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Policy Brief

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A modular mindset: Reframing security sector governance and reform in future peace operations

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

With the Review of Peace Operations soon to be released, streamlined missions are increasingly presented as a solution to overstretch and political constraints. Greater agility is necessary. But if modularity results in trimming core governance functions — particularly Security Sector Governance and Reform (SSG/R) — missions risk being unable to engage politically with underlying drivers of conflict or lay the foundations for sustainable security.

Lighter missions must become sharper: grounded in political strategy, informed by rigorous conflict analysis, and anchored in governance reforms. The challenge is not simply to do more with less, but to protect what is central to sustainable transitions.

A modular model can support this agenda — if it preserves core advisory capacity to political leadership. Networked approaches should enable the UN to retain standing expertise and scale up when required. Partnerships must act as force multipliers, leveraging comparative advantages while ensuring ultimate responsibility remains with the UN.

1. INTRODUCTION: RETHINKING PEACE OPERATIONS IN A CHANGING CONTEXT

With several large UN peace operations pressured to draw down or close, and their residual tasks to be handed off to UN country teams or special political missions,[1] the landscape of UN peace operations is transforming. It has been over ten years since the Security Council has approved new UN multidimensional missions; the last was MINUSCA in the Central African Republic in 2014, and MINUSMA in Mali before that, in 2013. Over the past decade, the Security Council has focused instead on extending existing mandates, as well as reducing mission footprints and promoting transitional mechanisms.[2]

It may be the hope of Member States that "lighter" missions will prove more agile and politically focused, more able to "do more with less". However, as missions are scaled down, the risk is that engagement with deeper governance reforms may be scaled down accordingly. This could lead to a de-emphasis or delay in implementing essential functions that are vital to sustaining peace, like security sector governance and reform (SSG/R). Yet, the success of any peace operation hinges on SSG/R – that is, the transformation of the national security sector into one that is not only technically capable but also politically legitimate, accountable, and inclusive. Smaller missions lacking the mandate or expertise to implement reforms in policing, justice, and the military may achieve short-term gains yet fail to tackle the root drivers of conflict on the ground.

Peace operations do need to be adapted – potentially by exploring modular deployments and closer partnerships – but these operations must remain anchored in the needs of people and institutions in conflict-affected and post-conflict environments in order to fulfill the very objectives for which they were created. **Thus, future peace operations, however "light" or modular, must retain the capacity to support SSG/R**, which is integral to conflict prevention, peacebuilding, and sustaining peace, as reaffirmed in Security Council resolution 2553 (2020), on security sector reform. This policy brief examines how UN peace operations can reconcile the push for lighter, more flexible missions with the crucial need to address complex governance challenges.

2. THE CASE FOR NETWORKED APPROACHES IN A LIGHTER MISSION ERA

Multidimensional peace operations have traditionally involved large civilian mechanisms tasked with implementing SSG/R, human rights mandates, gender affairs, civil affairs, and more. These structures have facilitated integrated approaches to addressing complex conflict drivers, but their flaws are well documented: they are often slow to deploy and act, carry a large footprint, come with high costs, and entail a certain degree of bureaucracy.[3] Hence, a recent report of the UN Secretary-General on the UN80 Initiative recommends reducing the size of missions by delegating civilian mandates such as rule of law and governance to the UN entities "best equipped to implement them," in order to "allow missions and entities to exercise their comparative advantage and avoid duplication."[4]

Yet this shift assumes that UN country teams can absorb these responsibilities, when many lack the resources to fully adopt new roles, particularly in areas like SSG/R. This gap matters because human security challenges are deeply interconnected: political exclusion, economic insecurity, environmental pressures, and human rights violations rarely operate in isolation. If missions focus too tightly on a limited set of tasks, they risk overlooking the broader drivers of conflict, reducing the prospects for lasting peace. **Without safeguards, a move toward lighter models could therefore result not only in narrower mandates,**

but in a wider collapse of engagement on core governance functions. These functions—generally understood as the fundamental roles and responsibilities required to make and implement policy, maintain order, and provide services—are essential to building effective, legitimate, and accountable institutions, and are central to achieving peace, security, and sustainable development.[5] While often framed as longer-term peacebuilding tasks, they are in fact vital for delivering immediate security, supporting political settlements, and enabling effective mission transitions.

The opportunities and risks of modularity

As discussions continue on how to shape future UN peace operations, the idea of "modularity" has gained traction. However, the term is being used in two distinct ways.[6] One interpretation relates to modularity in mission design, as a way to increase the inbuilt adaptability of peace operations; and the other refers to modularity in the implementation of mandates, conceived as a way to achieve more with less by drawing on and making the most of comparative advantages.

Through a mission design lens, modularity is used to describe a "building blocks" approach that envisions missions composed of discrete parts which can be combined, sequenced, or adjusted as contexts evolve.[7] The 2024 independent study, *The Future of Peacekeeping*, highlighted the potential advantages of this approach, noting that mission configurations could be more flexible, more tailored to every context, and potentially more cost-effective. Still, this kind of design-oriented modularity carries some risks, including the potential for siloed building blocks that overlook cross-cutting issues like SSG/R, gender, human rights, and protection of civilians.[8]

Experience shows that when these tasks are treated as optional add-ons, they are often postponed or deprioritized.[9] For example, in its recent *Review of SSR language in the mandates of peace operations*, DCAF

found that security sector reform was largely divorced from political efforts, due to the fact that it was discussed mostly as a technical task and rarely as one of the top political priorities of a mission.[10] If future peace operations adopt a modular design without well-considered safeguards, functions like SSG/R are in jeopardy of being both siloed and sidelined, which would undermine the overall coherence and political impact of missions.

The second notion of modularity, focused on how mandates are implemented, relies on a "networked" understanding of the term. It imagines a more distributed approach, whereby different elements of a mandate are carried out by various UN entities and partners based on their comparative advantages.[11] In other words, rather than expecting all aspects of a broad mandate to be implemented by a single mission, this modular approach would make the most of system-wide capacities and partnerships. Importantly, the efficiency and responsiveness of such a networked approach rests largely on the development and accessibility of specialized expertise to support activities like SSG/R, enabling in-mission capacity to be augmented whenever necessary.

Distinguishing between these two understandings of modularity is essential. **Without conceptual clarity, modularity could easily become a catch-all justification for the downsizing of missions in ways that weaken their ability to deliver on mandates.** Rather, the goal of any move toward modularity should be to strengthen missions as a whole and enhance their capacity for mandate delivery.

Towards networked and scalable approaches

If well-conceived, a networked and scalable approach would allow leaner missions to concentrate on core political functions – providing strategic advice to national leadership, identifying reform opportunities, and coordinating international engagement. Rather than attempting to

address all needs directly, missions would prioritize good offices, strategic convening, aligning international efforts, and supporting partnerships. Where gaps exist, missions would then scale up as needed or leverage partnerships relevant to the evolving context, all while containing political and financial costs.[12]

To ensure credibility and long-term impact, and to avoid fragmentation, future missions should be anchored in a set of 'core functions' that apply regardless of size or configuration. These include expertise in SSG/R, protection of civilians, and gender – capacities whose consistent presence signals political commitment, underpins prevention, and strengthens the sustainability of peace.[13] Within this model, **retaining a minimum yet credible level of SSG/R expertise is essential to support political engagement. Without this, missions risk missing critical entry points to reform abusive security institutions or defuse local conflicts.** The challenge, therefore, is not whether "light" or modular missions should support political priorities such as SSG/R, but how they can hold the essential capacities required to do so effectively.

Scalable approaches provide a practical solution. Rather than treating functions such as SSG/R as binary ("in the mission" or "not in the mission"), the UN could maintain a small advisory presence for essential functions in all missions, with the ability to scale up rapidly when needed. For instance, even the lightest missions would maintain an SSG/R advisor, ideally positioned directly under mission leadership, to support political engagement throughout the mission's lifespan.[14] Subject to needs, the work of these in-mission advisors may be reinforced by access to specialized expertise – on issues like human resources management, budgeting, oversight – that can be deployed quickly in response to windows of opportunity. Past reviews have shown the relevance of scalable approaches, as relying solely on generalists risks pushing the UN to take on tasks that fall outside its core competencies.[15]

A scalable model requires the ability to intensify support on demand, either through surge deployments or by calling on specialized partners to support nationally led reforms. **Seen this way, partnerships are not substitutes for UN capacity but force multipliers, bringing in the niche expertise and comparative advantages of specialized organizations, regional or bilateral actors, and international financial institutions.**

3. WHY SSG/R IS ESSENTIAL TO FUTURE MISSIONS: LAYING THE FOUNDATION FOR PREVENTION AND SUSTAINABILITY

Among the key messages of the 2015 report of the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (the HIPPO report) was that lasting peace cannot be secured solely through military or technical interventions. Highlighting the "primacy of politics", it emphasized that political solutions must be at the core of peace operations.[16] Missions have increasingly centred their efforts on facilitating political agreements, while the governance reforms needed to make those agreements durable are postponed or deprioritized. This is problematic: evidence across contexts shows that many conflicts are rooted in political exclusion, corruption, weak institutions, and abuses committed by security actors.[17] Without addressing these governance deficits—especially those linked to the security sector—peace agreements are unlikely to hold, and cycles of violence tend to recur.

No governance, no prevention

Experience shows that the effectiveness of peace operations depends on how well prevention is embedded in the design and implementation of mandates. Prevention requires transforming the political dynamics that gave rise to violence in the first place – dynamics that often involve security institutions and their relationships with

society. Too often, missions have focused on immediate political solutions without tackling these deeper dynamics, leaving risks unaddressed when they transition out.[18]

The 2018 World Bank-UN *Pathways for Peace* study demonstrated that grievances related to security and justice provision often drive the risk of conflict, and conversely, that reforming these sectors can mitigate violence.[19] Although SSG/R can contribute directly to addressing root drivers of conflict, peace operations are rarely mandated – or incentivized – to use SSG/R as a prevention tool. Research shows that security sector reform tasks in missions have only seldomly been associated with addressing the roots of conflict.[20] Instead, they are often framed as technical activities (e.g. involving the training of troops, police and corrections personnel) rather than as governance reforms that can shape political processes and the renewal of the social contract.[21]

When prevention and governance needs are not embedded in mission design, mandates risk becoming misaligned or overly narrow, sometimes inadvertently fuelling new grievances. For instance, peace operations are often mandated with the task to bolster the extension or restoration of state authority (RESA) by supporting the deployment of the security and administrative presence of the state. But if these institutions remain unaccountable, illegitimate, or abusive, RESA can backfire and inflame tensions.[22] Efforts to extend state authority must therefore go hand-in-hand with governance reforms, or risk reinforcing perceptions of a predatory state.[23]

A politically informed prevention lens is essential to doing more good than harm. **This requires grounding peace operations support in a rigorous analysis of all conflict drivers and risk factors to violence, including any related to the security sector.** Such analysis must identify how security provision, as well as failures in governance, contributed to conflict and violence; in order to appropriately address these issues through the mission strategy.

National prevention strategies that focus on these risk factors and identify resilience factors offer a promising entry point for informing the mandates of peace operations.[24] To that end, the UN Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) and Peacebuilding and Peace Support Office (PBPSO) can play an important role by keeping international attention on these structural reforms, and helping marshal resources. This kind of cooperation can contribute meaningfully to guiding mandate design, informing adaptation, and shaping sustainable exit strategies.

Transitions as a stress test

Perhaps the clearest evidence of the critical importance of SSG/R lies in mission transitions, which serve as a real test of sustainability. Recent UN experience shows that missions are increasingly required to transition in contexts of ongoing conflict and violence, as illustrated by MINUSMA's withdrawal from Mali in 2023.[25] Time and again, this test is failed because governance reforms are not addressed early enough in the timeline of a peace operation.

This reflects the fact that few mission mandates include clear provisions to strengthen national capacities for SSG/R until late in a mission's lifecycle, usually when transition is already imminent.[26] Critical milestones – like establishing independent oversight bodies, engaging civil society, or ensuring the government can budget for security reforms – are often neglected in mandates altogether, or are addressed only in final mandate renewals.[27] The consequence is that missions leave host countries insufficiently prepared to maintain security improvements.

For instance, when a UN mission hands over security responsibilities to national actors, host countries often seek to increase military expenditures.[28] In the DRC, for instance, military spending in 2023 rose 105 percent compared to the previous year, amid MONUSCO's planned drawdown and the resurgence of the M23 and other armed groups in eastern DRC.[29] In some contexts, if not carefully managed, such rapid increases

can exacerbate public grievances, especially where resources are diverted from critical peacebuilding and development priorities.[30] This dynamic was evident in Mali, when military spending more than doubled as a share of GDP after the outbreak of conflict in 2013, leaving little fiscal space for essential services like food and education. These trade-offs became a source of growing popular discontent and contributed to episodes of violent protest.[31]

These experiences highlight the importance of missions engaging early with national authorities on the budgeting and financing of security sector reforms. Early investment in sustainable national finance models can help ensure that any increase in military spending at the time of a mission's transition is carefully planned through an affordability lens, and balanced with other governance and development priorities. International financial institutions also have a key role to play by supporting national governments in developing financing approaches that maintain security while safeguarding broader investments in governance and development.[32]

To reduce risk, peace operations must treat sustainability as a day-one priority, integrating SSG/R objectives without delay, and throughout a mission lifecycle.[33] It is also good practice to align these SSG/R efforts with national development plans, essentially integrating such efforts into a country's declared vision for its future, so that reforms are more likely to be nationally owned, strategically aligned, and financially viable. Encouraging host governments to integrate SSG/R priorities into their national development plans can also anchor these reforms in domestic budgeting processes. Recognizing this, missions should push early for the creation or strengthening of national mechanisms to coordinate SSG/R. For example, by establishing a high-level committee on security sector reform, a host government can not only build local ownership vis-à-vis SSG/R but also prepare national actors to take the lead in this area upon a mission's departure.

UN missions are more likely to contribute to sustainable peace when they invest in capacities, policies, and institutions that can outlast their mandates.[34] Ultimately, any peace operation that departs without credible, accountable, and inclusive security institutions in place cannot assume to have fostered the conditions for a lasting peace.

4. REFRAMING SSG/R: FROM AN AFTERTHOUGHT TO A POLITICAL PRIORITY

In peace operations, SSG/R has often been treated as a technical add-on, disconnected from the political strategy of a mission. This reflects a persistent but flawed assumption in mission design and mandate practice that SSG/R is not a core tool of peacemaking and conflict resolution. Greater impact can be achieved when SSG/R is framed as a priority from the outset, embedded in political analysis and mandate design, and recognized as essential to building legitimate and resilient institutions. This in turn has implications for how mandates are drafted, how mission leadership is oriented, and how resources are allocated.

Understanding SSG/R as a political tool

From a strategic perspective, SSG/R is best understood as a political tool. At its core, reform is about the distribution of power and resources; by reshaping power relations within a society, it can serve as a vehicle to redefine the broader social contract. SSG/R can, for example, support the representation of previously marginalized groups in security institutions, and help establish safeguards to reduce the risk that security forces are used as instruments of repression by particular social or political actors, including through interference in electoral processes.

In mission mandates, the Security Council can make the political role of SSG/R explicit, such as by stipulating that good offices be used "to promote consensus on security

sector reform among political actors". This element was critical in Sudan, where the failure of the mission and international partners to broker a political agreement on security sector reform and the national security architecture is understood to have contributed to the outbreak of civil war in 2023.[35] Progress should therefore be tracked based on tangible advances in political consensus and reform implementation, rather than on activity outputs alone.

Achieving political progress on reform requires persistent leadership within missions, often through the role of high-ranking UN officials who are willing to champion SSG/R. Through their mandates on preventive diplomacy, mediation, and good offices, Special Representatives of the Secretary-General (SRSGs) and Special Envoys, possess both the authority and legitimacy to engage political actors on sensitive SSG/R issues. When mission leadership is supportive of the goals of SSG/R, real progress is possible; as shown in missions like UNMIL in Liberia or UNMIT in Timor-Leste, each of which had strong political engagement on security sector reform.[36]

Mandates shape governance outcomes

Where SSG/R lacks the support of senior political leaders, or is underfunded, UN missions often default to a narrow set of technical capacity-building activities that are palatable to host governments – such as organizing workshops or providing technical advice – but stop short of pushing for the kind of deeper changes in governance that could truly address the security concerns of local populations. Such a technocratic approach may be easier to implement in the short term but rarely addresses the real deficits in effectiveness, accountability, or inclusiveness that plague a security sector.

A review of mandates shows that security sector reform is often framed as a technical exercise.[37] The Security Council can correct this by empowering and expecting mission leaders to treat SSG/R as a political priority. Mandates should urge senior representatives to integrate SSG/R into their political engagement, and use it as a tool for peace, as described in Resolution 2553 (2020), which "encourages UN special representatives to fully integrate security sector governance in their good offices and to consider SSR in advancing peace processes and extending State authority."[38] Moreover, this formulation should become standard language in country-specific mandates.

Mandates should also better link SSG/R with the protection of civilians (PoC), which has become a central priority in many UN peace operation mandates. While PoC is often framed in terms of immediate protective actions by peace operations, sustainable civilian protection ultimately depends on the capacity, accountability, and legitimacy of national security institutions. Embedding SSG/R objectives within PoC mandates from the outset can help ensure that efforts to protect civilians are accompanied by reforms that enable national actors to assume this responsibility over time.

When such reforms are pusued, the good governance of security institutions improves, making the sector more *effective, accountable,* and *inclusive*. The UN has an important role to play in fostering commitment to these reforms, particularly in an international context where governance support is frequently overshadowed by an emphasis on trainandequip programs – programs that, while important, do little to build public trust or prevent abuse. Yet, few mission mandates have taken a comprehensive approach to "good governance" of the security sector, and there has been little emphasis on the crucial nature of independent oversight, civil society engagement, and financial management of security institutions.[39] In fact, only one recent mission mandate, for MONUSCO in the DRC, included language explicitly calling for the development of "accountable, effective, and inclusive" security forces. This framing and phrasing should become standard across mission mandates.[40]

Equally important is the early integration of SSG/R into political approaches in complex environments, including contexts of intense violence or where legitimate national authorities are weak or contested. In Haiti, the experience of BINUH illustrates the risks of separating political engagement from security governance support. As a civilian political mission without an SSR-wide mandate and dedicated SSR capacity, BINUH's SSG/R engagement has largely been disconnected from the political process and limited to advisory support for the Haitian National Police and justice system.[41] This created a structural gap in the mission's ability to address systemic security governance challenges, which in turn contributed to exacerbating an already deteriorating security and governance situation.[42] A recent DCAF assessment of Haiti's security sector and prospects for future SSG/R programming highlights the need to prioritize security governance issues in policy discussions.[43]

Gender equality and inclusion as governance imperatives

Embedding strong governance principles in security institutions also requires attention to inclusion, ensuring that reforms reflect the needs and rights of all segments of society. Central to this goal are *gender equality* and *inclusion*, which are essential components of effective security sector governance. Security is not just a top-down function of the state but also requires whole-of-society engagement; security sectors that exclude women and marginalized groups cannot be fully representative nor fully effective.

Yet, **references to gender remain inconsistent across mandates, which are not always aligned with the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda.** Key elements of WPS integration include prioritizing women's participation in reform bodies, embedding gender advisors on mission teams (and increasing the meaningful participation of women peacekeepers[44]), and establishing concrete objectives such as increasing female recruitment in security institutions

or addressing sexual violence by security forces. Missions can further support gender integration by engaging with female leaders, supporting gender audits of security institutions, and helping remove barriers for women in security careers.

Inclusion efforts should also extend to youth and other marginalized populations, because local communities rarely have a voice in how security is provided, yet their engagement is essential for the success of peace operations and for achieving sustainable and inclusive peace. People-centered approaches –which seek to meet the diverse security needs of women, men, boys and girls across all socioeconomic and cultural groups – cannot be effectively implemented without strong SSG/R.[45] Missions can support this outcome by convening dialogues that offer the population an opportunity to articulate their security needs and provide feedback on security provision. **Through a focus on governance, systems of accountability and participation can be built – which differentiates a merely capable security force from one that is legitimate and trusted.** In this way, efforts focused on *inclusion* and *participation* help ensure that a national security sector remains a source of stability after peacekeepers leave.

Making national leadership the goal from day one

The degree to which national actors own and lead reform processes is critical to the long-term success and sustainability of any such reforms. Hence, inclusive national ownership of SSG/R should be cultivated from the outset of any UN peace operation. This requires supporting national actors in developing a shared and inclusive vision for reform that is aligned with existing national strategies, while simultaneously strengthening their capacities to coordinate, budget, implement, and monitor SSG/R effectively.

Experience shows that delays in building national capacities can undermine reform processes: for example, in Liberia, UNMIL was tasked with supporting SSR

coordination by the government, yet the absence of early capacity-building meant that once the mission transitioned to the UN country team, national actors were insufficiently equipped to assume coordination efforts.[46] Lessons like this underscore the need for missions to work hand-in-hand with national authorities from day one. By prioritizing national leadership from the start, missions help guarantee that reforms are not only technically sound but also locally owned, politically legitimate, and sustainable after the mission departs.

Leveraging SSG/R at critical junctures

While SSG/R is inherently a long-term process, it can have immediate, real-time utility for advancing the political objectives of missions. Elections, transitions, and national dialogues all represent key opportunities to use SSG/R as a means of strengthening legitimacy and rebuilding trust. UN missions must be prepared to leverage SSG/R in appropriate moments, to push for positive security governance changes or prevent backsliding.

Elections, in particular, tend to test the impartiality of a security sector and its ability to provide a safe environment for all people. In such contexts, missions can work with national security authorities on measures such as the deployment of early warning systems for election violence, provided they have the flexibility, via their mandate and leadership, to act on SSG/R when such opportunities arise. Leveraging SSG/R in support of election security can create space for concrete violence prevention measures and contribute to rebuilding public trust in security institutions, while also strengthening institutional and societal resilience to hybrid threats such as mis- and disinformation. At the same time, it creates political entry points for peace operations to assess and engage security institutions on issues of accountability, professionalism, and respect for human rights. **By linking short-term electoral stability with longer-term institutional transformation, election security becomes a strategic vehicle for**

embedding SSG/R within the political strategies of peace operations.

Effectively leveraging SSG/R at critical moments requires missions to be prepared and responsive. When transitional authorities are established or political momentum for change begins to emerge, missions must be able to act quickly. And in such moments, SSG/R should be understood as a dynamic and flexible tool that enables missions to seize opportunities while mitigating risks. The Security Council can help facilitate this flexibility by incrementally strengthening the language on SSG/R used in mandates, as a situation evolves on the ground. Mechanisms such as periodic mandate renewals and SSG/R progress updates in the reports of the Secretary-General provide opportunities to introduce new guidance, maintain focus on SSG/R, and signal that progress is expected throughout a mission's lifecycle.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The international environment for peace operations is increasingly complex. Geopolitical tensions, budget constraints, and protracted conflicts make traditional blue-helmet missions ever harder to implement successfully. In response, the UN has proposed more agile, modular approaches that meet the need for adaptability. Yet such innovations cannot come at the expense of foundational governance work, including SSG/R, which is indispensable to any viable and sustainable peace strategy.

A mission that does not engage in SSG/R risks operating without a clear understanding of one of the core arenas where peace is secured – or lost. Experience demonstrates that even relatively small missions can exert significant influence when SSG/R capacities are retained and elevated, helping to steer countries toward stability and trust. Such lessons should underpin the current *UN Review on the Future of All Forms of UN*

Peace Operations and be cemented into the practice of peace operations mandates.

More broadly, the UN and its Member States should work to ensure that any new operational concepts are governance-driven. Anchoring mission components in a coherent political strategy with governance at its core can support modular, flexible deployments while discouraging fragmented approaches that overlook the interaction between the state and its people. **The key to success will be found in striking the right balance: peace operations must become lighter on their feet, but mission leadership must remain committed to fostering inclusive and accountable institutions.** Sustainability also relies on a virtuous circle of responsibility between the UN, host governments, and donor communities – linking political commitment, sustained financing, and nationally owned and led reform efforts.

The following policy recommendations addressed to the UN Secretariat (Department of Peace Operations and Department of Peacebuilding and Political Affairs), Security Council Members, and UN Mission leaders, are critical to operationalizing this vision:

▪ **Adopt networked and scalable mission models that retain a minimum yet credible set of in-mission capabilities for core priorities – such as political engagement on SSG/R – even in "light" deployments.** UN entities and external partners should be leveraged for specialized technical expertise as needed. This approach enables missions to support political engagement, build trust with national actors, and identify opportunities to scale interventions when appropriate.

▪ **Prioritize the protection of civilians (PoC) through people-centered approaches that are integrated with SSG/R from the outset.** Peace operations must ensure that PoC is not addressed solely through UN-led protection activities, but through strengthening the capacity of national security institutions to safeguard populations themselves. Embedding SSG/R within PoC mandates from the start helps build accountable, inclusive, and effective security forces that can sustain civilian protection beyond the mission's presence.

▪ **Ensure mandates recognize SSG/R as a core political tool for peacemaking and mediation.** Mandates should explicitly empower mission leadership to engage in good offices with national authorities and other stakeholders to advance security sector reforms, broker consensus among political actors, and support the design and implementation of inclusive governance frameworks.

▪ **Anchor peace operations in rigorous analysis of conflict drivers, including those related to the security sector**, to improve alignment with prevention needs. Where national prevention strategies exist, leverage them as a framework for connecting peacekeeping with peacebuilding.

▪ **Prioritise national leadership and capacity-building from the outset to enable early and credible transitions.** This means enabling national authorities to lead the design and implementation of security sector reforms, budgeting for them, and monitoring and evaluating progress, so that the institutions themselves can sustain improvements once the mission departs.

▪ **Strengthen long-term planning and accountability within UN peace operations by extending the vision beyond one-year mandates and reorienting success toward political outcomes.** Missions should be equipped with a robust monitoring and evaluation culture that tracks progress based on tangible political outcomes – such as advances in consensus-building and the implementation of security sector reforms – and their contribution to improved security for the population, rather than on activity outputs alone.

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About DCAF

DCAF – Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance is dedicated to improving the security of states and their people within a framework of democratic governance, the rule of law, respect for human rights and gender equality.

Since its founding in 2000, DCAF has contributed to making peace and development more sustainable by assisting partner states, and international actors supporting these states, to improve the governance of their security sector through inclusive and participatory reforms. It creates innovative knowledge products, promotes norms and good practices, provides legal and policy advice and supports capacity-building of both state and non-state security sector stakeholders.