

**Security Council**

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**Letter dated 24 December 2015 from the Chair of the  
Security Council Working Group on Peacekeeping Operations  
addressed to the President of the Security Council**

I have the honour to transmit herewith the concept note for the second thematic discussion of the Security Council Working Group on Peacekeeping Operations in 2015, held on 23 March, on the theme “Safety and security of United Nations peacekeepers: asymmetric threats” (see annex).

I should be grateful if the present letter and its annex were brought to the attention of the members of the Security Council and issued as a document of the Council.

(*Signed*) Mahamat Zene **Cherif**  
Chair

Security Council Working Group on Peacekeeping Operations



**Annex to the letter dated 24 December 2015 from the Chair of the Security Council Working Group on Peacekeeping Operations addressed to the President of the Security Council**

**Concept note for the Security Council Working Group on Peacekeeping Operations thematic discussion on the theme “Safety and security of United Nations peacekeepers: asymmetric threats”, 23 March 2015**

On 23 March 2015, Chad, as Chair of the Security Council Working Group on Peacekeeping Operations, will facilitate a thematic discussion on the theme “Safety and security of United Nations peacekeepers: asymmetric threats”. The meeting will bring together Security Council members and a broad range of Member States, including troop-contributing and police-contributing countries. David Pressman, Alternate Representative for Special Political Affairs of the United States Mission to the United Nations, Dmitry Titov, Assistant Secretary-General for Rule of Law and Security Institutions in the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, and Abigail Hartley, Chief of Policy, Advocacy and Public Information, United Nations Mine Action Service, have been invited to brief.

**Asymmetric threats and the impact of improvised explosive devices on United Nations peace operations**

United Nations peace operations, namely, peacekeeping operations and special political missions, have been increasingly deployed in countries experiencing high-intensity conflict. According to the United Nations University, two thirds of peacekeepers and almost 90 per cent of special political mission staff are currently operating in such environments.<sup>a</sup> In this context, the United Nations has increasingly become the target of armed groups, including terrorists, using asymmetric warfare tactics.

The threat posed by asymmetric warfare to the safety and security of United Nations personnel is best illustrated by the growing use of improvised explosive devices. The impact of their threat on United Nations peace operations is multifaceted:

- Improvised explosive devices have a human cost, given that they kill civilians, peacekeepers and humanitarian personnel. Since January 2013, the Mine Action Service office in Mali has recorded a total of 409 confirmed casualties (135 killed and 274 injured) resulting from improvised explosive devices, of whom 142 have been peacekeepers (25 killed and 117 injured) deployed to the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA). This figure accounts for approximately 85 per cent of the total number of MINUSMA peacekeeper casualties (158). In the past six months, MINUSMA has had more casualties than the remaining peacekeeping operations combined;
- Improvised explosive devices have a financial cost, given that they require protection measures, including additional training and costly specialized equipment, such as jammers, radars and mine-protected troop carriers, as well

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<sup>a</sup> See *Examining Major Recent Trends in Violent Conflict* (United Nations University, 2014).

as the possible redeployment of mission assets, and result in the destruction of buildings and equipment;

- Improvised explosive devices have an operational impact, given that they undermine the operational effectiveness and freedom of movement of peace operations. The threat of these devices may deter civilian and military personnel from moving out of their camps, thus preventing interactions with local actors and the implementation of critical mission-mandated tasks. It may also discourage Member States from contributing troops to peace operations owing to the increased threat posed to their safety and security;
- Improvised explosive devices have a political impact, given that they prevent peace operations from discharging their mandate, including with regard to the protection of civilians. These devices therefore have the potential to seriously undermine the credibility of the United Nations. For example, in 2003 the bombing of the Canal Hotel in Baghdad resulted in the withdrawal within weeks of most of the staff of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq. Today, owing to the threat posed by improvised explosive devices, MINUSMA is facing great difficulty in carrying out key tasks mandated by the Security Council, especially in northern Mali.

#### **Response by United Nations peace operations to the threat posed by improvised explosive devices**

In this context, it is a matter of urgency that measures be identified and implemented to help United Nations peacekeepers to mitigate asymmetric threats. A wide range of initiatives have already been undertaken to enhance the capacity of peace operations to deal with asymmetric threats, including improvised explosive devices, both in the field and at the policy level.

##### *Operational response*

On the basis of a needs assessment and planning exercise undertaken in the second half of 2014, a package of enhanced measures has been designed to support MINUSMA in mitigating the threat posed by asymmetric attacks, including improvised explosive devices. In this context, the Mine Action Service provides support, training, mentorship and equipment to MINUSMA peacekeepers, in particular to infantry units and explosive ordnance disposal companies. With respect to the primary responsibility of the host nation for the overall safety and security of peacekeepers, training is also provided to the Malian defence and security forces.

In Somalia, the Mine Action Service is training, advising, mentoring and equipping African Union troops to strengthen their capacities to deal with explosive and asymmetric threats. Support is also being provided to the Federal Government of Somalia security forces. In early 2015, the first national improvised explosive device defeat capacity was established within the Somali police force.

The measures implemented in Mali and Somalia strengthen peacekeepers' mobility, protection and response capacities, thereby further enhancing the capacity of peace operations to carry out their mandate.

*Capacity development response*

A Uniformed Capabilities Development Steering Group, established at the director level in January 2014, identified eight strategic workstreams considered to be critical to ensuring that peacekeeping operations are capable of effectively addressing the challenges expected in future operating environments. One workstream, an improvised explosive device survivability project, is aimed at ensuring that peacekeepers are able to operate in a threat environment characterized by the use of improvised explosive devices, complex attacks and other asymmetric assaults targeting peacekeepers directly, for both the protection of civilians and force protection purposes.

*Policy response*

At the policy level, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations is coordinating the drafting of guidelines on addressing the threat of improvised explosive devices for all United Nations personnel. The exercise, chaired by the Mine Action Service, involves all relevant stakeholders, including those within the Department, such as the Office of Military Affairs, the Policy, Evaluation and Training Division and the United Nations Police Division, and others, such as the Department of Political Affairs, the Department of Field Support and the Department of Safety and Security.

**Considerations for a comprehensive response to asymmetric threats**

Addressing the threat posed by improvised explosive devices and, more broadly, asymmetric threats is a challenging endeavour that necessitates adequate capabilities and resources. Asymmetric threats can be dealt with only through the development of a comprehensive approach involving a wide variety of initiatives and measures. Such an approach includes the provision of required training and equipment to United Nations staff, appropriate standard operating procedures for peace operations and improved weapons and ammunition management in crisis areas, given that stockpiles of weapons and ammunition are a readily available source of explosive ordnance used in improvised explosive devices. Wider initiatives, including the strengthening of national and international legal frameworks and export control regimes, as well as enhanced information exchange, can also be useful in mitigating the threat.

Technology can play an instrumental role in enhancing the capacity of the United Nations to address asymmetric threats and threats posed by improvised explosive devices, as explained in the final report of the Expert Panel on Technology and Innovation in United Nations Peacekeeping.<sup>b</sup> For instance, the report mentions the positive impact that “bolt-on” armour or ground-penetrating radar can have; however, such technology needs to be part of a broader response.

Awareness of and compliance with existing legal frameworks related to improvised explosive devices also need to be strengthened. These frameworks include Security Council resolutions, such as resolutions 2161 (2014) and 2178 (2014), both of which consider improvised explosive devices, Council-mandated arms embargoes and sanctions regimes, and the Protocol on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Mines, Booby-traps and Other Devices as Amended on

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<sup>b</sup> Available at [www.performancepeacekeeping.org/offline/download.pdf](http://www.performancepeacekeeping.org/offline/download.pdf).

3 May 1996. In particular, High Contracting Parties to the Protocol need to be reminded of their obligations under article 12 regarding the protection of peacekeeping and other missions from the effects of minefields, mined areas, mines, booby-traps and other devices, which include improvised explosive devices.

Responding to asymmetric threats and threats posed by improvised explosive devices therefore goes well beyond the reach of United Nations peace operations. In particular, it is generally agreed that peace operations should not become involved in addressing the network of financiers, bomb builders and combatants who support groups involved in asymmetric and improvised explosive device attacks.

In this context, there is a need to better define the role of relevant stakeholders, both within and outside the United Nations. The definition of a United Nations-wide approach would help to clarify the responsibilities of the various United Nations entities involved, as well as help to define requirements in terms of capability development, training and force generation.

Cooperation between the United Nations and other relevant actors, such as regional organizations, Member States and troop-contributing and police-contributing countries, could also be enhanced. Such collaboration, which would require the development of a common understanding of the nature of the asymmetric threats, would be useful in determining how the activities and competencies of other actors can best complement United Nations efforts.

Finally, addressing asymmetric threats is a costly endeavour. In particular, the provision of appropriate training and equipment to United Nations personnel requires significant financial resources.

### **Way forward**

The Security Council has an important role to play in defining the response of United Nations peace operations to asymmetric threats and threats posed by improvised explosive devices, as well as with regard to designing a comprehensive international approach to such threats. The Security Council could consider the following issues through mission-specific or country-specific resolutions or through a thematic resolution on the matter.

First, the Security Council could consider measures to develop the national capabilities of Member States to address asymmetric threats and threats posed by improvised explosive devices, including through bilateral cooperation. The reinforcement of the capacity of host nations of peace operations should be given priority in order not to place the United Nations on the front line against asymmetric threats or the armed groups using them. Such capacity-development activities should include initiatives in the field of the rule of law to include a criminal justice dimension in the response.

Second, the Security Council could identify ways to mainstream the need to address asymmetric threats and threats posed by improvised explosive devices into the mandates of peace operations. This could be done by encouraging troop-contributing and police-contributing countries to train and equip their contingents to operate in environments affected by these threats and to adapt their standard operating procedures accordingly. The Council could also consider calling for the inclusion of a counter-improvised explosive device expert capacity in peace operations to train and advise troop-contributing and police-contributing countries

and national authorities. Requesting the creation of such a component through Council mandates would secure assessed budget funding for these crucial activities. Such provisions would enhance overall force protection capability and further enable peace operations to carry out their mandate.

Third, the Security Council should invite the United Nations to develop a system-wide strategy to counter improvised explosive devices. Such a strategy could better determine the roles and responsibilities of the Organization and its various entities, taking into account the development of Department of Peacekeeping Operations guidelines on addressing the threat of improvised explosive devices, as well as activities of actors such as the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate and the Counter-Terrorism Committee.

Fourth, the Security Council could explore ways to enhance the collaboration between the United Nations and other relevant stakeholders, including regional organizations, the International Criminal Police Organization and Member States. There is a need for the United Nations to take advantage of the experience of other actors, especially those who have developed an expertise in improvised explosive devices.

Fifth, the Security Council could consider ways to enhance the implementation of, and possibly strengthen, existing legal frameworks relevant to improvised explosive devices, such as Council-mandated arms embargoes and sanctions regimes. The Council could also call for the implementation of relevant international humanitarian law instruments, such as the Protocol on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Mines, Booby-traps and Other Devices as Amended on 3 May 1996.

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