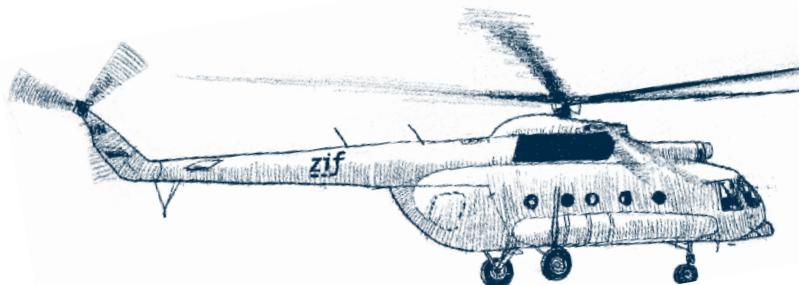


# PEACE

# OPERATIONS 2025



## IMPRINT

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# PEACE OPERATIONS 2025

# PEACE OPERATIONS ESOS

# PREFACE

The world of peace operations has changed tremendously in recent decades and will surely continue to do so in the future. That's not exactly news. But how will it change? What will be the drivers and key factors, what will be the landscape for change? What kinds of conflict will we face and what concepts, instruments and resources will we have to face them? In other words: How could the peace operations world look in the year 2025?

To predict and influence future events is one of mankind's most ancient activities. Everything from celestial objects to tea leaves has been used in the past. In lieu thereof, ZIF has applied modern scenario methodology with the support of Z\_punkt, a German foresight company. Furthermore, this scenario process has built on the contributions of an outstanding group of experts, practitioners and so-called wild cards, that is, non-insiders to peace operations.

We labeled our group the "Futurologists of Peace Operations". FoPOs met in three interactive workshops on three continents, in Berlin, Addis Ababa, and New York. On this solid basis, ZIF has created four distinct scenarios for peace operations in the year 2025: *National Interests*, *Erratic Progress*, *Regional Diversity*, and *Global Cooperation*.

Scenarios can be described as vivid pictures of the future, in this publication presented as narratives, "backcasting" events and illustrations. They serve as a tool to order our perceptions about alternative future environments. Don't be concerned if the pictures on the following pages appear at first sight somewhat over-vivid. Some aspects were deliberately exaggerated in order to portray possible alternatives more sharply.

While scenarios are not about exact predictions, they can serve as the foundation for strategic planning. They help us to develop specific measures that lead to desirable outcomes and avoid less desirable ones; or, to quote the German futurist Matthias Horx: "We cannot predict the future completely, but we can design organizations, mindsets, and systems to be more adaptable to evolution."

With these scenarios we want to contribute to the conceptual evolution of peace operations. They will hopefully provide impulses for dialog among experts, practitioners and decision-makers. They should also help promote a change from the current, mostly reactive approach to crises and conflicts in the world to a more proactive or preventive one.

We would like you to use this publication as a living instrument: tear the scenarios from the fold-out book cover and pin them to a board in your office. Let them serve as a small reminder to change into a preventive mode to crises. The blank pages intentionally left at the end will be filled with recommendations on the operational relevance of the scenarios. Of course, you can add your own considerations, too. We hope you will.

We would like to thank the German Federal Foreign Office for its generous support. Please enjoy reading and be inspired by our scenarios!

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "A. Wieland-Karimi".

Dr. Almut Wieland-Karimi | Director, ZIF

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# INTRODUCTION

## WHY SCENARIOS?

Scenario processes are a useful tool for a number of reasons – particularly in highly complex fields shaped by a multitude of factors, actors and interests such as international peace operations.

First, these processes can bring together experts with diverse backgrounds and from different disciplines in order to avoid groupthink and allow for new thinking and fresh approaches in a given field. Emerging trends and developments can be assessed from different angles leading to a more comprehensive picture of possible future impacts.

Second, scenario processes help identify key factors likely to drive change in a given field and make it possible to distinguish between those factors whose development can be influenced and those that must be accepted as given. They help us think about which factors could truly change the game.

Third, while scenario development does not result in forecasts, it generates “big pictures.” Scenarios present both more and less desirable versions of the future and the pathways leading to them. They thus encourage thinking about how to promote preferred outcomes and avoid undesirable ones and can help prepare for a large number of contingencies.

While scenarios do not come with policy recommendations as such, they allow policy-makers to think about the future and their own options in a more structured manner.

## WHAT TO EXPECT

In this publication, ZIF presents the results of a process that brought together a diverse and interdisciplinary group of experts in three workshops on three continents over a period of 18 months. The publication is structured in four parts.

The first part provides an overview of the factors seen as critical by the participants for the future of peace operations and of the ways these factors may develop in the next thirteen years. It also outlines the main features of four possible scenarios distilled from combinations of such “key factor projections.”

The second part contains the full scenarios: *Erratic Progress*, *National Interests*, *Regional Diversity*, and *Global Cooperation*. Each one portrays a different state of peace operations in 2025, and describes the path that has led to this state as well as events that have shaped it.

The third part of the publication offers some more thoughts on how the scenarios might promote strategic thinking on peace operations. We have added a few questions that can help jumpstart a debate.

Finally, the scenario process and the underlying methodology are described in more detail in the section “From Shaping Factors to Scenarios.”

## KEY FACTORS AND GIVENS

- National Interest versus Global Interdependence
- State of the Global Economy
- Economic and Political Power Shifts
- Norms and Values
- Evolution of International Organizations
- State Fragility
- Organized Crime
- Resource Scarcity
- Migration, Refugees, Diasporas
- New Technologies
- New Media
- Private Security Companies
- Demographics
- Climate Change

# TIMELINE PEACE OPERATIONS





# PEACE OPERATIONS 2025:

## FACTORS, PROJECTIONS, FUTURES

One of the few continuities in peacekeeping is its ever-changing nature. In that sense, the most daring scenario would probably be one in which things stay just the way they are. At the same time, fundamental changes in the international system rarely occur overnight – though writing this in Berlin compels one to add that sometimes indeed they do. However, many of the factors that will shape peace operations in the future are subject to long-term developments. It thus seems fair to ask: How much change can we realistically expect by 2025?

At the time of writing, 2025 is less than thirteen years away – in many ways a short time span. However, looking back at the past thirteen years in peacekeeping gives an idea of the degree of change that can occur during such a time period. In 1999, the UN launched its first ever missions with a broad executive mandate – in Kosovo and East Timor. This also marked the real beginning of state-building as a part of peace operations. That same time period saw the evolution of new norms such as the Responsibility to Protect (R2P), NATO's first use of Article Five in response to 9/11, the deployment of the first EU mission, the first AU mission, and the first hybrid mission. UN personnel in peace operations for the first time exceeded the 100,000 mark and, with peacekeepers on the ground, three new states emerged during this period: Kosovo, Timor-Leste and South Sudan.

Or look thirty years back at the period between 1982 and 1995, which was marked by a number of far-reaching events: the fall of the Berlin Wall, the violent break-up of the Balkans, the Rwandan genocide. It also saw the evolution of traditional peacekeeping into multidimensional peace operations, the founding of UN DPKO and the first ever NATO operation.

These examples also provide a glimpse of the range of factors that have shaped peace operations in the past: conflict patterns, state fragility, and new security challenges, the interest of influential actors, missions' successes and

failures or emerging norms. In the “Peace Operations 2025” project, participants identified twelve key factors or variables that will in one way or the other influence the future of peace operations, in addition to two known, “given” factors.

For the two given factors, **demographics** and **climate change**, the direction of future developments is fairly clear and much has been written elsewhere about how these two megatrends are likely to unfold within the next decades. We know, for example, that the world’s population will continue to grow and while youth bulges will persist in some low-income countries, population “graying” will become a challenge in most developed economies. We also know that global temperatures will rise and that higher sea levels, extreme weather conditions, droughts, desertification and flooding are some of the consequences associated with global warming. While the consequences will be global, vulnerabilities and the capacity to cushion the ecological and economic impact of global warming will be extremely unevenly spread.

**The World Economic Forum’s *Global Agenda Council on Population Growth* identified 14 countries (450 million people) in which high population growth is combined with water and other resource stresses.<sup>1</sup>**

For the twelve key factors identified by workshop participants, however, a number of projections are plausible. The twelve factors are closely interrelated and the impact of each one is never only one-dimensional. However, they can broadly be categorized into those that primarily influence the demand for peace operations and those that are likely to shape the response to emerging crises and security threats. In a nutshell, the twelve key factors relate to the why, who and how of peace operations, and different combinations of projections produce distinctly different answers to these questions.

## **DRIVING THE DEMAND**

The objective demand for peace operations will primarily be determined by the extent and nature of conflict on one hand and the ability of states to handle political, economic and social pressures on the other. These factors will not only determine the scale of the demand for peace operations. The need to respond to new challenges could also considerably change the character of these operations.

It is safe to assume that **state fragility** will still be a challenge in 2025. The 2011 World Development Report notes the link between state fragility and violent conflict: countries where government effectiveness, rule of law, and control of corruption are weak have a 30–45% increased risk of civil war. According to the same report, violent conflict and violent crime reinforce each other in fragile states: 1.5 billion people live in countries affected by repeated cycles of political and criminal violence.

Fragile and conflict-affected states are particularly vulnerable to **organized crime**. Organized criminal activities and illicit streams of goods and income have an impact on human security, state stability and the prospects for post-conflict recovery. Organized crime can sustain conflict by providing a major funding source for politically motivated violent actors. Already today, organized crime is affecting the sustainability of peace operations' efforts in the Balkans, West Africa, Haiti and Afghanistan.

**In 2005, the European wholesale price for 2.9 grams of cocaine was equal to Liberia's annual per capita GDP.<sup>2</sup>**

In future, more conflicts might evolve around the competition for natural resources such as water and arable land as a growing world population, economic progress, consumption patterns as well as climate change continue to fuel **resource scarcity**. Already today, 20% of the world's population is experiencing extreme water shortage. New technologies, innovative policies and international regimes are required to ensure a more sustainable use of resources that could counteract this trend.

**In 2008, the South Korean investor *Daewoo Logistics* signed a 99-year lease covering nearly half of Madagascar's arable land.<sup>3</sup>**

The citizens of today's world are more mobile than ever and a range of factors is fueling the global movement of people. For many states, managing the impact of population movements has become increasingly complex, particularly in areas of perceived or de facto resource scarcity, economic hardship or wealth disparities. Take for example migration. With an estimated 214 million

migrants worldwide (3% of the world population), global **migration** has reached an unprecedented scale. Not only migration as such but also the social, political and economic roles of **diasporas**, well connected to their home countries through advances in communication and travel, have the potential to influence future conflict patterns.

**In 2009, diaspora remittances made up 35% of Tajikistan's GDP.<sup>4</sup>**

## **SHAPING THE SUPPLY**

While it is difficult to establish a hierarchy among the factors that will shape the response to conflict or supply of peace operations, there are some definite game changers. One of the critical questions in this regard is how states will manage the dichotomy of **national interest versus global interdependence**. National interest continues to shape states' reactions to transnational challenges. Their prevalence frequently leads to highly fragmented global governance capacities to address systemic risks and hampers the reform of international governance frameworks. At least three distinct reactions to rising global risks are thinkable: an embrace of existing forms of multilateralism, an emergence of new regional frameworks, or a retreat from multilateral structures altogether – in addition, a combination of the three is conceivable. In the first case, the UN would most likely retain its central role within a modular approach drawing on partners. In the second case, regional organizations could take charge of operations within their areas. In the third case, bilateral initiatives or narrow, ad-hoc coalitions of the willing will likely be the primary actors. The precise outcome will both be determined by, and, in turn, determine the **evolution of international and regional organizations** and whether they will have the capacity to manage conflicts and respond to transnational risks.

Yet another game changer is the **state of the global economy**. In a climate of economic prosperity, one long-term aspiration for peace operations could be fulfilled: the matching of mandates and resources. A global recession in turn would most certainly reduce the willingness and capacity of states to act globally, to respond to crises and to resource global governance structures. A shrinking resource base and changing spending priorities in member states

could produce “missions impossible.” At the same time, in the developing world, growing economic inequality and price increases for basic commodities could fan pressure on fragile governments and cause unrest or crises and thus heighten the demand for peace operations.

In 2025, the geopolitical landscape will be different from today, however. It is unclear what implications **economic and political power shifts** will have for peace and security. Will new players integrate into existing multilateral structures? If they do, how will these structures be affected? If they do not, will they stay outside or create new structures? Pressure on existing multilateral frameworks to accommodate these new actors will most certainly grow. Power shifts could also bring new actors to the forefront of peacekeeping – and with it new spheres of interest and new leverage, but also new principles and new ways of doing business.

Aside from the hard realities of economic and political power, more intangible factors will also play a role. The presence or absence of a broadly shared set of **norms and values**, for instance, will influence the attitudes of societies towards peace operations and thus shape both supply and demand. In an increasingly connected, prosperous and optimistic world, the prospects for multilateral action are much better than in one dominated by ethnic, national, social or religious identities and zero-sum competition.

Greater awareness of global responsibility has also led to an increase in “norm entrepreneurs.” Non-state actors such as lobby groups and foundations are assuming increasing influence through creative actions that shape public opinion. In addition, the sheer financial power of megafoundations makes them potent players in the political, social and cultural realm. As a consequence, peace operations could be facing more support but also more scrutiny.

**Together, grant payments by the Open Society Foundations, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the Ford Foundation totaled the equivalent of over 50% of the UN peacekeeping budget for 2010.<sup>5</sup>**

Finally, at the operational level, missions in 2025 could look very different from today’s multilateral missions. Innovations in **technology** could change the face of peace operations by opening up new options for monitoring and surveillance.

However, peace operations might also need to protect themselves from risks posed by sophisticated technology in the hands of opposing parties. Imagine a lean but technologically highly sophisticated peace operation generating headlines such as “peacekeepers checkmated by cyber attack.”

Developments captured by the term **new media** could offer new opportunities for early warning, public relations and political inclusion. At the same time, as information travels faster, mission environments could become even faster-paced.

**The charity *Not on Our Watch* provided funds for the use of a commercial satellite to observe the border between northern and southern Sudan ahead of the 2011 referendum.<sup>6</sup>**

What role will **Private Security Companies** have in peace operations in 2025? A growing substitution of regular forces by PSCs, for example, will not come without implications for issues such as accountability and command and control, but also for the legitimacy of such operations and for host nations’ consent. More broadly, it is unclear how the growth of private security would relate to the issue of state power and authority.

**With more than 650,000 employees, the world’s largest private security provider G4S is one of the largest employers listed on the London Stock Exchange.<sup>7</sup>**

## FOUR POSSIBLE FUTURES

Combinations of projections for these factors led us to four possible futures. These four scenarios are briefly summarized below and presented in full in the next section. There, each one will be introduced by Grace Kimunyia, a young Kenyan who started her career in the field of peace operations in 2012. She is looking back from the viewpoint of the last day of 2025 at four distinctly different pasts, the changes in her life reflecting the changes in her area of work. It is also important to note that the scenarios are in no particular order, although the convention to end on a high note has been followed.

## **Erratic Progress**

In this scenario, things are kind of so-so – in a familiar way. The stuttering engine of multilateralism is limping along through under-resourced initiatives towards poorly defined or unrealistic goals. New and powerful actors that could make a difference are still trying to find their place in the international system and have not yet translated their economic clout into decisive political action. A partial consensus on key norms and values is reflected in informal and minilateralist “club governance” structures. However, the UN remains the centerpiece of multilateralism. Peace operations are muddling through with occasional successes and frequent setbacks. After various shifts in strategy have failed to produce better results, there is not much appetite for investing in the stabilization of failed states. Uneven economic growth has done nothing to reduce global income inequalities. This continues to fuel conflict while keeping the resources for international crisis management efforts scarce. The overall outlook is not hopeless but somewhat messy.

## **National Interests**

As the global economy is hard hit by the worst recession since the 1930s, an international climate of growing isolationism and unilateralism leads to the end of multilateral peace operations as we know them. Objectively, there is a strong demand for peace operations as many of the more fragile states relapse into violent state failure. Conflicts are also fanned by fierce competition for natural resources and the unchecked spread of organized crime – which in some cases has resulted in state capture by criminal networks. However, nations focus on economic survival and internal security at the expense of their international footprint. In addition, the rising powers fail to rally around shared values and agreed goals. A permanently blocked Security Council is yet another symptom of a growing divergence on basic norms and values and the prevalence of national interests. As a consequence, few operations are deployed and blue helmets are largely a phenomenon of the past. Where states do intervene in a crisis, ad-hoc and narrow coalitions of the willing prevail – usually not deploying their own boots but those of private security companies.

## **Regional Diversity**

Regional organizations are clearly in charge – including of peace operations. Transnational challenges – from climate change to resource scarcity, organized crime, state fragility and violent conflicts – are increasing the need for functioning global governance structures. However, after the “rise of the rest” and the “decline of the West,” existing multilateral structures failed to accommodate the new powers who in turn found ways to accommodate themselves – largely through a network of regional organizations. As a consequence, the UN has lost its role as the major multilateral player in the area of peace operations and the Security Council is no longer the primary legitimizing body for such operations. While the regionalization of peace operations could have led to “regional solutions for regional problems,” key actors alternate between cooperation, competition or mere co-existence without much consideration for each other. For peace operations, this to and fro is frequently getting in the way of sustainable successes. Fragile states remain a major challenge but state fragility fatigue limits reliable support and stabilization initiatives.

## **Global Cooperation**

The golden age of global cooperation has finally arrived and the framework for peace operations is one of well-endowed multilateralism. This is underpinned by a broad global economic boom benefiting established and rising powers and even the least developed nations. With new actors on the stage, multilaterals have realized reform plans in order to better reflect the new realities. International and regional organizations across the board not only enjoy an adequate financial base but are also backed by a broad consensus on values and norms developed under the growing influence of advocacy groups, civil society organizations, megafoundations and social media. Peace operations have changed considerably but the main driver of change is innovation rather than resignation. As the number of conflicts and fragile states decrease, so too does the demand for peace operations. While fewer peace operations are deployed, those that are in the field are better resourced, benefit from advanced technology and, crucially, take a longer perspective on conflict resolution.

# ERRATIC PROGRESS



**U n e v e n** *N e w*  
**E c o n o m i c** *Technologies*  
**G r o w t h** *Challenge*  
*Peace*  
*Operations*

**M e s s y** *State*  
**M u l t i l a t e r a l i s m** *Fragility*  
*Fatigue*

*Organized* *N e w*  
*C r i m e* **R i s e** *Media*  
*M a j o r* **o** *f Increase*  
*C h a l l e n g e* **Non-State** *Conflict*  
*A c t o r s*

**M u d d l i n g** *Informal*  
**T h r o u g h** *Cooperation*  
*M e c h a n i s m s*

*S h a k y* *Competition*  
*C o n s e n s u s* *o f r*  
*o n*  
*N o r m s* *R e s o u r c e s*

# ERRATIC PROGRESS

*There was a big party at the Bangalore headquarters of the “Sustainable Resilience Group” on this last day of 2025. “I haven’t seen so many Indians this happy – at least not since it was announced that the 2028 Olympics would go to Mumbai,” Grace Kimunya told a co-worker. At first she had been uneasy about taking a job with a private security company. But her career prospects with the UN had looked dim after all the big African operations were closed. It had seemed such a pity to leave with the job half finished, but what could you do when some member states no longer believed all the money and effort would bring results? Thankfully, there was still a demand for her expertise. SRG had just won the contract to provide satellite imagery and cybersecurity services for the AU operation in Cabinda, meaning that Grace would have to keep not only the AU happy but also the Europeans. That would not be easy, but after all the ups and downs of the last thirteen years, Grace felt ready for anything.*

Clearly, the international community has not found a comprehensive strategy, a grand design, to address the numerous challenges facing the world in 2025. But it is muddling through somehow. While this state of affairs is falling short of the aspirations of some academics and think-tankers, it is better than what many doomsayers predicted. What everyone can agree on is that our world has become more complex, heterogeneous and multipolar. In combination with another obvious fact – global interdependence through connectedness – this increased complexity places a huge strain on the international system.

On the one hand, there is a pressing need for more global governance in areas like finance, trade, energy, climate change, migration, and organized crime. None of these spheres can adequately be addressed separately or on a national, bilateral or even regional level. On the other hand, the international community has been unable to figure out how to meet this challenge predictably and systematically. One factor more than any other is the source of this imbalance between demand and supply: the rise of new powers, and their as yet unclear position within the international system.

In the economic sphere, the biggest of the new players have definitely arrived at the top of the table. China and India have overtaken the GDP of all other nations apart from the US and Japan. While Germany is still in fifth position, it will soon fall behind Brazil. At the same time, the glitter of the rising powers' economic booms hides an internal brittleness. Their societies are in the historically unique position of being key economic players without having achieved high per capita incomes. Social pressure is mounting as their growing middle classes demand increased domestic spending on welfare systems, infrastructure and environmental protection. All struggle to find their place in the international system, unsure of how to translate economic weight into political influence, and whether to challenge the existing order or to accommodate themselves within it. While each national approach is unique, the result is a bewildering mix of cooperation, detachment and confrontation.

The most confusing case is China, where the Communist Party still clings to power, even though civil society enjoys more political space and calls for genuine political reform are growing louder. Fueled by its economic growth, the country is now a military power of the first rank – if still firmly behind the US. Contrary to some fears, the Chinese leadership did not completely jettison its generally risk-averse foreign policy, but it did begin to flex its newly

acquired muscles, both regionally and on occasion in more distant arenas when its core interests were at stake. And while this shift towards a more assertive “China-first” policy enjoys much popular support at home it has made other influential actors decidedly nervous.

Some commentators see China’s involvement in UNAMIKES (UN-AU Mission for the Kenya-Somalia Border) a first step along this road. In 2019, the perception of growing Kenyan meddling in the internal affairs of the precariously unified Somalia and the suppression of Kenya’s own Somali minority led to military clashes along the shared border. Prompted by the need to safeguard its interests in the oil pipeline and terminal at the Kenyan port of Lamu, China acted. It provided a major part of the UN component of the hybrid mission – which also included an EU logistics support package – tasked to stabilize the situation. Today, the popular memory of this operation is of course dominated by the devastatingly accurate missile attack by a Somali militia on its headquarters that killed over 80 UN and AU personnel, including the Chinese general acting as UN force commander.

*The new powers struggle to find their place in the international system, unsure of how to translate economic weight into political influence, and whether to challenge the existing order or to accommodate themselves within it.*

The international sympathy for China generated by this tragedy quickly evaporated, however, under the impact of what its neighbors saw as its increasingly aggressive posture in the resource-rich South China Sea. In fact, the loss of a Vietnamese corvette in the Paracel Group early last year triggered one of the most remarkable political realignments in recent history. Massive anti-Chinese protests following the loss of the vessel ultimately turned Vietnam towards confrontation with China. Its territorial dispute with the

Philippines was resolved bilaterally with US assistance and around this core other nations feeling threatened by the growth of Chinese economic and military power formed the Pacific Security Organization. The PASO Charter connects the original trio with Australia, New Zealand, Japan, South Korea, and Malaysia in a security framework modeled on NATO, including an equivalent of its famous Article Five. What the emergence of this “Anyone-but-China-Coalition” will mean for the future of regional stability and global cooperation remains to be seen.

While their rise has not created the same level of tensions as China’s, India and Brazil, and also Mexico, Turkey and Indonesia, have added increasingly stronger voices to the controversies over issues such as the rights and responsibilities of national sovereignty, the legitimacy of the use of force, and the institutions of global governance. At the same time, however, these actors have taken on responsibilities in peace operations under the umbrella of the UN and regional organizations, but only selectively, when and where it suits their national policy priorities. India continues to provide military assets, if at a reduced level, with the shortfall partly made up by the availability of Indonesian troops. Brazil has, with some assistance from Mexico, in effect taken over responsibility for the Western hemisphere, most prominently in Haiti.

*A shaky consensus thus still holds about the central position of the UN within the international system, largely for want of a broadly acceptable alternative.*

A shaky consensus thus still holds about the central position of the UN within the international system, largely for want of a broadly acceptable alternative. While many of its structures are seen as fundamentally flawed, decisive reform has remained unattainable. As a result, some regional organizations have grown in importance. In addition, peace operations fatigue is widespread, particularly among the Western powers that are still recovering from the economic turmoil of the mid-2010s. Voters in many nations question the effectiveness of international state-building efforts, and financial resources have dried up in a time of



austerity. All suppliers of peace operations therefore now apply a more rigorous test of their national interests before making commitments.

As a result, the number of large, long-term, multi-dimensional operations with a centralized command structure has been in decline for several years. The major African UN missions in the DRC, Darfur, and South Sudan have all been declared a success and closed down. There also exists a broad consensus on an alternative. In principle, the international organizations, their member states and external experts all support the creation a comprehensive framework for coalitions combining the local knowledge and legitimacy, peacekeeping experience, and assets of a number of organizations. This modular structure would enable a mix of mission types ranging from heavy ones with a dominant military component to lighter versions, such as specialized political, monitoring, rule of law or logistics and mobility support missions.

While this common vision is certainly a step forward, the devil is still in the details. Two key questions remain unanswered: first, how to develop the organizations' internal capacities, and second, how to build strategic and working-level partnerships between them. In spite of well over a decade of discussions, there still is no agreement on a systematic division of labor or a reliable formula for the allocation of funds, personnel and equipment. Thankfully, two recent developments have helped make the stuttering multilateral engine run a little more smoothly.

As so many other spheres of global governance, the field of peace operations now has its own informal mechanism for major power cooperation. Since 2018, the Peace and Stability Initiative has provided a forum for multilateralism, bringing together "the smallest possible number of actors needed to have the largest possible impact,"<sup>8</sup> in this case the P5, Japan, Germany, India, Brazil,

and South Africa, as well as the UN, EU, AU, ASEAN, OAS, and AL. This group – generally known as the PSI 26, after earlier examples like the G20 and the Nuclear 25 – has achieved some notable successes. It facilitated the ill-fated UNAMIKES in 2019 and the first, UN-led mission in Cabinda (UNMICAB) to separate the Angolan and DRC forces the following year.

Its high point probably came in 2022, when the forum built a consensus for what became the UN-ASEAN operation that supported the transition to democracy in Burma (UNASMIB), one of the largest civilian missions on record. There was even talk of creating institutional structures for the PSI 26 in the form of a permanent secretariat, causing some discomfort at UN headquarters. But with the South China Sea crisis already spilling over into the Security Council, the brief honeymoon seems to be over. Just a few months ago, China vetoed the renewal of UNMICAB's mandate, forcing the AU with some EU assistance into a rushed take-over of the operation, now renamed AMICAB.

A second source of support has been the growing engagement of non-state actors in peace operations. Civil society activism, mobilized especially over new media platforms, had of course been a factor for some time. Then, major international corporations and charities joined the fray. Beginning in the late 2010s, car manufacturers from India, reinsurance giants from Germany, Russian oil tycoons, Swiss bankers, and US purveyors of soft drinks and software have opened their hearts and their pockets to the cause of post-conflict stabilization. They have provided general funding for several operations and paid for satellite surveillance. But more often they have sponsored highly desirable, and highly visible, infrastructure and equipment such as vehicles, helicopters or even entire field camps.

The various international organizations gladly accepted the offers but soon came to see them as a mixed blessing as the new actors added a further level of complexity to the already challenging task of coordinating the international

*As so many other spheres of global governance, the field of peace operations now has its own informal mechanism for major power cooperation.*

presence in the field. Particularly military officers longingly remember the days when they only needed to guard their operational secrets from civilian mission staff, rather than the public relations departments of several international mega-corporations wishing to publicize their good works.

While PR offensives are in fact only a sideshow, cyber offensives are very much in the spotlight. Today, gaining information supremacy is as much a key objective for peace operations as it is for national militaries. Numerous state and non-state actors have become so adept at asymmetric forms of conflict that most field operations and organizational headquarters have in recent years been the target of computer-borne attacks. The mother of them all was of course the virus that hit the EU's network during its engagement

*Car manufacturers from India, reinsurance giants from Germany, Russian oil tycoons, and US purveyors of soft drinks and software opened their hearts and their pockets to the cause of post-conflict stabilization.*



in Syria in 2014. Mixing European components with elements provided by Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Russia, that mission was already an exercise of nightmarish complexity. After the virus, chaos reigned in Brussels and the field mission for over a week.

After this “Damascus experience,” the EU and the other organizations rushed to create cyber capabilities. The demand was partly met by recruiting computer security experts into civilian expert pools, but these services were mostly outsourced to private contractors, already a familiar presence in peace operations. Mostly, they have done their job well, but some experts worry about their suitability for such a sensitive role and the general lack of transparency and accountability enforced by a regulatory framework. Probably the experts worry too much. Probably the rumors about the involvement of the chairman of a prominent private security company in shady business deals across the globe, including in some post-conflict areas, are just that – rumors. And the Indian company hired by the AU to provide satellite and cyber services for its Cabinda operation enjoys a truly stellar reputation.

*Numerous state and non-state actors have become so adept at asymmetric forms of conflict that most field operations and organizational headquarters have in recent years been the target of computer-borne attacks.*

# NATIONAL INTERESTS



**N e w  
Unilateralism**

*N e w*

*M a j o r  
R o l e  
f o r*

*M e d i a*

*P r i v a t e  
S e c u r i t y  
P r o v i d e r s*

*F u e l C o n f l i c t s* **Weak International Organizations**

*N a r r o w  
C o a l i t i o n s*

*o f  
t h e  
W i l l i n g*

**Economic  
Crisis**

*C o m p e t i t i o n*

*f o r  
R e s o u r c e s*

*O r g a n i z e d  
C r i m e  
O t h e r  
R i s k*

*N e w  
T e c h n o l o g i e s  
C r i p p l e  
P e a c e  
O p e r a t i o n s*

**State Failure**

# NATIONAL INTERESTS

*Grace Kimunya was bored – and cold. Sure, heat was frightfully expensive, and the Museum of Peacekeeping was probably not high on anyone’s list of priorities. But if that tired skeleton of a United Nations wanted to put on an exhibition on “UN Peacekeeping 1948–2023: Seventy-five Years of Success” and made her work on a New Year’s Eve to proofread the final text of the tablet-brochure for the grand opening in early January 2026, they should pay for a heater. Not that her employer could afford to pay for much of anything anymore. But maybe the Americans, Chinese and Indians would find a way to sort out the latest Persian Gulf crisis, and maybe oil would drop again to below 300 dollars per barrel. Maybe. And maybe the big nations would start to take the UN seriously again and kindly ask their permission before intervening in a foreign crisis. At least, Sweden and Norway were footing the bill for the exhibition. Grace tried not to feel bitter – but this job was not what she had had in mind when she had joined the UN thirteen years ago, filled with so much optimism.*

No one should have been surprised, the warning signs were everywhere. After promising yet again that “this time will be different,” the financial acrobats had finally created one bubble too many. When it burst, their entire elegantly leveraged building came crashing down. The first few bank collapses looked containable, but weren’t. When the first nations followed the banks into insolvency, a perfect storm developed that hit the global financial system in late 2015. It was naturally followed by an economic meltdown that plunged the Western nations into the worst recession since the 1930s.

The political fallout was similar, too. As retrenchment and austerity rule national policies, societies have drawn inwards. A deep sense of insecurity now favors an appeal to popular prejudices, xenophobia and religious zealotry. The new media fuel this resurgence of traditional identities based on nation, class, ethnicity or belief. Many of the exploding megacities experience violence against migrants or the “enemies of God.” International cooperation has become an increasingly alien concept in the current political culture dominated by fear and zero-sum competition. Isolationism is on the rise and most nations reduce their international footprint to focus on internal security and economic survival. It is not a good time for peace operations. Their legitimacy is eroded, not least because of the abject failures of global governance structures in the face of the Syria and Congo crises between 2012 and 2014. International political will is in short supply, as are financial resources.

*One driver of conflict is organized crime – one of the few economic activities that is flourishing today.*

An early indicator of this trend was the bill passed by the isolationist majority in both houses of the US Congress in 2018 forbidding all future payments to the UN and other international organizations. A number of nations quickly followed, although with less fanfare. As a result, the UN’s peacekeeping budget had to be drastically cut, spelling the end of large, multi-dimensional missions. Hardest hit was the UN engagement in Africa. In quick succession, MONUSCO, UNMISS, and UNAMID were closed or reduced to tiny political offices. By 2023, UN

peacekeeping was effectively finished. Capacity building assistance to other international organizations is, needless to say, also a thing of the past.

Not that the demand for peace operations has diminished. After two decades of decline, the number and scope of violent conflicts across the globe is on the rise again. One driver of conflict is organized crime – one of the few economic activities that is flourishing today. Of course, organized crime always existed but the accelerating loss of legitimate economic alternatives and the weakening of state structures in recent years have given it a new lethality. The Guinea-Bissau disaster is a case in point.

After the ECOWAS presence had been withdrawn due to a lack of funds, in 2016 a wave of violence between ethnically based drug gangs first triggered and then financed a bloody ethnic conflict. As the appalling pictures of atrocities committed against the civilian population spread over the internet, public pressure began to build for international action. Divided and distracted by the financial crisis, the EU at that point was still grudgingly prepared to respond. It quickly became clear, however, that the resulting EU Operation



in Guinea-Bissau (EUGIB Electra) was poorly planned and under-resourced and thus unable to overcome the opposition it encountered. After suffering severe casualties in attacks by ethnic militias under the control of drug cartels, its 300 soldiers were finally withdrawn as a result of the EU's internal upheavals.

The UK and Denmark had already left in 2015. The rest had limped along until Spain, Portugal, Italy and Ireland successively followed Greece into economic chaos and were forced out of the euro zone starting in late 2017. The remaining core EU, consisting of Germany, France, the Benelux states, the other Scandinavians, and Poland, decided to – literally – fence itself in. Over the coming years the Europeans have succeeded in raising the drawbridge even higher. While the Common Security and Defence Policy has officially been abolished, EU members now focus exclusively on territorial defense, internal security and border control.

International “stabilization” missions have not disappeared completely, however. But most can hardly be described as multilateral. Powerful nations still take action when their strategic interests are at stake, yet nowadays they typically do so unilaterally or within a short-term alliance. It comes as no surprise that the resulting operations are almost exclusively military in character. Long-term peace building has fallen out of fashion. When, for example, the imminent election of a presidential candidate with close ties to drug cartels threatened to turn Honduras into a narco-state in 2019, the US intervened. The participation of Mexico and Guatemala provided a cloak of legitimacy.

As is now the norm, a major element of the operation consisted of personnel provided by private security companies. While these proved highly effective militarily, civil society groups also documented several instances of human rights violations committed by the “corporate warriors” against the local population. When these circulated on the internet, the legitimacy of international interventions

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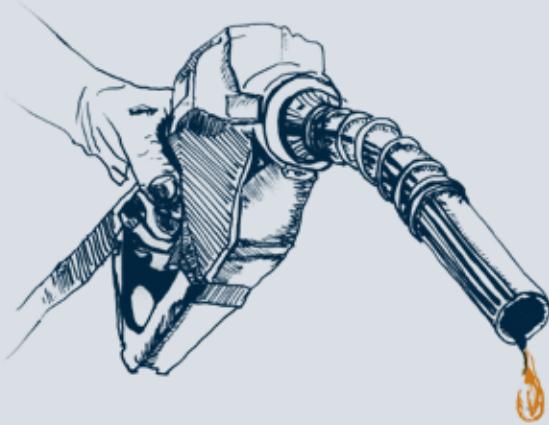
suffered a further setback. To make things worse, soon after the rapid withdrawal of the bulk of the force rumors started to circulate that some PSC staff had developed a lucrative business relationship with the criminals they had earlier fought.

*Powerful nations still take action when their strategic interests are at stake, yet nowadays they typically do so unilaterally or within a short-term alliance.*

Another prominent driver of international conflict in recent years has been the vicious competition for resources. The global recession has certainly dampened the growth of demand for energy and raw materials to a degree, but the state-led economies of the newly developed nations have weathered the global recession more successfully than Europe and North America. In fact, they are still expanding, if at a slower rate than before. In all of them, most clearly in undemocratic China, the governments' legitimacy is based on their ability to improve the living conditions of their citizens. The search for cheap commodities from energy to minerals in order to fuel economic growth has consequently become a centerpiece of their national strategies. The resulting "resource nationalism" has created some of the most combustible trouble spots in today's world.

Although all major powers are joining the fray, Western commentators love to denounce China as the most notorious resource-grabber. No doubt, its navy now dominates the South China Sea, although the Vietnamese are pushing back, with Indian and US assistance. The confrontation between the two Asian giants is more direct in the Persian Gulf, and has given rise to some strange marriages of convenience. In order to safeguard their access to oil, they felt compelled to choose sides in the fierce struggle for dominance playing out in the Middle East.

Due to common interests in reducing radical Sunni influence in Southern and Central Asia, India supports a now nuclear-armed Iran. China is aligned with the Caliphate of Arabia whose support of Pakistani and Afghan militants



and attacks on its Shiite minority keep tensions with Iran and India at a boiling point. Thankfully, the US still guarantees a minimum level of stability that keeps the oil flowing. In this situation, the EU is reduced to convening futile summit meetings and the UN, with the Security Council blocked by Chinese and US vetoes, is simply irrelevant.

Resource competition has also aggravated the effects of a further source of instability in the form of environmental degradation caused by climate change. While the use of nuclear energy has significantly expanded, it is dwarfed by the massive consumption of carbon-based energy supplies in the newly developed nations. As a result, emissions of greenhouse gases have risen dramatically and global warming has accelerated. The chain of

*“Resource nationalism” has created some of the most combustible trouble spots in today’s world.*

events we are currently witnessing was predicted decades ago, and while it is certainly a nice touch that many of the scientists responsible for the predictions have been awarded Nobel Prizes, this will do nothing to stop the downward spiral: lack of water and food has become a reality for roughly two billion people. At the same time, population pressure in youth bulge states

has grown more acute. The political repercussions are obvious: the “arc of instability” has, at least in parts, turned into an “arc of state failure.”

Unsurprisingly, the continent worst hit by this man-made disaster has been Africa. Some experts were optimistic that the income generated by the recent oil and gas boom in many African nations could be used to mitigate the effects of climate change. However, this has only happened in those where the improvements in governance achieved before 2012 have proved sustainable. In most, the new wealth has only benefited a tiny elite and thus sharpened income inequality and fueled ethnic strife. The reaction of the major powers was sadly predictable: energy-hungry outsiders have been falling over themselves to support any regime willing to grant them privileged access to local resources. After the expulsion of the Chinese, Brazil quickly locked down Angola in a transatlantic alliance of lusophone petroleum exporters. India has become remarkably cosy with Nigeria and South Sudan. Not to be outdone, China formed an alliance with Kenya and Uganda.

Tensions had, of course, already existed between China and India in Africa, yet the realignment caused by the 2024 crisis added a new dimension to the situation. In that year, open war erupted again between Sudan and South Sudan. A severe drought on the Horn of Africa had led to widespread starvation, mass migrations and political protests that threatened to overpower the weak governments in Khartoum and Juba. Both saw the best way to cling to power

*Energy-hungry outsiders have been falling over themselves to support any regime willing to grant them privileged access to local resources.*

in channeling popular unrest into a mobilization against the arch-enemy. When the military campaign turned so sharply against South Sudan that a forcible reunification of the former nation seemed possible, the neighboring states and their allies saw their strategic interests in South Sudan’s oil endangered. Yet while Kenya, Uganda, and India acted decisively, China missed the boat.

The military intervention by this ad-hoc coalition of the willing soon pushed the Sudanese to the old North-South border and guaranteed the South's independence. The belated European attempt to bring the moribund AU into play was a non-starter from the beginning. What could the organization have done, without credibility, funds or troops? Tellingly, no one had even bothered to involve the UN. But apart from demonstrating yet again the ineffectiveness of multilateral approaches to conflict resolution, the Sudan crisis had much more urgent repercussions. Angered by the loss of its position in East Africa, China struck back. It was an open secret that it was channeling military supplies to Khartoum via its friends in Arabia. Even more worrying is the fact that the recent crash of an Indian satellite has been linked to China – particularly in the Indian press and blogosphere. Only last week, Indian and Chinese warships exchanged gunfire in the Strait of Hormuz. No wonder the price of oil is at an all-time high.

# REGIONAL DIVERSITY

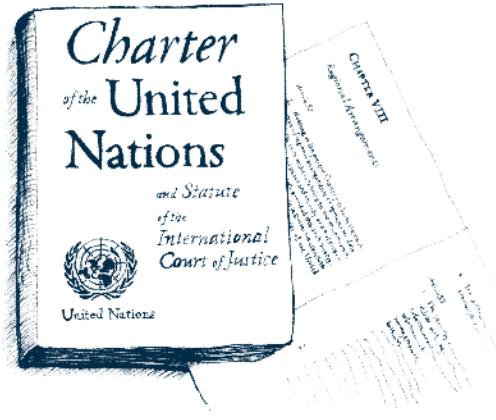


R i s e *N*e  
of the *T*echnologies  
R e s t *C*hallenge  
**- Decline**  
of the West *P*eace Operations  
S t a t e *R*i s e  
Fragility *o*f  
Fatigue *N*on-State  
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Regions **Regional**  
Organizations  
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& Regimes  
*Competition*  
for  
*Resources*  
Regionalization  
of Norms and  
Values

# REGIONAL DIVERSITY

*“Not another security briefing!” groaned Grace Kimunya as she stowed her helmet and vest next to her seat. The Libyan militias had been bad enough, but ever since the tensions between the two competing missions had erupted into open hostilities, there seemed to be one briefing every morning. Why did the Arab League have to interfere? Until their “stabilization force” had shown up, she and her colleagues with the African Union Mission in Libya had the situation under control. Well, mostly. Now, while AMIL and AL patrols were exchanging gunfire in Benghazi, diplomats in Addis and Cairo were exchanging threatening notes, and the EU was desperately trying to defuse the crisis. And Grace had to carry her body armor wherever she went. As the South African cyber forces colonel giving the briefing was droning on about the latest virus attack against the AU intranet that was tracked to a source in Dubai, Grace could not help thinking: “If somebody had told me when I started my career thirteen years ago that it would ever come to this, I would have called him mad.”*



In order to come to grips with our world of 2025, it helps to order an extra large bowl of alphabet soup. Economically, the BRICS have fully arrived, which means that the E7 are catching up with the G7. The N11 are on their way, led by the MIKT. The G20, naturally, cannot be caught as they include the BRICS, the E7 and the MIKT (but only four of the N11). ASEAN, AU, ECOWAS, SADC, CSTO, and CELAC are fine. The UN, NATO, OSCE, and OAS, not to mention the ICC, WTO and R2P, have not done so well.

This decline of the West and rise of the rest is the result of very uneven economic growth experienced by the two spheres after 2012. While most of the emerging nations boomed, North America, Europe and Japan stagnated. However, the old powers have not slipped as much as some experts gleefully predicted. Their per capita incomes still greatly exceed those of the new players. The US is still the world's leading power and the EU has not broken apart. Their loss of position is thus only relative – but still clearly visible in the shifting of the global balance of power.

For over a decade we had wondered how the emerging powers would accommodate themselves within the existing international system. Now we know the answer: They haven't. As a result, the international system has changed remarkably.

*For over a decade we had wondered how the emerging powers would accommodate themselves within the existing international system. Now we know the answer: They haven't.*

International governance is more necessary than ever, but it is largely provided by a network of regional organizations. In most cases, these organizations act independently within their spheres. However, inter-regional cooperation in the form of short-term, functional coalitions also occurs. Peace operations continue to be an important aspect of governance, but they have evolved to fit this messy, multipolar reality.

Several factors explain this rearrangement. Probably the most prominent are the new emphasis on regional identities among the emerging powers, the disengagement of the West from global institutions, and the perceived loss of legitimacy and lack of effectiveness of the international system of 2012.

Led by the surging confidence of China and other Asian nations in the value of their cultures, social systems and political and economic regimes, regional identities are going through a boom of their own. Just do an online search for “Asian values” or “African solutions” and count the hits. The new powers have grown increasingly impatient with constant lectures on anything from human rights and economic governance to climate change and have largely turned their back on the “universal” norms championed by the West. Regional mechanisms have therefore gained new attractiveness and legitimacy. Economic cooperation led the way, but political integration is also progressing.

China is, of course, the hub of an increasingly connected Asian Economic Zone built around the Asian Monetary Unit established in 2016 by China, Japan, South Korea and the ten ASEAN members. This was followed, in 2018, by the China-ASEAN Cooperation Agreement, which not only solved the territorial disputes in the South China Sea but also created regional peace operations capabilities. These have proved quite effective, if somewhat heavy-handed. Admittedly, there are some cracks in the harmonious façade. Indonesia and Malaysia are unhappy about the treatment of alleged

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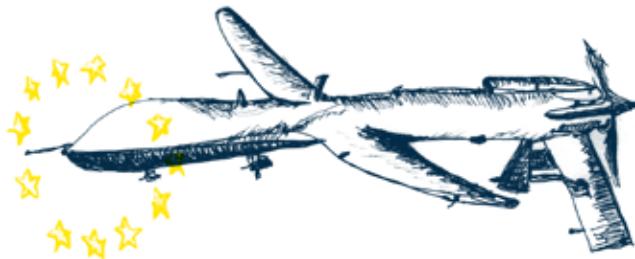
Muslim rebels in southern Thailand and Mindanao by ASEAN peacekeepers, for example. But by and large, the “Dragon and Tigers” alliance is working well.

Much ink has been spilt over the question of whether the resurgence of non-Western regional structures was the cause of, or rather caused by, the withdrawal of North America and Europe from institutions of global governance. Instead of trying to solve this chicken-and-egg problem, one can simply state that Western retrenchment is a fact. Still recovering from their financial crises of the mid 2010s, the US and the EU now invest primarily in internal security, border control and intelligence, and have cut political and financial support to the UN drastically. NATO is in decline, but transatlantic cooperation continues in a number of areas where interests converge, such as trade, intellectual property rights, terrorism, and cyber security.

The EU is still active in the field of international peace operations, if in a distinctly new fashion. Focusing on their key strategic interests in the MENA states and Sub-Saharan Africa, the Europeans have supported the growth of regional organizations through increased capacity building support. Naturally, this assistance was conditional on increased efforts to stem immigrant flows and grant preferential access to raw materials. With European armies and defense budgets shrinking, the EU has learned to lead from behind. It now concentrates on providing its partners with training and high-value equipment in areas like intelligence, communications, logistics and mobility, while putting very few European boots on the ground.

*The EU has learned to lead from behind. It now concentrates on providing its partners with training and high-value equipment, while putting very few European boots on the ground.*

An early indication of this new taste for proxy warfare was the 2016 intervention in Mali to stop the spread of the Islamist insurgency in the North that was fueled by the Second Libyan Civil War. After several unsuccessful attempts to gain UN Security Council endorsement, ECOWAS deployed an operation to Mali without UN involvement, but aided by a small EU Field Sup-



port and Mobility Mission (EUMI Ariadne). Militarily, MICEMA was quite successful, largely because the open terrain of northern Mali proved eminently suitable for the new Euro-drones. Yet long-term stabilization has remained elusive.

Mali was of course not the only case where the UN failed in the eyes of a growing number of countries. In addition, some also felt that UN mandates had been perverted in the course of their implementation and were determined to stop the trend towards interference in the internal affairs of sovereign nations or promotion of regime change. Libya in 2011 and 2016, Syria in 2012, Mali in 2012 and 2016, the DRC in 2013 – taken together, they fatally eroded the UN position as the central pillar of the international peace operations system. But fear not, the UN still exists, even if with reduced responsibilities.

It has survived because it still has its uses. Sure, a number of global regimes and norms have decayed. The ICC and the WTO have ceased to function, and R2P is gone. Many issues, however, still create a global consensus for cooperative action, such as combating piracy, terrorism, and the spread of infectious diseases. There is even a growing momentum for revitalizing talks on climate change, as there is no such thing as a

*The revision of Chapter VIII of the UN Charter in 2023 authorized regional organizations to use force within their area without a Security Council mandate.*

regional climate. Until recently, the UN also did often endorse uncontroversial regional peace operations, although that might change. After all, the revision of Chapter VIII of the UN Charter in 2023 authorized regional organizations to use force within their area without a Security Council mandate. In the absence of a credible alternative, New York also on occasion serves as a moderator or referee between regional organizations, a function that might grow in importance in the future. Finally, the UN still administers a number of legacy operations such as UNFICYP.

Indeed, UNFICYP. How useful that operation proved at the ripe old age of 55, during the Eastern Mediterranean Crisis. Despite Turkish warnings, in 2018 the Republic of Cyprus had begun to develop the oil and gas deposits in disputed waters in cooperation with Greece and Israel. In 2019, Turkey looked ready to invade the RoC to stop this challenge to its regional leadership position. With numerous strategic interests in play, the US and EU leaned on all the parties to accept UN mediation. The parties grudgingly did, and as a result UNFICYP was enlarged and a naval component added. It is now mandated to clarify the maritime boundaries and design a plan for the development of the energy resources that benefits all sides.



But this episode was just that. Most peace operations are now conducted by other actors, including some unexpected ones. Russia, Belarus, Armenia, and the central Asian nations are boycotting the OSCE and have drawn progressively closer together within the Collective Security Treaty Organization. In fact, CSTO launched its first mission as early as 2015. The location was Uzbekistan, where after the death of the incumbent president a short-lived “Uzbek Spring” was quickly followed by violence between supporters of the former president and modernizers that also took on an ethnic dimension. To stop the spread of the violence, CSTO – very much under Russian leadership – intervened and established calm. Unsurprisingly, it also established a pro-Russian regime.

Some Western commentators have used cases such as this one to argue that the new system of global governance is a clear step back from what existed in 2012. They point out that many operations today are short-term, strongly military missions, conducted in the interest of a dominant regional power, that lack strategies and structures to build sustainable peace. While that is unfortunately often the case, there are also positive examples. Look at the Western hemisphere.

Even severe critics admit that the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States is doing a fine job. Led by the regional superpower Brazil, CELAC has completely replaced the OAS as the forum for Latin American affairs. Actually, CELAC really is the OAS – minus the US and Canada. It also replaced the UN in Haiti in 2017, and no one has heard the Haitians complaining. Economic integration is progressing in parallel, under the umbrella of the Alliance for the Americas. So confident has the organization become that in 2020 it adopted the “Bolivar Doctrine” of strict non-interference by outsiders in Latin America.

The reaction of the US to this decision is not hard to imagine. All the more credit is due to the political leaders on both sides for their decision to coordinate US and CELAC efforts in support of the Cuban transition after the long-expected fall of the Communist regime in 2022. It is still too soon to be completely sure, but so far that difficult process is working better than expected. For instance, the feared expansion of organized crime syndicates into Cuba seems to have been averted.

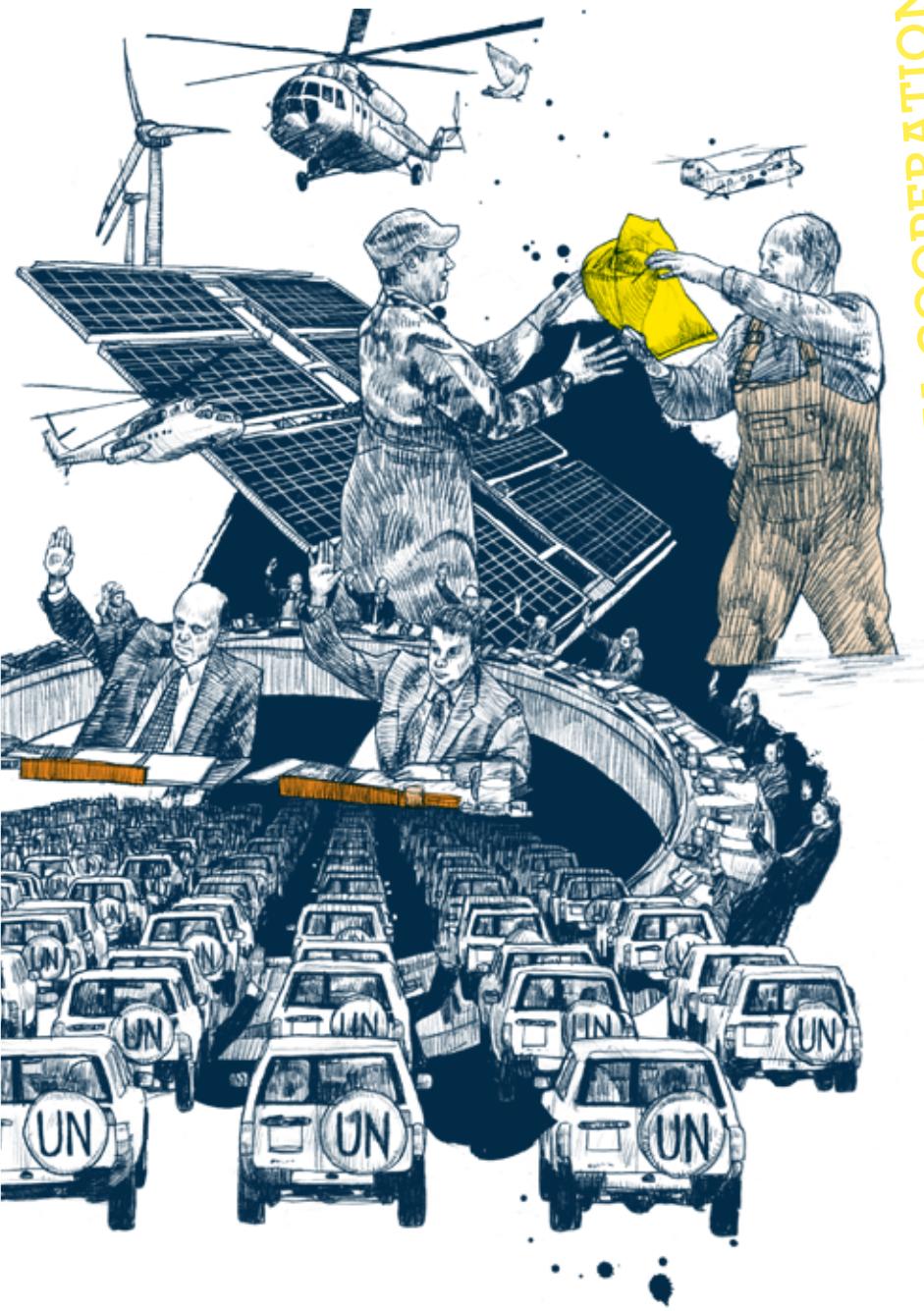
This achievement indicates that peace operation partnerships can still work in our fragmented world. In Cuba, the US provided financial resources

and technical expertise, the Latin Americans an understanding of local conditions, legitimacy, and manpower. A similar division of labor has also contributed to the at least partial successes of several missions deployed by African regional organizations in cooperation with the EU such as MICEMA, or the AU-EU operation in Burundi in 2019.

However, the example of Cuba also hints at a new challenge posed by fragmentation: the potential for conflict between regional actors. The Western hemisphere ultimately got its act together. That does not seem to be the case with the AU and the Arab League in Libya. As anyone who has been watching the news lately knows, the two have come close to a full-scale confrontation. The AU planted its flag first, intervening in its member state when the third intra-Libyan conflict after 2011 and 2016 caused civilian casualties and threatened yet again to destabilize the Sahel states. With the support of the EU, the AU green helmets did manage to establish a degree of security. However, the underlying tensions between the East and West of the country, and modernizers and Islamists, simmered on.

Then, prompted by one of the competing factions, the AL appeared on the scene, spearheaded by a resurgent Egypt. Maybe the organization wanted to make a point and improve its reputation as a credible actor among the other regional bodies. After all, Libya is not just a member of the AU but also of the AL. Maybe some Arab states worried that a clear-cut success of AMIL might lead to a dominance of European and African companies in Libya. Or maybe the Egyptian army felt it needed to justify its still significant size. However that may be, the world is again watching Benghazi, holding its breath.

# GLOBAL COOPERATION



*N e w  
Technologies  
Aid Peace Operations*

## **Global Economic Boom**

*Integration  
of New Powers*

## **Strong International Organizations**

*Fewer Failed States* *New Decades Conflicts* *Media Classes*

*Global Drive against Organized Crime*

## **Technological Breakthroughs**

# **Golden Age of Cooperation**

# GLOBAL COOPERATION

*For once, Grace Kimunya did not mind working on a holiday, even if it was New Year's Eve. She was very tired – the past weeks had been incredibly hectic at UN DPKO – and she would have preferred to be out celebrating, but she was also elated. In spite of the untold number of legal and technical glitches and last-minute changes, the documents were ready, the speech almost finished. With the start of the new year 2026, the Secretary-General would be able to announce that the UN would finally have its own stand-by force, built around several European brigades. As the two EU liaison officers, an Icelandic navy captain and a colonel from the Turkish unmanned aerial vehicles forces, started filling the plastic cups to celebrate, Grace leant back, closed her eyes and allowed herself a moment's reflection on how much her field of work had changed since she had entered it, only thirteen years earlier, fresh from Kenyatta University.*

It seems that the better angels of our nature have won. In 2012 few experts would have dared to predict this outcome: the turbulences they were witnessing marked the dawn of the age of mass collaboration. Granted, over the following years the international system did become ever more complex. The trend towards the diffusion of knowledge, legitimacy and power accelerated. Emerging powers had to be accommodated within the international system and the growing influence of non-state actors added some hurdles. As was to be expected, this transition caused a few stumbles. Yet all things considered, it went remarkably well – including in the field of international peace operations.

How did it happen?

Of course, this outcome was only possible against the background of a worldwide economic expansion that has safeguarded the prosperity of the Western nations, allowed the emerging powers to catch up and lifted millions out of poverty in the developing world. Looking back, it is clear that our blessed state of global prosperity was triggered by the happy marriage of two wildly improbable events: the political earthquakes that ended years of deadlock and enabled the US and Europe to overcome their debt and currency crises, and the scientific triumphs that triggered the Energy Revolution.

*A worldwide economic expansion that has safeguarded the prosperity of the Western nations, allowed the emerging powers to catch up and lifted millions out of poverty in the developing world.*

In 2014 the Democrats and Republicans negotiated a sweeping compromise to restructure US public finances. Spending on defense and welfare was cut, taxes were raised and major investments in education and infrastructure were announced. To say that the world was stunned by this breakthrough would be an understatement. We had hardly recovered when a few months later the leaders of the EU shocked us anew with their decision to combat Europe's festering crisis through a grand strategy of deeper integration: Eurobonds combined with tight fiscal controls, "flexicurity" schemes to help workers adjust to

labor market changes and an integrated immigration strategy to attract talented young migrants firmly set Europe on a path towards recovery and then expansion.

Pointing towards a future of ever closer cooperation, the emerging economies also played an impor-

*The real game-changer, however, was the revolution in alternative energy technologies, with Chinese and Indian researchers and corporations providing some key innovations.*

tant role in this revival of the established powers. Some very open words were spoken behind closed doors to US and European leaders about the importance of vision and leadership, and the punishment for missing historic opportunities. Wisely, China, India and other new players backed their advice with substantial support for the dollar and the euro during the upheavals that continued to rock the financial markets in the first years after 2014.

That these political developments coincided with a wave of scientific discoveries seems almost too good to be true. Yet, the Energy Revolution is a reality and promises in the near future to finally break the link between the creation of wealth and the consumption of resources. Conflicts over energy



are something you only find in history books. In a first round, new technologies opened inaccessible or uncompetitive oil and gas deposits. The real game-changer, however, was the revolution in alternative energy technologies, with Chinese and Indian researchers and corporations providing some key innovations. Renewables such as wind and solar, hydrogen and liquid gas technologies, and fuel cells providing vast energy storage capacities have spread into all aspects of our lives. In fact, the Under-Secretary-General for Climate Change just recently announced the conversion of the entire UN fleet of vehicles to zero-emission models, thanks to a donation by Guangzhou Mobility Industries.

The Energy Revolution, in combination with global economic expansion and political transformations, has begun to create prosperity in unexpected quarters. This has made the task of international peace operations easier. Just ask the staff of the AU Mission in the Sahel. Visibly energized after its earlier success in Somalia, in 2016 the AU had sent its brand new African Standby Force into Mali and Niger full of optimism. But the going had been rough initially for AMISAH, as stability would not take root in the absence of economic opportunities. In time, however, the positive effects of the remarkable take-off along the Southern Mediterranean littoral have begun to filter into the Sahel. The “Maghreb Tigers,” as the media have started to call Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia and – hard to believe – Libya, have leveraged their democratic revolutions and the gains from the European Desertec Solar Initiative and the liquid gas bonanza after 2017 into an economic boom. They have made full use of their large working age population and are attracting immigrants from the Sahel and even back from Europe. In fact, France has seen the start of a public debate about offering well-educated North Africans inducements to stay.

This development is just one example of a trend that characterizes the world of 2025. A social scientist might talk of dissolution of cultural barriers, an irreversible interconnectedness, a paradigm shift in mentalities, an emerging consensus on values and norms. You could also say people across the globe are getting to know each other, working together, losing their fear of the future and their neighbors.

While this is all well and good, one must acknowledge that the globalization of opportunities has been neither global nor total. It has not reached all parts of the globe equally nor benefitted all groups within nations to the same extent. In some parts of the world, persistent poverty in the midst of plenty,

the exploitation of scarce minerals, organized crime, and a cultural backlash against globalization continue to fuel existing conflicts and create new ones. And while the number of such conflicts has certainly declined over the years, some still require the active engagement of outside actors.

Fortunately, widespread prosperity and a climate of cooperation have finally created an “international community” worthy of the name that is willing and able to rise to the challenge. As multilateralism has become the default mode of international action, the UN and the regional organizations are stronger than ever, are working together seamlessly, and the new powers are pulling their weight. In economic terms, the demand for peace operations has declined while the supply of funds, personnel, equipment and political will has expanded – a virtuous circle if ever there was one.

Setting the tone for the following major reforms, a modular coalition of organizations scored an early success in an unexpected place. The first democratic elections in the Islamic Federal Republic of Somalia, held in 2015, sealed its reunification and began a slow process of rebuilding that conflict-torn country. Of course, it had taken a mighty effort to make the quarreling factions and clans agree on a federal constitution in 2013 and then to bring

*Fortunately, widespread prosperity and a climate of cooperation have finally created an “international community” worthy of the name that is willing and able to rise to the challenge.*

Somaliland and Puntland on board. But for once all sides acted in unison, ably coordinated by the AU and the UN. A powerful AU mission was on hand to ensure stability, largely funded by the EU. The Europeans also extended their naval presence and provided assistance with the creation of a Somali police force and coast guard,

building on the expertise gained in its earlier efforts in the region. Experts were quick to hail the smooth division of labor between the three international organizations – with the AU providing military manpower, the EU money, high-tech hardware and rule of law assistance, and the UN logistics and overall political guidance – as the role model for future cooperation.



Another example of the new spirit of cooperation is the concerted effort to safeguard the expanding trade routes that tie our world together. The enforcement of regimes to protect the global commons has, of course, become a central task of international governance. Just think of the Cyber Decalogue or the “Green Helmets” deployed by the UN Department for Climate Change. The foundation of the UN Office of Maritime Safety in 2018 was therefore a logical step to take. With regional headquarters in Panama, Accra, Mombasa, and Jakarta and assets ranging from traditional vessels to drones, OMS has largely swept the seas of pirates and drug runners. There was some grumbling in China, as the command of OMS went to an Indian admiral – and within the EU, as its suggestion for naming the new institution MEDEA (Maritime Enforcement and Defence Agency) was turned down. But even they agree that the UN armada is a huge success.

Thankfully, China no longer has much reason to grumble. Second place behind the US in economic and military power suits its ambitions well. Just like the other new economic giants it fits comfortably into the international system. The new generation of Party leaders is opening up domestic political space, and “peaceful rise” is clearly no longer just a slogan. The solution of the territorial disputes with its neighbors in the South China Sea Charter in 2018 illustrates its new attitude. It was no coincidence, therefore, that the event that prepared a tectonic shift in global governance was held in China’s capital.

Mandated by a series of summits of the regional organizations, the UN, EU, AU, ASEAN, OAS, and AL met at the Beijing Conference in 2021. There, they succeeded in rewriting the rulebook of international peace operations. They agreed on a global division of labor, a draft doctrine, new international regimes, and coordinating mechanisms for future peace missions. On the operational level, the result was a comprehensive framework for military, police, and civilian capacities; training standards and facilities; rosters; capacity building measures; and financial burden sharing. Strategically, the participants assigned the UN the role of sole legitimizer and central coordinator while strengthening its resources for those operations beyond the abilities of regional organizations.

Building on the achievements of Beijing, the UN 2022 Summit was an astounding success. The number of sweeping reforms pushed through in quick succession by the assembled world leaders surprised even seasoned commentators. The adoption of the Cyber Decalogue was followed by the creation of the new offices of Under-Secretary-General for Climate Change (the former Chinese Minister for the Environment) and for Technological Resilience (an

Indian IT entrepreneur and philanthropist). The adoption of a new UN peacekeeping doctrine expanded the scope of future operations to the enforcement of new international regimes in fields such as

environmental protection, resource management, technology transfer, cyber ethics, and intellectual property rights.

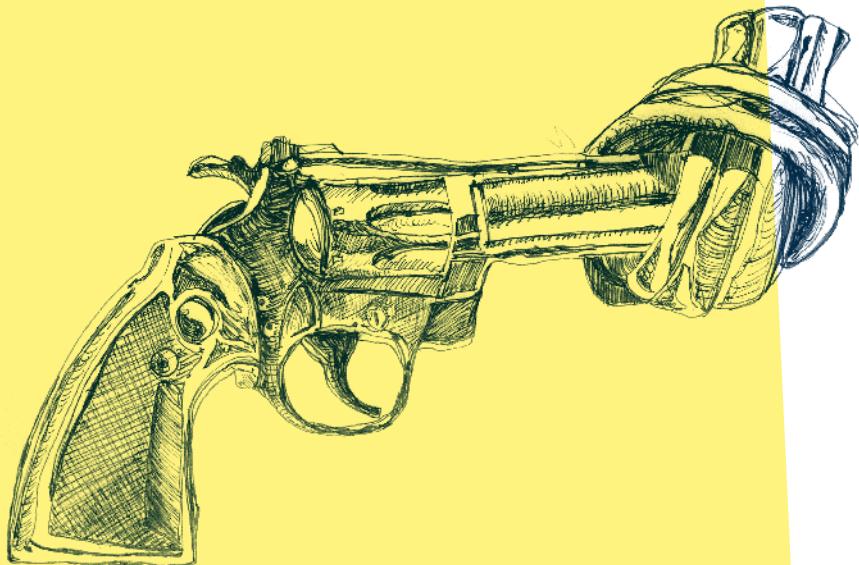
And more was coming. Led by the newly developed powers, member states signed off on a substantial raise of their assessed contributions to the peacekeeping budget. When finally the Secretary-General announced the

*A new UN peacekeeping doctrine expanded the scope of future operations to the enforcement of new regimes in environmental protection, resource management, technology transfer, and cyber ethics.*

creation of UN military and police stand-by forces within three years, with the core to be provided by the European Defence and Gendarmerie Forces, the audience was almost too stunned to applaud.

Of course there were some skeptics who felt this was all too good to last. And indeed, the new ship of global governance almost foundered on the first reef it encountered. The Korean Reunification of 2023 threatened to re-ignite tensions in East Asia and turn the clock back to the time of strategic competition. Serious economic turmoil and popular unrest followed as the South struggled with the integration of its Northern compatriots. But reason prevailed, and the situation was stabilized after the 5+1 talks between China, the US, Russia, Japan, India, and the UN decided on a collectively financed “Korean Marshall Plan” and a civil UN advisory and support mission to support the transition. And it was only fitting that the position of Special Representative of the Secretary-General was entrusted to a senior civil servant from Germany, the acknowledged master of reunifications.

Now all that remains is to find solemn words for the speech to celebrate a true Hollywood ending: the inauguration of the UN Standby Force in January 2026.



# SO WHAT?

The four scenarios presented on the preceding pages are internally plausible but only four out of an infinite number of possible futures. They consciously do not make predictions. At worst one could say they are invented stories. So what is their value, how can they help us – the peace operations community and policy-makers in member states and multilateral organizations – to prepare for the future?

The value of scenarios is that they make it possible to take the proverbial step back and at least catch a glimpse of the big picture and the high degree of interconnectedness of the key factors that will shape the future of international crisis management. In describing several different futures and pathways towards them, scenarios also make us think about *desirability*: What kind of future do we prefer and what are the specific reasons for this preference?

In addition, scenarios help sharpen our focus on *achievability*. They allow us to distinguish between those key factors that can be influenced by the peace operations community alone, those that have to be addressed in cooperation with partners, and those that are outside our sphere of influence. The latter include predictable megatrends like climate change and population growth and unpredictable processes like the development of the global economy and the trajectories of rising powers. The fact that these external factors clearly have a large impact on our field demonstrates the importance of making the current peace operations system more robust to allow it to function under a variety of different conditions.

In order to promote desirable outcomes and avoid less pleasant ones, the peace operations community must therefore be able to both *shape* and *adapt* to a variety of different factors and allow for an element of unpredictability. To structure our thinking on how to make peace operations capable of meeting these challenges we suggest looking at three elements. First, what institutional *structures* are necessary within and between international and regional organizations and member states? Second, what financial, personnel, administrative, and technical *capacities* must be provided, and

by whom? Third, what political *strategies* should be employed on the various levels to achieve our goals?

Solutions will need to exhibit both *resilience* and *flexibility*. *Resilience*, because they must be able to cushion the impact of developments outside of our control, as mentioned above. *Flexibility*, because peace operations will likely remain the Swiss army knife of international conflict management, called upon at short notice to help in all kinds of contingencies.

To jumpstart the debate, we present a number of questions below. They provide examples for issues and challenges related to the three elements outlined above. Further questions, comments and recommendations will emerge as work with the scenarios continues – there is room for them at the end of this publication.

## QUESTIONS:

- What are the structures needed to allow a flexible and modular approach to peacekeeping partnerships and how can they be implemented?
- How can emerging powers be accommodated in the system as we know it today? Is Security Council Reform a part of the answer?
- Do we need global regulatory frameworks for Private Security Companies and who would enforce them?
- Given that few governments currently have internal structures capable of managing complex cooperation issues, what can we do to put our own houses in order?
- Can we make peace operations financially more resilient by decoupling their budgets from global economic cycles?

- How do we guarantee intelligence and cyber supremacy for peace operations?
- Is there a need to actively engage and invest in capacity building for those regional organizations not yet active in peace operations?
- Should fighting organized crime become a standard task in peace operations mandates? Is there a place for international jurisdiction in this regard?
- How do we counteract state-building fatigue among electorates as well as political leaders?
- How do we explain global interconnectedness and its consequences to national electorates and prepare them for the necessary national policy shifts?
- How can one balance effectiveness with legitimacy? Would unilateralism delegitimize peace operations?
- Is it possible to promote emerging norms such as R2P without coming into conflict with legitimate concerns over state sovereignty?



# FROM SHAPING FACTORS TO SCENARIOS

Originating in military planning, scenarios soon became an instrument primarily used in the business world. However, they have emerged as a frequently applied tool in other fields, including political processes. Scenarios can be perceived as descriptions of complex and consistent future situations or vivid pictures of the future.

Scenarios are not about predictions and probabilities of occurrence. Yet they do not come out of the blue. Scenario development is based on a well-founded methodology.

In the past years there has been no lack of reports and publications about future global challenges that shape current debates (e.g. the National Intelligence Council “Global Trends” series and the annual “State of the Future” report by The Millennium Project). However, as we started this project, we were not aware of any holistic approach to the evolution of conditions shaping the field of peace operations. We have therefore partnered with a leading strategy and foresight company to facilitate a process that provides credible outcomes. In three interactive workshop sessions, an interdisciplinary group of experts progressed from the collection of shaping factors to the four scenarios.

All scenario processes are based on key factors, i.e. factors that determine the future development of the subject at hand. The notion of key factors is used to reduce the evident complexity, especially in a field like peace operations.

## **Environmental Scanning**

ZIF's scenario process began with a so-called environmental scanning in the first workshop that systematically mapped trends, challenges, actors, and other factors shaping future developments in the field of peace operations. We started with an intuitive collection of ideas that was comparable to a mind mapping exercise. Participants identified and evaluated a total of 102 shaping factors. Additionally, thirteen so-called wild cards were described. Wild cards are future developments or events that are characterized by their low probability but high impact. They have a surprising character, undermine current trends and might even create new futures.

## **Intermediary Processing**

### **– From Shaping Factors to Key Factors**

These results were then clustered into sixteen groups and refined in a two-stage process of analysis that consisted of a computer-based cross-impact analysis and an additional impact-uncertainty analysis of the newly defined clusters. By doing this, complexity was further reduced and the most influential clusters of factors were identified. This process left us with twelve key factors, i.e. factors with a high impact on the subject and considerably high uncertainty with regard to their future development. Additionally, we identified two given factors that are also very relevant but not so uncertain in their evolution. Both, demographic trends and climate change, are based on solid scientific data and models.

## **Key Factor Analysis**

The key factor analysis in the second workshop defined various possible future projections for each key factor, asking how the key factors might develop or which alternative occurrences they might have. Here again, we looked not only for the most probable development path but for all possible ones.

## **Consistency Check**

Once projections for each key factor had been described, conflicts and synergies between the projections for the various factors were identified by a consistency check. All possible combinations of projections of different key factors were checked for their compatibility and plausibility. For example, the

projection that resource scarcity triggers widespread international cooperation in the development of resource-efficient technologies and free access to these new technologies does not go particularly well with the projection of another key factor that describes a new unilateralism with nations focusing on narrowly defined self-interests.

Risk Assessment and Horizon Scanning software (RAHS) developed jointly by Z\_punkt and the Bundeswehr Transformation Centre (ZTransfBw) helped to identify the most consistent bundles of projections out of the vast amount of all possible combinations.

As too many of these projection bundles still remained for the subsequent steps, they were further clustered on the basis of similarities. Four of these clusters were chosen as raw scenarios and provided the backdrop for discussions in the third and final workshop.

### **Scenario Construction**

The third workshop was dedicated to adding substance to the mere combinations of projections and drafting first ideas about the specific characteristics of each scenario. Participants discussed possible consequences for peace operations and developed assumptions about the causalities or underlying logic. This was done by “backcasting.” We asked participating experts to think about specific actions and events that must have occurred to make a specific scenario possible in 2025.

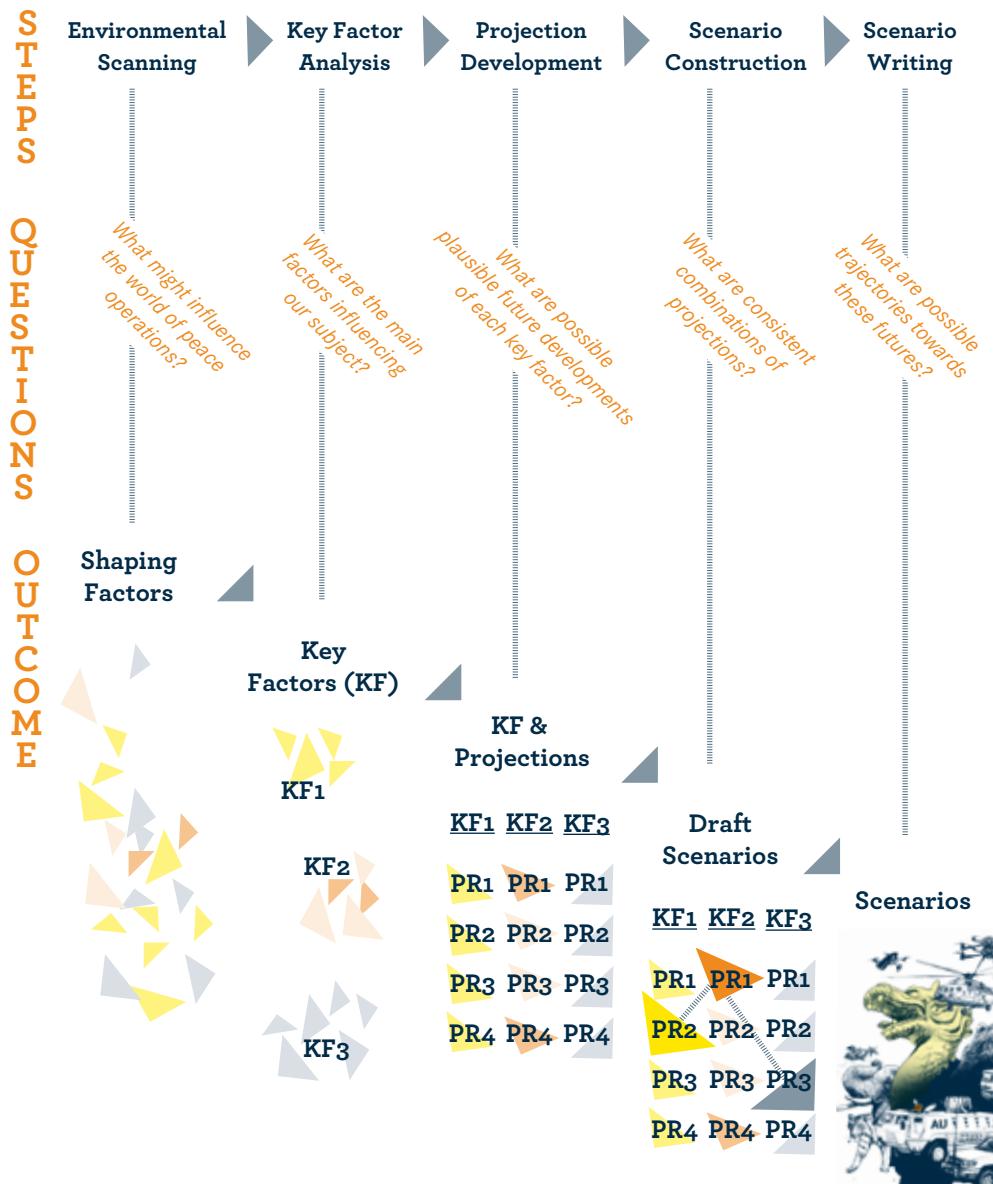
### **Scenario Writing – The Post-Workshop Phase**

All three workshops provided an invaluable resource of ideas and thoughts about the future of peace operations that contributed to the last step – the elaboration of the final scenarios. This scenario writing and a visualization in the form of illustrations helps to process the results in a suitable way for further dialog with a broader audience of practitioners, policy-makers and scholars alike.

## Taking the Work on Scenarios Further

By presenting the scenarios to policy-makers and practitioners in the field of peace operations, we aim to enrich the debate on future strategies and operational requirements. All scenarios, even adverse ones, have positive and negative aspects. They provide food for thought on risks and opportunities, options and strategies, thus laying ground for further reflections and actions. We have shared some initial thoughts on the previous pages. We also left some room for your thoughts as well as for further insights and recommendations generated as work with the scenarios continues in various fora and contexts.

# FROM SHAPING FACTORS TO SCENARIOS



# SPACE FOR COMMENTS AND THOUGHTS





# ENDNOTES

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We would like to express our wholehearted thanks to everyone who contributed to this new approach to reflection on peace operations. It was a great pleasure to work with such a distinguished group of experts. Specific positions are not attributable to individual participants or their employers. Any errors in this publication are those of ZIF.

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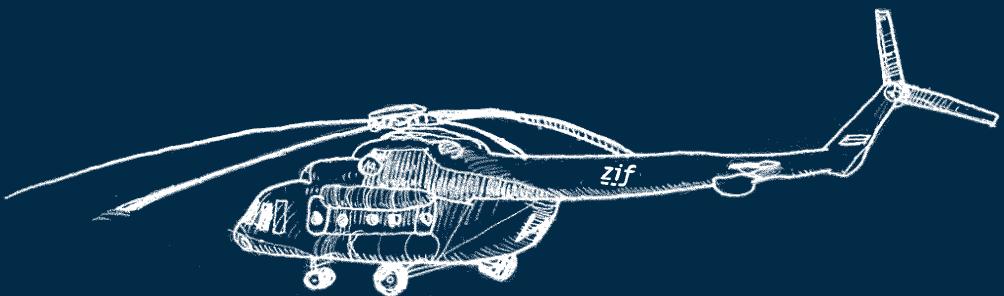
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# ABBREVIATIONS

|               |   |
|---------------|---|
| AL .....      | Arab League/League of Arab States   |
| ASEAN .....   | Association of Southeast Asian Nations  |
| AMIB .....    | AU Mission in Burundi   |
| AU .....      | African Union   |
| BIH .....     | Bosnia and Herzegovina  |
| BRICS .....   | Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa  |
| CELAC .....   | Community of Latin American and Caribbean States  |
| CSTO .....    | Collective Security Treaty Organization   |
| DFS .....     | Department of Field Support (UN)  |
| DPKO .....    | Department of Peacekeeping Operations (UN)  |
| DRC .....     | Democratic Republic of the Congo  |
| E7 .....      | Emerging Seven: China, India, Brazil, Mexico, Russia, Indonesia, Turkey   |
| ECOWAS .....  | Economic Community of West African States   |
| EU .....      | European Union  |
| EUPM .....    | EU Police Mission in BiH  |
| G7 .....      | Group of Seven: US, Japan, Germany, UK, France, Italy, Canada   |
| G20 .....     | Group of Twenty: G7 plus Argentina, Australia, Brazil, China, the EU, India, Indonesia, Mexico, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, South Korea, Turkey |
| GDP .....     | Gross Domestic Product  |
| ICC .....     | International Criminal Court  |
| IFOR .....    | Implementation Force  |
| MENA .....    | Middle East and North Africa  |
| MIKT .....    | Mexico, Indonesia, (South) Korea, Turkey  |
| MONUSCO ..... | UN Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo  |
| N11 .....     | Next Eleven: Bangladesh, Egypt, Indonesia, Iran, Mexico, Nigeria, Pakistan, Philippines, Turkey, South Korea, Vietnam                                   |
| NATO .....    | North Atlantic Treaty Organization  |
| OAS .....     | Organization of American States   |
| ONUC .....    | United Nations Mission in the Congo   |
| OSCE .....    | Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe  |
| P5 .....      | Permanent Five (Members of the UN Security Council)   |
| PSC .....     | Private Security Company  |
| R2P .....     | Responsibility to Protect   |
| SADC .....    | Southern African Development Community  |
| UN .....      | United Nations  |
| UNAMID .....  | AU-UN Hybrid Operation in Darfur  |
| UNEF .....    | UN Emergency Force  |
| UNFICYP ..... | UN Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus   |
| UNMISS .....  | UN Mission in South Sudan   |
| UNTSO .....   | UN Truce Supervision Organization   |
| WTO .....     | World Trade Organization  |



## **THE CENTER FOR INTERNATIONAL PEACE OPERATIONS**

ZIF was founded in 2002 by the German government and parliament to strengthen civilian capacities for international peace operations. The Center's core mandate is to recruit and train civilian personnel and to provide analysis and advice on peacekeeping and peacebuilding issues. ZIF unites training, human resources and analysis expertise under one roof, allowing for an integrated approach.

ZIF works closely with the German Federal Foreign Office and is responsible in particular for Germany's civilian contributions to UN, EU and OSCE missions. Through joint projects with international partners, ZIF works to expand international peacekeeping capacities and to contribute to the conceptual evolution of peace operations.



