

Reframing the Protection of Civilians Paradigm for UN Peace Operations

NOVEMBER 2017

IPI Protection of Civilians Project

The International Peace Institute (IPI) is developing a new project to look at current challenges faced by peace operations in the protection of civilians (POC) for 2018–2019. While there is generally a lack of a unified vision for reconciling POC, political processes, and exit strategies, UN missions tend to implement POC mandates in a technical and mechanistic way, to reduce POC to a separate task, and to overly focus on questions related to the use of force.

This project aims to define a new vision for POC in peace operations, based on solid political strategies, clearer roles and responsibilities within missions, and enhanced accountability. Through research, convening, and training, it will support the UN Secretariat's efforts to reframe the vision of POC for peace operations, promote tailored approaches that explore the added value of the different actors implementing POC mandates within UN missions, and support a multilayered accountability system for POC.

This issue brief was drafted by Namie Di Razza, Post-doctoral Fellow at IPI and lead of the POC project. The views expressed in this publication represent those of the author and not necessarily those of the International Peace Institute. IPI welcomes consideration of a wide range of perspectives in the pursuit of a well-informed debate on critical policies and issues in international affairs.

IPI would like to thank the permanent missions of Italy and the Netherlands to the United Nations for making this publication possible.

Introduction

Following the dramatic failure of United Nations peacekeepers to protect civilians in Rwanda and Bosnia in the early 1990s, the UN engaged in a deep lesson-learning process to change the face of its peace operations and to regain credibility. This led the Security Council to establish the “protection of civilians” (POC) as an explicit mandate for the peacekeeping mission in Sierra Leone in 1999.

Since then, POC has continuously gained prominence, both as a concept and in practice, and has become the mandated priority for most UN peacekeeping operations. Peacekeepers are authorized and expected to use “all necessary means” to protect civilians from threats of physical violence in nine of the fifteen countries where a UN peacekeeping operation is deployed. This includes a wide range of multidimensional actions from the civilian, police, and military components of UN missions, which are all seeking to deter, prevent, preempt, and stop violence perpetrated against civilians through coordinated POC strategies. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), South Sudan, and the Central African Republic (CAR), peacekeepers have designed numerous tools, mechanisms, activities, and tactics to better implement POC mandates, such as enhancing community engagement and establishing alert networks, monitoring and advocating for human rights, ensuring the safety of POC sites, and engaging in robust operations against armed groups.

The UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) and Department of Field Support (DFS) have developed multiple guidance materials, including a POC concept that defines protection around three tiers (protection through dialogue and engagement, provision of physical protection, and establishment of a protective environment) and four phases (prevention, preemption, response, and consolidation).¹ POC tasks involve all components of peace missions and are therefore as much implemented by troops as by UN police, human rights officers, community liaison assistants, and disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) experts. From avoiding genocide and massive war crimes, the focus of POC has been extended to include preventing any kind of physical violence,² responding to multifaceted threats, and consolidating an environment conducive to the security of populations

1 UN Department of Peacekeeping/Department of Field Support (DPKO/DFS), *The Protection of Civilians in United Nations Peacekeeping*, April 2015, available at <http://providingforpeacekeeping.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/2015-07-Policy-on-PoC-in-Peacekeeping-Operations.pdf>.

2 The policy developed by DPKO defines “threats of physical violence or POC threats” as encompassing “all hostile acts or situations that are likely to lead to death or serious bodily injury, regardless of the source of the threat.”

and the preservation of their human rights.

However, this evolution has had divergent effects. On the one hand, POC has become the centerpiece of peacekeeping for many stakeholders, and the “culture of protection” called for by the secretary-general in 2001 seems to have percolated throughout the UN system and into the mindsets of those in the field.³ On the other hand, the multidimensional and holistic approach to POC promoted by the Secretariat has contributed to diluting the concept, which has become a consensual label that is rarely opposed and that may be used to justify very diverse actions and approaches.

The widespread usage of the POC concept has notably changed the nature of peace operations by allowing for more flexible interpretation of the basic principles of peacekeeping related to the limited use of force, the impartiality of UN missions, and the necessity of consent from the parties to the conflict. Under the banner of POC, peacekeepers have been led to conduct robust or offensive military operations in the DRC, to thwart the movement of certain armed groups threatening populations in CAR, and to work without the consent of the main parties to the conflict in South Sudan. In Mali, POC has even appeared as a possible entry point to link peacekeeping with efforts to prevent and counter violent extremism.

In addition, due to the broad definition of POC—it encompasses all activities contributing to preventing or stopping violence against civilians by any actor, and includes political dialogue, physical protection, and the consolidation of an environment conducive to protection—POC is often seen as an open-ended mandate. It has also become increasingly perceived as contradicting and preventing exit strategies for peace operations and, more generally, as competing with other priorities related to the support of political processes.

This paper explores these debates in order to

inform the reframing of protection of civilians for peace operations. As the secretary-general intends to lay out his vision for POC in the coming months and to launch a global campaign to champion the agenda,⁴ and as DPKO is expected to update its official policy on protection of civilians in 2018, this is an opportune moment to readjust perspectives on POC.

Shifting from Output-Focused to Outcome-Driven Implementation

DEVELOPMENT OF A POC SYSTEM: POLICIES, TOOLS, AND ACTIVITIES

Since 1999, POC has conceptually and practically expanded in New York and field missions, leading to its institutionalization within the UN system and its consecration as a new paradigm for UN peace operations.

On the political level, the Security Council has demonstrated the continued practice of including POC in the mandates of peacekeeping operations, including in the DRC (MONUSCO), CAR (MINUSCA), Mali (MINUSMA), Darfur (UNAMID), South Sudan (UNMISS), Abyei (UNISFA), Lebanon (UNIFIL), Liberia (UNMIL), and Haiti (MINUJUSTH). The language used by the Security Council, listed in the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs’ (OCHA) aide-mémoire on the protection of civilians, has greatly evolved.⁵ Missions were originally mandated to protect civilians “under imminent threat of physical violence” and with the caveats that they should only do so “within [their] capabilities and areas of deployment” and “without prejudice to the primary responsibility of the Government of [the affected country].” Today, these limitations have been reduced, and in some missions, peacekeepers are authorized to “use all necessary means”⁶ to “ensure” protection of civilians from any threat of physical violence.⁷

3 UN Security Council, *Report of the Secretary-General to the Security Council on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict*, UN Doc. S/2001/331, March 30, 2001.

4 The global campaign will focus on the POC question at large, beyond peace operations, including the human cost of armed conflicts; data collection on threats to and violations of POC; conduct of hostilities and combatants’ behaviors; and development and dissemination of good practices to protect civilians.

5 OCHA, *Aide Memoire for the Consideration of Issues Pertaining to the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict*, 2016, available at www.unocha.org/sites/unocha/files/Aide%20Memoire%202016%20II_0.pdf.

6 “All necessary means” or “all necessary measures” to protect civilians are authorized in the mandates of MINUSCA, MONUSCO, UNMISS, and MINUSMA, while UNAMID is authorized to “take the necessary action.”

7 UN Security Council Resolution 2348 (March 31, 2017), UN Doc. S/RES/2348.

“irrespective of the source of such violence,”⁸ and POC has been given “priority in decisions about the use of available capacity and resources.”⁹

POC mandates are also far more detailed and precise. In CAR, MINUSCA is invited to protect the civilian population under threat of physical violence and to:

take active steps to anticipate, deter and effectively respond to serious and credible threats to the civilian population and, in this regard, to enhance early warning, while maintaining a proactive deployment and a mobile, flexible and robust posture, as well as conducting active patrolling, in particular in high risks areas.¹⁰

In South Sudan, UNMISS is tasked “to protect civilians under threat of physical violence” and:

to deter violence against civilians, including foreign nationals, especially through proactive deployment, active patrolling with particular attention to internally displaced persons (IDPs), including, but not limited to, those in protection sites and refugee camps, humanitarian personnel and human rights defenders, and identification of threats and attacks against civilians, including through regular interaction with civilians and working closely with humanitarian, human rights and development organizations, in areas at high risk of conflict including, as appropriate, schools, places of worship, hospitals, and oil installations.¹¹

In the DRC, MONUSCO is expected to:

ensure effective and dynamic protection of civilians under threat of physical violence, including by preventing, deterring, and stopping all armed groups and local militias from inflicting violence on the populations, and by supporting and undertaking local mediation efforts to prevent escalation of violence, paying particular attention to civilians gathered in

displaced persons and refugee camps, humanitarian personnel and human rights defenders, with a focus on violence emerging from any of the parties engaged in the conflict, as well as in the context of elections, and mitigating the risk to civilians before, during and after any military operation.¹²

On the policy level, the Secretariat has developed a wide range of guidance and strategic documents to better define and frame the concept and its implementation on the ground. It developed a specific POC concept in 2010 and an official policy in 2015, establishing a multidimensional approach to protection of civilians.¹³ It also produced specific “guidelines on the role of United Nations police in protection of civilians” and “guidelines on implementing protection of civilians mandates by military components of UN peacekeeping operations.” In addition, DPKO developed training modules on protection of civilians in 2009 (soon to be updated) and collects best practices and lessons learned in the field.¹⁴

In practice, missions have also set up various tools and mechanisms to implement protection of civilians mandates. Mission-wide POC strategies have been adopted in peace operations mandated to protect civilians; dedicated “POC advisers” and “POC officers” have been deployed in MONUSCO, MINUSCA, MINUSMA, UNMISS, and UNAMID; and coordination mechanisms such as senior management groups on protection or protection working groups have flourished in the field, with the aim of getting all sections and partners to work on POC in an integrated manner.

The UN mission in DRC has notably become a laboratory for POC practices, and, due to past failures that revealed gaps in coordination, analysis, and community engagement, has created various innovative tools to enhance protection. These include a “protection matrix,” joint protection

8 UN Security Council Resolution 2327 (December 16, 2016), UN Doc. S/RES/2327.

9 UN Security Council Resolution 2348 (March 31, 2017), UN Doc. S/RES/2348.

10 UN Security Council Resolution 2387 (November 15, 2017), UN Doc. S/RES/2387.

11 UN Security Resolution 2327 (December 16, 2016), UN Doc. S/RES/2327.

12 UN Security Council Resolution 2348 (March 31, 2017), UN Doc. S/RES/2348.

13 See DPKO/DFS, *Operational Concept on the Protection of Civilians in United Nations Peacekeeping Operations*, 2010; DPKO/DFS, *The Protection of Civilians in United Nations Peacekeeping*, April 2015.

14 As cited in the 2015 DPKO/DFS policy, the Secretariat has produced various guidance and lessons-learned documents in recent years, such as the DPKO/DFS *Guidelines on Implementing Protection of Civilians Mandates by Military Components of United Nations Peacekeeping Operations*; the DPKO/DFS *Protection of Civilians Resources and Capabilities Matrix*; the DPKO/DFS *Framework for Drafting Comprehensive Protection of Civilians Strategies*; the DPKO/DFS *Comparative Study on Protection of Civilians Coordination Mechanisms*; the DPKO/DFS and Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights’ *Lessons Learned Report on the Joint Protection Team Mechanism in MONUSCO*; and the DPKO/DFS *Lessons Learned Note on Civilians Seeking Protection at UN Compounds*.

teams,¹⁵ community liaison assistants,¹⁶ community alert networks,¹⁷ and regular polls to gauge the popular perception of security threats and protection. Such practices have spread to other missions as good standards that help orient the mindsets and activities of military, police, and civilian personnel around the priority of protecting civilians.

Each component of a mission has roles and responsibilities in the implementation of POC mandates, and the continuum of actions and tools UN missions can use to protect civilians has significantly expanded. The military component benefits from a wide range of postures now recognized as having a place in UN peacekeeping. Troops can protect civilians through deterrence by their presence or through their domination of the terrain, including through active patrolling. They can also respond to threats and protect civilians through rapid reaction, physical intervention, or even offensive operations against groups threatening civilians.

The police component contributes to the protection of civilians through activities aimed at maintaining law and order, especially through patrols and community engagement in camps and sites for IDPs, and through efforts to build the capacity of local police forces. Formed police units and police officers can also conduct executive tasks and operations, including arresting and detaining people threatening the safety and security of local communities.

The civilian component, through the political affairs, human rights, civil affairs, DDR, or justice support sections, also contributes to the implementation of POC mandates through analysis, investigation, mediation, sensitization, community engagement, and capacity building.

AN OVERLY MECHANISTIC AND BUREAUCRATIC RESPONSE

Despite these developments, there are still limitations to the implementation of POC on the ground. The institutionalization of POC has led to greater recognition of POC mandates, wide acceptance of its importance by UN personnel on the ground, and, to a certain extent, professionalization and rationalization of its implementation. This has mainstreamed and prioritized POC in the UN's organizational culture.

However, this institutionalization has also made the implementation of POC more bureaucratic and technical and has triggered an approach overly based on mechanistic responses. Both UN headquarters and missions focus too much on outputs, such as the deployment of military bases, establishment of alert networks, multiplication of joint protection teams, creation of protection coordination mechanisms, development of protection strategies, recruitment of protection personnel, conduct of investigations, and production of analyses of threats to civilians. Because the system prioritizes quantitative reporting on organizational measures over qualitative impact analysis, the number and frequency of such activities have become the main point of reference, more so than the actual results for local populations.¹⁸

Despite their value, the creation of POC tools, deployment of POC professionals, and implementation of POC activities do not necessarily have the desired effect, and there can be a significant disconnect between outputs and outcomes and between action and impact.

Having a joint protection team visit a remote village in Walikale in North Kivu, for example, does not guarantee that its recommendations will

15 MONUC (renamed MONUSCO in 2010) created joint protection teams after the massacre of Kiwanja in 2008, where it seemed that the military did not understand the scope of the threats and failed to prevent and stop the killings. Joint protection teams are multidisciplinary teams composed of different experts in the mission, such as human rights, civil affairs, political, gender, or police officers. They are deployed to areas marked by protection concerns to interact with the population and analyze the security dynamics in light of their different fields of expertise in order to help the military component develop more comprehensive protection plans or responses.

16 Community liaison assistants are national staff members, usually embedded with the military contingents in different bases, who facilitate community engagement with local populations and analyze threats to civilians and the management of alert networks. The initiative was launched to ensure a permanent civilian presence in military bases to enhance understanding of local security dynamics.

17 Early-warning systems and community alert networks were established in several missions. In the DRC, community alert networks were developed after systematic rapes in Luvungi in 2010, which revealed the lack of an alert mechanism for rapid reaction of peacekeepers.

18 The secretary-general's reports make a point of listing the number of community alert networks established, the number of community liaison assistants deployed to identify threats, the number of joint protection teams conducting field visits, and the number of temporary bases and patrols.

be followed or that locals will be better protected; without proper risk analysis and follow-up, it could even put civilians at risk.¹⁹ Deploying a high number of patrols can be meaningless if troops always patrol the same main roads where abuse is less likely to happen in the first place, or if they fail to effectively interact with local communities to understand their vulnerability and be informed of existing threats in the area. As a result, there remains an important gap in most missions between the act of protecting, carried out by the UN, and the state of being protected, for local populations.

Generally, the obligation to use all means available to protect civilians (in order to demonstrate due diligence in fulfilling the POC mandate) has prevailed over the obligation to achieve results. UN missions deeply need to shift from this technical and process-focused approach to a strategic implementation of POC.²⁰ In other words, they need to become more people-centered than organization-centered in the way they deliver protection. To this end, they should better link the execution of POC tools and activities to appropriate planning informed by relevant analysis, and to impact-driven decision making (and risk taking) by senior mission leadership.

In addition to this technical implementation of POC mandates, the UN's bureaucracy, overburdened and marked by complicated processes and administrative flows, does not support the types of responses needed to address threats to civilians. While dynamics are constantly changing on the ground, with violence erupting in different hotspots in CAR, South Sudan, and the DRC, the UN machine makes peace operations insufficiently fit for the purpose of protecting civilians. The human resources system does not allow for rapid recruitment of people with tailored profiles, dynamic reorganization of the workforce, or in-mission mobility. Uncertainties over command and control within the military branch of UN missions limit the speed and efficiency of responses. The lack of equipment and capacities is often aggravated by the

lack of autonomy in using them due to complex authorization and clearance systems, further impairing the timeliness of POC responses.

Finally, a certain lassitude among personnel, inherent to any process of institutionalization, has also affected the implementation of POC. When the bureaucracy took over responsibility for POC, anchored it in the *raison d'être* of missions, and started systematizing and rationalizing all POC activities, it also reduced it to a banal output. This can affect the personal motivations of staff, leading them to implement POC more dispassionately and mechanistically. This lack of motivation can be further aggravated by the lack of impact measurement. As there is no system to hold the personnel of peace operations accountable for implementing POC,²¹ personnel can always find excuses for failing to protect civilians, from the lack of capacities to the slowness of the UN machine or the role of other sections and components. There is a general lack of a sense of individual responsibility and commitment in the system, and personnel tend to be over-reliant on the bureaucratic machine that is supposed to be in charge of POC.

The mechanistic implementation of POC, the limitations of the UN bureaucracy in responding to threats to civilians, and the lack of accountability for POC have contributed to a certain loss of strategic vision for this central mandate of UN missions.

Anchoring POC in Political Strategies

While POC mandates have tended to be systematically given to UN peacekeeping operations, the strategic meaning and political framework given to such mandates remain unclear, and there seems to be a growing disconnect between protection of civilians and political strategies.

LACK OF A UNIFIED VISION

The main issue is the general lack of a unified vision for POC in peace operations. On the one

19 Joint protection teams visit villages, sometimes controlled by armed groups, and interview civilians in order to gather information on protection concerns and security threats and to set up protection plans. However, these teams cannot physically protect civilians if an attack occurs during their visit. In addition, they are not always able to go back to these villages and to verify the effective implementation of the protection plans they established.

20 DPKO/DFS, *Evaluation of Mission-Specific Protection of Civilians Strategies*, internal report, September 2016.

21 DPKO is currently developing an accountability framework for POC.

hand, there is consensus behind the global call for “POC,” and the Secretariat has worked on developing a holistic and multidimensional POC concept. However, there is not a shared understanding among the Security Council, troop-contributing countries, host states, the departments and offices within the Secretariat, and missions’ components and personnel on what they are expected and authorized to do to protect civilians, the specific roles of each component in fulfilling the POC mandate, how protection relates to other mandated tasks, and how it contributes to political strategies.

Strangely situated in a position where there is consensus on the principle of protection but still controversy on what it concretely entails, the “POC” label has tended to be applied by the UN and certain member states to color, give meaning to, or justify certain activities. The comprehensive approach promoted by DPKO and DFS paved the way for the appropriation of the principle of POC to justify a wide range of actions, including intelligence or offensive operations, which has provoked controversy among member states. This has ultimately led to POC’s loss of operational meaning and to growing mistrust of the concept.

DISCONNECT FROM POLITICAL STRATEGIES

In addition, protection of civilians has been included in the mandate of most peace operations without much consideration for the feasibility and relevance of such a broad mandate in particular contexts, or for how it would support durable political solutions and “sustaining peace.” In CAR, where there is no viable peace process, the UN has kept its distance from mediation activities,²² and state authorities are nearly nonexistent, protecting civilians from violence appears to be an unachievable task disconnected from any prospect of building peace. In South Sudan, UNMISS is expected to protect civilians in a context of active conflict, while the host state itself is perpetrating abuse against its own population and obstructing the work and freedom of movement of peacekeepers. In Mali, MINUSMA has been mandated to protect civilians in areas where

peacekeepers are themselves targeted and where, consequently, blue helmets cannot play a deterrent role or intervene to protect civilians and could even expose populations to collateral damage. In certain areas, peacekeepers are tasked both to protect the population and to conduct offensive operations against armed groups in support of national forces, even when these armed groups may represent and protect disenfranchised parts of the civilian population and national forces may themselves be perpetrators of abuse. The lack of thorough analysis and long-term vision for POC has therefore impaired the effectiveness of POC activities on the ground.

In this context, POC is increasingly perceived as a separate task that contradicts or competes with other tasks such as support for the political process or capacity-building activities to extend state authority. For example, the renewal of MINUSCA’s mandate in CAR in November 2017 was the occasion of debates about whether POC should be prioritized over support to the political process and mediation efforts, or vice versa. There is a general perception that, even if the political process is stalled, the mission can still “do protection of civilians,” as is the case in South Sudan. In certain missions, this division between politics and protection has been even more striking. In UNAMID, for example, political affairs and protection represent two separate streams of work led by different deputy joint special representatives.

As a consequence, POC is increasingly vulnerable to criticism. Both member states and UN personnel on the ground tend to struggle to understand a mandate they perceive as impossible to fulfill, and they fail to link it to a broader strategy that goes beyond firefighting and avoiding the worst. In the field, peacekeepers have stated that, even though they know POC is their priority, they do not always understand how it relates to a more comprehensive peace strategy for the country or how it translates into specific activities serving such a strategy.

Without a political vision framing its implementation, the “POC” label is at risk of being emptied of any real meaning, paving the way for more

²² See Marie-Joëlle Zahar and Delphine Mechoulan, “Peace by Pieces: Local Mediation Initiatives and Sustainable Peace in the Central African Republic,” International Peace Institute, November 2017.

output-focused, process-oriented, and short-term activities that are disconnected from outcomes and impact. POC should be prevented from being used as merely a label and from being understood as a short-term task likely to distract from supporting political processes and exit strategies. The 2015 report of the High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (HIPPO) called on peacekeepers to use every tool available to protect and to link protection mandates “to a wider political approach.”²³

Following this recommendation, missions need to overcome the division, or perceived tension, between the political process and the protection process. POC can be an effective lens for peace operations (both peacekeeping operations and special political missions, in the framework of the secretary-general’s proposed restructuring of the peace and security architecture) to design sound political strategies for sustaining peace. Now that tools, mechanisms, and documents have been developed to facilitate its implementation, POC needs to be integrated into the new culture of prevention, primacy of politics, and accountability called for by the secretary-general and HIPPO.

A new compact between the Secretariat, the Security Council, troop-contributing countries, and host states around a shared vision for protection of civilians linked to long-term political strategies would help make field missions fit for purpose. The current practice of systematically including POC in peacekeeping mandates without defining its role in the overarching strategy for sustaining peace has proven ineffective, and peacekeepers should not be deployed with a mandate to protect civilians without a clear political vision for the mission. The cases of South Sudan and Mali demonstrate how missions can be put in impossible situations when they are mandated to protect without clear political intent or political understanding with host governments and parties to the conflict.

However, anchoring POC in political strategies should not mean politicizing it; the essential task of protecting civilians from violence should not be dependent on political bargains, negotiations, or

compromises. Anchoring POC in political strategies requires mission leadership to provide a politically led direction and vision for defining tailored and dynamic POC strategies on the ground.

Exploring the POC Toolkit for Tailored Approaches

ADDED VALUE OF ARMED AND UNARMED STRATEGIES

Despite the comprehensive and multidimensional vision of DPKO/DFS’s Division of Policy, Evaluation and Training, certain troop-contributing countries and UN personnel in headquarters and in missions still tend to envision POC as a purely military or security-related task and to focus too much on the use of force. The deployment of peacekeeping operations to challenging environments, particularly those characterized by violent extremism and asymmetric threats, has notably accentuated the focus on robust and offensive approaches to peacekeeping to better protect civilians. This focus on military action has contributed to overshadowing possible activities in the fields of police work, political mediation, information analysis, human rights monitoring and advocacy, and community engagement.

It is therefore crucial for the secretary-general to further explore and promote the use of unarmed strategies led by missions’ civilian components, as recommended by HIPPO, as an important complement to military operations. Such strategies can make crucial contributions to preventing violence and defusing threats in relation to the first and third tiers of the POC concept (protection through dialogue and engagement and through consolidation of a protective environment).

To this end, there is a need to better clarify the integrated approach of POC and the different roles, responsibilities, and functions of missions’ different components and sections in the implementation of POC mandates. Each section can have significant added value by addressing specific threats to civilians and providing short- and long-term positive change to the security

²³ UN General Assembly and Security Council, *Uniting Our Strengths for Peace: Politics, Partnership and People—Report of the High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations*, UN Doc. A/70/95-S/2015/446, June 16, 2015.

situation.

Police, for example, are often the first point of contact with local populations in IDP camps. They can play an important role in reestablishing confidence between communities and between the population and the state. They can also prevent, deter, and respond to threats related to public safety through extensive patrolling, arrest and detention of criminals, extraction of civilians, or investigations. Civilians, from their side, have a wide range of expertise and possible streams of work when it comes to political negotiation, threat analysis, mediation and reconciliation, sensitization to human rights principles, monitoring of abuse, or DDR.

The roles and expected actions of each substantive and support section of a mission could also be better broken down. This would empower every peacekeeper, including support personnel, as a partner in the implementation of POC. For example, the safety and security section tends to prioritize the safety of the mission's personnel through general rules and regulations restricting movement and interaction with local populations—an approach that prevents civilian sections from undertaking POC work in South Sudan and Mali.

Generally, missions' support personnel could be better sensitized to POC and could adapt their operating procedures according to POC emergencies. Similarly, each level of personnel should have clarified responsibilities and better understanding of the courses of action they can lead, initiate, or participate in. Senior mission leadership, middle management, and expert-level personnel could benefit from more discussion and better training on their respective roles in the implementation of POC. Finally, each mandated task could be better linked to the overall goal of POC in the mission's strategy and analyzed in light of its possible contribution to POC in order to avoid any duplication, competition, or contradiction.

SHIFTING TO TAILORED AND MODULAR APPROACHES

Renewed and regular discussions within missions on the added value of certain types of military

operations, police activities, and civilian initiatives are needed in order to better develop mission-wide protection strategies adapted to the specific needs of the environment. Each theater and each country present unique challenges to POC, and the UN should reflect this in the design of specific POC mandates and strategies.

Missions should therefore be able to explore the continuum of possible actions by their different components and to constantly adapt by using one or another category of intervention. The military, for example, can adopt a wide range of different postures, from deterrent presence and community engagement up to robust domination to preempt hostile moves by armed groups or offensive operations to neutralize their capacity to prey on populations.²⁴ Human rights sections, from their side, can not only sensitize and liaise with armed groups to pressure them to respect human rights and humanitarian law but also conduct thorough investigations and work to build cases for future prosecution and for fighting impunity. Each posture and activity can be identified as the best fit for specific situations, in certain areas, toward certain actors, at certain times.

The different possible POC activities within the framework of the current DPKO/DFS policy should be perceived as part of a toolkit from which missions can pick those that would have the most impact in their specific context. By exploring the continuum of tools, activities, tactics, and postures useful for POC, they can better sequence and prioritize their POC activities, adapt POC strategies according to dynamic changes on the ground, and respond to the complex sets of threats through a modular approach by advancing certain categories of activities fit for the situation.

This is why senior mission leadership needs to design a sequenced and modular approach closely aligned with up-to-date and thorough analysis and mapping of threats, political dynamics, opportunities for influence, potential leverage, and risks. Senior leadership teams should be able to choose among different tools, prioritize certain activities, consider specific sections' advantages as the situation changes, and revise their modular

24 For example, MONUSCO is mandated to "prevent the expansion of all armed groups, neutralize these groups, and disarm them in order to contribute to the objective of reducing the threat posed by armed groups to state authority and civilian security."

approach as often as they deem necessary due to changing circumstances.

With a POC strategy aligned with a thorough political strategy and informed by adequate analysis, missions would need flexibility to navigate their POC toolkit and protect civilians in a more organic and dynamic way. That could mean focusing exclusively on civilian activities in areas where there is space for political dialogue and mediation but where troops are not welcome because they are seen as siding with one party to the conflict. It could also mean stopping capacity-building activities in an area where local authorities are fueling violence and using UN support to gain legitimacy. It could entail replacing national community liaison assistants with international staff in areas where ethnic tensions are too acute and impair the leverage of national staff perceived as hostile agents. It could also require adjusting the balance between interventions by civil affairs officers and DDR officers in areas where self-defense armed groups are closely linked to social dynamics between different ethnic groups. It could demand moving from a military approach based on static deterrence to the projection of force and mobile operations when threats are evolving.

UN teams on the ground should therefore further explore the potential for smarter and more tailored POC approaches, possibly limited to certain areas or certain tiers or tasks, and these teams should be given enough autonomy to independently make such adjustments. To this end, UN reforms need to succeed in making systems more field-focused and in reallocating autonomy and decision-making processes to the field. The secretary-general's proposed managerial reform could greatly help in more effectively delivering on POC. For example, a more decentralized human resources system with streamlined and leaner procedures would contribute to making missions more fit for the purpose of POC.

Conclusion: Toward Enhanced Accountability for POC

POC responses will dramatically improve if they are framed by sound political visions, based on impact-driven activities, and implemented in dynamic and modular ways aligned with a thorough analysis of threats and opportunities and the added value of each component of the mission. Such changes, beyond enabling smart delivery of POC mandates, would also allow better management of expectations and enhanced accountability for POC. UN personnel can be held accountable if they understand their roles and responsibilities, are supported by a solid political strategy, implement activities adapted to the specific situation, and are given the tools to gauge impact. A system to ensure accountability can be initiated once these conditions for POC are met.

This accountability system will also need to be inclusive. While the accountability framework currently being developed by DPKO/DFS's Division of Policy, Evaluation and Training has started to map roles and responsibilities for POC, especially within senior leadership, more clarification is needed for all personnel, at all levels, and in all sections. The accountability system should include both senior and working-level personnel. It should stop focusing only on the military side and also look at police and civilian peacekeepers responsible for POC activities and outcomes.²⁵

An effective accountability system should also be multilayered, comprising both the political and the execution levels. Notably, it should include not only Secretariat personnel but also the Security Council and troop- and police-contributing countries. The Security Council needs to design mandates anchored in clear political strategies and to remain engaged in implementing these strategies

²⁵ In 2014, the UN Office of Internal Oversight Services reviewed the action of peacekeeping missions on the protection of civilians but primarily focused on the use of force and intervention of the military component. Similarly, after the failure to protect civilians in Juba, South Sudan, in July 2016, the force commander of UNMISS was fired, which triggered discontent among troop-contributing countries and criticism over the tendency to make the military component bear the full responsibility for failures. Interviews in DRC also conveyed this frustration over the lack of accountability for other components of the mission.

to support field missions. In the spirit of the 2015 Kigali principles on the protection of civilians, troop- and police-contributing countries should be ready to use the wide range of possible actions at their disposal to protect civilians and should refrain from limiting their contingents and units in the implementation of POC. The Secretariat, especially through the upcoming managerial reform, needs to improve its support to peace operations by enabling them to take more flexible, nimble, and dynamic actions and decisions on the ground. Through its reform of the peace and security architecture, the Secretariat is also expected to bring peacekeeping and politics closer together and

to bridge the gap between the imperatives of protecting civilians and supporting political processes.

The effectiveness of protection of civilians mandates in UN missions would be greatly strengthened by these political and institutional efforts. The secretary-general, when framing his vision for POC, should reassign meaning and legitimacy to POC as the core of sound political solutions, reinvest in the full range of armed and unarmed protection tools, favor tailored interventions in a context of budgetary cuts, and establish a meaningful accountability system.

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