



United Nations Truce Supervision Organization

Role, Relevance, Function, and Utility
– Lessons for Future Peace Operations

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GCSP
Geneva Centre for
Security Policy

Publisher: Norwegian Institute of International Affairs

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ISBN: 978-82-7002-371-4

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Cover photo: UNTSO Observer Group Lebanon (source UNTSO HQ)

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Future Peace Operations

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Acknowledgements

The Effectiveness of Peace Operations Network (EPON), Geneva Centre for Security Policy (GCSP), Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI), United Service Institution of India (USI), and the Study Team would like to thank the United Nations’ Department of Peace Operations (UN DPO), Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA) and all contributing UN staff who have provided guidance and support throughout the study. The co-organisation of a mid-way study consultation on the early findings at UN Headquarters with UN Staff and Member States was especially useful.

In particular, we are grateful to UNTSO mission staff at the Headquarters in Jerusalem, as well as at the different UNTSO Observation Groups and Liaison Offices, for hosting our visits and discussions, sharing documents, insights, expertise and experience, and responding to our requests and questions. We thank the UNIFIL mission staff for hosting our visit and for the instructive roundtable discussion and briefings. We are equally grateful to UNDOF staff, who contributed their perspectives from the mission through bilateral interviews, discussions and online meetings. Important assessments shared by mission staff of UNSCO, UNSCOL, and the MFO also informed the study findings.

Invaluable to the project was the analysis and perspective shared by representatives of the Host States of UNTSO, primarily governmental organisations in Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria, but also through contributions from think tanks and civil society representatives. We are grateful to them for supporting our visits and arranging meetings. We thank the Cairo International Centre for Conflict Resolution, Peacekeeping and Peacebuilding for co-hosting a round table on the New Agenda for Peace and what lessons can be learned from UNTSO for the future of peace operations.

We appreciate input and comments from other key stakeholders, including representatives of the five Permanent Members of the UN Security Council, Troop-Contributing Countries, and current and former UN Military Observers in UNTSO, for sharing their expertise and lessons learnt from the mission. The study report benefited from the advice and comments provided on drafts by a wide range of independent reviewers, too many to mention by name.

We would like to thank the Swiss Federal Department for Foreign Affairs, including the Permanent Mission of Switzerland to the UN in New York, the Swiss Armed Forces, and the Swiss and Norwegian Embassies in the countries of visit, for their important support for the project. We would also like to recognise with appreciation Sarah Saugier and Jonathan Norton, Junior Professional Officers at GCSP, for their coordination and support for the overall study effort. Finally, this study would not have been possible without the generous funding and institutional support provided by the Governments of Norway and Switzerland. Thank you.

Key Findings

The study finds the United Nations Truce Supervision Organisation (UNTSO) to be a quick and light in movement and action mission, with a mindset that enables it to understand, reflect, and act nimbly. It regularly adapts to changing conditions and responds to requests to set up new and/or reinforce existing missions.

Overall and over the years, the origin, establishment and continued operation of UNTSO has been marked by innovation. UNTSO has had to adapt continuously to recurring cycles of wars, ceasefires, and other related challenges. Although the exact configuration and location of UNTSO Military Observers have changed over time, primarily as a result of the wars of 1956, 1967, 1973, 1978, and 2006, as well as the peace treaties of 1979 and 1994, the Mission's overall aim and focus have remained consistent and straightforward.

The study makes recommendations regarding how some of UNTSO's innovations can be scaled up or built upon.

There are several lessons from UNTSO's rich peace operations experience that can be applied in the development of future mission models and options. The study makes recommendations regarding how some of UNTSO's innovations can be scaled up or built upon. These include, firstly, adapting the regular but ad hoc practice of UNTSO helping to set up or reinforce new missions into a UN-wide institutional capacity similar to the UN Standing Police Capacity, i.e., a Vanguard Rapid Deployment Capacity. A second proposal envisages the establishment of a Centre of Excellence (COE) for Observers in support of military and civilian observers.

Such a centre could help the UN, Regional Organisations and Contributing Countries to build knowledge on the observer function, harness and refine experience and expertise across missions, and provide advice and specialised training to observers. Third, it is proposed that a flexible budgetary architecture to support the two proposals above should be developed to ensure a strengthened, adaptive and effective observer function and the consolidation of an active global observers' community of practice.

The study offers recommendations for the development of future peace operations policy, principles and doctrine; operations; and education and training.

In addition to these findings and recommendations, the study offers recommendations for the development of future peace operations in general in the areas of policy, principles and doctrine; operations; and education and training. All these areas require the support of adaptive leadership exercised at all levels and by all stakeholders – countries, organisations and individuals. UNTSO symbolises the commitment (both at strategic and local levels) to the pursuit of comprehensive peace in the Middle East and represents a mechanism for operationalising that commitment.¹ As such, and despite the successive eruptions of war in the region, the study posits that the authorised mandate and designated purpose of the mission, both in its political value and functional role, remain valid and relevant.

1 Maj. Gen. Patrick Gauchat, Chief of Staff/Head of Mission, UNTSO, speech at the 75th Anniversary Commemoration of UN Peacekeeping and UNTSO, Government House, Jerusalem, 29 May 2023.

Acronyms

CASEVAC	Casualty Evacuation
CCCPA	Cairo International Centre for Conflict Resolution, Peacekeeping and Peacebuilding
COE	Centre of Excellence
CPAS	Comprehensive Planning and Performance Assessment System
DPO	Department of Peace Operations
DPPA	Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs
EPON	Effectiveness of Peace Operations Network
GCSP	Geneva Centre for Security Policy
MFO	Multinational Forces and Observers
MINURSO	UN Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara
NUPI	Norwegian Institute of International Affairs
SPM	Special Political Mission
UN	United Nations
UNAMA	UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan

UNAMI	UN Assistance Mission for Iraq
UNASOG	UN Aouzou Strip Observer Group
UNDOF	UN Disengagement Observer Force
UNEF	UN Emergency Force
UNFICYP	UN Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus
UNIKOM	UN Iraq-Kuwait Observation Mission
UNIFIL	UN Interim Force in Lebanon
UNMHA	UN Mission to Support the Hudaydah Agreement
UNMO	UN Military Observer
UNMOC	UN Military Observers Course
UNMOGIP	UN Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan
UNOGIL	UN Observation Group in Lebanon
UNOWAS	UN Office for West Africa and the Sahel
UNRWA	UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East
UNSCOL	Office of the UN Coordinator for Lebanon
UNSCO	Office of the UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process
UNSMIL	UN Support Mission in Libya
UNSMIS	UN Supervision Mission in Syria
UNSOM	UN Assistance Mission in Somalia
UNTSO	UN Truce Supervision Organisation
UNYOM	UN Yemen Observation Mission

Introduction

In a world that is increasingly fragmented, there is a pressing need for multilateral cooperation, and United Nations (UN) peace operations remain the most visible instrument of international collective security cooperation.² This is a study about the effectiveness of UNTSO and the lessons that can be drawn from its 75 years of experience to inform the continuing development of peace operations and provide options for the future.

UN peace operations remain the most visible instrument of international collective security cooperation.

The Secretary-General's policy brief on a New Agenda for Peace emphasised that UN peace operations need to be nimble, adaptive and effective. UNTSO has continually adapted over the years in the face of significant challenges and responded effectively to recurring, potentially existential developments. For example, one of the central characteristics of UNTSO is the innovation of a Vanguard Rapid Deployment Capacity of Military Observers who are regularly sent to set up or reinforce other missions.³ In contexts characterised by heightened geopolitical sensitivity and uncertainty, frequent discussions over “double standards” in treatments of conflicts and disputes as well as heightened focus on sovereignty, this kind of nimble and impartial

2 de Coning, C. 2021. The future of UN peace operations: Principled adaptation through phases of contraction, moderation, and renewal. *Contemporary Security Policy*, 42(2): 211-224. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13523260.2021.1894021>

3 UNTSO Military Observers have been sent to help set up or reinforce at least 14 other missions over the years, but the exact number of missions is difficult to confirm. There might be more instances, as there is hitherto no clear policy or consistent recording of these missions. While UNTSO is not the only mission to provide military support to other operations and organisations, it has unique longevity (1956-) and has contributed to the highest number of operations.

third-party observer function, with its small footprint and non-intrusive, unarmed individual observers, makes UN observer missions a suitable and important component of the international conflict management system.

This kind of nimble and impartial third-party observer function, with its small footprint and non-intrusive, unarmed individual observers, makes UN observer missions a suitable component.



Early UNTSO Patrol (source: UNTSO HQ)



UNTSO Patrol Today (source: UNTSO HQ)

Objective of the Study

The aim of the study is, firstly, to assess the role, relevance, function, and utility of UNTSO, and secondly, to identify what lessons can be learnt from UNTSO's model and experience that can help to inform the future of UN peace operations in the context of the UN Secretary-General's policy brief on a New Agenda for Peace, as well as in the preparations for the Summit of the Future.

The effectiveness of peace operations is dependent on the political backing, financial support, and deployment of trained peacekeepers by the UN Member States. While recognising the important roles of the UN missions, the UN Secretariat, host states, and other key stakeholders and contributors, the primary audience for the present study's findings and recommendations is the UN Security Council and UN Member States.

Although the study is primarily focused on UN peace operations, it is suggested that the findings can also be informative for strengthening the role of observers in other organisations, including regional organisations, and can enhance cooperation between different organisations in dealing with peace and security issues. As outlined in *Our Common Agenda*, an emerging “networked multilateral system”⁴ requires enhanced and specialised capabilities, and broader thinking for wider application and cooperation beyond the immediate organisation and structure of current peace operations.⁵

Peace operations is dependent on the political backing, financial support, and deployment of trained peacekeepers by the UN Member States.

Literature Review

Given that UNTSO was the very first UN peacekeeping operation to be established, there are a myriad of references to the mission, albeit often in a cursory manner. There are also historical records, policy documents, and memoirs of state officials and mission personnel. However, there is little in-depth research focused exclusively on UNTSO, especially in recent years and in relation to current conflict dynamics.⁶ The general perception of the mission, and other older observer missions, as static and non-dynamic (which this report challenges) may have limited the research interest in these types of missions over the last few decades. It is the intention of this study to help fill in some of the missing information and in the process, contribute to reshaping the narrative and collective understanding of UN observer missions in general and UNTSO in particular.

4 Guterres, A. 2021. *Our Common Agenda – Report of the UN Secretary-General*. New York: UN.

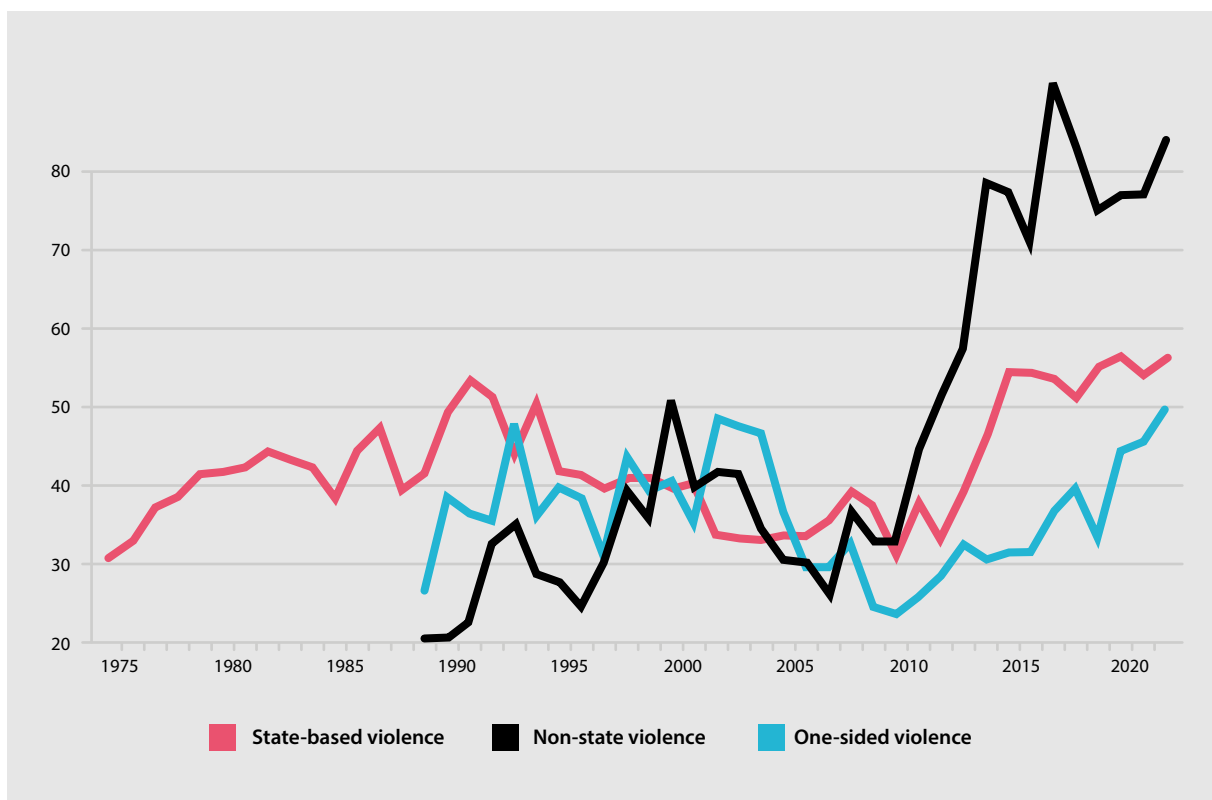
5 UNTSO is not only the first UN peacekeeping mission. It is also first among the currently deployed 84 multinational missions around the world (24 UN Peacekeeping Operations and SPMs; 25 European Union Missions and Operations, 13 African Union and African Subregional Operations; 13 Organization of Security Cooperation in Europe Field Missions; two North Atlantic Treaty Organization Missions, and six other missions and operations, including the Neutral Nations Supervisory Commission on the Korean Peninsula). With an emphasis on strengthening partnerships, in particular with the African Union, it is proposed that mutual cooperation between UN and regional organisations on strengthening observers would align well with current policy trends and developments.

6 Exceptions include, but are not limited to: Mood, R. 2016. *Supervising a Temporary Truce, Working for a Permanent Peace: UNTSO’s Mission in the Middle East*. In: Khouri, R.G., Makdisi, K., and Wählich, M. (Eds), *Interventions in Conflict*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137530820_10 and the EPON and Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung report by Novosseloff, A. 2022. *A comparative study of older one-dimensional UN Peace Operations: Is the future of UN peacekeeping its past?* <https://effectivepeaceops.net/publication/a-comparative-study-of-older-one-dimensional-un-peace-operations>

The Context – Trends and Developments

The global peace and security landscape is marked by increasing turbulence, with the post-Cold War era giving way to a new world order that is still emerging. Global organisations and nations face a rapidly expanding array of challenges that are unprecedented in scale and complexity. These challenges encompass political, security, economic, environmental, and several other interconnected domains. Civil unrest and violent confrontations have become prolonged and entrenched. There is a resurgence in interstate conflict and warfare, while intrastate disputes, which have been predominant since the end of the Cold War, show no sign of abatement. New technologies have opened additional domains like space and cyber security, while also making the battle over narratives and information more complex. Indeed, there is little evidence to suggest that there will be less conflict in the foreseeable future.

Figure 1: The Number of Conflicts from 1975-2022⁷



In this context, it is clear that there is a pressing need for more effective, comprehensive and cost-efficient action to promote peace, security, human rights, gender equality, and sustainable development. However, the turbulent geopolitical landscape and fiscal constraints have contributed to a contraction in the use of UN peacekeeping operations. No new peacekeeping mission has been

⁷ Uppsala University Department of Peace and Conflict Research Conflict Data Program, <https://ucdp.uu.se> (accessed 1 May 2024).

established over the past decade, and several existing peace operations have been reduced in size or withdrawn. As a result, the number of peacekeepers deployed and the overall peacekeeping budget have diminished by approximately 40% over the last decade. At the same time, as demonstrated by the conflict trends in Figure 1, the need for peace operations remains high. Trust in peacekeeping among troop- and police-contributing nations is reflected in pledges at the biannual peacekeeping ministerial meetings, as well as through the ongoing willingness of UN Member States to deploy peacekeepers and invest in their training and preparation.

Peacekeeping has proven to be an innovative, agile and diversified instrument.

Since 1948, some two million women and men peacekeepers from 125 countries have served in 71 missions and operations around the world. Peacekeeping has proven to be an innovative, agile and diversified instrument. Each mission is unique and has been designed and developed to the best knowledge, available resources, and political will mobilized at the time of deployment. Although recognising that diversity is the hallmark of UN peace operations, it is possible to identify common characteristics associated with different mission models. Primarily, but not exclusively, three broad models or “families” of peace operations can be identified:

- ***Multidimensional and integrated peacekeeping operations.*** These are typically large missions with several thousand civilian, police and military capabilities and ambitious political mandates dealing with intra-state conflict in support of peace agreements and host governments. In recent decades, most of these missions have been mandated to protect civilians, but a range of national building tasks have also been added, making these missions increasingly complex.
- ***Special political missions (SPMs).*** These are small, mostly civilian missions with typically a few dozen to a few hundred personnel. They have less ambitious mandates to support the implementation of a ceasefire or peace agreement or to help find solutions during a conflict or political transition. These missions are also required to advance cross-thematic UN policies, such as Women, Peace and Security and Youth Peace and Security, to leverage peace making and peacebuilding efforts.
- ***Observer missions.*** These are military or civilian peacekeeping operations with a limited mandate to assist the parties to a conflict implement or monitor a ceasefire or truce agreement. Observer missions have typically been used for the prevention and management of conflict between states by providing an impartial, confidence-building monitoring mechanism. Observers also assist with internal ceasefire monitoring in intra-state conflicts and thus provide a distinct function within multidimensional peacekeeping operations and as part of SPMs⁸.

⁸ Military and civilian observers are used in a variety of missions across the spectrum, including to manage conflict between states (e.g., Israel and Lebanon or India and Pakistan), for internal ceasefire monitoring (e.g., Colombia and Yemen), and as a liaison function within multidimensional peacekeeping operations (e.g., DRC and South Sudan).



UNTSO Observation Team (source: UNTSO HQ)

Having said this, many missions have features that belong to several or all of the groups above. For instance, the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) is normally categorised among the traditional group of observer missions. However, since the war in 2006, additional characteristics and functions that go beyond strict observer missions have been added.⁹

In addition to the above three groups of missions, the UN Security Council has authorised coalitions of the willing to enforce its decisions to maintain international peace and security. Examples include East Timor, Libya, and Afghanistan, to name a few.

When peacekeeping was first launched, with a few exceptions, most missions were established as unarmed or lightly armed observer missions. Since the end of the Cold War, most peacekeeping missions have been large, multidimensional peace operations. Consequently, this mission model has dominated policy and research attention over the past four decades.¹⁰ Now, with the

⁹ See Bardalai, A. K. (2021). *United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon: Assessment and way forward*. The Netherlands: Pentagon Press LLP.

¹⁰ See, for example, reports of the International Forum for the Challenges of Peace Operations (1997-) available at www.challengesforum.org and de Coning, C., Aoi, C., and Karlsrud, J. (Eds). 2017. *UN Peacekeeping Doctrine in a New Era*. Abingdon, UK: Routledge.

global peace and security landscape rapidly changing, and as a result of the contraction of large multidimensional peacekeeping missions and, to a lesser degree, SPMs, the majority of peacekeeping operations are observer missions. Caveated by the mixed nature of missions, six of the current 11 peacekeeping operations are normally considered observer missions, namely, those in Jerusalem/Middle East (UNTSO), Kashmir (UN Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan or UNMOGIP), the Golan (UN Disengagement Observer Force or UNDOF), South Lebanon (UNIFIL), Western Sahara (UN Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara or MINURSO), and Cyprus (UNFICYP).

As of April 2024, there were 1 176 UN military experts serving in eleven peacekeeping missions and seven SPMs or support missions.

Since UNTSO was established, the use of Military Observers, Advisers or Experts on Mission has grown considerably.¹¹ As of April 2024, there were 1 176 UN military experts serving in 11 peacekeeping missions and seven SPMs or support missions. Approximately 90% of UN military experts on mission are UN Military Observers (UNMOs), totalling 1 041. UNMOs in SPMs include 104 in Colombia and 11 in Haiti. There are three military advisers in Libya (UN Support Mission in Libya or UNSMIL), one in Afghanistan (UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan or UNAMA), eight in Somalia (UN Assistance Mission in Somalia or UNSOM), and two in West Africa and the Sahel (UN Office for West Africa and the Sahel or UNOWAS).

Methodology

The Effectiveness of Peace Operations Network (EPON) network uses an overarching methodological framework to assess the effectiveness of peace operations against the mandated tasks and the broader impact a mission is having on the political and security dynamics in the conflict system.¹² The focus is on undertaking comprehensive strategic-level assessments reflecting the complexity of the objectives of a peace operation, the means at its disposal, and the environment in which they are pursued, rather than evaluating an operation as if it were an isolated programme.¹³

11 Department of Peace Operations Office of Military Affairs, information shared on 24 April 2024.

12 2019 Methodological Framework for EPON Case Studies, p. 2.

13 The EPON's approach is different from operational or tactical approaches to assessing performance. It is similar to but adapted from the OECD/DAC guidelines which defines impact of an intervention to the level of having generated "significant positive or negative, intended or unintended, higher-level effects." See: www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation/dacriteriaforevaluatingdevelopmentassistance (accessed 10 April 2024).

The present UNTSO study adopted an iterative and adaptive approach to the assessment process. Building on the initial desk research and a set of consultations with the Department of Peace Operations (DPO), the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA) and other UN and think tank interlocutors in New York and the Mission Headquarters in Jerusalem, a set of research questions were designed covering a range of strategic and operational topics. The data collection process utilised a series of meetings, consultations, focus groups and interviews designed to enable broad engagement, input and feedback from personnel in relevant countries, organisations, and missions.

The research included a field visit to four of the five countries covered by the UNTSO mandate (Egypt, Israel, Jordan and Lebanon). This allowed direct observation of the way in which the UNTSO mandate is implemented at different sites (UNTSO Headquarters, observation posts and liaison offices) and a broad range of interviews with key local, national, regional and international stakeholders, departments, missions, agencies and programmes, contributors and subject matter experts in the mission area. Since the visit to the fifth country, Syria, was not possible due to the deteriorating security situation, in-person consultations with Syrian officials were held outside Syria. Three visits to UN Headquarters in New York, including a seminar on the UNTSO study's emerging findings held at UN Headquarters in New York in December 2023, allowed for significant input and perspectives from the UN Secretariat, Member States and New York-based experts to be considered in further development of the findings.

The study was undertaken by the Geneva Centre for Security Policy (GCSP), the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI), and the United Service Institution of India (USI). The study was co-funded by the Governments of Switzerland and Norway. The study team consisted of Ms Annika Hilding Norberg, Head of Peace Operations and Peacebuilding, GCSP (team leader and lead author); Maj. Gen. Dr A. K. Bardalai (PhD), former Deputy Force Commander and Acting Head of Mission, UNIFIL; and Lt Gen. Robert Mood, former Head of Mission/Chief of Staff, UNTSO and UN Supervision Mission in Syria (UNSMIS). Valuable support was provided by Ms Sarah Saugier and Mr Jonathan Norton, Junior Professional Officers, Peace Operations and Peacebuilding Programme, GCSP.

The Origin, Purpose and Establishment of UNTSO

“United Nations Peacekeeping began with a historic decision by the Security Council on 29 May 1948 to deploy Military Observers to the Middle East to supervise the cessation of hostilities in the region. This first-ever peacekeeping operation, known as the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO), continues its work today alongside 11 other missions, operating in some of the world’s most fragile political and security situations.”¹⁴

*Mr Jean-Pierre Lacroix, Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations,
on the occasion of the 75th Commemoration of UN Peacekeeping*

The Middle East has a long and deeply complex history marked by the impact of colonialism, the holocaust, exclusion and occupation. Following the end of World War II, tensions, violence and conflict in the Middle East escalated. The first UN Partition Plan of November 1947 was rejected and the Arab-Israeli conflict was spiralling out of control. As Sir Brian Urquhart put it:

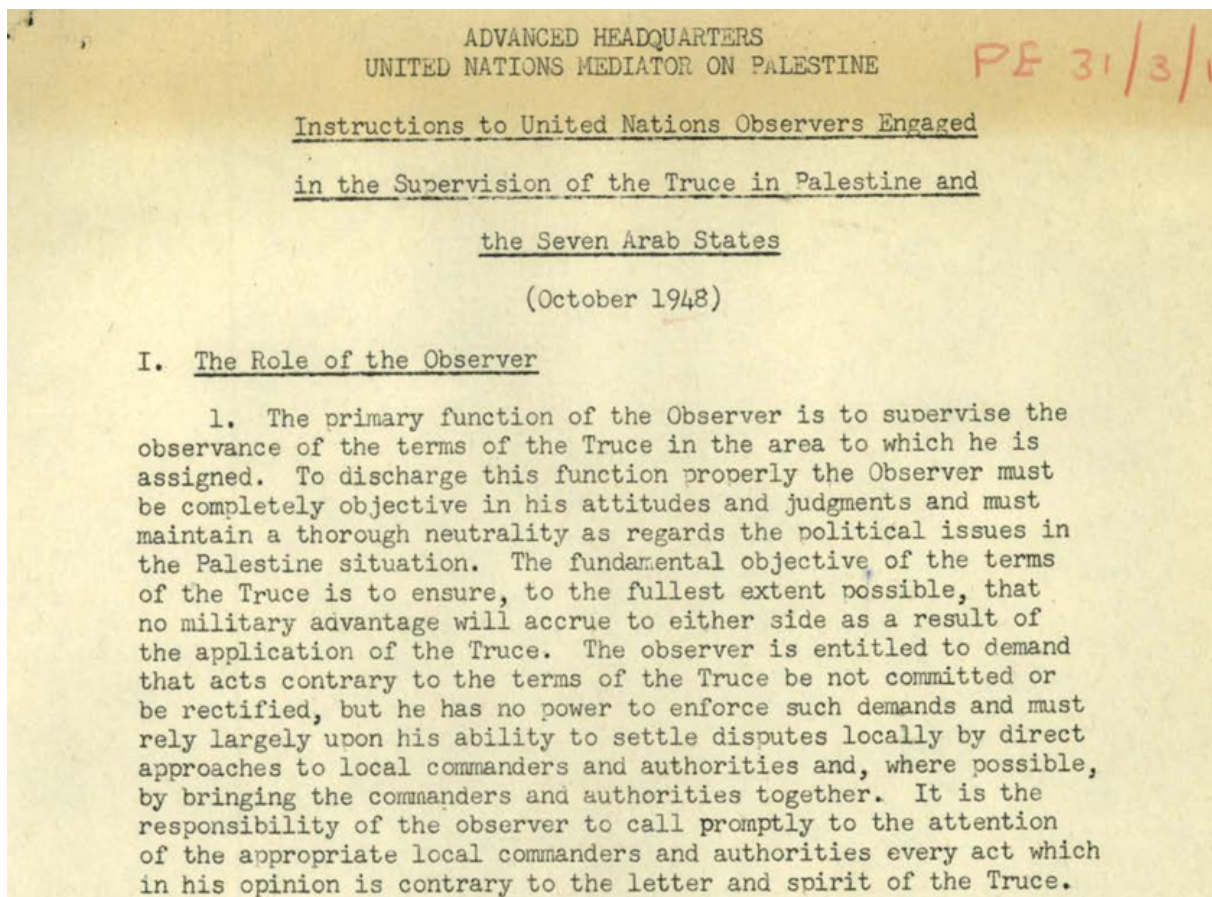
The sudden relinquishment by Great Britain in May 1948 of its League of Nations Mandate over Palestine led in rapid succession to the proclamation of the state of Israel, its recognition by the UN, fighting between Jews and Arabs in Palestine, and the invasion of the former mandated territory by the armies of Egypt, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Transjordan.¹⁵

14 Lacroix, J. P. 2023. Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations, Foreword, UNTSO 75th Anniversary (1948-2023), Commemorative Edition, 2023, p. 5.

15 Urquhart, B. 1972. *Hammar skjöld*. New York: Norton, p. 132.

On 20 May 1948, the first UN Mediator, Count Folke Bernadotte, was appointed with the mandate to negotiate an end to the violence between Jews and Arabs.¹⁶ The UN Secretary-General sent Dr Ralph Bunche, as his Special Representative, to assist the Mediator.¹⁷ As violence kept escalating, on 29 May 1948, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 50, calling for a cessation of hostilities in Palestine and instructing the UN Mediator to supervise the observance of the truces. The Mediator was joined by 36 Military Observers, forming the first nucleus of UNTSO. At present, the mandate still covers five countries: Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria.

The Mediator was joined by 36 Military Observers, forming the first nucleus of UNTSO.



Instructions to UN Observers Engaged in the Supervision of the Truce in Palestine and the Seven Arab States
(source: UNTSO HQ)

¹⁶ Urquhart, B. 1993. *Ralph Bunche: An American Life*. New York: Norton.

¹⁷ Raustiala, K. 2023. *The Absolutely Indispensable Man*. New York: Oxford University Press, p. 181.

Since then, the number of UNTSO Military Observers has ranged from 36 at the start to a maximum of 296 in 1975. On 17 May 2024, UNTSO had a strength of 152 Military Observers (from 30 countries) and 211 civilian staff (total number of nationalities represented at the mission is 47).¹⁸

UNTSO Main Events Timeline: 1948-2024

1948: UN Security Council Resolution 50, adopted on 29 May 1948, provided the original mandate for the establishment of UNTSO. It called for a cessation of hostilities in Palestine and instructed the UN mediator to supervise the observance of the provisions stated in the Resolution assisted by a group of Military Observers.

1949: The Armistice Agreements were signed between Israel and Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan, and Syria, formally ending the 1948 Arab-Israeli War and demarcating the Green Line, which separated Arab-controlled territory (i.e., the Jordanian-annexed West Bank and the Egyptian-occupied Gaza Strip) from Israel. Mixed Armistice Commissions were established.

1956: As a consequence of the Suez Crisis, UNTSO was tasked with supporting the UN Emergency Force (UNEF I) and monitoring the ceasefire agreements put in place after Israel, the United Kingdom and France invaded Egypt.

1967: Following the Six-Day War in 1967, UNTSO's responsibilities increased significantly to include monitoring ceasefires and troop withdrawals. UNTSO Military Observers supervised ceasefire lines and observer missions in the Golan, Sinai and Jerusalem.

1973: In the wake of the Yom Kippur War, UNTSO was tasked with supporting parties in observing ceasefires and disengagement agreements between Israel, Egypt and Syria.

1974: UNTSO assisted in establishing the UN Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF), which was tasked with supervising the disengagement agreements between Israel and Syria in the Golan.

1978: Following the Lebanon War, UNTSO Military Observers were deployed to support the establishment of UNIFIL, which was tasked with confirming the withdrawal of Israeli forces from southern Lebanon, restoring international peace and security, and assisting the Government of Lebanon to ensure the return of its effective authority in the area.

1979: Egyptian-Israeli Peace Treaty signed.

1990s: During the Peace Processes in the 1990s, UNTSO supported various initiatives, including the Madrid Conference and the Oslo Accords.

1994: Treaty of Peace between Israel and Jordan.

2006: The Israeli-Lebanon War broke out and the UNIFIL mandate was changed to include additional tasks and increased troop levels.

2012: UNTSO provided a startup nucleus for the UNSMIS.

¹⁸ Confirmed by UNTSO Mission Headquarters, Jerusalem, per email, 17 May 2024. For a list of contributing countries, number and type of personnel, see: <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/departments-of-peace-operations>

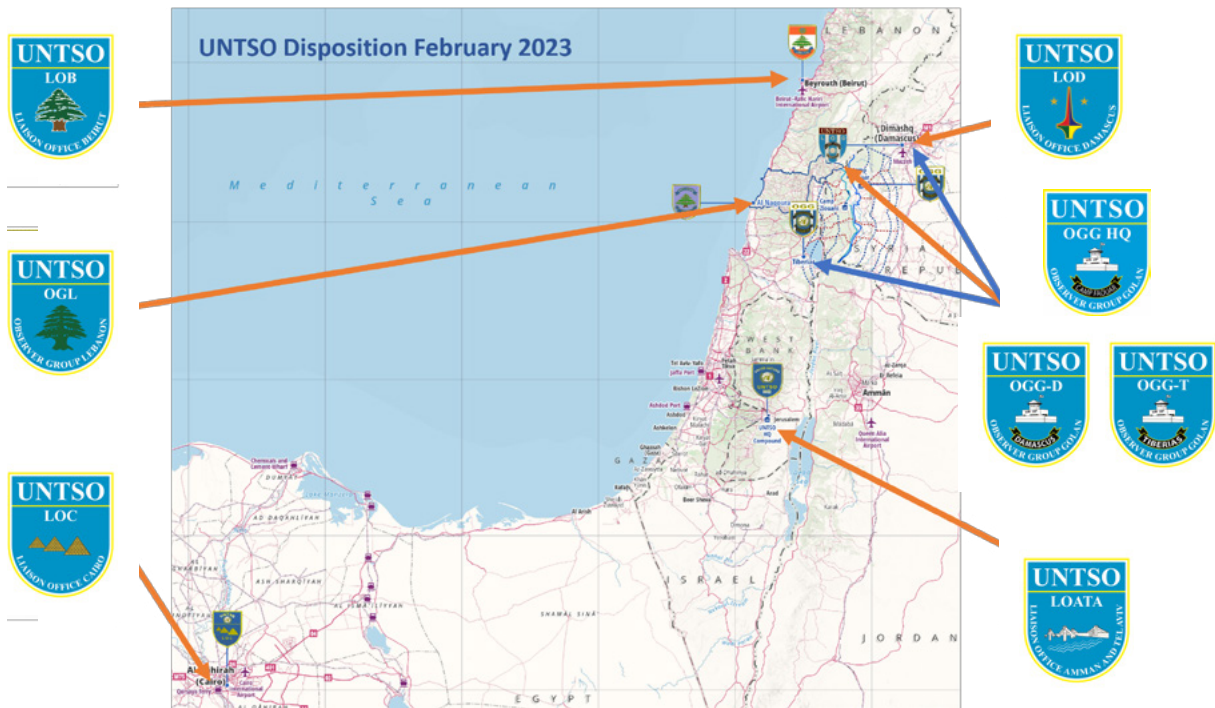
The Mission Mandate

The study considers the context within which UNTSO operates and the effectiveness of the mission through its effect on the conflict situation. The performance of the mission is assessed against the mission mandate and what it has been authorised to pursue and required to deliver.

As the first UN peacekeeping mission, the mandate of UNTSO is clear and simple. It is surprisingly short compared to the mandates of contemporary peace operations. Central characteristics of UNTSO's mandate are its regional scope and that it is open-ended and does not have to be regularly reviewed for extension like most other operations. Under Chapter VI of the UN Charter, UN Security Council Resolutions 50 (1948), 54 (1948) and 73 (1949) authorise UNTSO to observe and maintain the Armistice and subsequent Agreements and maintain regional liaisons to assist the parties in their application, until a peaceful adjustment in the situation of Palestine. In practical terms, the operationalisation of the mandate is done by providing three functions:

1. Observe, monitor, report, investigate and inspect the implementation of the truce, cease-fire, cessation of hostilities, armistice or disengagement agreements by deploying trained UNMOs or Experts on Mission to the Observer Group Lebanon and Observer Group Golan (under operational control of the Force Commanders of UNIFIL and UNDOF, respectively). This function is supported by a strategic analysis component providing conflict analysis and assessments to support mandate delivery and implementation.
2. Maintain regional liaison with host states through regular visits by Head of Mission or Chief of Staff and through continued activities of the Liaison Offices in Amman, Tel Aviv, Beirut, Cairo and Damascus. The regional liaison mandate allows the Mission to analyse and address complex political and security issues, and to help in passing messages or establishing tactical confidence-building measures.

UNTSO Disposition – February 2023



Source: UNTSO Headquarters

3. Prepare and deploy Military Observers to set up or support new missions through temporary deployments, detachments and reassignments to establish new missions and by continuous support to other missions and organisations, such as UNEF I and II, UNDOF, and UNIFIL, but also Angola, Afghanistan/Pakistan, Iran/Iraq, Haiti, the former Yugoslavia, Mozambique, Georgia, Iraq/Kuwait, Yemen, Libya, Sudan and Syria.¹⁹

The third element, to prepare and deploy Military Observers to set up or support new missions, is not a task explicitly mentioned in the mandate, but has evolved as an operational practice. Established in 1948 as the first peacekeeping mission, the focus was on the Arab-Israeli conflict. Providing rapid and temporary support for other missions in need was an ad hoc initiative started in 1956, when the first UNEF in Sinai was launched. UNTSO for the first time sent what could be called a Vanguard Rapid Deployment Capacity to support the setting up of a mission in the territory and between two states covered by the UNTSO mandate. This demonstrated the power of a simple, regional mandate. To date, the provision of an agile instrument which significantly raises mission establishment pace and impact is not yet a codified practice. It is the view of the study team that a Military Observers’ standing capacity should be codified to allow the recognition of capability, enhance predictability, and strengthen peace operations’ agility and effectiveness.

¹⁹ Briefing by Mission Leadership Team at UNTSO Headquarters in Jerusalem on 28 May 2023.



Briefing UNTSO Observation Post Golan (source: Annika Hilding Norberg)

Military Observers' standing capacity should be codified to allow the recognition of capability, enhance predictability, and strengthen peace operations' agility and effectiveness

It should be noted that UNTSO's mandate deals with the supervision of the truce arrangements and armistice agreements between Israel and its neighbouring states and does not cover the relationship between Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories, including Gaza and the West Bank. However, in the wake of developments following October 7, 2023, and the consequent challenges and mounting requirements, the mission might need further adaptation. Whether such a potential adaptation would come in the form of mandate change, or if UNTSO could use its vanguard rapid deployment capability to help set up a new / another mission, may be alternatives for consideration.

UNTSO Support for the Startup of New or Reinforcing Other UN Peace Operations – The UNTSO Vanguard Rapid Deployment Capacity

UNTSO developed and deployed a Vanguard Rapid Deployment Capacity of Military Observers a few years after it was established. This instrument could benefit from being institutionalised in secretariat policy, guidelines, and resource processes.

UNTSO military support to other missions since 1956 has included various configurations and capabilities: 1) temporary deployment of UNMOs from UNTSO to new missions (for example, UNSMIS); 2) detachment and reassignment of UNTSO military personnel to establish new missions (for example, the UN Observation Group in Lebanon or UNOGIL and the UN Yemen Observation Mission or UNYOM); and 3) continuous support to other missions in the Middle East (for example, UNEF II, UNDOF, and UNIFIL), normally under the operational control of the supported Head of Mission. Some examples of types of support provided by UNTSO:

Case 1 – UNEF I: Shortly after its establishment and demonstration of agility and adaptability, UNTSO was called upon to assist in setting up UNEF in 1956 (the first armed UN peacekeeping force). Led by the UNTSO Chief of Staff, UNEF I was created in a few days under emergency conditions without the benefit of precedents. It was a temporary force with a limited mandate and designed to meet a special situation.²⁰

Case 2 – UNOGIL: In the wake of the Lebanon-Jordan Crisis in 1958, the UNTSO Chief of Staff and Military Observers assisted in the establishment of the UN Security Council-authorized deployment of UNOGIL.²¹

Case 3 – Iran-Iraq: In 1984, in the midst of the Iran-Iraq war, small inspection teams were seconded from UNTSO and based in Baghdad and Tehran to verify what became known as the nine-month truce in the “war of the cities”. The war was characterised by the use of chemical weapons and missile targeting of cities.²²

Case 4 – UNDOF and UNIFIL: UNTSO also maintains the capability for continuously supporting regional peacekeeping with a UNMO capacity, for example, as it does in support of UNDOF and UNIFIL since 1974 and 1978, respectively.

20 Foote, W. (Ed.) 1962. *The Servant of Peace, Dag Hammarskjöld, A Selection of his speeches and statements*. London: The Bodley Head, p. 140; Col. Dr Sharma, K. K. 2023. *India and UN Peace Operations In Service of Humanity & Global Peace*. Delhi: KW Publishers, p. 80-82.

21 Hammarskjöld is quoted as saying: “It [UNOGIL] has already rendered very useful service and its further development is, in the light of our experience, fully justified”. Hammarskjöld went on to caution: “however the present operation is related to conditions which may be temporary and the time may not be distant when a change of those conditions would call for a change of approach.” See Foote, W. (Ed.) 1962. *The Servant of Peace*. op. cit., p. 189.

22 Dorn, W. 2011. *Keeping Watch – Monitoring, Technology and Innovation in UN peace Operations*. Tokyo: UN University Press, p. 87.

Case Study: UNTSO Support for Mission Startup

UN Supervision Mission in Syria (UNSMIS) – Startup Characteristics

On 25 March 2012, the Syrian government committed to a six-point plan designed to end the escalating conflict, which was proposed by the UN and the League of Arab States (LAS) Joint Special Envoy Kofi Annan and endorsed by the UN Security Council.

Negotiations were conducted in Damascus to secure a military agreement with the government on the basis of the Joint Special Envoy's six-point proposal, while the envoy pursued an understanding with other stakeholders and worked the wider political arena.

UNSMIS was established by Security Council Resolution 2043 of 21 April 2012. One of the key elements of the plan was to bring about a sustained cessation of armed violence in all its forms by all parties with an effective UN supervision mechanism. A small advance team of unarmed military observers was dispatched by the Council to Syria a week earlier, pending a decision on a wider peacekeeping supervision operation based on the Secretary-General's assessment of the situation on the ground. UNSMIS, set up for an initial 90-day period, was to comprise 300 unarmed military observers as well as an appropriate civilian component to monitor a cessation of armed violence.

With a record rapid deployment, UNSMIS was fully operational on 30 May 2012. On 30 June 2012, UNSMIS had 278 military observers at its Damascus headquarters and eight team sites, and 121 civilian staff addressing political and civil affairs, human rights matters, administration and support at Mission headquarters, with mixed military-civilian teams at five of the sites.

As civilian staff were deployed, mixed teams expanded their interactions and sought every opportunity to engage with the local population in government and opposition areas, building a network of community contacts and national officials. Liaison and engagement at the local level were important instruments towards the building of stability where signs of cooperation encouraged it.

UNSMIS operations are focused in and around population centres, in relation to both military monitoring and civilian interactions. To consolidate the cessation of violence, saturated patrolling was conducted in those areas, together with visits to conflict-prone and incident-specific areas for fact-finding and tension-defusing purposes. A system of transparent violation reporting was also put in place.

The Head of Mission summarised the instrumental factors enabling the record-pace establishment:

- Forward-leaning engagement from UN Headquarters and the Joint Special Envoy.
- TCC flexibility and willingness to release observers on short notice (from UNTSO to set up UNSMIS).
- Forward-leaning support from UNTSO.
- Mission support staff with previous experience from the region (through UNTSO), supported and resourced through unbureaucratic mechanisms at the UN Secretariat
- Cultural understanding through previous experience from the region and/or Syria among mission leadership and individual observers (already serving together in UNTSO).

- Forward-leading engagement and cooperation between the UN Secretariat and the LAS.
- Willingness of the Syrian government to engage.
- Expectations by the Free Syrian Army groupings that the UN would create peace.



UNSMIS. Local Syrian Interlocutors in Homs (Source: United Nations)

Assessment of Effectiveness

Using the EPON methodology, the study analyses the effectiveness of UNTSO by considering selected explanatory factors, including (1) political primacy, (2) realistic mandates and matching resources, (3) people-centred approaches, (4) legitimacy and credibility, (5) coordination and coherence, and (6) women, peace and security. In addition, the study assessed the (7) nimbleness and adaptiveness of the mission.

As the only peacekeeping mission with a regional mandate, UNTSO provides a regional mechanism for supporting conflict prevention and de-escalation.

Political Primacy

UNTSO originated as a political-military innovation supporting fragile and struggling peace efforts and processes. As the only peacekeeping mission with a regional mandate, UNTSO provides a regional mechanism for supporting conflict prevention and de-escalation. Its tasks include the monitoring of ceasefires, supervision of armistice agreements, support through liaison to prevent isolated incidents from escalating, and assisting other UN peacekeeping and SPMs in the region to fulfil their mandates. All efforts are part and in support of the larger overall political peace processes pursued in the Middle East.

The lead role in advancing a lasting political solution for the conflicts in the Middle East rests with governments in the region. The UN Security Council authorised the deployment of the first Mediator and subsequently, a series of Special Representatives to support governments of the region with this process. Since UNTSO's deployment, the complexity and intractability of conflicts in the Middle East have prevented a viable political process from gaining sufficient and sustainable traction to produce sustainable peace. The lack of an effective peace process should not be confused with the limited but focused mandate and purpose of UNTSO.

The lack of an effective peace process should not be confused with the limited but focused mandate and purpose of UNTSO.

The liaison function of UNTSO's Military Observers at different levels contributes to reducing tensions and avoiding escalations and creates the space essential for the parties to pursue peace. Especially in times of heightened conflict, the UNTSO Chief of Staff and his/her Military Observers, through the liaison function, can foster and encourage communication between parties to a conflict, preventing and/or mitigating misunderstandings. For example, during the lead-up to the 1967 war, Israel used UNTSO to pass a message on to King Hussein of Jordan.²³ Currently, the liaison function is being actively exercised for meetings by the Head of Mission with Host States' representatives and officials to discuss the developing conditions and confrontations in the region during the war in Israel and Gaza.²⁴

Realistic Mandate and Matching Resources

A central aim in the past few decades of efforts to strengthen UN peace operations has been to adopt mandates that are "clear, credible and achievable" and matched with the necessary resources.²⁵ The New Agenda for Peace policy brief revisited the issue and put it even more clearly: the Security Council should "not burden peace operations with unrealistic mandates".²⁶ UNTSO is an example of a peacekeeping operation with a clear and simple mandate. It is function-focused, predictable (does not need regular mandate renewals), and allows agility over time (within a broad and simple mandate framework).

23 Eban, A. 1992. *Personal Witness*. London: Mackays and Chatham, p. 274.

24 The value of such meetings were, for example, referenced on the website of the League of Arab States (LAS) following the meeting on 17 April 2024 between UNTSO Chief of Staff and the Secretary-General of the LAS. See: www.league-ofarabstates.net/ar/news/Pages/NewsDetails.aspx?RID=4589

25 See UN General Assembly and Security Council. 2002. *Report of the Panel on UN Peace Operations*. A/55/305 S/2000/809, 21 August, pp. 10-11 (also known as the Brahimi Report) and subsequent reform reports launched since.

26 UN. 2023. *New Agenda for Peace, Our Common Agenda Policy Brief 9*. p. 24.

UNTSO's mandate is function-focused, predictable, and allows agility over time.

The open-ended mandate protects the mission from regularly having to posture for support in the UN Security Council or being ascribed new requirements and tasks, as the Council so decides. Given the light footprint, as designed in the mandate, the relatively limited funding for the mission has had its benefits. UNTSO has had a clear and steady agenda that is predictable yet adaptive in a very challenging and dynamic context. The UNTSO mandate stipulates functions to be provided and tasks to be achieved “until there is peace in the Middle East.” It provides a mechanism to diffuse tensions and contribute to the prevention, containment and management of conflict.²⁷

It provides a mechanism to diffuse tensions and contribute to the prevention, containment and management of conflict.



UNTSO MILOB OGL with local community in Southern Lebanon (Source: Annika Hilding Norberg)

27 Novosseloff, A. 2022. A comparative study of older one-dimensional UN Peace Operations: Is the future of UN peace-keeping its past? EPON and Friedrich-Ebert Stiftung.

People-Centred Approach

Despite a mandate that may create less direct expectations of a people-centric approach, UNTSO has adopted a people-centred methodology that allows the mission to achieve this aspect of the mandate. The unarmed observer patrols, including village patrols, promulgate a posture and presence which is less imposing and, as such, more easily accepted by the local population. Although UNTSO's mandate adopted in 1948 (and 1949) does not stipulate an obligation to Women, Peace and Security, as a mission operating under the general principles, policies and guidelines for UN peacekeeping, it works to implement the policies as required and applicable. For example, UNTSO female Military Observers facilitate engagement and strengthened communication with local communities, including women and youths, which helps mission effectiveness and operational impact.²⁸

The presence of language assistants ensures communication with the local population, further facilitating a people-centred approach. Different from translators, the use of language assistants provides a light mechanism to aid communication with local communities. It has proven to be a useful middle option between full translation expertise and no language support. Prior to the war in 2006, UNTSO Military Observers serving in UNIFIL used to live among the population.²⁹ Unfortunately, this was changed due to the deteriorating security situation and heightened risk levels. Similarly, UNTSO was earlier a “family mission”, which allowed for more natural contact between Military Observers and their families with the local population. For example, after the 2006 war, UNTSO was treated as a family mission for certain postings, like Jerusalem or Tiberias, but not for the Observers stationed at UNIFIL in Naqoura. The application of the concept also varies between countries and is determined by the national policies of Troop-Contributing Countries.

The use of language assistants provides a light mechanism to aid communication with local communities.

Legitimacy and Credibility

Given the particularly challenging security context of the Middle East, it is significant that UNTSO has been able to earn and maintain broad political support from the five Permanent Members of the UN Security Council, the Host States, and Contributing Countries alike over

²⁸ Interview with female Military Observer serving with UNTSO, speaking at the “Peace Starts with Her” conference co-organised by the University of Geneva, UN Women, UN DPO, Government of Switzerland, and Canton of Geneva, on International Peacekeepers Day, 8 March 2024.

²⁹ Interview with Mission personnel during May 2023 research visit.

the past 76 years. This is confirmed by the fact that none of the five Security Council's Permanent Members have requested that the mission be closed. On the contrary, three of the five Permanent Members of the Security Council are longstanding contributors of Military Observers to the mission, namely, China, the Russian Federation and the United States. In interviews with the study team, Representatives of Host States all confirmed that UNTSO is valuable in times of crisis, in particular.

Over many years, UNTSO has been able to earn and maintain the trust of its main stakeholders.



UNTSO Chief of Staff and Senior Staff (source: UNTSO HQ)

While Israel and its population are generally sceptical or critical of UNTSO, at the same time, in interviews between the study team in Jerusalem with official and think tank representatives, when asked whether UNTSO should leave or stay, the response was most often the latter because the mission provides a platform for international engagement as required. The open-ended and regional mandate was regarded as particularly valuable, allowing the mission mandate to be flexibly implemented and operations adapted, depending on developments.³⁰

³⁰ Interviews in Jerusalem with Israeli representatives, May 2023.

Over many years, UNTSO has been able to earn and maintain the trust of its main stakeholders. The mission was guided from the very outset by what later became known as the UN Principles for Peacekeeping (consent, impartiality and the non-use of force). The study team suggests that this is one of the main reasons for its high level of trust and operational longevity. The mission demonstrates the relevance of the peacekeeping principles, as well as the three factors required for mission success (legitimacy, credibility and national ownership), as articulated in the UN's principles and guidelines for peacekeeping, i.e., the Capstone Doctrine.³¹ The ability to operate in an agile and adaptive manner is a central characteristic of UNTSO. This study proposes that "Adaptability" should be considered for inclusion as a recognised factor for success if, as and when the UN peacekeeping principles and guidelines are next revised.

Military Observers provided by UNTSO are often senior in age and experience, adding to the quality and expertise enhancing the missions' credibility.

Factors that contribute to credibility of the mission are clear mandates, well considered and developed plans, impartial and professional posture and resources to match the task. UNTSO is delivering in all these aspects. Another factor of importance bringing credibility to the mission is its focus on providing training to its Military Observers, including those sent to serve under the operational command of UNIFIL and UNDOF. The training programme is supported by a strategic analysis function, which also conducts seminars, briefings, and information exchanges with regional partners, Military Observers, Troop-Contributing Countries, and other relevant stakeholders.³² The Military Observers provided by UNTSO are often senior in age and experience, adding to the quality and expertise that they bring to the mission, and thereby enhancing the missions' credibility.

Currently, Military Observers from 30 countries are represented in UNTSO. If civilian staff are included, 47 nationalities are represented, proving remarkable diversity for such a small mission, bringing universal legitimacy to the mission purpose and operations. The fact that each observation post, liaison office or observation patrol has members from a range of countries was cited as an important reason for the level of trust that Host States place in the objectivity and legitimacy of the missions' reports.³³

31 UN. 2008. *UN Principles and Guidelines for UN Peacekeeping*. New York: UN. This document is also known as the Capstone Doctrine.

32 Mission Briefing at UNTSO Headquarters, May 2024.

33 Raised in interviews by Mission Headquarters personnel as well as Host State representatives.

Coordination and Coherence

UNTSO is the only peacekeeping mission with a regional mandate. This scope provides UNTSO with a strategic overview of the whole region and helps the mission facilitate liaison by establishing reliable communication channels and relations of confidence with the parties to the conflict. It also enables the mission to help defuse tension, and friction, as well as mitigate potential misunderstandings. However, there is only so much a mission with 153 Military Observers can do. When one or several parties are determined to enter full war, this is beyond the mission and mandate of UNTSO and, in most cases, likely beyond the capability of any peacekeeping mission.³⁴ Hence, UNTSO acts in service of peace as one part of the larger presence of the UN and other missions, agencies, and programmes in the region, each contributing with distinct functions and capabilities to support the political peace process.

In the case of UNTSO, UNDOF and UNIFIL, where UNTSO Military Observers are placed under the operational control of UNDOF and UNIFIL, an extra layer of complexity was added.

For mission effectiveness, peace operations require effective and clear authority, command and control arrangements, which can be difficult to achieve even within the same mission. In the case of UNTSO, UNDOF and UNIFIL, where UNTSO Military Observers are placed under the operational control of UNDOF and UNIFIL, an extra layer of complexity was added. When the arrangement was initially set up, this was a particular challenge. Some observers contend that this is still an issue requiring further attention. It was raised in interviews that the level of willingness by all, in particular the respective Force Commanders, to implement the Letters of Understanding, which were signed in 2019 and 2021, is especially important³⁵ The authority, command and control of the observer groups have generated the most attention in internal reviews and audits regarding UNTSO. When there is an overlap in areas of operations and functions among missions, even with clarity of authority and command and control mechanisms in place, focus and the exercise of effective and adaptive leadership in support of the greater mission good are still required. Despite the very real authority, command and control challenges faced by having such a wide regional remit, the fact that UNTSO remains coherent and coordinated in its approach, is a credit to the mission.

34 If parties are determined to pursue war, there is often little an international presence can do to stop it, whether it is the 153 Military Observers in UNTSO, or the 140 000-strong, well-equipped coalition force deployed in Afghanistan.

35 Letter of Understanding, Chief of Staff and Head of Mission's Intent for 2015 (COS/HOM Directive No. 001/2015), and Letter of Understanding between UNIFIL and UNTSO concerning the Observer Group Lebanon, 2019 and 2021.



Lebanese President and UNIFIL Deputy Force Commander (source: A.K. Bardalai)

The Mosaic of UN Missions, Agencies and Envoys in the Middle East

Current UN Models for Peace and Security Engagements in the Middle East:

UNTSO (Middle East): The first UN peacekeeping operation providing Military Observers to supervise ceasefires, prevent isolated incidents from escalating, and assist other UN Missions as a capacity for set up or reinforcement.

UNDOF (Golan): Mandated to observe the ceasefire between Israel and Syria by supervising the disengagement of their forces and monitoring the areas of separation and limitation.

UNIFIL (Lebanon): Tasked with confirming the withdrawal of Israeli forces from Lebanon, restoring international peace and security, and assisting the Lebanese government in ensuring the return of its effective authority in the area.

UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) (Iraq): Supports the government and people of Iraq to consolidate peace, including through political dialogue and electoral assistance.

Office of the UN Coordinator for Lebanon (UNSCOL) (Lebanon): Works on behalf of the UN Secretary-General to assist Lebanese parties in reaching peaceful solutions to contentious issues and to implement the relevant Security Council resolutions.

Office of the UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process (UNSCO) (Middle East): UNSCO provides support towards a comprehensive peace agreement based on a two-state solution.

Special Envoy for Syria: Facilitates the peace process for the Syrian conflict aimed at developing a political solution based on dialogue and negotiation.

Special Envoy on Yemen: Works towards a peaceful resolution to the conflict in Yemen, including ceasefire efforts and political talks.

UN Mission to Support the Hudaydah Agreement (UNMHA) (Yemen/Hudaydah): Supports the implementation of the agreement on the city and ports of Hudaydah, Salif, and Ras Issa and monitors the ceasefire and redeployment of forces.

Other Relevant Organisations Operating in the Middle East of particular relevance for UNTSO

UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA): Supports the relief and human development of Palestinian refugees who fled or were expelled during the 1948 Arab-Israeli War and the following conflicts.

Multinational Forces and Observers (MFO): The MFO, established by a tripartite agreement between Egypt, Israel and the United States, is mandated to supervise the implementation of the security provisions of the Egypt-Israeli Treaty of Peace and prevent their violation.

League of Arab States (LAS): Since the Arab Spring, the LAS has considered the development of a peacekeeping capability, an initiative that has come to the fore again as a response to the current war in Gaza. Presently, it is calling for a UN peacekeeping force to be deployed to Gaza.³⁶

³⁶ Manama Declaration calling for a UN Peacekeeping Force in the Palestinian Territories, announced at the Arab League Summit, Bahrain, 16 May 2024.



All Female Security Guard Team at UNTSO Headquarters (source: UNTSO HQ)

Women, Peace and Security

At 21%, UNTSO benefits from a larger number of female Military Observers, while for the civilian staff, the figure is even higher, with 41% female international staff and 28% female national staff. In support of the UN Gender Parity effort and operationalising the Women, Peace and Security agenda, the mission prioritises female recruitment. For example, the deployment at UNTSO Headquarters in Jerusalem of an all-female Security Guard Team allowed the mission to mitigate concerns by family members of female guards who would otherwise have to serve in mixed teams. The mission further prioritises deploying female Military Observers to all observation posts, which is facilitated by improved facilities to accommodate both men and women better when a new observation post was built in Syria.

By including a considerable number of female Military Observers, in addition to delivering on their tasks, they help serve as role models for the local communities and those not used to women serving in uniform. There are, however, few women at the leadership team level. Although the second appointment of a female Force Commander to a UN mission was to UNTSO, there is still progress to be made in integrating women at all levels of the mission.

Deployment at UNTSO Headquarters in Jerusalem of an all-female Security Guard Team allowed the mission to mitigate concerns.

Nimbleness and Adaptiveness

Overall, it is the view of the study team that UNTSO has proven to be a nimble, adaptive and effective mechanism for peace. Within the context of the political constraints and limitations beyond its control, the Study Team found the mission to have a proven record of effectiveness. In recent times, since the establishment of the Comprehensive Planning and Performance Assessment System (CPAS), the UN tool for planning and monitoring and evaluation of mission performance, the mission has been able to adapt its activities in an even more agile and adaptive manner. For example, by assessing and measuring the perceptions at each meeting undertaken as part of the liaison function, over time, the mission can detect patterns of concern across the mission mandate, and regularly adjust the frequency and focus of its relations, to ensure a balanced and impactful outcome.³⁷

The *role* of UNTSO, as reflected in the mission's mandate, is clear and well supported: to observe, monitor, report, investigate and inspect; and maintain regional liaison with host nations. Within the broader framework, the mission has developed a capacity to prepare and deploy observers to set up or support new missions. All three roles have been adapted and evolved in response to challenges and opportunities facing the mission over the years. Yet, the mandate is simple and broad enough to encompass such developments. The *relevance* of UNTSO to its purpose and to what is happening on the ground has been confirmed by the way in which the mission repeatedly adapts and reconfigures to meet its stakeholders' requirements on the ground. It is further confirmed by its ability to retain legitimacy and credibility with its key stakeholders throughout periods of adjustments to its presence in a particular area or focus. Throughout its long life, the *function* of UNTSO, i.e. to perform its authorised duties of an essentially military-technical and liaison nature, operationalised across the region, and supporting startups of other missions, has continued without interruption. The mission's *utility*, i.e., the ability to do several different things well, to be useful rather than "attractive or fashionable", and to satisfy a particular need, has been confirmed by the surprisingly steadfast continued political support for the mission from all key stakeholders.³⁸ This all speaks to the nimbleness and adaptiveness of the mission.

³⁷ Interview with Mission Headquarter personnel, 17 May 2024.

³⁸ Adapted definitions of role, relevance, function and utility applied to peace operations as derived from generic definitions, *Cambridge University Dictionary*, 2024.

The relevance of UNTSO to its purpose and to what is happening on the ground has been confirmed by the way in which the mission repeatedly adapts and reconfigures to meet its stakeholders' requirements.

Perspective on Mission Continuity Through Adaptability

Regarding mission continuity through adaptability, Major General Tim Ford, former Chief of Staff and Head of Mission at UNTSO from 1998 to 2000, stated:³⁹

The region has experienced a number of wars since 1948, which changed the cease-fire lines, and therefore affected the way UNTSO has functioned and deployed its military observers. UNTSO has moved with the cease-fires lines and has also adapted to developments in bilateral relations and agreements, but its military observers remained in the area, acting as go-between for the hostile parties and as means by which isolated incidents could be contained and prevented from escalating into major conflicts.

Between 1949 and 1967, UNTSO observers continued to conduct patrols along the Armistice Demarcation Lines, and to supervise a neutral zone in Jerusalem and two demilitarized zones in the Sinai and near Lake Tiberias. Following the 1967 war, UNTSO observers demarcated the cease-fire lines and established two cease fire observation operations, in the Israel-Syria Sector and in the Suez Canal zone. In 1972, a similar operation was set up in southern Lebanon, but without the specific agreement of Israel.

UNTSO's main responsibilities were also related to the work of the Mixed Armistice Commissions (MACs), set up by the Armistice Agreements between Israel and four Arab countries. The main task of the Commission was the investigation and examination of the claims or complaints presented by the parties relating to the application and observance of the Armistice Agreements. UNTSO observers assigned to each Commission carry out the investigations of complaints submitted to the Commission.

Overall Effectiveness of UNTSO

In conclusion, it is the view of the Study Team that UNTSO has achieved its strategic purpose of supervising and supporting the various truce and armistice agreements between Israel and its neighbours. Through its liaison function, it supports confidence-building efforts that maintain

³⁹ Extract from Former UNTSO Head of Mission Major General Tim Ford, United Nations Peacekeeping Support in the Region: Visions for the Future, in "Challenges of Peace Support: into the 21st Century", Challenges Forum publication, Institute of Diplomacy, Amman, October 1998, pp. 129-130. Reconfirmed in conversations since, including an interview on 17 May 2024.

lines of communication and enhance mutual understanding. This allows the UN's envoys seeking to secure a lasting peace in the region to continue their work without having to deal with issues related to the management of the existing truce agreements. The nimble, adaptive and effective UNTSO Vanguard Rapid Deployment Capacity to set up or reinforce other missions has added to the relevance and utility of the mission in a significant and concrete manner.



Round Table on The New Agenda for Peace and the Future of UN Peace Operations – What Lessons from UNTSO? co-organized in Cairo with Cairo International Centre for Conflict Resolution, Peacekeeping and Peacebuilding (source: CCCPA)

Recommendations from UNTSO's Experience

In addition to the study's overall findings about the effectiveness of UNTSO, the study puts forward recommendations for the future of peace operations, sometimes unique to UNTSO's experience, but often of relevance also for other missions. The three areas are: 1) policy, principles, and doctrine; 2) operations; and 3) education and training. The recommendations below are intended to be potentially useful for Military Observers, Advisers or Experts on Missions of all UN missions and operations, as well as for their counterparts in regional organisations.

Policy, Principles and Doctrine

1. ***Promote Prevention in Peace Operations Policies, Principles and Doctrine.*** At the core of Our Common Agenda and the New Agenda for Peace is the priority placed on strengthening prevention. Trust, Universality and Solidarity are the values required to underpin multilateralism and the nurturing of preventive action collaboration. Established as a mechanism designed to assist parties to conflict with tasks undertaken under Chapter VI of the UN Charter, UNTSO functions fully in line with and contributes to the strategic vision of the UN Secretary-General in terms of the central role of the UN in the prevention of violence, as highlighted in the New Agenda for Peace policy brief presented in July 2023.⁴⁰ The emerging trend of increased interest in the so-called traditional missions, the observer missions, should be welcomed as it allows for revisiting and learning more about their role, relevance, functions and utility for promoting peace and security in times of trial and turbulence.

40 Guterres, A. 2021. *Our Common Agenda*. op. cit

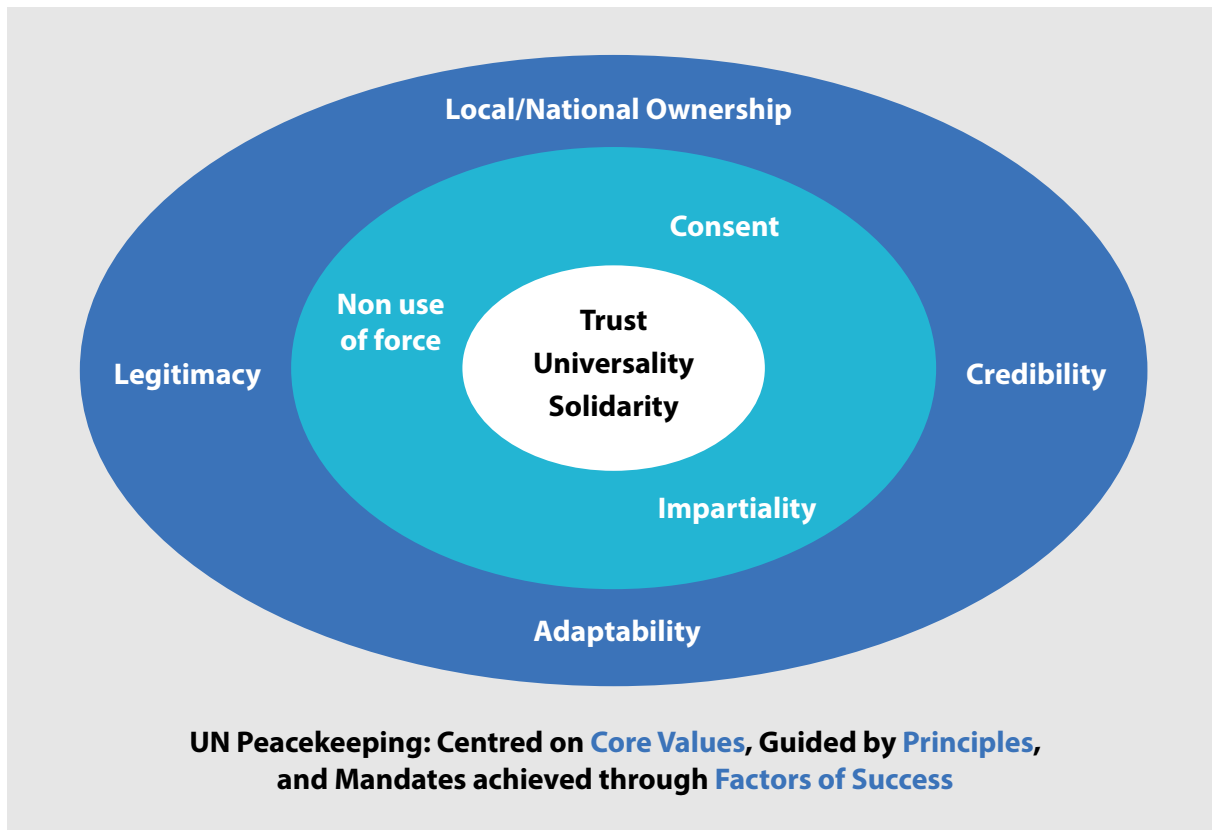
2. ***Reconfirm the Principles of UN Peacekeeping.*** The principles of UN peacekeeping originated in the first design and practical experience of UNTSO and were later codified during UNEF I in 1956.⁴¹ The interpretation of the principles evolved slightly over time and they were codified in their current form during the development of the UN Principles and Guidelines for Peacekeeping, i.e. the Capstone Doctrine of 2008: (Strategic) Consent, Impartiality (rather than neutrality), and Non-use of Force, except in self-defence and in defence of the mandate (rather than only in self-defence). These are the cornerstones of UN peacekeeping today. Today, the central tenet for missions to build and enjoy trust, confidence, local support and engagement remains vital and contributes to the establishment of consent.⁴²

3. ***Refocus on Delivering the Peace Operations Factors for Success.*** Operating according to the three principles of peacekeeping is necessary, but not sufficient. The Capstone Doctrine underlined the importance of three additional supporting factors that the mission needs to meet for success: Legitimacy, Credibility, and National and Local Ownership. UNTSO's three factors for success that complement the principles of peacekeeping are more important and relevant than ever. These are related to legitimacy and credibility, the level of trust maintained by the mission, and a people-centred approach. This study proposes that it is time to elevate the focus on the three factors of success, Legitimacy, Credibility, and National and Local Ownership, to the same level of importance as the three fundamental principles of peacekeeping (Consent, Impartiality, and Non-use of Force except in self-defence and in defence of the mandate). If a mission is not perceived as legitimate, operating with credibility, or trusted by the local and national host country, it will not be effective, even if it abides by the three original peacekeeping principles. In addition to the above principles of peace operations and factors for success, the study proposes that "Adaptability" be added as a fourth factor for success. The adaptive capacity of a mission is a critically important element in its responsiveness and resilience and, as such, should inform the design, deployment, leadership and evaluation of future missions and operations.

41 UN. 1948. Instructions to the UN Observers Engaged in the Supervision of the Truce in Palestine and the Seven Arab States, Advanced Headquarters UN Mediator Palestine. October, p. 1.

42 de Coning, C. 2023. How Not to Do UN Peacekeeping: Avoid the Stabilization Dilemma with Principled and Adaptive Mandating and Leadership. *Global Governance: A Review of Multilateralism and International Organizations*, 29(2): 152-167. <https://doi.org/10.1163/19426720-02902008>

Figure 3: The New Agenda for Peace and the Principles of Peacekeeping Applicable to UN Military Observers



Source: Bardalai/Hilding/Mood

4. **Revisit Benchmarking for Success.** Developing a deeper understanding of how to assess the performance of missions is another critical enabler for the effectiveness of peace operations. Trends and developments in peace operations require a redefinition of what success or mission accomplishment actually means for different types of mandates and operations. The larger multidimensional and integrated peacekeeping missions are ambitiously tasked with generating conflict transformation. This has not been the purpose and mandate of observer missions. There is a need to enhance and consolidate the understanding of how to assess the outcomes of conflict prevention. Indeed, it is time to review the definition and benchmarking of what is considered mission success, and hence, what operations are to be evaluated against. Less has been written in recent years that validates the role and relevance of observer missions. The CPAS is an important tool for planning and monitoring and evaluation of mission performance. It is continually updating its framework to meet the evolving needs of missions, including observer missions. This effort needs to continue, given the rapidly changing context in which missions are found.
5. **Review the Policy and Strategies for Advancing Female Military Observers.** The policies relating to female Military Observers should be reviewed. Research can be commissioned with the purpose of strengthening policy related to the use, roles, selection, deployment, education and training, and conditions of service of female Military Observers.

The positive impact of the presence of female Military Observers on patrols strengthens the ability of the mission to engage with local communities. To this end, by creating equality in process and equal opportunities for men and women, it is envisaged that female officers of all ranks, including as head of missions, will be able to advance and better contribute. Removing biased obstacles in existing policies that may hinder the full and equal use of female Military Observers should be a priority. The 25th Anniversary of Security Council Resolution 1325 on the Women, Peace and Security Agenda in 2025 provides a useful opportunity for advancing a Women Military Observers Agenda by the UN, Regional Organisations and Member States.

Operations

6. ***Promote Systems and Partnership Coherence.*** Over the years, UNTSO has been able to operate in an agile manner, despite new cycles of conflict remaining a feature of the region. It has adapted to changing situations and developments on the ground. The mission is a central component in a mosaic of complementary missions in the region: UNTSO, UNIFIL, UNDOF, UNSCO, UNSCOL, and MFO, to mention the main missions. The Middle East regional networked multilateralism is a useful example of an albeit complex, but valuable network of small missions each focused on a very specific mandate grounded in a specific context, but part of a broader regional system and approach. Such a Middle Eastern modular approach might be relevant, in an adapted format, in other contexts.
7. ***Invest in Continued Adaptation Capabilities for UN Peace Operations.*** As new technologies, including the developments in the cyber domain and artificial intelligence, are gaining further traction, it will be essential for the UNTSO mission, as well as other peace operations, whichever their function and format, to be empowered to develop capability and capacities to respond to challenges generated in this domain and to make full use of and leverage the potential of new technologies. Foresight, situational awareness, and understanding will be critical for both mission security and success in the years to come. New topics of relevance having an impact on all missions, including UNTSO, include climate change, refugee and migration flows, youth and women peace and security. With greater recognition of the political constraints peace operations face, UNTSO serves as a good example of what can be achieved through flexible and adaptive implementation of a clear and realistic mandate.
8. ***Recognise the Benefits of Customised Strategic Communication Strategies.*** The fact that UNTSO has received little attention over the years, given its open-ended mandate and small yet distinct presence, could be perceived as a limitation. It is the consequence of a deliberate decision by the mission not to promulgate a proactive social media presence. Arguably, this is part of the reason the mission has been less affected

by mis- and disinformation.⁴³ However, it is important to underline that a light social media presence does not mean that a mission does not need to be actively following, engaging with, mitigating and sometimes countering efforts to undermine the mission mandate and purpose within the information domain (digital, cyber, social media, and artificial intelligence). Furthermore, given the rapid development of new technologies, including the cyber domain, artificial intelligence and associated mis- and disinformation campaigns plaguing other peace operations, the capacity for the mission to be vigilant and preventive in the information domain is required.

9. ***Meet the Pre-conditions for Deployment for UN Military Observers.*** Military Observers are an effective means to observe, monitor, verify, and report on truces, ceasefires, armistices, cessation of hostilities, and other pauses or terminations of armed conflicts. There are three key concerns regarding the deployment of Military Observers: clarity of mandate, security and safety, and life support. A credible agreement between or among parties to the conflict to pause or terminate hostilities should provide the foundation for a Military Observer mission mandate. All parties to the conflict should consent to the Military Observer deployment, along with any other relevant stakeholders (for example, the Permanent Members of the Security Council). Clear and unambiguous authority, command and control mechanisms for Military Observers need to be put into place. The level of security risk to Military Observers in armed conflict, terrorism, violent civil disturbance and criminality must be acceptable. If a high security risk exists, prevention and mitigation measures must be in place to reduce that risk to an acceptable level. To achieve an acceptable safety risk level, timely casualty evacuation (CASEVAC) arrangements are required. Minimum mission essential capabilities for operational mission and crisis management must exist for: situational awareness, integrated analysis of the operational environment, contingency planning and coordination, communications, and security and safety of UN personnel and eligible dependents. Finally, the Military Observer mission requires sufficient mission support (administration, finance, logistics, etc.) capacity.⁴⁴ Overall and over time, UNTSO has been able to remain in place and meet its conditions. However, during certain critical conflicts, the mission has had to relocate and reconfigure.⁴⁵

Education and Training

10. ***Revision, Refocus and Refine Training Curricula to Enhance Military Observer Relevance.*** The current changing context and consequent reconfiguration of the peace operations landscape should inform revision, refocusing and refinement of education and training

43 Proposed by UNTSO Mission Staff in interviews, December 2023 and May 2024.

44 Interview with William R. Phillips, former Chief of the UN Military Planning Service at the UN. This was the general list of concerns addressed prior to the deployment of unarmed UNMOs to missions of particular complexity.

45 Ibid.

curricula for peace operations. For example, the UN leadership courses, including the UN Senior Mission Leadership Course, UN Senior Leaders Programme, UN Police Commanders Course, UN Mission Advanced Staff Training, as well as regional and national equivalents, are generally designed for pre-deployment requirements for larger multinational missions. There are the UN Military Observers Course (UNMOC) and other specialist training, but overall and in recent years, the framing and focus of education and training for peace operations has naturally been on serving larger multidimensional missions. The common courses should be widened in scope to better engage and serve the broader peace and security continuum of actors focused on prevention, peacemaking, peacekeeping and peacebuilding, and include the observer community more prominently. The potential increased use of Military Observers in missions and operations should be reflected in these training courses and their curricula.

11. ***Integrate New and Emerging Themes and Issues in Military Observers' Education and Training Curricula.*** In light of the exponential acceleration in the development of new technologies, including artificial intelligence, cyber issues, mis- and disinformation, climate change, health and pandemic-related risks, it is proposed that applicable research and training in emerging areas be fully and effectively integrated into all observer-related education and training.⁴⁶ The initiative of Member States and the DPO to review and revise the policy, guidance and training for UNMOs that is already underway is welcomed, timely and promising. It will be important for Member States to engage and take on board future adaptations required in the national and regional UNMOCs, ensuring that national instructors are up to date for impactful training delivery.
12. ***Pioneer State of the Art Learning Pedagogy and Methods.*** The UN COE proposed below could become a networked observers' education and training hub with mobile training teams that can be sent out to missions as and when required. The COE could focus on developing innovative observer-focused pedagogy to harness and adapt to how artificial intelligence, distant learning, cyber insecurities, and other developments impact the preparation and training for future peace operations. Accompanying face-to-face training delivery, the Centre could provide a repository of expertise, experience and knowledge. Ready to support and advise upon request, national training centres can be responsible for the UNMOCs. A rollout of an upgraded digital course library for online E-learning would also contribute to the professional development of a Global Cadre of Observers, serving the UN and also Regional Organisations, as and when required and requested.

46 See Hilding Norberg, A. N. (Ed.) n.d. Ideas Notes 2030: Strategic Reflections on the Future of UN Policing – Advancing progress towards the required and emerging New Normal – Nimble, Adaptive and Effective Peace and Security Engagements. This report covers a range of emerging issues of relevance. Regarding Military Observers, see also MacClinchy, W., Abdel-Latif, A., Dina El Mamoun, D., and Rabie, S. n.d. Preparing for the Future: Climate Supportive United Nations Policing; Hansen, A. S., and Kaba, F. n.d. Implications and Opportunities for United Nations Police: Harmful Information in the Context of Peace Operations, unpublished report; Kelly, M., and Kvilekval, A. 2024. Leveraging New Technologies in Support of United Nations Policing. May, GCSP, Geneva.

There are three particularly defining characteristics of UNTSO that can be consolidated, scaled up and built upon to help make future UN and regional peace operations more nimble, adaptive and effective.

Proposal I: Establish a Vanguard Rapid Deployment Capacity

UNTSO represents and already delivers a Vanguard Rapid Deployment Capacity. UNTSO has supported the startup or reinforcement of a range of new missions, from the first UNEF in 1956 to later missions in the former Yugoslavia, Rwanda, and Afghanistan. It is time to recognise this nimble and adaptive UN capability properly. Given overall resource constraints on UN missions, it is a low-cost, less intrusive, yet highly valuable and effective peace operations instrument.

Recommendations

13. Establish a Vanguard Rapid Deployment Capacity. The UNTSO capability to send Military Observers to support the set-up or reinforcement of new missions should make a transition from ad hoc arrangements to a standing Military Observer capacity, similar to the UN Standing Police Capacity.
14. Military Observers should be prepared and permitted to support startups or reinforcements of other missions temporarily, as a standard practice. Regardless of whether they are serving in observer missions, larger multidimensional missions, or SPMs, all UNMOs should be prepared and deployed with an agreement that permits them to be deployed temporarily during the startup phase of new missions or reinforce other missions, as and when required.

Proposal II: Establish a Centre of Excellence for Observers

It is proposed that a multiorganisational Centre of Excellence (COE) for Observers should be established, building on the nucleus training capacity of UNTSO, which already exists. The UNTSO has developed an advanced and impactful capacity for the induction training of new Military Observers. The training UNTSO delivers contributes to mission effectiveness, enhanced cooperation and coordination in the mission setting, and effective implementation

of routine mission tasks. The UNTSO induction training also serves as an impactful tool for preparing UNTSO Military Observers to support startup or reinforcement of new missions.

Furthermore, it is proposed that the COE, engaging both military and civilian observers can support both the UN and Regional Organisations to build knowledge on the observer function, harness and refine experience and expertise across missions, and provide advice and specialised training to observers. As such, the Centre can provide capability in observer-related policy, applicable research and advice, strengthened analysis and foresight, and host seminars and workshops, and ensure the effectiveness and operational impact of observers.

Recommendation

15. Establish a COE for observers that can serve the Vanguard Rapid Deployment Capacity, conduct applicable policy research, and train and offer induction or specialised training for other missions as needed, i.e., provide coordination, analysis, and training capabilities. UNTSO's capacity to analyse developments in the region relevant to its mandate can be enhanced through the establishment of the Centre and serve as a regional clearing house for the analysis of information relevant to its observer mission mandate.

Enabler: Strengthening a Predictable yet Adaptive Budget Structure

As an unarmed Military Observer mission, UNTSO is a low-cost mission. Over the last few years its budget has been around approximately USD 50 million per year. Over the 75-year history of the mission, financial support for UNTSO has been characterised by restraint, predictability and adaptability. When required, UNTSO's budget and financial arrangements with the receiving mission have been used to support the start-up, build-up and draw-down of other peacekeeping missions. This has required the ability to combine and integrate regular and assessed budget allocations. The proposal to establish a COE for Observers that could be designed to engage observers from regional organisations, including but not limited to the African Union, LAS, and others. The collaborative partnership approach would enhance partnership and promote burden sharing and mutual exchange of good practices.

Recommendation

16. Develop predictable and adaptive budget and financial capabilities to support the establishment of a COE for observers and a consolidated Vanguard Rapid Deployment Capacity.

Leading the Way



UNTSO Observer Group Lebanon (source UNTSO HQ)

Over time and at various junctures and stages, UNTSO has proven that leadership for peace in general and leadership of peace operations, in particular, requires an adaptive approach at the strategic, operational and tactical levels. Operating from the strategic analytical level of the region to the very specific tactical level of observations at the community level, UNTSO has proven to be an adaptive vehicle for trust-building and preventive and impartial liaison support for the conflict parties.

Adaptive leadership requires the ability to live with and embrace ambiguity and navigate complexity, the courage and energy to experiment and innovate, to be humble and ready to correct and relearn, to lead inclusively and with integrity in the face of danger and polarising narratives, and to create positive a sum solution with, in support of, and for all.⁴⁷ In a deeply contested and arguably the most politically complex region in the world, the fact that UNTSO has been able to remain steadfast and engaged in pursuing its mandate and mission over the years, as entrusted by the conflict parties and other stakeholders alike, speaks to the unique role, relevance, function and utility of UNTSO. There is much to learn.

“The difficult takes a little time, the impossible is what takes a little longer.”

Fridtjof Nansen, 1939

⁴⁷ Part of the key findings of a GCSP project on “Strengthening Leadership for Peace Operations” pursued in association with the International Leadership Association, 2022-2024.

The Effectiveness of Peace Operations Network (EPON)

Peace operations are among the most important international mechanisms for contemporary conflict management. However, their effectiveness remains the subject of confusion and debate in both the policy and academic communities. Various international organizations conducting peace operations, including the United Nations (UN), the African Union (AU), and the European Union (EU), have come under increasing pressure to justify their effectiveness and impact. Although various initiatives are underway to improve the ability to assess the performance of peace operations, there remains a distinct lack of independent, research-based information about the effectiveness of such operations.

To address this gap, the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI), together with over 40 partners from across the globe, have established an international network to jointly undertake research into the effectiveness of peace operations. This network has developed a shared methodology to enable the members to undertake research on this topic. This will ensure coherence across cases and facilitate comparative research. The network produce a series of reports that are shared with stakeholders including the UN, AU, and EU, interested national government representatives, researchers, and the general public. All the EPON reports are available via <https://effectivepeaceops.net>. The network is coordinated by NUPI. Many of the partners fund their own participation. NUPI has also received funding from the Norwegian Research Council and the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs to support the Network and its research, including via the UN Peace Operations project (UNPOP) and the Training for Peace (TfP) programme.

For more information, please contact:

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This is a study about the effectiveness of the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO) and the lessons that can be drawn from its 75 years of experience to inform the continuing development of peace operations and provide options for the future. The New Agenda for Peace emphasised that UN peace operations need to be nimble, adaptive and effective. The innovations at UNTSO gave rise to a mission that has continually adapted over the years in the face of significant challenges and responded effectively to recurring, potentially existential developments in the region. The study finds that UNTSO has several unique characteristics, including being quick and agile and regularly responding to requests to set up new and/or reinforce existing missions. Despite the successive eruptions of war in the region, the study posits that the authorised mandate and designated purpose of the mission, both in its political value and functional role, remain valid and relevant.

Moreover, there are several lessons from UNTSO's peace operations experience that can be applied in the development of future missions. The study makes recommendations regarding how some of UNTSO's innovations can be scaled up or built upon. These include adapting the practice of UNTSO setting up or reinforcing new missions into a UN-wide institutional capacity similar to the UN Standing Police Capacity, i.e., a Vanguard Rapid Deployment Capacity. A second proposal envisages the establishment of a Centre of Excellence for Observers in support of military and civilian observers to help the UN and Regional Organisations build knowledge on the observer function, harness and refine experience and expertise across missions, and provide advice and specialised training. Informed by the UNTSO experience and in support of strengthening peace operations in general, recommendations are offered in the areas of policy, principles and doctrine; operations; and education and training.



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