacy.

55 This includes substantive dialogue about the role of peacekeeping missions in the protection of civilians. See Lisa Sharland, "MINUSMA and Protection of Civilians: Implications for Future Peacekeeping Missions," International Peace Institute's Global Observatory, 14 July 2023, https://theglobalobservatory.org/2023/07/minusma-and-protection-of-civilians-implications-for-future-peacekeeping-missions/.

56 UN General Assembly, *Report of the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations*, A/77/19, para. 175.

57 Virtual interview with UNMISS official, August 2022.

58 UN Security Council, *Situation in South Sudan: Report of the Secretary-General,* S/2021/566, 14 June 2021, para 97.

59 Virtual interview with UNMISS official, August 2022.

60 Virtual interviews with UNISFA official in March 2022 and UNMISS officials in August 2022.

61 Virtual interview with UNMISS official in August 2022.

62 UNIFIL's coordination with the Lebanese Armed Forces remains a particular point of contention since the Security Council noted in Resolution 2650 (2022) that UNFIL "is authorized to conduct its operation independently." UN Security Council, Resolution 2650 (2022), S/RES/2650, 31 August 2022, para. 16.
    In the lead up to UNIFIL's 2023 mandate renewal, Lebanon's Foreign Minister advocated that the draft resolution "does not refer to the necessary and importance of UNIFIL coordinating its operations with the Lebanese government, represented by the Lebanese army." See "Lebanon rejects UNSC draft resolution to renew UNIFIL mandate," Al Mayadeen, 26 August 2023, https://english.almayadeen.net/news/politics/lebanon-rejects-draft-resolution-by-unsc-to-renew-unifil-man.

63 Virtual interview with UNIFIL official, October 2021.

64 Virtual interview with UNIFIL official, June 2022.

65 "Annex I: Restriction of the freedom of access and movement of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon from 21 February to 20 June 2023," in UN Security Council, *Implementation of Security Council resolution 1701 (2006) during the period from 21 February to 20 June 2023,* S/2023/522, 13 July 2023, para. 3.

66 UN Security Council, *Implementation of Security Council resolution 1701*, para. 21.

67 Virtual interviews with UNIFIL officials, October 2021.

68 Virtual interview with UNIFIL official, October 2021.

69 For context on some of the challenges to the use of air assets in missions, see Lisa Sharland and Ilhan Dahir, "Addressing Threats to UN Peacekeepers: The Potential of the Air Domain," Stimson Center, 24 February 2023, https://www.stimson. org/2023/addressing-threats-to-un-peacekeepers-the-potential-of-the-air-domain/.

70 "Sudan/South Sudan: May 2023 Monthly Forecast," Security Council Report, 30 April 2023, https://www.securitycouncilreport. org/monthly-forecast/2023-05/sudan-south-sudan-17.php.

71 Virtual interview with UNISFA officials, January 2022.

72 UN Security Council, *Situation in Abyei: Report of the Secretary-General,* S/2021/881, 15 October 2021, para. 79.

73 UN Security Council, *Situation in Mali: Report of the Secretary-General*, S/2022/446, 2 June 2022, para. 70.

74 UN Security Council, 9156th Meeting, S/PV.9156, 19 October 2022, 2.

75 Spokesman for UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, "Expressing Condolences for Peacekeepers Killed in Central African Republic, Secretary-General Urges National Authorities to Identify Perpetrators," SG/SM/21515, 4 October 2022, https://press. un.org/en/2022/sgsm21515.doc.htm.

76 UN Security Council, 9156th Meeting.

77 UN Security Council, *Central African Republic: Report of the Secretary-General*, S/2023/108, 16 February 2023, para. 69.

78 UN Security Council, 8971st Meeting, S/PV.8971, 22 February 2022.

79 UN Security Council, C*entral African Republic,* S/2023/108, para. 18.

80 UN Security Council, *Central African Republic: Report of the Secretary-General*, S/2023/442, 15 June 2023, para. 91.

81 Michele Kambas, "UN Peacekeepers Hurt in Cyprus Buffer Zone Clash with Turkish Forces," Reuters, 18 August 2023, https:// www.reuters.com/world/un-peacekeepers-hurt-cyprus-buffer-zone-clash-with-turkish-forces-2023-08-18/.

82 UN News, "Spare no effort in probe into attack against blue helmets in CAR: Guterres," 5 November 2021, https://news. un.org/en/story/2021/11/1104992.

83 Virtual interview with MINUSCA official, April 2022.

84 UN Press Release, "At Least 32 Peacekeeping, Associated Personnel Killed in Malicious Attacks during 2022, United Nations Staff Union President Says," ORG/1730, 20 January 2023, https://press.un.org/en/2023/org1730.doc.htm.

85 Interviews with UNIFIL officials in October 2021 and June 2022 and MINUSCA officials in April and June 2022.

86 Virtual interview with MINUSCA official, April 2022.

87 UN Security Council, *Situation in South Sudan: Report of the Secretary-General*, S/2020/890, 8 September 2020, para. 92; virtual interview with MINUSCA official, April 2022.

88 Virtual interview with UNISFA officials, April 2022; UN Security Council, *Situation in Abyei: Report of the Secretary-General,* S/2023/305, 1 May 2023, para. 66.

89 UN Security Council, *Situation in Abyei: Report of the Secretary-General,* S/2021/881, 15 October 2021, para. 80.

90 UN Security Council, *Situation in Abyei,* S/2023/305, para. 34.

91 UN Security Council, *Implementation of Security Council resolution 1701* (*2006*) *during the period from 21 February to 20 June 2023: Report of the Secretary-General,* S/2023/522, 13 July 2023, para. 27.

92 Virtual interview with UNIFIL official, October 2021.

93 Virtual interview with MINURSO official, April 2022.

94 Ibid.

95 Ibid.

96 UN Security Council, *Resolution 2654* (*2022*), S/RES/2654 (2022), 27 October 2022, para. 7.

97 Virtual interview with mission official, April 2022.

98 Ibid.

99 UN Security Council, *Situation in South Sudan: Report of the Secretary-General*, S/2022/689, 13 September 2022, para. 91.

100 UN Security Council, *Situation in South Sudan: Report of the Secretary-General*, S/2023/433, 13 June 2023, para. 93.

101 Virtual interviews with UNIFIL official in October 2021, MINUSCA official in April 2022, UNFICYP official in May 2022, and UNMISS official in August 2022.

102 Virtual interviews with MINUSCA officials in April and June 2022 and MINURSO official in April 2022.

103 Virtual interview with UN officials, April 2022.

104 Virtual interview with UNMISS official, August 2022.

105 Virtual interview with UNFICYP official, May 2022; UN Security Council, *United Nations Operation in Cyprus: Report of the Secretary-General,* S/2023/498, 5 July 2023.

106 Virtual interview with UNFICYP official, May 2022; UN Security Council, *United Nations Operation in Cyprus*, para. 33.

107 Virtual interview with UNMISS official, August 2022.

108 For analysis on how SRSG Wane's relationship with Mali's transitional authorities may have impacted consent for MINUSMA, see Fatoumata Diallo and Joan Tilouine, "Assimi Goita's risky plan for post-MINUSMA era," African Intelligence, 28 June 2023, https://www.africaintelligence.com/west-africa/2023/06/28/assimi-goita-s-risky-plan-for-post-minusma-era,109998256-eve.

109 Virtual interview with UNMISS official, August 2022.

110 Virtual interview with MINURSO official, April 2022.

111 Virtual interview with UNIFIL official in October 2021, MINUSCA official in June 2022, and UNMISS official in August 2022.

112 Virtual interviews with UNMISS officials in August 2022.

113 Virtual interviews with MINUSCA official in April 2022 and UNIFIL official in October 2021.

114 Virtual interviews with MINUSCA official and UNMISS official in August 2022.

115 Virtual interview with UNMISS official, August 2022.

116 Virtual interview with UNMISS official, August 2022.

117 Virtual interview with MINUSCA official, August 2022.

118 UN Security Council, *Situation in South Sudan: Report of the Secretary-General,* S/2021/784, 9 September 2021, para. 95.

119 Virtual interview with UNMISS official, August 2022.

120 Virtual interviews with UNMISS officials, August 2022.

121 UN Security Council, *Situation in South Sudan,* S/2021/784, para. 95.

122 Virtual interview with UNMISS official, August 2022.

123 UN General Assembly, *Implementation of the Recommendations of the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations: Report of the Secretary-General—An Addendum*, A/76/505 Add. 1, 2 November 2021, para. 158.

124 Virtual interview with UNMISS official, August 2022.

125 Virtual interview with UN member state representative, April 2022.

126 Virtual interviews with UNMISS official and MINUSCA official in August 2022.

127 Virtual interview with MINUSCA official in April 2022.

128 Virtual interview with UN member state representative, May 2022.

129 UN Department of Peace Operations, "Action for Peacekeeping +: Overview for November 2021 – April 2022," 30 July 2022, https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/a4p_report_-_30_jul_1747_ed.pdf, 3.

130 UN General Assembly, *Report of the High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations*, para. 153.

131 Virtual interviews with UNIFIL official in October 2021 and UNISFA officials in January and April 2022.

132 UN Security Council, *Situation in Abyei,* S/2023/305, para. 66.

133 Virtual interview with UNISFA officials, March 2022.

134 Virtual interview with UNISFA officials, April 2022; UN Department of Peace Operations, "History Made as UNISFA Establishes Community Protection Committee in Northern Abyei," 30 June 2022, https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/history-made-unisfa-establishes-community-protection-committee-northern-abyei; UN Security Council, *Situation in Abyei,* S/2023/305, para. 27.

135 UN Department of Peace Operations, "History Made as UNISFA Establishes Community Protection Committee in Northern Abyei."

136 Virtual interviews with UNIFIL officials in October 2021 and June 2022 and UNISFA officials in April 2022.

137 Virtual interviews with UNIFIL officials in October 2021.

138 Virtual interview with UNISFA officials, January 2022.

139 UN General Assembly, *Report of the High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations*, para. 127.

140 Virtual interview with peacekeeping scholar, October 2021.

141 For other ideas, see UN General Assembly, *Report of the High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations*, para. 151 on establishing a compact and para. 184-185 on a two-stage mandating process; Adam Day, "To Build Consent in Peace Operations, Turn Mandates Upside Down," United Nations University, Centre for Policy Research, 19 January 2017, https://cpr.unu.edu/publications/articles/to-build-consent-in-peace-operations-turn-mandates-upside-down.html; and Aditi Gorur, "Managing Host-State Consent and the Protection of Civilians" in *Evolution of the Protection of Civilians in UN Peacekeeping*, Australian Strategic Policy Institute, 1 July 2019, https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep23103.6?seq=9#metadata_info_tab_contents, 19.

142 Virtual interview with peacekeeping scholar, July 2021.

143 France, the United Kingdom, or the United States currently holds the pen on 11 out of 12 peacekeeping files. The exception applies to the mission in the Golan Heights (UNDOF), which the United States and Russia share the pen on. Julie Gregory, "Sharing the Pen in the UN Security Council." In some cases, a Group of Friends may also have input into the development and draft of the mandate e.g., Group of Friends of Western Sahara (which includes France, Russia, the UK, US and Spain). See "October 2020 Monthly Forecast", Security Council Report, 30 September 2020, https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/monthly-forecast/2020-10/western-sahara-5.php.

144 "Host-Country Consent in UN Peacekeeping," Stimson Center.

145 In June 2022, the representative of Mali thanked China and Russia for abstaining on MINUSMA's mandate renewal, claiming that the mandate did not incorporate their "strongest reservations." UN Security Council, 9082nd Meeting, 7. That same month, the representative of the CAR suggested that a member of the A3 would serve as a more appropriate penholder. UN Security Council, 9074th Meeting, S/PV.9074, 22 June 2022, 23. The Central African representative also issued a letter to the President of the Security Council ahead of MINUSCA's November 2022 mandate renewal, advancing that the draft resolution did not incorporate some of the CAR's top concerns. "Central African Republic: MINUSCA Mandate Renewal," Security Council Report, 13 November 2022, https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/whatsinblue/2022/11/central-african-republic-minusca-mandate-renewal-2.php. Most recently, the representative of South Sudan called for the penholder to adopt a more "collaborative spirit" going forward. UN Security Council, "Security Council Extends Mandate of United Nations Mission in South Sudan, Adopting Resolution 2677 (2023) by 13 Votes in Favour, 2 Abstentions," SC/15227, 15 March 2023, https://press.un.org/en/2023/sc15227.doc.htm.

146 Virtual interviews with peacekeeping scholars in July and October 2021.

147 Introducing co-penholding to peacekeeping files could open new channels of communication and strengthen the resiliency of the Council's relationship with the host-state(s), particularly if relations with the original penholder start to deteriorate. On African files, the A3 have expressed increasing interest in being involved in the mandating process. See Gregory, "Sharing the Pen in the Security Council."

148 Virtual interview with UN officials, April 2022.

149 Virtual interviews with UNISFA official in March 2022, UNFICYP official in May 2022, MINUSCA officials in April and August 2022, and UN officials in April 2022.

150 Virtual interview with UN officials in April 2022.

151 Ibid.

152 Ibid.

153 Virtual interview with UNIFIL official, October 2021.

154 Virtual interviews with UN member state representatives in April 2022.

155 "UN Chief Pledges to Support South Sudan Peace Process," *Sudan Tribune,* September 19, 2022, https://sudantribune.com/article264285/.

156 Unless otherwise stated, feedback included in this section comes from virtual interviews with UNIFIL officials in October 2021, a MINUSCA official in April 2022, UN officials in April 2022, a UN member state representative in April 2022, a non-state conflict party in April 2022, and a UNFICYP official in May 2022.

157 UN General Assembly, *Implementation of the Recommendations of the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations*, A/76/505 Add. 1, para. 158.

158 See UN Department of Peace Operations, *Report of the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations: 2020 substantive session*, A/74/19, 20 March 2020, para. 142; UN Department of Peace Operations, *Report of the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations: 2021 Substantive Session*, A/75/19, 17 March 2021, para. 158.

159 See UN Department of Peace Operations, "Action for Peacekeeping+ Plan," 2021, https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/action_for_peacekeeping_plan.pdf.

160 UN General Assembly, *Implementation of the Recommendations of the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations*, A/76/505 Add. 1, para. 158.

161 "Security incidents" is a wide-ranging term that tends to include traffic violations, accidents, detainment of personnel, loss of property, and attacks against personnel. Some of these incidents (e.g., detainment or attacks against property) are SOFA/SOMA violations, while others in this category may not be. The utility of security incidents as a category is thus limited, particularly as an accountability tool.

162 UNIFIL serves as a notable exception, as each report contains an annex dedicated to a narrative of each freedom of movement incident. Out of the larger peacekeeping missions, UNMISS provides the best balance of quantitative and qualitative data, with SOFA violations and movement restrictions featured in every Secretary-General report on South Sudan since early 2014. However, less qualitative information has been featured on SOFA violations against UNMISS in the last few years. MINUSCA and MINUSMA have also made initial strides to include more qualitative information on SOFA violations in 2023 reports.

163 Virtual interview with UN member state representative, April 2022.

164 Virtual interviews with UN member state representatives in April and May 2022 and February 2023.

165 This was MINSUMA's last substantive mandate prior to the Council's decision in June 2023 to drawdown and withdraw the peacekeeping mission from Mali. In MINUSMA's terminating mandate, the Council did not include any reporting requirements, though requested that the government "fully respect all provisions of the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) until the departure of the final element of MINUSMA from Mali." UN Security Council, *Resolution 2690 (2023)*, S/RES/2690 (2023), 30 June 2023, para. 4.

166 Following publication of MINUSMA's internal review in January 2023, the Secretary-General re-structured subsequent reports to the Security Council on Mali (released in March and June 2023) around the four parameters for MINUSMA's effective engagement in-country. Prior reports referenced restrictions imposed on the mission under a section on "Capacities of the Mission" and a subsection on "Safety and Security of United Nations Personnel."

167 UNISFA's renewed mandate in November 2022 links directly back to Resolution 2609 (2021).

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