



## INDEPENDENT COMMISSION ON MULTILATERALISM

### Armed Conflict: Mediation, Conciliation, and Peacekeeping

#### Executive Summary

The persistence of armed conflict motivates a growing perception that global stability is at risk. Although the number of armed conflicts has declined, the number of conflict-related deaths has risen dramatically, and the number of high-intensity, long-lasting conflicts has increased. Moreover, the increased involvement of outside actors and new types of non-state actors, as well as the increased presence of organized crime in conflict settings, has made recent armed conflicts resistant to peaceful settlement.

It was in this context that the UN system set out to review key elements of its peace and security architecture in 2015 and to ask whether the traditional tools of the multilateral system are adequate to the task at hand. This paper assesses these reviews and other challenges facing the multilateral system in two areas: (1) mediation and peacebuilding; and (2) peacekeeping.

**Mediation and peacebuilding:** While mediation and peacebuilding are not new, they now operate within a larger institutional architecture. But despite the increasing number of actors and institutions engaged in mediation and peacebuilding, there is significant disagreement over the existing architecture. Questions remain over the appropriate end goals of peacebuilding and mediation, how to ensure actors and institutions engaged in these processes are legitimate, and how to design processes that are flexible and inclusive—including of women, as recognized in the Global Study on the Implementation of Resolution 1325.

At the institutional level, these debates are reflected in a number of gaps in terms of politics, bureaucracy, and ideas. The main political challenge is the vested interests in maintaining the status quo, which favors existing inequalities and privileges. The 2015 Review of the UN Peacebuilding Architecture provided a good diagnosis of the institutional challenges, calling for the reframing of peacebuilding as “sustaining peace” and urging the Peacebuilding Commission to bridge structural silos separating the three pillars of the UN’s work. There is also a gap in terms of vision and ideas. Addressing these challenges requires redefining the purpose and vision of mediation and peacebuilding.

**Peacekeeping:** Peacekeeping remains the most visible UN activity and one of the most important conflict management tools available to the multilateral system. However, the nature and ambitions of peacekeeping have evolved considerably, creating challenges for the existing peacekeeping model. The report of the High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (HIPPO) comprehensively assesses the state of UN peace operations, calling for peace operations to become more politics-driven, more context-specific, grounded in stronger partnerships, and more field-focused and people-centric. While the HIPPO report was initially well-received by member states, the secretary-general's follow-on report endorsing some of its recommendations brought to the surface long-standing differences.

In order for UN peace operations reform to move forward and result in a UN that is “better fit for purpose,” the UN Secretariat and member states will need to address these differences and carry forward momentum. This will require the next secretary-general to demonstrate strong leadership, articulate a strategic vision, and build a compelling narrative. It will also require individual member states or groups of member states to champion specific reforms.

Considering these challenges, the paper provides a number of recommendations for the UN system:

1. The **president of the General Assembly** should organize a leaders summit to launch the process for developing a global agenda on prevention.
2. The **Department of Political Affairs** should reexamine the state-centric assumptions behind normative advances in mediation and help devise practical programming for member states to integrate prevention and mediation as national governance and development functions.
3. The **new secretary-general** should appoint a small team to consult with member states and propose a detailed five-year plan for carrying forward the HIPPO recommendations not taken up by the current secretary-general or on which member states remain undecided.
4. **Member states** committed to the spirit of the 2015 reviews should carry forward the momentum of peace operations reform and build on emerging consensus.
5. **Further research and debate** should be undertaken on some of these issues, as well as on other issues not taken up by the 2015 reviews.