



A Study on Protection of Civilians Through United Nations Peacekeeping Missions From 1999 To 2024

Jeetendra Kumar Yadav

Research Scholar, Department of Political Science/Faculty of Arts, University of Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh, India
Email – jeetendrakumar150786@gmail.com

Abstract: *The United Nations (UN) commitment to protecting civilians through peacekeeping has evolved significantly, shaped by critical historical events and global challenges. This dedication began taking root in the post-Cold War era when the UN initially engaged in missions aimed at maintaining stability in conflict-prone areas. The emphasis on civilian protection, however, took on greater urgency following tragic failures to prevent mass atrocities, particularly in Rwanda in 1994 and Srebrenica in 1995. These crises underscored the need for the UN to adopt more robust measures, leading to the institutionalization of the Protection of Civilians (POC) as a central element in peacekeeping mandates. Today, safeguarding civilians is a top priority in the UN's largest peacekeeping missions around the world, with comprehensive policies, doctrines, and training programs established to support these goals. Nevertheless, today's geopolitical climate and the shifting nature of armed conflicts bring new challenges to the forefront. These developments have prompted renewed discussions about the effectiveness of peacekeeping, with many stakeholders advocating for reassessment and adaptation. While the UN has made notable strides, there are ongoing debates about the limitations and future trajectory of peacekeeping in protecting civilians. Increasingly complex conflicts, shifts in power dynamics, and the proliferation of non-state armed groups all contribute to a more complicated security landscape that peacekeeping missions must navigate. Despite these challenges, civilians around the world continue to look to the UN for protection amid violence and conflict. This paper aims to contribute to the ongoing discourse on the future of UN peacekeeping, with a particular focus on the role of civilian protection. By revisiting pivotal moments in the Security Council's approach to POC and evaluating the ways in which peacekeeping missions have safeguarded civilians, the paper will examine core challenges and dilemmas that have emerged over the last quarter-century. Additionally, it will provide insights into how the UN can adapt and strengthen its peacekeeping model to ensure that it remains effective and relevant in addressing the protection needs of civilians in conflict zones.*

Key Words: *United Nations, peacekeeping, Post-Cold War, Protection of Civilians (POC), Institutionalization, Geopolitical and Security Council.*

1. INTRODUCTION:

In 1999, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) took the historic step of prioritizing civilian protection within its agenda. Responding to crises where civilians and their infrastructure were under direct assault, UNSC Resolution 1265 called on all parties in conflict to adhere to international humanitarian law. Following notable failures in peacekeeping during the 1990s, where operations were unable to prevent widespread civilian casualties, Resolution 1270 authorized the UN mission in Sierra Leone under Chapter VII to explicitly protect civilians. The United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) was thus directed to “within its capabilities and areas of deployment, to afford protection to civilians under imminent threat of physical violence.” These resolutions also requested that the UN Secretary-General provide an annual report to the UNSC on conflict trends affecting civilians and the international response to protect them. Today, peacekeeping remains central to the UNSC's strategy for protecting civilians. Since 1999, a total of 16 UN peacekeeping operations have received mandates explicitly aimed at civilian protection, five of which continue in active conflict zones. These missions operate in complex environments with diverse threats to civilians, and the protection of civilians (POC) mandate has become embedded in the “DNA” of UN peacekeeping.



To support POC mandates, the UN has reinforced its peacekeeping structures, making civilian protection not merely one of many tasks but the core objective of uniformed and civilian personnel. However, contemporary challenges present significant obstacles to this mission. Addressing the UNSC on the 25th anniversary of the POC mandate, ICRC President Mirjana Spoljaric highlighted the dramatic increase in global conflicts—from 20 in 1999 to over 120 in 2024—with devastating impacts on civilians. According to the latest Secretary-General report, civilian fatalities have surged by 72 percent in the past year alone. Conflicts are more protracted and complex, often involving multiple armed factions with external support¹. Meanwhile, geopolitical divisions have eroded consensus within and outside the UNSC, with frequent breaches of conflict norms and UNSC resolutions weakening the international community's resolve to protect civilians. UN peacekeeping missions, including MONUSCO (DRC), MINUSCA (CAR), and UNMISS (South Sudan), face persistent challenges in implementing their POC mandates. The recent withdrawal of MINUSMA from Mali, at the government's request, and MONUSCO's gradual disengagement from areas of the DRC have taken place amid sustained threats to civilians. In some settings, public discontent and anti-UN protests, often influenced by external actors, further complicate peacekeeping operations. Escalating violence against civilians has been especially pronounced in regions where peace operations ended prematurely, such as Sudan. This milestone year calls for critical reflection on peacekeeping's role in civilian protection and exploration of how POC can remain central within new models of conflict prevention, management, and resolution. As UN Member States and the UN Secretariat consider the future of peace operations, understanding why civilian protection became a Security Council priority and how peacekeeping achieves this protection is essential. This analysis also revisits key debates over the last 25 years on civilian protection through peacekeeping, underscoring pivotal questions about the future of the POC mandate in an increasingly complex global landscape.

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

This paper aims to contribute to the ongoing discourse on the future of UN peacekeeping, with a particular focus on the role of civilian protection. By revisiting pivotal moments in the Security Council's approach to POC and evaluating the ways in which peacekeeping missions have safeguarded civilians, the paper will examine core challenges and dilemmas that have emerged over the last quarter-century. Additionally, it will provide insights into how the UN can adapt and strengthen its peacekeeping model to ensure that it remains effective and relevant in addressing the protection needs of civilians in conflict zones.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

This research is a qualitative, descriptive and historical in nature hence the major portion of the study is reliance on secondary data which was obtained from various websites including those of Government of India, United Nations, magazines, journals, other publications, etc. This data was then analyzed and reviewed to arrive at the conclusions.

4. HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE OF DEVELOPMENT OF POC IN PEACEKEEPING :

The evolution of civilian protection in United Nations peacekeeping operations represents a journey marked by key historical moments that reshaped the UN's approach to safeguarding civilians during conflict. During the Cold War, peacekeeping mainly aimed to stabilize conflicts and maintain ceasefires, which indirectly protected civilians by reducing violence and enabling diplomatic resolutions. Notable early instances of civilian protection included the UN Operation in the Congo (1960–1964), where peacekeepers provided refuge to civilians during the Katanga crisis, and the actions of UNIFIL troops who positioned themselves to protect civilians in Lebanon in 1982. However, these interventions were isolated and largely unauthorized by the UN Security Council for explicit civilian protection under Chapter VII of the UN Charter, which underscores the limited scope of peacekeeping mandates at the time. The devastating failures to protect civilians during the genocides in Rwanda and Srebrenica in the 1990s marked a turning point². These tragic events revealed severe shortcomings in UN peacekeeping: the absence of clear civilian protection mandates, insufficient command structures, poor intelligence sharing, and critical missteps in military strategy³. The systemic issues also reflected deeper challenges within Security Council mandates, inadequate resources, and decisions by Member States that ultimately left civilians unprotected. These failures galvanized a sense of moral urgency within the UN to address civilian protection more explicitly, leading to a push for Security Council mandates that directly prioritized the protection of civilians (POC) as a fundamental component of peacekeeping operations⁴.

In response to these crises, the UN acknowledged that protecting civilians might sometimes necessitate the use of force and require a rapid, well-prepared response force. This era saw a growing recognition within the Security Council of the need for mandates that addressed threats to civilians, including targeted violence against women and children and conflict-related sexual violence. Former Secretary-General Kofi Annan became a prominent advocate, calling upon Member States to commit to civilian protection at the opening of the UN General Assembly in 1999. He



emphasized the importance of ensuring that the Security Council could effectively confront these humanitarian crises, urging collective action to support mandates that reflected the complex needs of modern conflict zones. Annan's approach to protection was broad and multi-faceted, as he envisioned a protection agenda that included both military and civilian actors working collaboratively. In his 1998 report on the situation in Africa, he described the protection of civilians as a "humanitarian imperative," urging the Security Council to mobilize resources to not only address immediate protection needs but also tackle the root causes of internal conflicts⁵. This conceptual framework laid the groundwork for what would become the modern POC doctrine in UN peacekeeping. It included monitoring human rights violations, engaging with national governments, and strengthening legal and security institutions, establishing a more comprehensive approach to protecting civilians in conflict zones. Through these efforts, the UN has developed a more robust and systematic approach to the protection of civilians, although challenges and limitations continue to test its effectiveness in peacekeeping missions.

4.1 Protection of Civilians Agenda From 1999 To 2009

The initial decade of the Protection of Civilians (POC) agenda from 1999 to 2009 saw a series of milestones and challenges for UN peacekeeping efforts. In this period, the UN Security Council (UNSC) authorized peacekeepers in ten different missions to safeguard civilians. However, the actual implementation of these mandates varied significantly across different missions, revealing a range of experiences and lessons learned. In some instances, peacekeepers were able to take robust actions to protect civilians, while in others, their efforts fell short of expectations. One early and significant test occurred in 2003 during the Ituri crisis in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), where reports of severe human rights abuses, including systematic sexual violence linked to the conflict, and the risk of escalating ethnic violence, evoked comparisons to the Rwandan genocide. At the time, the UN mission in the DRC, MONUC, had a POC mandate but was not adequately equipped to respond with the necessary force. This gap led to the UNSC's authorization of Operation Artemis, a European Union-led military intervention that served as a precursor to more robust action by MONUC. With MONUC's subsequent engagement in eastern DRC, significant progress was made in protecting civilians, using both diplomatic measures, such as militia disarmament, and military force when needed. Between 2005 and 2006, MONUC's forceful actions were among the most assertive in the UN's history, contributing to civilian protection and the facilitation of elections. In stark contrast, similar protection efforts in Kiwanja in 2008 failed to prevent significant harm to civilians, prompting the UNSC to place increased focus on POC across missions. The failure to adequately protect civilians in some instances, alongside lessons from these experiences, led to a shift in how POC mandates were framed. In 2008, UNSC Resolution 1856 granted MONUC the first mandate explicitly prioritizing civilian protection, authorizing the use of force to shield civilians from harm by any parties to the conflict⁶. Additionally, a 2009 UN policy known as the Human Rights Due Diligence Policy (HRDDP) was implemented, requiring UN support for non-UN security forces to be conditioned on adherence to international human rights, reinforcing the POC framework. Simultaneously, the international community faced significant challenges in Darfur, Sudan. The UN faced resistance from the Sudanese government regarding the expansion of peacekeeping efforts into the Darfur region. This impasse led to the creation of a hybrid UN-AU mission, the UN-AU Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID) in 2007. Although this mission was one of the UN's largest and most complex, its efforts were hindered by a lack of genuine peace processes and limited host-state consent, though it succeeded in reducing violence and protecting civilians⁷.

4.2 Doctrinal Framework and Operational Guidance for The Protection of Civilians

The initial years of implementing the POC agenda highlighted the need for clearer doctrinal and operational guidance. A 2009 study by OCHA and the UN's Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) revealed that UN personnel frequently had differing interpretations of POC mandates, even within the same mission context. This discrepancy pointed to the absence of a shared understanding of POC across missions, particularly regarding military doctrine and training, leaving troop-contributing countries (TCCs) without a unified approach. In response, the DPKO began developing doctrinal frameworks for POC.

The 2010 Operational Concept on the Protection of Civilians in UN Peacekeeping Operations expanded the understanding of POC to include not only military intervention but also preventive and developmental measures. This included a three-tiered strategy: 1) protection through dialogue and engagement; 2) physical protection via presence and force if necessary; and 3) fostering a protective environment through capacity-building and rule-of-law support. The concept also emphasized POC as a whole-of-mission responsibility, incorporating military, police, and civilian personnel into the protection effort. Additionally, by 2012, the DPKO established dedicated Protection of Civilians teams both at UN headquarters and within missions, including Senior Protection of Civilians Advisers, whose role was



to ensure that POC concerns were systematically integrated into mission planning and implementation. These teams played a key role in translating doctrinal guidance into practical, operational frameworks on the ground⁸.

4.3 Practical Innovations and Tools For Protecting Civilians

In parallel with doctrinal development, several field-level innovations emerged to enhance the effectiveness of POC efforts. The DRC became a testing ground for new protection tools. MONUC established Joint Protection Teams (JPTs) combining military, police, and civilian staff, who visited high-risk areas to assess civilian threats and formulate responses. The mission also created Community Liaison Assistants (CLAs) to bridge the gap between peacekeepers and local populations, improving communication and understanding of community vulnerabilities. These initiatives, along with the establishment of Community Alert Networks (CANs), enhanced the mission's early-warning capabilities and response mechanisms. As POC mandates became more robust, peacekeeping missions increasingly integrated political engagement at the local level, focusing on local conflict management processes and fostering inter-community dialogue. In the Central African Republic, MINUSCA supported the creation of Local Peace Committees, which became instrumental in facilitating conflict resolution and early warning, particularly in areas where national political processes had stalled. Additionally, UN police forces (UNPOL) played an important role in POC efforts, often working alongside military units and sometimes acting as the primary uniformed presence in areas such as internally displaced persons (IDP) camps. Their community-oriented policing strategies helped strengthen relations with local populations, fostering trust and enhancing the overall effectiveness of the peacekeeping mission⁹.

4.4 Exploring the Limits of POC Implementation (2013)

In 2013, the UN's POC mandates were tested in several critical contexts, pushing the boundaries of peacekeeping operations. The establishment of a Force Intervention Brigade (FIB) in the DRC under UNSC Resolution 2098 marked the first time the UN authorized offensive operations as part of a peacekeeping mission. The FIB, composed of troops from South Africa, Tanzania, and Malawi, was tasked with neutralizing armed groups, including the M23 (March 23 Movement), through robust military action. Although the operation successfully weakened the M23 and reduced threats to civilians, concerns about impartiality arose, as the FIB's close ties to the Congolese military raised questions about the UN's neutrality in the conflict. Similarly, in Mali, the MINUSMA mission, which aimed to stabilize the country following a military coup, faced challenges due to its proximity to French counterterrorism operations. The close collaboration between MINUSMA and French forces risked undermining the mission's perceived impartiality, complicating its ability to protect civilians and maintain credibility in a highly polarized environment. Another significant test occurred in South Sudan, where the outbreak of civil war in December 2013 led to the establishment of large-scale POC sites within UNMISS bases, which sheltered tens of thousands of displaced civilians. Although these sites served as crucial havens, their long-term sustainability posed significant challenges in terms of security, resources, and the eventual transition of responsibility to the host government¹⁰.

4.5 Training, Accountability, and Performance Evaluation

The growing complexity of POC mandates necessitated improvements in training, accountability, and performance evaluation. Initially, POC was not integrated into military doctrine or pre-deployment training, which led the DPKO to develop training modules for troop-contributing countries (TCCs). Over time, the focus on POC became an integral part of pre-deployment preparation. To ensure consistent and high-quality implementation, the UN established the Office for the Peacekeeping Strategic Partnership (OPSP) in 2013 to assess peacekeeping missions, identify gaps in performance, and evaluate the effectiveness of POC strategies. This initiative helped standardize the interpretation of rules of engagement and improve coordination between military, police, and civilian components. The 2015 Leaders' Summit on Peacekeeping emphasized the importance of accountability, setting new standards for peacekeeping performance and ensuring that TCCs prioritized POC in their operations.

With initiatives like the Secretary-General's Action for Peacekeeping (A4P) agenda, these efforts have led to a more integrated and results-oriented approach to civilian protection in UN peacekeeping missions¹¹.

5. THE UNIQUE NATURE OF PROTECTION IN UN PEACEKEEPING:

The concept of Protection of Civilians (POC) within UN peacekeeping has evolved, highlighting its unique position in providing security. As discussions continue about the future of peace operations, it's essential to pinpoint elements of POC that remain specific to UN peacekeeping and distinguish it from other protective frameworks. This approach ensures clarity on areas where the UN has a comparative advantage and where other organizations might take on similar roles.



5.1 An Integrated, Multi-Tiered Strategy for Protection

The integration of civilian expertise bolsters the mission's protective capabilities, challenging the idea that only armed peacekeepers can secure civilian safety. Recent studies on unarmed civilian protection validate this approach, showing that local empowerment and civilian participation can yield substantial protective effects. Peacekeeping's reliance on both military and civilian components in all aspects of protection is a significant advantage that distinguishes UN missions from other international forces, which often lack comparable civilian support structures or local knowledge. The UN's approach to protection in peacekeeping missions involves three interconnected tiers, which together create a distinctive protective framework. While the physical protection offered by uniformed personnel (Tier 2) often draws the most focus, it is complemented by political efforts and preventive measures (Tiers 1 and 3), forming an interconnected system. Through dialogue with communities, local officials, and other actors, uniformed components can work towards peacebuilding objectives, including security sector reforms. Their presence also aids humanitarian operations, allowing aid to reach remote populations. The POC approach involves not only armed personnel but also civilian staff who play critical roles across all tiers. Civilian peacekeepers engage in conflict resolution, support for gender-based initiatives, child protection, and prevention of sexual violence. They work to strengthen human rights, promote women's participation, and advocate for institutional reform. Civilian personnel contribute to Tier 2 protection by identifying risks with local communities and helping mitigate them through early warning systems that mobilize local and national resources for immediate intervention. These teams also provide protection by mere presence, discouraging violence and sometimes facilitating evacuations¹².

5.2 Impartiality

UN peacekeeping's multilateral and impartial nature is one of its most defining characteristics, ensuring that missions operate without favoring states' interests. The UN Security Council (UNSC) authorizes POC mandates, emphasizing the UN's commitment to neutrality and focusing solely on civilian protection, free from political agendas. This impartiality is critical, as it upholds the mission's credibility with local communities, encouraging trust and cooperation with peacekeepers. This trust is crucial for effective civilian protection since civilians are more likely to provide information or seek assistance if they view peacekeepers as impartial. The multinational composition of UN peacekeeping missions, comprising personnel from diverse regions, further solidifies their impartiality. Unlike regional coalitions, which may have national interests tied to the conflict, UN peacekeepers are seen as neutral protectors of civilians. While regional actors or ad-hoc coalitions could adopt similar mandates, they often face limitations due to their closeness to the conflict, which can influence or compromise their perceived neutrality. Peacekeeping operations led by neighboring countries or regional alliances may also lack local trust, as their interests are often perceived as politically or culturally motivated. The UN's long-standing commitment to impartiality has been crucial for fulfilling the POC mandate, even as challenges have arisen over time. Although regional and international organizations have attempted to apply similar frameworks, the UN's established impartiality remains a cornerstone of its protective mandate, as it allows for an unchallenged focus on POC, free from external agendas. Moving forward, other organizations interested in adopting multilateral protective strategies may need to adopt the same impartial principles and invest in building trust with host communities¹³.

5.3 Capability for Immediate Physical Protection

One defining aspect of protection in UN peacekeeping is its capability to offer immediate physical protection to civilians. With armed uniformed personnel deployed, peacekeepers can deter or use force against armed threats targeting civilians. However, this force is not limitless. UN peacekeeping mandates restrict this protection to situations within the mission's reach and ability, focusing on localized threats rather than replacing a state's duty to safeguard its citizens.

Missions do not bear a universal responsibility for all civilian protection but are expected to act against evident threats nearby. While other entities, such as regional or international forces, could theoretically offer similar protection, several challenges exist. For instance, regional organizations would need a clear doctrine defining the POC mandate, field structures aligned with protective objectives, and trained personnel prepared to defend civilians. Additionally, accountability systems and evaluation mechanisms are vital for learning and improving effectiveness. The UN's approach evolved over decades, developing an integrated system that blends direct protective actions with comprehensive, field-tested policies. Replicating this model in other organizations would necessitate considerable investment, rigorous planning, and an established culture of accountability¹⁴.



6. PROTECTION THROUGH PEACEKEEPING: CHALLENGES AND CRITICAL CONSIDERATIONS:

The evolution of UN peacekeeping with a strong emphasis on the protection of civilians (POC) has brought about distinct operational, strategic, and ethical challenges that Member States, the UN Secretariat, and other stakeholders must continuously address. With peacekeeping missions now deployed in increasingly complex environments, questions arise not only about the effectiveness of POC but also about how these efforts can evolve to better serve vulnerable populations. This overview explores key considerations for the future of peacekeeping as missions grapple with diverse conflict settings, host-state relations, and broader political dynamics.

6.1 The Significance of Partnerships in Peacekeeping

From the inception of the POC mandate, UN peacekeeping was never intended to function in isolation. Partnerships with host states, regional organizations, and international actors have been essential in creating protective environments. Collaboration with regional organizations, such as the African Union, has enabled more flexible responses, and the recent Security Council resolution to support African Union-led peace support operations marks a significant step toward sustaining these partnerships. However, challenges can arise when working with non-UN forces, as these groups may prioritize security or counterterrorism in ways that are less compatible with the UN's broader POC objectives. To ensure that these partnerships truly advance civilian protection, peacekeeping missions must work closely with regional actors, balancing operational demands with protection mandates and mitigating any risks of harm to civilians from partnered forces¹⁵.

6.2 Evaluating the Effectiveness of Peacekeeping Operations in Protecting Civilians

Over the past 25 years, the protection of civilians in UN peacekeeping operations has garnered both praise and skepticism. While incidents of harm to civilians in UN-mandated areas have led to questions about the missions' effectiveness, research largely supports the notion that UN peacekeepers play a valuable role in reducing civilian casualties and preventing further harm. Peacekeepers often work in austere and expansive territories with limited resources, yet their presence alone tends to mitigate violence, reduce the geographic spread of conflict, and decrease subnational tensions. These positive impacts are attributed to advocacy, monitoring, and direct intervention, as well as deterrent actions that prevent violence from reaching civilians. Notably, research indicates that a larger troop presence can enhance the protective capacity of a mission, not only through physical deterrence but also by symbolizing international resolve. However, recent analysis suggests that it is not simply the quantity of peacekeepers that matters, but rather the ratio of peacekeepers to civilians in any given area and their approach to addressing the specific tactics of armed actors. The most effective operations leverage the peacekeepers' presence as a deterrent rather than depending on direct force, often aided by a proactive stance and rapid-response capabilities developed in contexts such as the MONUSCO mission. However, peacekeepers face significant challenges in preventing violence when it emanates from host-state forces, as their mandate often relies on host-state consent. Missions can struggle to respond robustly in cases where state actors perpetrate violence, and peacekeeping forces may be limited in their actions to maintain diplomatic relations.

Nonetheless, the UN Security Council and other bodies recognize the importance of tailored POC assessments that consider mission-specific goals and circumstances. The Comprehensive Planning and Performance Assessment System (CPAS) has been instrumental in helping missions define context-specific indicators, enabling more accurate performance assessments and informed decision-making¹⁶.

6.3 Balancing the Primacy of Politics with Civilian Protection

The High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations underscored that sustainable peace emerges primarily from political processes rather than military action. This primacy of politics, however, can sometimes appear at odds with the immediate needs for civilian protection, especially if pursuing political objectives leads to hesitancy in confronting authorities over harm to civilians. While POC is central to peacekeeping mandates, political considerations may sometimes delay direct protective actions. However, the UN's three-tiered approach to POC integrates political engagement, underscoring that political stability and civilian protection are interdependent goals. The adaptive nature of peacekeeping allows missions to pursue local and sub-national political initiatives even when national efforts stall, with integrated efforts across civilian, police, and military peacekeepers facilitating both political and protective outcomes. Effective leadership is essential in balancing these sometimes-competing goals, as unity among peacekeeping actors contributes to a holistic approach that values protection as a crucial component of any peace strategy.



6.4 Challenges of Protection of Civilian in the Absence of Peace

Many UN peacekeeping missions are now deployed in regions without stable peace agreements, in which violence and instability remain endemic. In such environments, peacekeepers face logistical, operational, and security hurdles that hinder their ability to implement POC mandates effectively. Despite these difficulties, evidence shows that peacekeeping missions can still exert a protective influence at the local level. Peacekeepers can help maintain security in otherwise unstable areas, mediate local disputes that could spark broader conflict, and engage actors to honor existing ceasefire agreements. The protective impact of peacekeepers is often most visible when they are withdrawn without adequate alternative mechanisms to address ongoing risks to civilians, underscoring their stabilizing role. Through engagement with local leaders and communities, peacekeepers work to build trust, fostering cooperation that can strengthen peace initiatives. This local-level engagement contributes not only to immediate stability but also to long-term resilience, reducing the risk of violent escalation. While comprehensive national political processes may stall, these community-level efforts remain an essential component of effective peacekeeping¹⁷.

6.5 Strategic Planning for Peacekeeper Transitions and Withdrawals

A final consideration is determining when it is appropriate for peacekeepers to withdraw. The absence of peacekeepers can leave civilians vulnerable, especially when national security forces lack the capacity to provide sustained protection. The Security Council has underscored the importance of establishing POC as a priority in peacekeeping transitions, ensuring that UN missions do not depart prematurely. The departure of MINUSMA from Mali and UNAMID from Sudan illustrates the risks of inadequate planning for peacekeeping transitions, with both cases seeing increased violence post-withdrawal. To avoid such scenarios, the UN and its partners must ensure a robust plan for capacity-building and continued international support, so that peacekeeping efforts leave a lasting, positive impact on civilian safety. In sum, the challenges facing UN peacekeeping operations in their pursuit of civilian protection are significant, yet their evolving approaches and the potential for effective partnerships offer pathways for meaningful protection outcomes. As the UN looks to the future, these critical considerations and strategic adjustments will be essential to ensuring that peacekeeping missions adapt to meet new and complex protection challenges¹⁸.

6.6 The Role of Host-State Consent in Effective Civilian Protection

A foundational principle of UN peacekeeping is the consent of the host state, which allows peacekeepers to operate with a degree of legitimacy and cooperation necessary for effective mandate implementation. However, when host-state consent is compromised, peacekeepers may face restrictions that severely impact their protective capabilities. Obstacles such as limited movement, delayed supplies, and the potential reluctance to confront host-state actors over civilian protection violations present substantial operational challenges. To avoid straining diplomatic relations, peacekeeping missions may hesitate to address abuses by host-state forces, thereby compromising POC objectives.

Even so, compromised consent does not necessarily preclude protection; peacekeepers can still engage in local mediation and support community-led protection efforts that do not rely on direct cooperation with national governments¹⁹. For example, despite political obstacles in South Sudan, UNMISS has supported community dialogues and local peace agreements, demonstrating that POC is feasible at localized levels despite higher-level obstructions.

7. CONCLUSION

UN Peacekeeping is frequently viewed primarily as a conflict management tool, rather than as a fundamental contributor to the strategic goal of safeguarding civilians from conflict and violence. The 25th anniversary of the Protection of Civilians (POC) agenda and mandate provides a timely opportunity to highlight this critical role, encouraging efforts to ensure that, despite an unpredictable global and security environment, UN peacekeeping remains a powerful instrument within the multilateral system for civilian protection. Achieving this objective requires both adaptability and innovation - a path the UN has traversed before. Peacekeeping is not formally outlined in the UN Charter; it emerged through innovative and collaborative diplomacy and has evolved over the years into a globally recognized framework for maintaining peace. Those same qualities are essential now to guide the future of peace operations. Looking forward, there are tangible opportunities for stakeholders in peacekeeping to enhance the role of UN peace operations in protecting civilians. This includes continuous evaluations of peacekeeping mandates, budgets, and policies through intergovernmental bodies like the UN Security Council (UNSC) and General Assembly (UNGA), where prioritizing POC remains crucial. As highlighted in this paper, prioritizing civilians and their protection within UN peacekeeping demanded a fundamental transformation. This shift required uniformed and civilian personnel, along with UN Secretariat staff, to adopt new mindsets and approaches. Adapting to this mandate called for extensive efforts across multiple areas, including doctrine development, operational guidelines, training, evaluation, and communication. This transition was made possible through considerable resource investments by a diverse array of actors. Implementing



the Protection of Civilians (POC) mandate in peacekeeping also required continuous innovation to address new conflict environments, evolving tactics of armed groups, and civilians' shifting expectations, especially within a climate of misinformation and disinformation. Looking ahead, the pivotal question for the next 25 years is whether UN Member States and other peacekeeping stakeholders will continue to build on this foundation, committing to make civilian protection a core objective of peace operations into the future.

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