

# Assessment Tool for Measuring the Political Impact of Peacekeeping Operations

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USER'S GUIDE

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UNITED NATIONS  
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## I. Background

The 2018 Action for Peacekeeping Declaration (A4P) commits UN peace operations to pursue political objectives based on integrated strategies and solutions. It also demands a greater focus on impact and performance across peacekeeping. Together, these commitments require that peacekeeping places greater focus and resources on its political engagement and that this is translated into improved performance and impact on the ground. While much emphasis has been placed on the military performance of peacekeeping, the political performance of missions presents an especially important and challenging area. Often, the Good Offices/political engagement of missions is done behind closed doors or is part of a much larger constellation of actors working to influence peace processes in a positive direction. In this context, **what evidence demonstrates that political engagement is having an impact?**

Significant scholarship has examined the extent to which peacekeeping in general results in a lowering of overall rates of relapse,<sup>1</sup> reductions in rates of violence,<sup>2</sup> and improvements in the stability of fragile settings.<sup>3</sup> Recent initiatives, such as the Effectiveness of Peace Operations Network, promise further in-depth measures of peacekeeping's impact.<sup>4</sup> Within the UN, too, the Comprehensive Performance Assessment System (CPAS) offers peacekeeping a much deeper set of context-based data to demonstrate the impact of missions. Already rolled out in eight missions, CPAS has put in place

an important framework for gathering information and analysis. By basing itself on the full mandate of peacekeeping operations, CPAS may also generate useful data for the political work of missions. Alongside existing sources of information about the effects of peacekeeping, more data is becoming available to make evidence-based analyses of the political impact of peacekeeping. However, the process of drawing that information together into a cogent, defensible argument about impact is challenging, and thus far the UN has not reported systematically on the political impact of peacekeeping, as required by A4P.

The present project was designed in consultation with the UN Department of Peace Operations and specifically aims to support A4P and CPAS in the area of political engagement. Drawing on existing methodologies in the social science and development fields,<sup>5</sup> it offers a **Tool for assessing and describing the political impact of peacekeeping missions**. Designed for practitioners and policymakers, it will offer a set of steps that can be taken to build, synthesize and organize information to make the strongest possible claims about causality in complex socio-political settings. The following is a “user’s guide” to help practitioners undertaking assessments of UN peace operation, identifying the main challenges, methodological considerations and approaches that will allow for rigorous evidence-based assessments. The Tool itself is attached as an annex to this document.

## II. Challenges in Assessing Political Impact

Any attempt to assess the political impact of peace operations faces significant definitional, practical and methodological challenges. This section offers a brief overview of the main challenges, with a view to informing how the Tool can be developed and implemented.

### DEFINING “THE POLITICAL” AND ITS OBJECTIVES

There is no consensus on what a “political objective” means in peacekeeping.<sup>6</sup> In fact, most UN policy-level work tends to restate the term rather than define it.<sup>7</sup> For example, the High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (HIPPO) states that “political solutions should always guide the design and deployment of UN peace operations,” but offers little sense of what political solution should entail, other than something comprehensive. One of the authors of the HIPPO report offers some insight by suggesting that a political solution needs to address “the legitimate interests and grievances of all parties,” but again this does not offer a clear definition.<sup>8</sup>

In some cases, a peacekeeping operation will have an explicitly political goal, such as free and fair elections, an inclusive peace process or national-level reforms. Other goals may seem less overtly political but still require significant engagement by the national leadership of a country, such as a successful Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) process, effective protection of civilians, and human rights. This does not mean that other goals should be divorced from the political: the highly technical exercises of border demarcation, demining and infrastructural projects may carry enormous political consequences and be essential to a broader peace process. Even the work of development and humanitarian officials, while ostensibly eschewing the political sphere, is often deeply enmeshed in relations with political representatives in country.

Likewise, some peacekeeping tasks are clearly political, such a diplomatic overture, mediation, provision of Good Offices, support to a peace process, and convenings of national/regional stakeholders. But as some experts have pointed

out, even the concept of Good Offices – arguably the most overtly political aspect of the UN’s work – can mean “almost anything,”<sup>9</sup> while support to peace processes can take a variety of forms, including very technical activities. Moreover, many of the most important political efforts take place below the visible surface, behind closed doors, and necessarily without a public record. As Secretary-General Javier Pérez de Cuellar acknowledged, “No one will ever know how many conflicts have been prevented or limited through contacts which have taken place in the famous glass mansion, which can become fairly opaque when necessary.”<sup>10</sup>

Compounding this amorphous definition, peacekeeping operations are often mandated with fairly imprecise tasks, such as “supporting,” “encouraging” or “assisting” parties. It can be difficult to know when such mandates are achieved, and especially complicated to identify an appropriate timeframe for measuring impact (e.g. two parties could agree on a ceasefire one week and then reject it one month later). This is due to the fact that the success or failure of the political mandates of peacekeeping operations – more so than any other aspect of their work – rests almost entirely in the hands of other players.

For the purposes of this Tool, and drawing from the policy paper associated with this project, we here **define “political solution”** as follows:

A political solution in a peace operations context is one where parties reach negotiated, inclusive agreements to halt the killing and attempt to address the major grievances that triggered the violent conflict or are likely to trigger further violent conflict. As such, a political solution offers a comprehensive framework for a sustainable transition to peace, and a clear set of commonly agreed elements for achieving it.

Under this definition, ceasefires or cessations of hostilities typically would only be part of a broader political solution, unless they were considered sufficient to sustainably end a conflict; likewise, protection of civilians, stabilization and State-building could be part of a political solution,





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but would not in and of themselves constitute one. In line with the HIPPO report, this definition demands that a political solution be negotiated, not merely the outcome of force, and that it be inclusive, representing more than just the interests of the belligerents.<sup>11</sup> At the same time, it allows for military and technical engagements that could be used to incentivize parties to reach a political solution.

We are not here advocating for the UN to adopt a static definition of political solution, as many contexts may require a more flexible set of characteristics. However, it is useful when developing an assessment Tool to have a common starting point.

## ESTABLISHING THE FACTS

Effective assessments must be based on a sound evidentiary basis. However, evaluating any intervention in conflict settings presents inherent challenges; peacekeeping is no exception. Acquiring first-hand data in conflict-affected areas can be dangerous and difficult,

while the situation on the ground can change quickly without warning. Fragile conflict-prone countries often have poor national-level data, and conflict actors themselves may control access to information.<sup>12</sup> Even where relevant data does exist—related to socioeconomic conditions, violence levels, access to arms or other drivers of conflict<sup>13</sup>—crucial indicators of political mood, dissatisfaction amongst certain populations and risks of imminent violence are typically unknown. But these more nebulous pieces of information are often crucial for understanding whether a peace operation is succeeding in its political work.<sup>14</sup>

Shortfalls in baseline data is a chronic issue when it comes to political work as well: *how can the UN describe what would have happened if the peace operation had not intervened?* Here, evaluation designs from other disciplines might build a partial answer to the question, but many of these involve rigorous pre-and post-intervention control group testing, and/or generation of significant amounts of new data.<sup>15</sup> It is unrealistic to demand that Department of Peace Operations (DPO) conducts such time- and resource-

intensive evaluation methodologies. But it is equally important that any assessment exercise take on this counter-factual question in creative and compelling ways, if it is to meaningfully show the impact of peacekeeping on its political mandates.

**CORRELATION, CAUSATION, CONTRIBUTION**

UN peace operations work alongside (and sometimes in competition with) a wide range of international, regional and national actors. In many settings, the UN is a relatively minor player, supporting national institutions, providing logistical support to local stakeholders or convening regional players. Examining this crowded field, it is difficult to assess the degree to which a UN operation may have influenced the situation, and even harder to claim that the UN was either necessary or sufficient to any concrete outcome. This can be called a problem of correlation rather than causation: **UN activities are often correlated with change, but seldom the immediate cause of it.** In situations like these, it may make more sense to think of the UN's *contribution* to change, rather than attribution *per se*.

Typical UN evaluation approaches—such as the results-based budget—leave little room for such nuanced distinctions, while even more scholarly approaches tend to use outdated methodologies.<sup>16</sup> Take, for example, a standard peacekeeping mandate to help a country build an effective police force. A results-based assessment for measuring progress towards this goal would look something like this:

Here, the underlying assumption is that a peacekeeping operation undertakes activities, which cause a result, which in turn contribute to a desired change. This linear causal thinking underlies most UN evaluations, and is the basis upon which peacekeeping (and aid and development agencies worldwide) usually assesses progress and allocates funds. It avoids the thorny issue of causality by presupposing it: An increased number of police trainings by a peacekeeping operation is assumed to contribute to a reduction in criminality, which in turn leads to improved stability. None of the causal links are established via this approach.<sup>17</sup>

At best, peacekeeping assessments follow poor logic to get around the problem of causality, stating that (1) the mandate objective was achieved, and (2) the UN did a good job in various ways, therefore (3) the UN was effective. This tends to dramatically overstate the UN's contribution to the outcome, giving it credit (or blame) for a range of events beyond its control.<sup>18</sup> For example, the UN might play a distinctly positive role with two conflict parties, convening their leaders, producing incentives, coordinating with other actors and providing logistical support to implementation of an agreement. Nonetheless, the analysis might determine that none of these activities played a significant role in influencing their decision to honour the peace agreement, given the much weightier role of other actors in the process. Well-informed counter-factual analysis is thus crucial in making an accurate assessment of the political impact of peacekeeping.

Input Indicator	Output Indicator	Outcome Indicator	Impact Indicator
Number of police trainings conducted by the UN	Number of police trained to international standards	Reduction in instances of criminality	Improvements in stability in the country

Finally, linear approaches to evaluation such as results-based budgeting (RBB) treat issues like political will of the parties, socioeconomic changes, and shifting public opinion as beyond the scope of analysis, either presumed as unchanging, or listed as “external factors.” But in peacekeeping’s political work, these are precisely the issues at the heart of the story: the Good Offices work of peacekeeping is meant to generate political progress, establish leverage and ultimately affect decision-making.

### **INCLUSIVITY AND THE PROBLEM OF ELITE-DRIVEN PEACE PROCESSES**

There is a strong trend in the UN towards inclusivity when it comes to understanding and preventing conflict.<sup>19</sup> Some experts have suggested that those designing and evaluating interventions in conflict should “start with a problem as defined by the society itself and then generate a theory of change for how to address the problem.”<sup>20</sup> Wherever possible this

Tool encourages such an approach, including by posing specific questions regarding the extent to which the UN’s intervention may have addressed deeper issues of socio-political exclusion.

However, the reality is that peacekeeping operations are mandated by the Security Council, a Member State-driven organization with a strong tendency toward State-level actors. Peacekeeping mandates are usually focused on the elite actors in conflict—government, opposition parties and military leaders—and the need to implement agreements at the highest level. There may be important roles that civil affairs and other subnational parts of peacekeeping missions play in supporting such peace processes (and these are highlighted in the case studies), but typically a peacekeeping mandate will focus overwhelmingly at the national level. This may at times create a tension between the principle of inclusivity and the mandate of peacekeeping operations, complicating an evaluation of impact.

## **III. Methodology**

The above challenges underscore the need for an evaluation approach that (1) imposes minimal additional burdens on DPO and field missions; (2) is complementary to existing evaluation tools, such as CPAS and the RBB; and (3) can be done with existing resources and data. The Tool should see the assessment process as a form of communication, rather than mere self-critique: telling a compelling evidence-based story of how peacekeeping is having an impact (or indeed why it is not having the intended impact). And importantly, the Tool should help to place the peacekeeping intervention in context, weighing its impact against the other (frequently far more influential) factors that cause change in a given country setting.

### **COMPLEX SYSTEMS ANALYSIS**

This Tool recognizes that the challenges of attributing impact to a UN peacekeeping operation cannot be addressed in a purely linear input-output fashion. There is almost never a

convincing case to be made that a peacekeeping mission delivered a political outcome on its own. Instead, we take as a starting point that political processes in peacekeeping settings are part of complex and overlapping social, political and economic systems, appearing more as interdependent “messes” than solvable “puzzles.”<sup>21</sup> Change in these systems results from a combination and interrelation of underlying structural patterns and the actions of individuals. What Jane Boulton eloquently calls complexity’s “dance between detail and structure, between science and history, between form and individualism” means that change can never be isolated as between two variables; the way complex systems self-organize is always contingent upon both the patterns in a system and the specificity of the moment.<sup>22</sup>

This Tool therefore resists input-output calculations and instead enables a description of a given setting as a complex system of interrelated actors, each of which influence each

other in different ways. It requires the assessor to embrace uncertainty, to accept that there will never be a perfect alignment between what is put into an intervention and what is achieved by it. Instead, the Tool encourages assessors to look for:

- **How the system self-organizes and adapts:** Societies, as complex systems, self-organize in a number of ways, often through feedback loops that regulate behaviour. Corruption offers a good example of a positive feedback loop: the more government officials direct money into their personal coffers, the weaker State institutions become, further encouraging corruption and leading to still weaker institutions.<sup>23</sup> Here, a mandate to build more effective State institutions may not be possible merely by funnelling money into national reform programming, but may require an adjustment of the underlying economic incentives, disrupting the feedback loop in society. This Tool encourages assessors to examine the main ways in which a given society tends to self-organize, providing a context for evaluating impact.
- **Indirect consequences:** There is a tendency in peacekeeping to assume that impacts are the result of incremental achievements added together. As described above, a typical RBB approach will assume that the number of police trainings aggregates into an improved rule of law capacity in a given setting. However, the interrelated nature of complex systems means that actions often have unintended consequences well beyond their immediate target.<sup>24</sup> For instance, improved policing capacity may, in fact, lead to greater arrests and longer pre-trial detentions, potentially leading to growing resentment against the State and a rise in tensions.<sup>25</sup> This Tool provides some guidance for how an assessor might include analysis of such indirect consequences in an evaluation.
- **Multiple causes:** Interdependence in complex systems means that outcomes are never the result of a single cause. This

is especially relevant for peacekeeping, where a mission operates alongside a range of actors and in a context where long-standing structural dynamics play a crucial role. In some cases, the UN may do a superlative job but be a minimal influence on a given outcome. In others, even small actions by the UN could have an outsized impact. Getting out of the linear framing of the RBB and staying open to multiple causes is a key function of this Tool.

- **Localized perspectives:** Complex systems are not driven from the top down, but experience change at multiple levels as they interact. This means that local experiences of conflict, and indeed local conflict actors, are extremely important to the overall system. Wherever possible, data should be drawn from local perspectives if the assessment wishes to accurately portray impact on the ground. This is particularly relevant when local decision-makers influence the trajectory of a given setting, which is often the case in peacekeeping settings.<sup>26</sup>

Taken together, this approach aims to provide assessors with a **viable theory of change** for describing the impact of peace operations. Rather than placing the causal emphasis on the peace operation itself, it allows for a contextual understanding of a given situation, a description of how change happens within the system and a sense of what kind of actions generate change.

## ADAPTIVE ASSESSMENT APPROACHES

Some peacekeeping interventions deliver clear results: a signed agreement, a national dialogue, a ceasefire. Others may be nearly impossible to determine, such as building trust between parties, defusing tensions, or advancing a national reform agenda. Where there is a tangible result, generally it will be easier for the assessment to conclude that the UN contributed to a specific impact. But it is often the UN's quieter role in building trust and defusing tensions that is its real value added in many situations.



This Tool follows the Humanitarian Dialogue Centre and other experts in suggesting an adaptive approach: Where results are easily defined, greater focus should be placed on the impact of the intervention. Where results are more difficult to identify, greater focus should be placed on how the intervention was conducted, whether it was appropriately designed and implemented.<sup>27</sup> For example, if a peace operation is asked to broker a ceasefire between parties, the question can easily be asked “was a ceasefire achieved?” If a peace operation is mandated to support a national reform agenda aimed at the improvement of rule of law nationwide, the question may be a twofold one, “did the national reform agenda progress positively, and what role did the UN play in this advancement?” In the latter case, the assessment might focus more on how well the UN performed, given that much of the onus for change lies with other actors. Adaptation does not mean the basic structure of the assessment needs to be changed, only the emphasis within it.

## TIMEFRAME

Findings on the impact of peacekeeping will be strongly influenced by the time-window chosen. Support to a national reform agenda, for example, may show little signs of progress for decades, or may even coincide with significant periods of relapse before taking root in a country (e.g. the 20 year history of security sector reform in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which still has very little to show for it). Much of the political work of peacekeeping is of this nature, supporting national-level processes that extend well beyond the expected life of the mission. A given intervention may not generate an immediate impact (positive or negative), but could contribute to stability in the longer term, a gain that would not be captured by an assessment done too early on. Conversely, if an assessment attempts to capture too much time, the number of intervening factors may become overwhelmingly, making impact difficult to ascertain.

This Tool proposes a relatively small timeframe for analysis, examining the political impact of a mission within a single year period, and focusing largely on the extent to which the UN facilitated progress on a peace process. This aligns with the other UN reporting processes and would thus not create a separate assessment timeline for practitioners; it would also allow for this Tool to be used alongside both CPAS and the RBB if needed. However, the Tool includes questions around the potential longer-term impacts of a given intervention: how was the political intervention linked to longer-term objectives of the UN? Sustainability and prevention of relapse are two key guiding concepts.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF PEER REVIEW AND INSTITUTIONAL LEARNING

Who should use this Tool? There are benefits and drawbacks to the use of either external or internal evaluators. External evaluators would provide the assessment with greater impartiality, avoid the issue of DPO congratulating itself and could possibly engage greater monitoring/evaluation expertise than the staff within the department. But external consultants may also require greater time to familiarize themselves with the case, face constraints in access to confidential information or key actors and can tend to provoke the defences of those who designed and led the intervention. The use of external evaluators may also limit the internal learning of the UN.<sup>28</sup> This Tool does not take a position on whether external or internal evaluators should lead assessments and is designed for use by both. However, to avoid some of the pitfalls of either choice, we suggest a process *complemented by peer-review*, where preliminary findings of the assessment are discussed amongst a group of experts in diplomacy and mediation.<sup>29</sup>

Secondly, there is a growing recognition across peacebuilding that assessments should feed institutional learning.<sup>30</sup> This Tool is designed to create the kind of empirically-based, consistent studies that will allow for cross-case comparison and longer-term learning for the UN.



## IV. Using the Assessment Tool

The Assessment Tool is designed for practitioners to develop convincing rigorous analysis of the political impact of peacekeeping operations. It can be used to evaluate a specific activity (e.g. support to elections) or a broader set of linked activities (e.g. support to a peace process). While each setting will require a bespoke approach and different weighting within the analysis, the Tool offers six key question areas to be addressed in every assessment:

1. A **contextual analysis** of the peacekeeping setting, which identifies the main factors driving change and the desired objectives of the peace operation;
2. A **causal analysis**, identifying the major factors that influenced a particular outcome;
3. Analysis of the extent to which the **UN contributed** to that outcome, weighted against other factors;
4. A **counter-factual argument** describing what would have happened if there had been no UN intervention;
5. An analysis of what **enabled and/or inhibited the UN's** ability to achieve its desired impact;
6. An assessment of what the UN can **learn** from the experience.

Taken together, these elements form the backbone of a story of impact, allowing assessors to marshal data and perceptions into a cogent and rigorous evaluation that can increase learning across the UN system.

### 1. CONTEXT ANALYSIS

This Tool uses the term “context analysis” rather than the more commonly used “conflict analysis.” This builds on the key elements of conflict analyses but suggests that a broader lens may be needed to describe how change takes place in different settings. Conflict analyses vary, from that of the World Bank,<sup>31</sup> to those of major development agencies,<sup>32</sup> to several

different approaches within UN agencies.<sup>33</sup> Drawing from these, a Secretariat planning cell identified four minimum elements to be included in all analyses: (1) situational profile; (2) conflict drivers; (3) stakeholder analysis; and (4) overall conflict dynamics.<sup>34</sup> This Tool builds on these four elements and expands them slightly:

- **Situational profile:** The profile provides a snapshot of the setting at the moment of the assessment. It offers a mini-narrative of the conflict and the basic issues involved in driving risks (e.g. interparty animosity, regional dynamics, key events).
- **Drivers of change:** the context analysis should cover the so-called “root causes” of conflict e.g. long-standing grievances, socioeconomic inequalities, competition over natural resources, demographic shifts) as well as the more immediate “triggers” that led to the need for a peacekeeping operation.<sup>35</sup> But wherever possible, it should aim to describe how change takes place within the country. How has the country responded to economic shocks? How do communities deal with rises in violence? What kind of patterns can be established to make a case for understanding how the system responds to new inputs.
- **Stakeholder analysis:** Typical stakeholder analyses cover all those who can influence the course of the conflict or are affected by it. Usually these are high State officials, leaders of opposition movements, military leaders and/or heads of large coalitions. But it can also be influential local leaders, or even the broader relationships between communities. There may be cases where undefined groups can affect the course of a peace process—such as unruly mobs or displaced populations—but these are less typical. Most important is to understand what motivates these actors, what inhibits their action, and what factors are most important in their decision-making around conflict.

- **Conflict Dynamics:** The heart of the analysis should capture the distribution of power amongst different actors, their ability to drive a situation toward or away from violence and the forces that influence change. In terms of the UN's intervention, this establishes the degree of difficulty in terms of prevention, as well as the focus of the assessment.<sup>36</sup>

## 2. CAUSAL ANALYSIS—A THEORY OF CHANGE

At the core of any impact story is a **theory of change**,<sup>37</sup> a set of evidence-based assumptions concerning what caused a change in circumstances on the ground. In terms of peace processes, the theory will often rest largely upon the will of the key parties to an agreement, the underlying animosity between communities, and the ability to deliver on key provisions. Crucially for this Tool, the assessment should identify what the peace operation's theory of change was at the time: what theory was driving their activities and did it reflect a realistic understanding of how change takes place in that setting? In the cases of bad outcomes, this will allow an assessment to distinguish between "theory failure" (a poor understanding of how change takes place) and "implementation failure" (poor execution of a course of action).<sup>38</sup>

Of course, conflict settings are inherently complex, there may be several factors influencing a given period. Some of these might be short-term and specific—such as the views of a leading individual or the position of a political party. They also could be immediate to the setting on the ground, such as the removal of small arms or the interposition of forces to prevent confrontation. Or a premise could be broader and more societal, like breaking down ethnic divisions, addressing grievances or fostering socioeconomic progress.

Here, we offer an example drawn from United Nations University Centre for Policy Research's prior case study on Sudan.<sup>39</sup> In 2010, UNMIS was mandated to support the final phase of Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) between the Government of Sudan and the Juba-based Southern People's Liberation Movement. The key process at the time was a national referendum

to determine whether southern Sudan would become an independent country or remain part of Sudan. A major risk to the overall peace process was the possibility that Khartoum (President Omar al Bashir) might refuse to recognize the outcome of the referendum, or indeed prevent it from taking place. In building a theory of change that would describe how the UN could contribute to a peaceful process, the following elements were considered:

- Agreement by Khartoum to recognise the results of the referendum was a determinative factor in implementing the peace process fully;
- President Bashir needed to receive credible assurances of his own political future after the referendum;
- For Khartoum and Juba to agree on the referendum process, post-referendum issues needed to be addressed in an agreed forum;
- For the referendum to take place peacefully, the two armies needed to be kept from confrontation in Abyei;
- Maintaining the ability for southerners and northerners living in border areas to continue to trade and retain relations was crucial for both sides to peacefully get through the CPA period.

Taken together, these factors offer a theory of change related to the southern Sudan referendum, contributing to the statement: If President Bashir receives credible assurances about the referendum and is willing to recognize the outcome, Khartoum and Juba have a viable process to resolve outstanding CPA issues, the two armies are kept from confrontation around hotspots, and citizens of both areas are able to continue economic relations, then there is a high likelihood that the referendum can take place peacefully. This analysis also suggests the key entry points for UNMIS and its partners: the UN needed to find actors capable of offering credible assurances to President Bashir, support the process of resolving other outstanding CPA issues, deploy troops to monitor the movements of the respective armies, and help ensure the northern and southern communities saw a viable

future after the CPA. As the case study concluded, UNMIS played a small but important role in all of these areas, thus contributing to a successful conclusion of the CPA peace process.

### 3. A COUNTER-FACTUAL ARGUMENT

To determine the impact of an intervention, an assessment should establish what would have happened if an intervention by external actors had not occurred. While this does not need to be a particularly detailed element of the assessment, a counter-factual argument should indicate the most likely course of events absent outside intervention.

Counter-factual statements are notoriously difficult to make with any certainty.<sup>40</sup> In many cases, the UN peace operation may have conducted scenario planning that helpfully identifies a range of likely outcomes.<sup>41</sup> And often a strong case can be made based on the risk analysis and the positions of the key conflict actors at the time. Using the above example of the southern Sudan case study, southern Sudan President Salva Kiir publicly announced he was ready to return to war if Khartoum did not accept the referendum process.<sup>42</sup>

When crafting a counter-factual argument, it is important not to place the UN peace operation too centrally in it. In many cases, the UN is but one of many other external actors (regional, international, bilateral) involved in supporting a peace process. Taking into account the possible effects of these actors will result in a more accurate and realistic analysis, also avoiding the trap of making the UN appear overly responsible for events well beyond its control.

### 4. THE UN'S CONTRIBUTION

Following from the counter-factual statement, the assessment then should describe the UN's contribution to change, weighed against the other factors at the time. Contribution may be quite direct: for example, a peace operation might oversee a ceasefire process and provide a forum for de-escalation when incidents occur. Or it might be indirect: the use of Good Offices could affect the posture of the parties; communications work could slightly alter public perceptions about

talks; behind-the-scenes diplomacy could alter regional positions in small but important ways.

Returning to the above example of the southern Sudan referendum, the theory of change was roughly, if President Bashir accepts the referendum process, the CPA is far more likely to conclude peacefully. In order for President Bashir to agree, the case study suggested he needed to receive credible assurances of his own political future (i.e. that there would be no economic isolation, that the post-referendum arrangements would not be biased against his party, and that economic incentives like sanctions relief were viable). UNMIS' contribution to this outcome could be identified by asking questions like:

- *Was the UNMIS SRSG considered a trustworthy interlocutor for Bashir to receive assurances?*
- *What role did UNMIS play in facilitating talks between Bashir and those actors who could offer assurances to his future?*
- *What role did UNMIS play in gathering international and regional actors towards a common position that would influence Bashir's decision?*
- *What other factors beyond UNMIS' control were influencing Bashir's decision-making?*

From these lines of questioning, an argument emerges that the UNMIS Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) was considered a trustworthy interlocutor, uniquely placed to bridge to other key stakeholders with leverage over President Bashir (in the African Union and Intergovernmental Authority on Development), and able to bring international actors together around common messaging to influence Bashir's views.<sup>43</sup> While there were of course many other factors that influenced the outcome, this kind of analysis helps to articulate the specific impact of the UN in a given setting.

### 5. ENABLING/INHIBITING FACTORS FOR THE UN

A UN peace operation's ability to impact a given conflict setting depends upon a range of factors, which roughly fall into two categories:

(1) degree of difficulty, and (2) effectiveness of mission's approach.

### 1) Degree of Difficulty

Some peacekeeping operations are deployed in settings where the parties are highly receptive to UN engagement. Others face the challenges of "no peace to keep," parties reluctant to allow the mission to operate and/or poor starting conditions for achieving their mandates. Some of the issues that should be considered here are:

- Existing violence levels in country and the apparent willingness of the parties to enter into a negotiated political process;
- Willingness of the parties to accept a UN role;
- The UN's perceived legitimacy amongst the population;
- Access of the UN to key conflict actors;
- Relationship between the UN and regional organizations and bilateral donors.

These factors are not static and the UN mission can take proactive steps to improve its chances. But as a starting point, they offer a sense of how much leverage and room for manoeuvre the mission will have on its political objectives.

### 2) Effectiveness of UN Approach

Many assessment approaches on an organization's effectiveness are based on its use of resources, coherence across different agencies and internal coordination.<sup>44</sup> This is important in a UN peacekeeping context, as the assessment will feed the UN's broader justification for resources. Having a clear sense of what was an efficient use of resources will play a central role in this justification and also will make the assessment useful to more system-wide, comparative evaluations.

Key considerations here include:

- Appropriateness of the mandate given to mission;
- Degree to which the UN strategy matched the situation on the ground;

- Cohesion of the peacekeeping effort alongside other UN actors;
- Resourcing for the mission;
- Mission leadership.

It is worth noting that some of these are within the mission's control and others are either shared or beyond its control. Separating these will allow missions to prioritize their actions.

## 6. SUSTAINABILITY

While the timeframe for assessing peace operations is often fairly limited in scope and restricted to mandate areas, it is also important to examine the extent to which missions also contribute to longer-term outcomes. This responds to the Secretary-General's call to break down the divisions between conflict prevention and development, and also to the criticism of peacekeeping that it will be ineffective unless accompanied by national-level institutional reforms.<sup>45</sup> At the same time, UN peace operations should not be held to too high a standard: demanding that they influence multi-decade structural reforms with limited resources may create unrealistic expectations.<sup>46</sup> Particularly given the focus of this Tool on the political work of missions, much of the immediate focus of a UN mission will be on reducing the risks of escalation into violent conflict.

This Tool suggests that UN peace operations may not deliver longer-term sustainable outcomes, but should be assessed on the extent to which they link their engagements to processes and capacities that will outlast the mission.<sup>47</sup> Examining the exit strategy of the mission will help identify whether the UN has meaningfully planned for its work to transition into viable national and local capacities, and whether its approach has successfully promoted inclusion in the peace process.



# Assessment Tool for Measuring the Political Impact of Peacekeeping Operations

## V. Objectives

This Tool provides DPO with an approach to: (1) evaluate the political impact of its peacekeeping interventions; (2) build a rigorous knowledge base of best practice; and (3) communicate the impact of its work both internally and externally. The following document constitutes the Tool itself, offering general guidance and indicative questionnaires for conducting research. It is meant to be implemented in conjunction with the above User's Guide.

Ultimately, this Tool is guided by the question, *How did the UN peace operation contribute to the prospects for sustainable peace in a given setting?* Within this, however, the specific goals will be determined by the peace operation's mandate. Tailoring the assessment around the mission's mandate and identifying the political objectives of the UN is therefore the first step.

When conducting the assessment, the Tool is built around six core question areas:

1. A **contextual analysis** of the peacekeeping setting, which identifies the main factors driving change and the desired objectives of the peace operation;

2. A **causal analysis**, identifying the major factors that influenced a particular outcome;
3. Analysis of the extent to which the **UN operation contributed** to that outcome, weighted against other factors;
4. A **counter-factual argument** describing what would have happened if there had been no UN intervention;
5. An analysis of what **enabled and/or inhibited the** UN's ability to achieve its desired impact.
6. A description of what the UN more broadly should **learn** from this experience.

These six areas of inquiry form the basic structure of the assessment. To answer each of these questions, the Tool here provides an illustrative questionnaire, which will need to be adapted to the specific conflict, interlocutors and available information sources.

## VI. Questionnaire for Conducting the Assessment

### 1. *Contextual Analysis*—What are the main factors driving change?

This section can cover deeper root causes of conflict, but should relate those to the more immediate risks, the triggers and the positions of the parties.

Questions	Possible Key Indicators
What were the major drivers of conflict/tension in country?	Socioeconomic divisions, ethnic tensions, political divides, climatic changes.
What were the triggers that create heightened risk?	Elections, political upheaval, violent incidents, economic shocks, disasters.
What best describes the way in which conflict has developed and changed over time?	Historical analyses of the country; political-economic analysis.

### 2. *Causal Analysis*—What influenced change?

This section should draw directly from the contextual analysis in terms of identifying what ultimately drove the major changes on the ground. Importantly, this section should attempt to weight different factors, describing which of the broader range appeared to be the most important in the outcome.

Questions	Possible Key Indicators
What were the interests of the conflict actors at the time of the crisis?	Political survival, military advantage, interpersonal disputes, economic incentives, intercommunal issues, legacy.
What were the most important factors influencing the conflict actors' decisions?	Pressures from within a political party or from opposition groups, sanctions/economic issues, military pressures, battle fatigue, bilateral relations, relations with regional/international entities.
Who were the most important third parties with influence over the conflict actors?	Political allies, bilateral heavyweights, regional bodies, Security Council, sometimes broader international opinion.

Questions	Possible Key Indicators
What were the conditions necessary for the situation to move towards peaceful resolution?	Agreement between two opposing parties, interruption of an escalatory dynamic, face-saving, political/economic assurances, reduction of personal risk.
Why did the situation play out as it did?	A culmination of the above points.

### **3. Counter-factual Analysis—What are the most likely scenarios that would have taken place absent external intervention?**

This section takes the full range of external interventions by international, regional and other actors and asks what would have happened if the intervention had not occurred. This does not need to be overly detailed, and often the UN will have conducted scenario planning ahead of an event to capture likely outcomes. The risk analysis carried out in the earlier sections should also provide an evidence base for arguing the most likely course of events.

Questions	Possible Key Indicators
What are the most likely scenarios absent external intervention?	Widespread violence, inter-State war, continued confrontation in the streets, sporadic killing.
Why are these the most likely scenarios?	Rhetoric/actions by the conflict actors, military posture by conflict groups, history of violent conflict in similar moments in country.
What are the likely costs saved?	Expert estimates of costs of violence; human costs; broader regional instability

### **4. The Peace Operations' Contribution—To what extent can the outcome can be attributed to the UN's engagement?**

This section identifies the extent to which the UN's intervention played a role in the outcome. In many cases, the UN is but one of many preventive actors, and it is crucial that the analysis focus in on how the UN contributed. It can cover a wide array of difficult-to-measure issues, such as the impact of coordinated international messaging or the role the UN as an impartial intermediary between conflict

parties. Getting the views of the conflict actors themselves, or those most close to the decision-making process, is often the best way to address this question convincingly.

Questions	Possible Key Indicators
To what extent did the UN achieve what it was mandated to do?	Written understandings between conflict parties; reduction of tensions; statements of intent by key actors; statements by the Security Council on continuing risk levels.
What was the UN's leverage over any of the parties? What helped/hindered leverage?	UN actions to coordinate international and regional positioning/messaging; UN role in sanctions/economic issues; UN leverage through impartiality; etc.
What other factors alongside the UN drove the decision-making of the conflict actors?	International, regional, national actors; bilateral sanctions; financial incentives; arrest warrants; personal relationships; external military pressures; etc.
Were there any unintended results from the intervention?	Heightened expectations amongst population leading to greater tensions; etc.
To what extent was the UN's intervention a factor in the decision-making of the conflict actors?	Statements by the conflict actors; expert opinion; views of others directly involved in the process.

## 5. *Enabling/Inhibiting Factors*—What enabled and/or inhibited the UN's capacity to contribute to preventing violence?

This section aims to identify the key conditions that helped or hurt the UN's chances of success through a description of the UN's role. Sometimes the conditions are outside the UN's control. The willingness of the parties to avoid or end the violence is something the UN is only marginally able to influence in most cases. Focusing on those actions the mission took (or could have taken) to increase influence and positively affect the situation, while acknowledging those issues beyond the UN's control, is a goal of this section.

Questions	Possible Key Indicators
How receptive were the parties to the UN's involvement?	Willingness of the parties to meet the UN; ability to enter the country in question; public statements by parties about UN role; competing mediation initiatives.



Questions	Possible Key Indicators
How was the UN perceived more broadly, including by the population and/or regional actors?	Statements by leaders and civil society groups; statements by regional organizations; population surveys where available.
How ready were the parties to enter into a negotiated settlement?	Stated willingness of parties to avoid or end the violence; willingness to meet with UN and/or face to face; public and private statements.
How well did the UN's approach/strategy match the needs at the time?	Security Council/other mandate; statements by the conflict parties and civil society leaders; peer review assessment.
Was the UN sufficiently resourced for the task?	Results-based budget; comparison with other similarly placed interventions in the past; assessment of envoy as to what resources were required.
Was there unity of effort across the UN system?	Unified strategic plan across UN entities; lack of duplication of resources.

## 6. *Learning*—What can the UN more generally learn from this experience?

Are there comparable peace operations settings where this experience might have application?	Mandates, Secretary-General reports, expert interviews
Did the mission/leadership develop innovative solutions that could become policy?	End of assignment reports, strategic reviews

## VII. Sustainability

While the Tool focuses on the intervention at the most immediate periods before and after a high risk of violent conflict, it should include an evaluation of the extent to which the intervention was linked to longer-term capacities and activities (see User's Day). Key questions in this regard include:

Questions	Possible Key Indicators
Did violence resume soon after the intervention, and if so, why?	Levels of violence pre- and post-intervention; statements by the conflict actors about intentions to resume violence; extent to which agreements were implemented.
Was the work of the peace operation linked to longer-term UN engagements?	Capacities left in place following the intervention; existence of a strategy showing handover of tasks from diplomatic intervention to other actors (UN and non-UN); national conflict prevention capacities in place.
How were root causes impacted by the intervention?	

## VIII. Conclusions

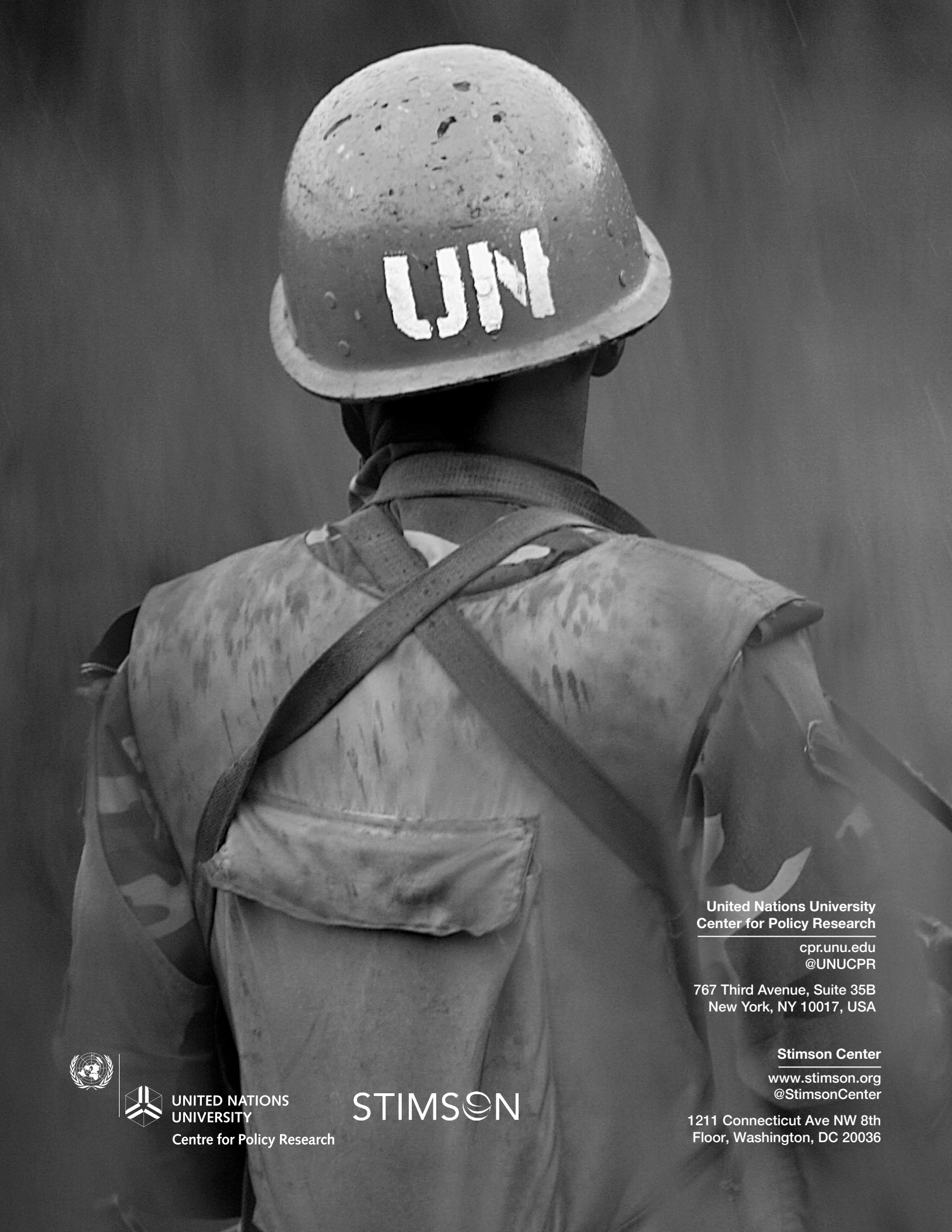
Each assessment should include a set of conclusions based on the above analysis. These can describe what worked particularly well in an intervention and/or what inhibited success. To the extent possible, these conclusions should be generalizable for use by mission leadership in other conflict settings and for the development of policy guidance by DPO.

# References

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- 2 Brandon Prins and Anup Phayal, "Armed peacekeepers really do protect civilians — with one big exception," *Washington Post*, 14 June 2018, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2018/06/13/yes-armed-peacekeepers-actually-do-protect-civilians-except-when-governments-are-the-source-of-the-attacks/?noredirect=on](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2018/06/13/yes-armed-peacekeepers-actually-do-protect-civilians-except-when-governments-are-the-source-of-the-attacks/?hpid=hp_hp-top-table-main-army%3Ahomepage%2Ft-peacekeepers%3Ahomepage%2Ft-peacekeepers&hpid=hp_hp-top-table-main-army%3Ahomepage%2Ft-peacekeepers&hpid=hp_hp-top-table-main-army%3Ahomepage%2Ft-peacekeepers).
- 3 Håvard Hegre, Lisa Hultman & Håvard Mokleiv Nygård, "Evaluating the conflict-reducing effect of UN peacekeeping operations," *The Journal of Politics* 81, 1 (2019): 215–232.
- 4 The Effectiveness of Peace Operations Network (EPON), accessed 30 July 2020, <https://effectivepeaceops.net/>.
- 5 United Nations University Centre for Policy Research recently produced an assessment framework for evaluating the impact of the UN's preventive diplomacy interventions, which offers a strong starting point for this project. United Nations University Centre for Policy Research, *Assessment Framework for UN Preventive Diplomacy: An Approach for UN Mediators and International Policymakers* (Tokyo: United Nations University, 2018), <https://cpr.unu.edu/assessment-framework-for-un-preventive-diplomacy-an-approach-for-un-mediators-and-international-policy-makers.html>.
- 6 This issue is covered in more detailed in the policy paper associated with this project.
- 7 For a more detailed version of this argument, see Jake Sherman and Adam Day, "Political Solutions Must Drive the Design and Implementation of Peace Operations," International Peace Institute Global Observatory, 20 June 2018.
- 8 Jean Arnault, "A Background to the High-Level Panel on Peace Operations," *Global Peace Operations Review*, 6 August 2015.
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- 11 See twin General Assembly and Security Council resolutions on Sustaining Peace: United Nations Security Council, "Resolution 2282, adopted by the Security Council at its 7680th meeting," United Nations, 27 April 2016, S/RES/2282 (2016); United Nations General Assembly, "Report of the Peacebuilding Commission on its ninth session," United Nations, 4 February 2016, A/70/714.
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- 13 E.g. World Bank Development Reports, Small Arms Survey, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute.
- 14 See, e.g. Christian van Stolk et al., *Monitoring and Evaluation in stabilization interventions* (London: RAND Europe, 2011): underscoring the crucial importance of local perceptions in assessing interventions.
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- 17 For a full critique of input-output approaches to M&E in peacekeeping, see Charles T. Hunt, "Avoiding Perplexity: Complexity-Oriented Monitoring and Evaluation for UN Peace Operations," *Complexity Thinking for Peacebuilding Practice and Evaluation* eds. Emery Brusset et al. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 79-104.
- 18 For further work on the difficulty of attribution in such settings, see Michael Bamberger, *Conducting Quality Impact Evaluations Under Budget, Time and Data Constraints* (Washington DC: World Bank, 2006).
- 19 See, United Nations General Assembly, "Strengthening the role of mediation in the peaceful settlement of disputes, conflict prevention and resolution," United Nations, 13 August 2014, A/RES/68/303.
- 20 Rachel Kleinfeld, *Improving Development Aid Design and Evaluation: Plan for Sailboats, Not Trains* (New York: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2015). See also, Center for International Cooperation, Assessment Framework (New York: New York University Centre for International Cooperation, 2011) [on file with author], which suggests, "any claim using counterfactual arguments must be able to demonstrate that a broad range of diverse stakeholders share the proposed perspective . . . this is one area where a 'majority opinion' approach is for now the best approximation of an unknown past or future."
- 21 See, Emery Brusset, Cedric de Coning and Bryn Hughes, (eds.), *Complexity Thinking for Peacebuilding Practice and Evaluation* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017); see also, Rachel Kleinfeld, *Improving Development Aid Design and Evaluation: Plan for Sailboats, Not Traintracks* (New York: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2015).
- 22 Jean Boulton et al., *Embracing Complexity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015): 32.

- 23 For a good description of feedback loops, see, Donella Meadows, *Leverage Points: Places to Intervene in a System*, (Hartland, VT: The Sustainability Institute, 1999), <http://donellameadows.org/archives/leverage-points-places-to-intervene-in-a-system/>.
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- 29 Ibid: for a fuller description of the peer review process.
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- 31 Shonali Shardaesai and Per Wam, *The Conflict Analysis Framework (CAF): Identifying Conflict-Related Obstacles to Development* (Washington DC: World Bank, 2005).
- 32 UK Department for International Development, *Conducting Conflict Assessment: Guidance Note* (London: DFID, 2002); United States Agency for International Development, *Conflict Assessment Framework* (Washington DC: USAID, 2012).
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- 34 United Nations Sustainable Development Group, *United Nations Conflict Analysis Practice Note* (New York: United Nations, 2016), <https://undg.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Conflict-Analysis-Practice-Note-13-May-2016-Version.pdf>.
- 35 This is described in the well-worn metaphor of the iceberg in: United Nations Sustainable Development Group, *United Nations Conflict Analysis Practice Note* (New York: United Nations, 2016), <https://undg.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Conflict-Analysis-Practice-Note-13-May-2016-Version.pdf>.
- 36 See, United States Agency for International Development, *Conflict Assessment Framework* (Washington DC: USAID, 2012), [http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf\\_docs/pnady739.pdf](http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/pnady739.pdf); SIDA, *Practice Guide to Power Analyses* (Stockholm: SIDA, 2013), [http://www.sida.se/contentassets/83f0232c5404440082c9762ba3107d55/power-analysis-a-practical-guide\\_3704.pdf](http://www.sida.se/contentassets/83f0232c5404440082c9762ba3107d55/power-analysis-a-practical-guide_3704.pdf).
- 37 The term "theory of change" is used across a wide range of assessment approaches. We note that in many cases the so-called "theory of change" is less of a theory and more of a logic of causality. While we here make reference to the term "theory of change," we emphasize that it is the logic of causality—what contributed to the key decisions—that is of interest here.
- 38 See OECD, *Guidance on Evaluating Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding Activities* (Paris: OECD, 2008): distinguishing between theory failure and implementation failure. This is discussed in more detail in the section on assessing failure below.
- 39 Adam Day, "Preventive Diplomacy and the Southern Sudan Independence Referendum," *Capturing UN Preventive Diplomacy Success: How and Why Does It Work?* eds. Laurie Nathan et al. (Tokyo: United Nations University, 2018), <https://i.unu.edu/media/cpr.unu.edu/attachment/2754/PD-Sudan.pdf>.
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- 43 Ibid.
- 44 OECD, *Guidance on Evaluating Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding Activities* (Paris: OECD, 2008).
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United Nations University  
Center for Policy Research

[cpr.unu.edu](http://cpr.unu.edu)  
@UNUCPR

767 Third Avenue, Suite 35B  
New York, NY 10017, USA

Stimson Center

[www.stimson.org](http://www.stimson.org)  
@StimsonCenter

1211 Connecticut Ave NW 8th  
Floor, Washington, DC 20036



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