

UKRAINE OPTIONS PAPER: PEACE OPERATIONS

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Section A: Introduction

1. This paper outlines potential models for an international peace operation to contribute to the implementation of an agreement to end hostilities between Russia and Ukraine.
2. The paper focuses on 4 issues:
 - Scenarios and types of possible operation (*Section B*);
 - The primary tasks of a peace operation (*Section C*);
 - Mandating authority and oversight mechanisms (*Section D*);
 - The composition and deployment of an operation (*Section E*).
3. Before addressing these points, we should note some general caveats to the analysis.
4. It is an axiom of planning for effective peace operations that *any mission should be designed to serve a specific political agreement or process*. Optimally, planners should only design a peace operation once the outlines of an agreement or process is clear. In reality, this is not always possible. At the present time, there is little clarity over the terms on which hostilities between Russia and Ukraine will pause or end, when they will do so or whether there will be any appetite in either Moscow or Kyiv for neutral outside involvement. This paper, therefore, offers options based on broad scenarios for the end of the war (see Section B below).
5. Nonetheless, many essential details about the actual circumstances for an end to hostilities – such as the relative balance of forces between Russia and Ukraine, and the location and length of the front lines between them – cannot be predicted with confidence. There are “blanks” that planners will need to fill in when peace is possible.
6. It is also important to note that, while this paper focuses on options for a peace operation, any such mission is likely to be only one element of a much broader international contribution to ending hostilities between Ukraine and Russia. It is, for example, probable that external actors (such as the European Union, international financial institutions, etc.) will play a significant part in reconstruction and economic stabilization. However, they fall outside the immediate purview of this paper, which remains security issues.¹

¹ This paper also focuses on possibilities for a peace operation *on land* as part of settlement to end the war. There have been discussions of an international *naval* operation to escort ships carrying grain and other agricultural products out of the port of Odessa (see for example “The blockade of Ukraine’s ports is worsening world hunger,” *The Economist*, 21 May 2022). Such an operation could take place against the backdrop of ongoing hostilities, to help secure global food supplies. A similar naval mission could also operate in conjunction

Section B: Types of possible mission

7. Given the caveats set out above, it is necessary to consider (i) what types of agreement an international peace operation may be required to support and (ii) what scenarios may apply on the battlefield at the time a peace operation is envisaged and deployed. Having taken these factors into account, we can outline what types of mission *may* be possible.

Types of agreement and battlefield conditions

8. The current fighting between Russia and Ukraine may end, temporarily or permanently, with a number of types of agreement, ranging from thin deals to well-developed bargains.²
9. Although conflict resolution specialists use a range of terms to describe the ways hostilities end, there are five broad categories of agreement that *may* apply in Ukraine:³
 - i. A general **truce**, allowing all sides to pause hostilities for a limited period of time and undertake limited humanitarian acts and confidence building measures, such as prisoner exchanges.
 - ii. A **cessation of hostilities**, by which both sides stop fighting, but without (i) a clear set of military measures to reduce the risks of renewed combat; or (ii) a clear political pathway to negotiate solutions to territorial and other issues arising from the war.
 - iii. A more developed **ceasefire**, by which both sides both stop fighting *and* agree to processes (however preliminary and tentative) to both reduce risks of a return to violence and discuss the political agreements necessary for a broader settlement.
 - iv. A **transitional agreement**, involving a fuller set of security arrangements (such as long-term commitments on the movement and staging of forces), and parallel diplomatic agreements including plans to negotiate a lasting peace framework.
 - v. A **final agreement**, covering a complete set of security and political arrangements.
10. International peace operations can be deployed in support of any of these types of agreement. Generally speaking, experts on peacekeeping are cautious about deploying missions to facilitate very minimal truce agreements where there is no credible “peace to keep”. In such situations, humanitarian agencies may be better placed to support short-

with a land-based peace operation in a post-conflict setting. The terms of such a maritime mission are a matter for specialists in naval affairs.

² It is also possible that hostilities will grind to a halt without any sort of agreement at all, due to exhaustion on both sides, but in this case there would be no basis for a monitoring mechanism.

³ In some cases, this paper uses “ceasefire” as a shorthand for any pause in hostilities in any situation other than a basic truce. See Robert Foster, “Ceasefires” in S. Romaniuk et al. (eds.), *The Palgrave Encyclopaedia of Global Security Studies* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).

term measures (such as free movement of civilians and prisoner swaps) than a fully-fledged peace operation. The Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe's Special Monitoring Mission (SMM) supported many such initiatives from 2014 to 2022.

11. Without precluding the possibility of an international peace operation solely focused on truce supervision, such an operation is more likely to be feasible in the case of a cessation of hostilities or one of the other better-developed types of agreement outlined above.
12. A further significant factor in deciding what (if any) types of peace operation are feasible will be the conditions prevailing on the battlefield when combat stops. Scenarios include:⁴
 - i. Russian troops occupy significant areas of Ukrainian territory taken since 24 February 2022, and maintain the capacity to hold this ground.
 - ii. Russian troops occupy significant areas of Ukrainian territory taken since 24 February, but need to withdraw for military or political reasons.
 - iii. Russian troops only hold onto territories that they occupied on 23 February, with some minor variations.
 - iv. Ukraine reoccupies some or all of the territory it lost prior to 24 February.
13. In very general terms, options for peace operations will depend on (i) the type of agreement possible between Russia and Ukraine; and (ii) the balance of territorial control at the time an agreement is made. The mandate and scope of a mission designed to observe the *withdrawal* of Russian forces from some or all Ukrainian territories would differ from one required to supervise a long-term frontline inside Ukraine. Section C of this paper outlines some of the differing tasks involved in these potential scenarios.

Basic types of peace operation

14. Before turning to scenario-specific tasks for peace operations, we can outline some of the broad types of operation that could be deployed. These include at least five basic options:
 - i. A **political mission** with a mandate to facilitate contacts between Russia and Ukraine and support talks on problems arising over the end of hostilities, but without a parallel mandate to monitor the implementation of an agreement.⁵
 - ii. A **civilian observer mission** involving non-uniformed observers tasked with facilitating contacts between the sides *and also* (i) monitoring the implementation of the agreement terms; and/or (ii) investigating any breaches of an agreement.

⁴ These scenarios are *possible* outcomes, with no suggestion one is a *preferred* end-state.

⁵ In the UN system "Special Political Mission" refers to a budgetary category covering a wide range of small and large UN presences that are not full-fledged peacekeeping operations. But "political mission" is used here in a more generic sense to cover crisis management missions (mandated and deployed by any organization) that are primarily civilian in nature and focus on facilitating political solutions to security challenges. See Richard Gowan, *Multilateral Political Missions and Preventive Diplomacy* (USIP, 2011).

- iii. A **military observer mission** involving international military officers undertaking these tasks (see Section E on the merits of civilian and military monitoring).
- iv. A **peacekeeping mission** including international military units monitoring the implementation of an agreement, and also creating some sort of military “buffer” between the two sides through its presence. Such a mission however would *not* have a mandate to use force in response to breaches of an agreement.⁶
- v. A **peace enforcement** mission involving international military units mandated and equipped to use force against either side in case of breaches of an agreement.

15. This paper will outline options for the first four of these categories of mission. The fifth option – peace enforcement – is almost impossible to envisage in an agreement between Russia and Ukraine at this time. Neither state is likely to accept the possibility that international peacekeepers could take enforcement actions against its own personnel. It would also be exceedingly hard to find third parties willing to deploy soldiers with a mandate to use force against either the Ukrainians or Russians. While Poland has suggested deploying a NATO force to parts of Ukraine to provide security support, such a mission would not really involve “peacekeeping” and falls outside the scope of this paper.

Section C: Tasks for a peace operation

16. Having outlined potential *scenarios* and *models* for a peace operation, we can now consider what some of the possible *tasks* for such a mission should be. It is important that mission design focuses on how best to achieve the tasks set out for a mission in the circumstances prevailing when it deploys (for the process of deciding this, see Section D).

17. We can divide the potential tasks for an operation into (i) *general tasks*, which would likely occur in most of the circumstances envisaged above; and (ii) *context-specific tasks*, which would only arise in some of the specific circumstances we have noted are possible.

General tasks

18. Experience has shown that, where peace operations deploy to facilitate cessations of hostilities or better-developed peace agreements, certain tasks are necessary, including:⁷
- i. **Facilitating strategic-level engagement between the parties:** International civilian and military officers can act as liaisons between the headquarters of the opposing

⁶ Pre-war studies of options for a UN peacekeeping force in Donbas focused more on peacekeeping and peace enforcement options, also noting that some peacekeeping missions can be classed as “robust” (using limited force to deter or defeat spoilers). These gradations of mission type are less relevant in current circumstances. See Richard Gowan, *Can the United Nations Unite Ukraine?* (The Hudson Institute, 2018).

⁷ This list draws on a very useful annex listing the mandated tasks of past observer missions in Alexandra Novosseloff, *A Comparative Study of One-Dimensional UN Peace Operations: Is the Future of UN Peace Operations its Past?* (EPON/FES, 2022).

sides, chairing information exchanges and dispute resolution mechanisms, and where appropriate managing “hot lines” and other channels for urgent messages.

- ii. **Facilitating tactical-level engagement:** At a lower level, civilian and military officers can play similar facilitating roles between individual military units.
- iii. **Supporting bilateral monitoring mechanisms involving representatives of the parties,** through which officers/officials from both sides can directly verify each other’s fulfillment of ceasefire commitments, with external facilitation.
- iv. **General ceasefire observation/monitoring:** Civilian and military observers can offer regular, impartial reporting on developments in conflict-affected areas as a confidence-building mechanism and to flag risks of a reversion to hostilities.
- v. **Verification of ceasefire commitments:** More specifically, international observers can report on the parties’ fulfillment or non-fulfillment of specific commitments made as part of any written ceasefire arrangements. These could include (i) the withdrawal of forces from the frontline; (ii) maintaining limits on forces within set distances from the front lines and (iii) moving heavy weapons out of range.
- vi. **Dispute investigation and mediation:** Given the risks of unintended incidents leading to flare-ups between combatants, international officials or officers can reduce the risks of escalation through (i) conducting investigations of security incidents; and (ii) where tensions persist, mediating between the units involved.
- vii. **General confidence-building measures:** As noted above, even during quite minimal truces, international actors can facilitate confidence-building measures – such as prisoner exchanges – alongside their main mandated tasks.
- viii. **Community liaison:** Peace operations of all types generally find that solely dealing with uniformed counterparts from conflict parties is insufficient; and that it is also necessary to build links with local community leaders to (i) increase awareness of local risks and humanitarian needs; and (ii) avoid frictions with civilian populations.
- ix. **Public communications:** Given the high degree of attention to a war like that in Ukraine, even a relatively limited peace operation has to answer to international public opinion and domestic opinion in the counties involved in the war, requiring regular briefings to global media and online reports.

Context-specific tasks

19. Peace operations can also take on additional tasks depending on (i) the circumstances of their deployment; and (ii) their civilian/military capabilities. Potential tasks include:
 - i. **Where the frontline freezes with no immediate peace in sight,** a peace operation can take responsibility for (i) administering civilian crossings at points along the

frontline; (ii) facilitating cooperation between civilian authorities on maintaining essential infrastructure (such as water and electricity grids) across the line.⁸

- ii. **Where one side commits to a full withdrawal of its forces from a territory**, observers can (i) verify that the forces involved leave according to schedule; (ii) assess delays in the withdrawal and ensure that these do not lead to dangerous misunderstandings; and (iii) supervise the return of troops from the side regaining control of the evacuated territories to ensure meets the terms of agreement.⁹
- iii. **Larger peacekeeping operations**, involving significant numbers of uniformed personnel, can take on broader tasks including (i) creating a visible “buffer” or tripwire between the parties; (ii) reassuring civilians about their day-to-day security through regular patrolling; and (iii) potentially deploying international police officers or units to assist in law and order work in their areas of operation.

20. Many peace operations today (especially larger operations) also include human rights monitors, experts on gender issues, dialogue experts and other advisers that can improve the mission’s understanding of a security situation. Peace operations can also facilitate technical tasks, most notably demining, that can contribute to overall civilian safety and reconstruction.

Matching scenarios, mission models and tasks in Ukraine

21. Because we do not yet know the precise circumstances under which the Russian-Ukrainian war will end, we cannot say what exact combination of tasks any peace operation may have to undertake there. Options range from (i) an operation that deploys to manage and mitigate the continued division of Ukrainian territory to (ii) one that supervises significant or total Russian withdrawals. Under any circumstances, some of the “general tasks” noted above – facilitating communication, observation/verification and confidence-building – remain the most likely core business for any international mission.

Section D: Mandating authority and oversight mechanisms

22. While there may be a case for some sort of peace operation to help terminate the Russian-Ukrainian war, there are likely to be questions about (i) what international authority, if any, should mandate the mission; and (ii) what body or bodies should oversee its work.

23. It should be noted that the *mandate* and *oversight* of a mission are separate issues. It is possible for a single international body to both mandate and oversee an operation. The

⁸ As an obvious point of reference, the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission in Ukraine (2014-2022) undertook many tasks linked to cross-line cooperation in Donbas. See André Härtel, Anton Pisarenko and Andreas Umland, “The OSCE’s Special Monitoring Mission in Ukraine,” *Security and Human Rights* Vol. 32 (2022).

⁹ Examples include (i) the UN Good Office Mission in Afghanistan and Pakistan (UNGOMAP), which deployed in part to observe the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan between 1988 and 1990, and (ii) the United Nations Transition Assistance Group (UNTAG) which observed the departure of South African forces from Namibia in 1989-90.

UN Security Council, for example, both passes resolutions authorizing “blue helmet” peacekeepers in Africa and the Middle East and also direct reviews their performance.

24. But it is also possible for one organization to mandate an operation and another actor or actors to oversee it. The Security Council, for example, has provided mandates for (i) the European Union to deploy peacekeepers in the Balkans; and (ii) the African Union to send troops to Somalia. Such split responsibilities are useful where (i) it is necessary to gain the political legitimacy of an organization (e.g. the UN) for overarching political reasons; but (ii) other actors are operationally or politically more credible players on the ground.

Mandating options

25. Russia and Ukraine could come to an agreement that does not require any sort of external mandate *or* oversight mechanisms. The two sides could, for example, agree to invite small numbers of mutually agreed-upon military observers from third countries to facilitate a ceasefire or political agreement. This would involve no outside authorization.
26. Given the level of tensions and mistrust arising from the war, however, there is a reasonable possibility that Russia and Ukraine will want some sort of third-party mandate and oversight for any peace operation to facilitate an end to fighting. Options include:
- i. **Requesting a United Nations Security Council Resolution** authorizing either (i) a UN peace operation; or (ii) a peace operation led by other actors.
 - ii. **Requesting the OSCE Permanent Council** to mandate a mission;
 - iii. **Requesting a “double mandate” from the UNSC and OSCE**, by which both organizations give their endorsement to a single operation;¹⁰
 - iv. **Requesting an individual state or group of states** to establish a mission, with its own oversight structures, independent of any multilateral body. These states would be expected to provide the military and civilian personnel necessary to make an operation run, and would need the consent of both Ukraine and Russia.
27. There are other potential points of reference for mandates – such as the EU, NATO and CSTO – but each of these are unlikely to be politically acceptable to either Ukraine or Russia.
28. The political mandate for a peace operation – whatever its origin – should include general directions for the mission, including its primary tasks. However, it is important that the mandate should not be inflexible or include so many detailed instructions that it is unlikely to be unworkable in the field. It is preferable for the mandating authority to either (i) give the senior officials running a mission “on the spot” considerable leeway to follow their

¹⁰ The OSCE does not oversee any military operations but does have a mandate, stemming from its 1995 Helsinki document, to do so.

judgment in mandate implementation; or (ii) establish a separate oversight mechanism that can follow and advise on developments.

Oversight mechanisms

29. As noted, a body such as the UN Security Council can oversee a peace operation through existing mechanisms. In the case of the UN, the Department of Peace Operations (DPO) and Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA) in New York manage peace operations and Special Political Missions, and report to the Council via the Secretary-General. In the OSCE, oversight for field operations lies with the Chairman-in-Office and ultimately with the Permanent Council, assisted by the Organisation's secretariat.
30. But in some cases, there may be political or operational reasons to establish stand-alone oversight structures for a peace operation. In the case of Ukraine, for example, it may be prudent to establish some sort of oversight mechanism for a mission that is removed from the day-to-day diplomatic disputes of the Security Council and OSCE Permanent Council, which can poison dialogue.
31. Options for such stand-alone mechanisms include:
- i. **A Contact Group of States** which takes day-to-day *diplomatic* oversight of the peace operation, monitoring its performance and attempting to resolve differences over its performance informally as they arise (this sort of diplomatic oversight does not entirely replace more formal mechanisms like the Council).
 - ii. **A "Board" of States** with more formal powers to review and adjust the actions of a peace operation in line with its mandate.¹¹
 - iii. **A mission-specific Secretariat or Strategic Command:** The most robust form of stand-alone oversight mechanism is a stand-alone secretariat or military command cell to oversee its functioning.¹² Such structures can be set up in conjunction with existing multilateral structures or – in the scenario where an ad hoc group of states take responsibility for an operation – entirely independently.
32. Each of these mechanisms has strengths and weaknesses. It may be diplomatically easiest to work through existing structures, like the UN and OSCE systems, rather than design something entirely new. These organizations also have standard mechanisms for deciding how missions will be funded. Equally a contact group may provide more flexible diplomatic oversight than more institutionalized alternatives. It is also possible to mix-

¹¹ One point of reference for this option is the Peace Implementation Council and its Steering Board in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

¹² One example of a peace operation that has run for decades under the oversight of a mechanism without UN or other multilateral backing is the Multinational Force and Observers in Sinai (MFO Sinai), which is overseen by an independent secretariat in Rome. An example of a special cell set up to work in conjunction with an existing secretariat was the Strategic Military Cell (SMC) set up at UN headquarters to back up UNIFIL in Lebanon in 2006. See Ronald Hatto, "UN Command and Control Capabilities: Lessons from UNIFIL's Strategic Military Cell," *International Peacekeeping* Vol 16, No. 2 (2009)

and-match the mechanisms described here. Many UN and OSCE field missions work in parallel with contacts groups or “groups of friends” that offer them diplomatic support.¹³

33. Ultimately, it is essential that both Ukraine and Russia have the maximum possible confidence in both the mandate *and* oversight mechanisms covering any future operation, especially given past tensions over the mechanisms agreed to in 2014-2015.

Section E: Composition and Deployment of a Peace Operation

34. If it is possible to secure agreement on an international peace operation, further political and logistical questions will follow. These include (i) whether the mission should primarily involve civilian or military personnel; (ii) which states can deploy personnel acceptable to both sides; and (iii) what units and equipment the mission will need to fulfill its mandate.

Civilian vs military mission options

35. Of the four models for operations envisaged here two (a political mission or civilian observer mission) would require primarily civilian personnel and two (a military observer mission and larger peacekeeping operation) would require primarily uniformed personnel. This division is not entirely watertight. It is possible for largely civilian missions to include small numbers of military advisers, while UN and other peacekeeping forces with strong military components also typically involve significant civilian staff too. Finally, many “civilian” peace observers are ex-military personnel with recent military skills.
36. Civilian observers – especially those that include ex-military staff – can bring a high level of regional expertise, language skills and other relevant knowledge to a mission. The OSCE Special Monitoring Mission (SMM) that deployed in Ukraine from 2014 to 2022 built a strong reputation for gathering and sharing reliable information on the Donbas conflict. It also played a significant part in negotiating local ceasefires. However, the mission also faced persistent harassment and restrictions on freedom of movement in many areas, in particular in areas controlled by Russian-backed separatists.
37. Military observers may enjoy additional credibility with their Russian and Ukrainian interlocutors in uniform, and may include officers with special knowledge of relevant topics (such as artillery) who can facilitate the implementation of ceasefire terms. It should be noted, however, that military observers often face similar security and harassment challenges to their civilian counterparts. In many post-conflict situations, it is often necessary to deploy guard units to provide day-to-day security for observer teams.
38. A larger military peace operation would involve not only observers, but also fully-formed units capable of self-defense and patrolling vulnerable areas. Such a force would, however, require a significantly bigger logistics “tail” than lighter-weight observers. It would also require states to be willing to provide sufficient numbers of soldiers.

¹³ While there have been a number of groups of friends associated with UN peace operations, this is not a common practice in the case of the OSCE.

Composition of the force

39. It will be difficult for Ukraine to agree on which states should deploy observers or larger-scale military units to any peace operation. Ukraine is likely to want to see NATO personnel involved, while Russia will prefer CSTO personnel. They are likely to make similar demands concerning civilian staff as on military ones. Potential solutions include:
- i. **Looking for countries that are distanced from the conflict:** Although few potential troop contributors are totally neutral over Ukraine (most have taken positions in UN General Assembly votes on the war, for example) some states are either (i) politically and geographically remote from the war; and/or (ii) have tried to take a “balanced” approach to it. It may be possible to find potential peacekeepers from these sources – such as the Latin American countries and some Asian states – who are generally politically acceptable and have the right military/security knowledge, although it will likely be difficult to find a lot of Russian and Ukrainian speakers.¹⁴
 - ii. **Balancing NATO and CSTO representatives:** Ukraine and Russia could also agree that a peace operation could work on a “quota system” with pre-agreed numbers of NATO, CSTO and “non-aligned” personnel involved to provide some balance.
40. The difficulties in finding the right mix and number of personnel will increase significantly in the case of a larger peace operation. It would be harder for Ukraine and Russia to agree on deployments of fully-fledged CSTO and NATO units as part of a peace agreement than to compromise on relatively small numbers of observers from the same countries. Many governments may also be willing to deploy observers but think large units are too risky.

Logistics and deployment

41. In practical terms, it will also be challenging for any peace operation to cover the frontlines that exist between Ukrainian and Russian forces at the close of hostilities. We cannot predict how long the lines will be. But it is worth noting that many existing peace observation missions cover relatively small areas. The UN-patrolled Green Line in Cyprus is, for example, under 200 kilometers long. By contrast, the line of contact in Donbas on 23 February was already roughly 400 kilometers long. The Ukrainian-Russian front lines have extended over vastly greater distances since then. Even if they reduce in length in the course of the war, any peace operation is likely to have to cover considerable ground.
42. This means that – assuming a peace operation has at least basic observation duties – it will not be able to rely on the sort of fixed watch-towers and short-range patrols some other peace operations conduct elsewhere. Even a relatively small civilian or military observation mission will require (i) mobility, for example by having helicopters available for rapid movement; and (ii) access to drones and/or satellite imagery to observe large areas.¹⁵

¹⁴ For further discussion of various contributors see Gowan, *Can the United Nations Unite Ukraine?*, pp24-25.

¹⁵ The OSCE made good use of drones in Ukraine prior to this year. See Walter Dorn, “Technological Innovation in the OSCE: The Special Monitoring Mission in Ukraine,” *OSCE Yearbook 2019* (Baden-Baden, 2020).

43. Security will remain an ever-present concern and a light mission would also need to field such as armored cars – and potentially have some guard units for protection – to work properly.
44. Discussions of peace operations often boil down to numbers: How many “blue helmets” or other peacekeepers are necessary to handle a particular situation? But in a complex setting such as Ukraine, it is more important to determine what technologies and other assets would enable a peace operation to achieve its agreed tasks than focus on numbers.

Section F: Conclusions

45. This paper has not attempted to offer the “best” model for a peace operation in Ukraine, for the simple reason that – as noted at the start – this cannot be defined until we know more about the context for its deployment and its potential mandate. Many of these factors will be decided on the battlefield, and through wider Russian-Ukrainian contacts.
46. Many of the options laid out above – for example around what bodies should mandate and oversee a peace operation – inevitably involve political calculations, and there is no scientific answer about what models are “best” in objective terms. This paper has, however, highlighted that there are a range of potential pathways to agreeing and establishing different types of peace operation to facilitate an end to the war between Russia and Ukraine. Which pathway is most feasible is for future negotiators to explore.