

Multipolarity and UN Peacekeeping: Between Great Power Rivalry and Global Governance

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ABSTRACT

The transition from unipolarity to multipolarity has fundamentally reshaped the dynamics of global governance and international security. In this evolving order, United Nations (UN) peacekeeping operations face mounting challenges arising from great power rivalry, normative contestation, and institutional fragmentation. This article examines how multipolarity reshapes the mandates, operational practices, and normative foundations of UN peacekeeping, with particular attention to the competing strategic interests of major powers. Employing a qualitative doctrinal methodology, the study synthesizes contemporary scholarly literature, UN policy documents, and institutional analyses to assess emerging trends in peace operations. It analyses the interaction between geopolitical competition and multilateral governance frameworks, highlighting a shift from liberal peacebuilding models toward more pragmatic, sovereignty-centered approaches. The findings reveal a dual dynamic: while multipolarity constrains collective action through Security Council paralysis and intensified strategic rivalry, it simultaneously encourages adaptive responses, including increased reliance on regional actors and hybrid operational models. As a result, UN peacekeeping is transitioning from a predominantly norm-driven enterprise to a more negotiated and politically contingent instrument of conflict management. The article concludes that the future legitimacy and effectiveness of UN peacekeeping will depend on its capacity to reconcile divergent great power interests with foundational normative commitments. It recommends targeted institutional reforms, including enhanced P5 cooperation, strengthened multilateral coordination, and a recalibration of normative and operational priorities to sustain peacekeeping in an increasingly fragmented global order.

Introduction

The international system is undergoing a profound structural transformation from a post-Cold War unipolar order characterized by Western liberal norm dominance and United States leadership to an increasingly complex multipolar configuration marked by the resurgence of great power rivalry and the rise of non-Western powers (Acharya, 2017; Kupchan, 2012). This shift carries far-reaching implications for global governance institutions, particularly the United Nations (UN), which continues to serve as the

primary multilateral framework for maintaining international peace and security.

Among the UN's core instruments, peacekeeping operations have historically functioned as a cornerstone of multilateral conflict management. Today, however, contemporary peace operations operate in an environment of heightened geopolitical tension. The permanent members of the UN Security Council (P5) especially the United States, China, and Russia are pursuing increasingly divergent strategic interests, resulting in normative contestation over mandates and operational constraints

(Coleman & Job, 2021). These dynamics have made consensus on new or renewed mandates more elusive, contributing to delays, diluted mandates, funding uncertainties, and, in several cases, premature mission drawdowns or transitions.

This article addresses the central research question: How does the transition to multipolarity reshape the mandates, operational practices, and normative foundations of UN peacekeeping between great power rivalry and the imperatives of global governance? It argues that multipolarity generates a dual dynamic constraining collective action through geopolitical rivalry and Security Council divisions, while simultaneously encouraging adaptive, pragmatic, and sovereignty-sensitive approaches to peace operations (Abdenur, 2019; Karlsrud, 2023).

Adopting a qualitative doctrinal methodology, the study synthesizes contemporary scholarly literature, official UN policy documents (including the *New Agenda for Peace* and the *Pact of the Future*), and institutional analyses to evaluate emerging trends. It underscores the ongoing shift from ambitious liberal peacebuilding models toward more negotiated, politically contingent, and hybrid forms of conflict management that prioritize host-state consent and regional partnerships.

The article proceeds as follows: the next section provides conceptual and historical background. Subsequent sections analyze the constraining effects of great power rivalry, the emergence of adaptive mechanisms, and the normative implications of these changes. The conclusion discusses broader implications for UN peacekeeping

legitimacy and offers targeted recommendations for institutional resilience in a fragmented global order.

Background

The evolution of UN peacekeeping closely mirrors broader transformations in the international distribution of power. Established in 1948 with the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO), early peacekeeping missions were limited in scope, primarily focused on monitoring interstate ceasefires. These “Chapter VI½” operations adhered strictly to the foundational principles of consent, impartiality, and the non-use of force except in self-defense, reflecting the constraints imposed by Cold War bipolar rivalry.

The end of the Cold War and the advent of unipolarity created conditions for rapid expansion. The UN launched ambitious multidimensional (“second-generation”) missions that extended beyond traditional ceasefire monitoring to encompass governance reform, electoral assistance, human rights protection, and liberal state-building components. This liberal peacebuilding paradigm rested on a relatively cohesive international consensus regarding democratic governance, rule of law, and market-oriented reforms (Doyle & Sambanis, 2006; Fortna, 2008). By the mid-2010s, UN peacekeeping deployments reached unprecedented levels, with over 100,000 personnel deployed across multiple theaters.

Yet this expansive model encountered growing limitations in the 21st century. Operational challenges in complex intra-state conflicts, coupled with the assertiveness of rising powers, exposed the

fragility of liberal peacebuilding assumptions. Emerging and non-Western powers have increasingly contested interventionist norms, advocating instead for stronger emphasis on state sovereignty, non-interference, and context-specific approaches (Abdenur, 2019). Concurrently, intensifying geopolitical competition among major powers has produced deeper divisions within the UN Security Council, often described as “Security Council paralysis” in addressing major crises (von Einsiedel, 2015).

The ongoing shift toward multipolarity driven by China’s expanding global role, Russia’s geopolitical assertiveness, and relative Western retrenchment has accelerated these pressures. This transition has coincided with a noticeable decline in large-scale multidimensional UN peacekeeping missions and a growing reliance on regional organizations (such as the African Union) and ad hoc coalitions. As Karlsrud (2023) observes, these alternative arrangements frequently prioritize stabilization objectives and strategic interests over broader normative goals such as comprehensive human rights protection and transformative governance reforms.

Consequently, UN peacekeeping is undergoing a fundamental transformation. Rather than serving as a unified vehicle for liberal global governance, it is increasingly shaped by political negotiation, compromise, and geopolitical realities. This evolution highlights a deeper tension at the heart of contemporary multilateralism: the struggle to reconcile the demands of effective global governance with the competitive realities of great power rivalry. In this context,

peacekeeping functions simultaneously as a site of normative contestation and as a pragmatic adaptive mechanism within an increasingly fragmented international order.

Literature Review

Scholarly literature on UN peacekeeping has evolved significantly in response to shifts in the global order. Early post-Cold War studies celebrated the expansion of multidimensional missions as embodiments of a liberal peacebuilding consensus, emphasizing democratization, human rights, and state-building (Doyle & Sambanis, 2006; Fortna, 2008). These works largely assumed a permissive international environment enabled by unipolarity and Western normative hegemony.

Since the mid-2010s, however, a growing body of research has examined how changing power dynamics—particularly the transition toward multipolarity—challenge this paradigm. Foundational contributions highlight four transformational trends affecting UN peace operations: the rebalancing of global power, changing conflict patterns, evolving peace-sustaining architectures, and shifting expectations of the UN’s role (de Coning & Peter, 2019). This edited volume remains a cornerstone, arguing that multipolarity necessitates greater pragmatism, strategic coherence, and adaptation in peacekeeping doctrine and practice.

A central theme in recent scholarship is the constraining effect of great power rivalry on UN peacekeeping. Intensifying competition among the P5, especially between the United States, China, and Russia, has contributed to Security Council

divisions, weakened mandates, and what some describe as institutional paralysis (von Einsiedel, 2015; Coleman & Job, 2021). Karlsrud (2023) documents a clear decline in large-scale multidimensional UN peacekeeping missions alongside a rise in regional and ad hoc coalitions. He attributes this to geopolitical contestation that limits consensus on robust or transformative mandates, pushing operations toward narrower stabilization objectives or logistical support roles for non-UN forces.

Parallel to these constraints, scholars identify adaptive and pragmatic responses emerging within multipolarity. Abdenur (2019) examines how multipolarisation reshapes norms-setting and role expectations in UN peacekeeping, noting that rising powers advocate for greater emphasis on sovereignty, non-interference, and host-state consent. This has accelerated a shift from liberal peacebuilding toward “pragmatic peacekeeping”—a more negotiated, sovereignty-centered, and hybrid approach that accommodates divergent great power interests while retaining core operational utility (Dunton et al., 2023; Karlsrud, 2023).

Recent analyses further explore this pragmatic turn. Dunton et al. (2023) conceptualize pragmatic peacekeeping as involving bureaucratic reform, integration of different mission types (including stabilization and counter-terrorism support), and increased norm contestation over traditional principles such as impartiality and the use of force. Hellmüller (2025) situates UN peace operations as “children of their time,” arguing that world politics—marked by geopolitical rebalancing and contestation of the liberal order—directly shapes mission

design, actor diversification, and outcomes. Complementary studies highlight the growing role of regional actors (e.g., the African Union) and hybrid arrangements as adaptive mechanisms that fill gaps left by declining UN multidimensional deployments (Osland & Peter, 2021; de Coning, 2021).

Normative contestation forms another key strand. Non-Western powers increasingly challenge interventionist elements of liberal peacebuilding, favoring context-specific and sovereignty-respecting models (Abdenur, 2019; Adu, 2023). This has led to debates about whether peacekeeping can retain its normative foundations or must evolve into a more politically contingent instrument of conflict management (Paris, 2024; Badache et al., 2022).

While these contributions provide valuable insights into structural shifts and operational changes, gaps remain. Much of the literature focuses either on constraints (e.g., Council paralysis) or adaptation (e.g., regionalism and pragmatism) in isolation, with fewer studies systematically examining their dual and simultaneous operation across mandates, practices, and norms. Moreover, empirical analyses often prioritize specific regions (notably Africa) or single powers (e.g., China’s evolving role), leaving room for broader syntheses that link great power rivalry directly to global governance implications for UN peacekeeping as a whole.

This article addresses these gaps by adopting a qualitative doctrinal approach to synthesize how multipolarity generates both constraining and enabling dynamics. It contributes to the literature by foregrounding

the tension between great power rivalry and effective multilateral governance, offering a nuanced assessment of UN peacekeeping's ongoing transformation in a fragmented international order.

Theoretical Framework

Understanding the transformation of United Nations (UN) peacekeeping in a multipolar world requires a multi-theoretical approach that captures both power dynamics and normative evolution. This article draws on three major traditions in international relations theory—realism, liberal institutionalism, and constructivism—to explain how great power rivalry and global governance interact to reshape peacekeeping practices.

From a realist perspective, international politics is fundamentally driven by the distribution of power and the pursuit of national interests. The transition from unipolarity to multipolarity intensifies strategic competition among major powers, particularly within institutions such as the UN Security Council (UNSC). Realism explains why divergent interests among the permanent members (P5) lead to veto politics, weakened mandates, and selective engagement in peacekeeping operations (Mearsheimer, 2001; Waltz, 1979). In this view, UN peacekeeping becomes an instrument constrained by great power calculations rather than an autonomous mechanism of collective security.

In contrast, liberal institutionalism emphasizes the role of international institutions in facilitating cooperation, reducing uncertainty, and sustaining global governance. The UN, as a central multilateral

institution, has historically enabled collective responses to conflict through peacekeeping operations grounded in shared norms and rules (Keohane & Nye, 1977). During the post-Cold War unipolar era, relative consensus among major powers allowed the expansion of multidimensional peacekeeping and liberal peacebuilding agendas. However, in a multipolar context, institutional effectiveness is challenged by declining consensus, raising questions about the capacity of the UN to coordinate collective action and maintain legitimacy.

A constructivist approach complements these perspectives by focusing on the role of norms, identities, and discourse in shaping international behavior. UN peacekeeping has long been embedded in normative frameworks such as human rights protection, civilian protection, and the Responsibility to Protect (R2P). However, the rise of non-Western powers has led to increasing normative contestation, with alternative visions emphasizing sovereignty, non-interference, and context-specific governance models (Abdenur, 2019). Constructivism helps explain how these competing normative frameworks influence mandate design, operational priorities, and the evolving identity of UN peacekeeping as an institution.

Taken together, these theoretical lenses provide a comprehensive framework for analyzing the dual dynamics identified in this study. Realism highlights the constraining effects of great power rivalry, liberal institutionalism underscores the challenges to global governance mechanisms, and constructivism reveals the shifting normative foundations of

peacekeeping. This integrated approach allows for a more nuanced understanding of how multipolarity simultaneously limits and transforms UN peacekeeping, positioning it as both a site of geopolitical contestation and an adaptive instrument of multilateral cooperation.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, doctrinal, and analytical research design to examine how multipolarity reshapes the mandates, operational practices, and normative foundations of United Nations (UN) peacekeeping. The qualitative approach is appropriate given the study's focus on interpreting institutional behavior, normative shifts, and geopolitical dynamics rather than measuring causal relationships through quantitative data.

The research primarily relies on secondary data sources, including peer-reviewed scholarly literature, UN policy documents, Security Council resolutions, and institutional reports. Key academic sources include works on peacekeeping effectiveness, multipolarity, and global governance (e.g., Abdenur, 2019; Karlsrud, 2023; Coleman & Job, 2021). In addition, official UN documents—such as the *High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (HIPPO) Report*, the *New Agenda for Peace*, and the *Pact for the Future*—are utilized to capture contemporary policy directions and institutional responses.

The study employs a doctrinal and thematic analytical method. First, doctrinal analysis is used to examine the evolution of peacekeeping principles, mandates, and institutional frameworks within the UN

system. Second, a thematic analysis is conducted to identify recurring patterns across the literature and policy discourse, particularly focusing on three core themes:

(1) the constraining effects of great power rivalry and Security Council divisions;

(2) the emergence of adaptive mechanisms, including regionalization and hybrid operations; and

(3) the transformation of normative foundations from liberal peacebuilding to more sovereignty-centered approaches.

To complement this analysis, the study incorporates illustrative case references—including developments in Mali (MINUSMA), Somalia (AU–UN cooperation), and broader Security Council responses to crises such as Syria—to demonstrate how theoretical dynamics manifest in practice. These cases are not treated as full comparative case studies but rather as empirical illustrations that support broader analytical claims.

This methodological approach enables a holistic synthesis of structural, institutional, and normative dimensions of UN peacekeeping in a multipolar order. While the study does not aim to provide statistically generalizable findings, it offers analytical generalizations that contribute to understanding the evolving role of UN peacekeeping within the wider framework of global governance and great power politics.

The Dual Impact of Multipolarity on UN Peacekeeping

Multipolarity exerts a dual and simultaneous influence on UN peacekeeping: it constrains collective action through great power rivalry

and institutional fragmentation, while simultaneously fostering adaptive, pragmatic, and hybrid operational models. This section examines both dimensions across mandates, practices, and normative foundations, drawing on recent developments and doctrinal shifts.

Constraining Effects: Great Power Rivalry and Security Council Paralysis

In a multipolar order, divergent strategic interests among the P5 increasingly hinder consensus on robust peacekeeping mandates. Geopolitical competition—particularly between the United States, China, and Russia—has intensified normative contestation over the purposes of peace operations, leading to delayed mandate renewals, diluted language, funding uncertainties, and outright paralysis on new or expanded missions.

A prominent example is the termination of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) in 2023. Following the Malian transitional government's request for immediate withdrawal amid a "crisis of confidence," the Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 2690 (2023), ending the mission's mandate and mandating a rapid drawdown by December 2023. This case illustrates how host-state assertiveness, often amplified by external great power alignments (including Russian influence via Wagner/Africa Corps groups), intersects with P5 divisions to accelerate mission closures. Similar pressures have affected transitions in Sudan and planned adjustments in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and South Sudan.

Broader trends confirm this constraint. Large-scale multidimensional missions have declined sharply since the mid-2010s, with total peacekeeping personnel dropping from peaks above 100,000 to around 80,000 in recent years. Veto threats or abstentions have complicated responses to crises with spillover effects (e.g., Sudan, Haiti proposals), while funding cuts—exacerbated by major donor retrenchment—further limit operational capacity. As Hellmüller (2026) observes, world politics now directly shapes mission design, with multipolar rebalancing reducing the "unity of purpose" that characterized post-Cold War expansions.

These dynamics erode the liberal peacebuilding model's transformative ambitions. Mandates increasingly avoid ambitious governance reform or robust civilian protection language when it risks P5 disagreement, shifting toward narrower stabilization or monitoring roles. The result is a more politically contingent instrument, where peacekeeping effectiveness depends heavily on alignment with great power interests rather than consistent normative application.

Adaptive Responses: Pragmatism, Regionalism, and Hybrid Models

Paradoxically, the same multipolar pressures encourage innovation and pragmatism. Faced with Council gridlock, the UN and member states have pivoted toward flexible, sovereignty-sensitive, and hybrid arrangements that accommodate divergent interests while maintaining some multilateral utility.

Key adaptations include greater reliance on regional and sub-regional actors. The African Union and other regional bodies have assumed larger roles in stabilization, often with UN logistical, training, or political support rather than direct peacekeeping leadership. Hybrid or sequenced models—where UN special political missions or country teams complement regional forces—have gained traction, as seen in transitions following MINUSMA’s exit and in support for African-led initiatives in the Sahel and Somalia.

Scholarship frames this as the rise of pragmatic peacekeeping (Dunton et al., 2023; Karlsrud, 2023; Paris, 2024). This approach prioritizes host-state consent, context-specific solutions, and limited objectives (e.g., ceasefire monitoring, stabilization support) over expansive liberal transformation. It accommodates non-Western preferences for sovereignty and non-interference while retaining core principles such as impartiality where feasible. UN policy documents, including the *New Agenda for Peace* and the *Pact of the Future* (2024), explicitly call for adaptation to multipolar realities through enhanced partnerships, realistic mandates, and a rebalancing of normative versus operational priorities.

Recent UN initiatives further illustrate this pragmatism. Emphasis on military and civilian observers, nimble mission models, and support for parallel operations reflects a move away from large troop-heavy deployments toward more modular, politically driven engagements. While these adaptations enhance flexibility and local ownership, they also risk diluting the UN’s

normative authority, particularly on human rights and civilian protection.

Overall, multipolarity thus produces a negotiated peacekeeping landscape. Constraints from rivalry limit ambition and consensus, yet they compel creative responses that may sustain the institution’s relevance in a fragmented order—albeit in a more modest, politically contingent form.

This dual dynamic underscores the tension at the heart of contemporary global governance: UN peacekeeping must navigate great power competition without abandoning its foundational role in collective security.

Case Illustrations of Multipolar Peacekeeping Dynamics

To better understand how multipolarity reshapes UN peacekeeping in practice, this section examines selected cases that illustrate the dual dynamics of constraint and adaptation identified in the analysis. These cases—Mali, Somalia, and Syria—demonstrate how great power rivalry and evolving global governance structures influence peacekeeping mandates, operational models, and normative priorities.

1. Mali (MINUSMA): Host-State Assertiveness and Strategic Realignment

The termination of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) in 2023 represents a critical example of how multipolar dynamics constrain UN peacekeeping. Initially established in 2013 with a robust multidimensional mandate—including stabilization, protection of civilians, and support for political processes—MINUSMA operated in one of the UN’s most complex environments.

However, relations between the Malian transitional government and the UN deteriorated significantly, culminating in a formal request for the mission's withdrawal. The UN Security Council subsequently adopted Resolution 2690 (2023), mandating a rapid drawdown. This development reflects a broader pattern of host-state assertiveness, often reinforced by shifting geopolitical alignments, including closer ties between Mali and non-Western actors.

From a multipolar perspective, the Mali case highlights how great power competition intersects with sovereignty claims, limiting the UN's ability to sustain long-term multidimensional missions. As noted in the literature, such dynamics contribute to the decline of liberal peacebuilding mandates and the prioritization of political pragmatism over normative ambition (Abdenur, 2019; Karlsrud, 2023).

2. Somalia: Regionalization and Hybrid Peacekeeping Models

In contrast to Mali, the case of Somalia illustrates how multipolarity can foster adaptive and hybrid approaches to peacekeeping. The African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), later transitioned into the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS), represents a model of regionalized peace operations supported by the UN.

Rather than leading the mission directly, the UN has provided logistical, financial, and political support, demonstrating a shift toward burden-sharing arrangements between global and regional actors. This hybrid model reflects the

increasing role of regional organizations in conflict management, particularly in Africa, where local ownership and contextual expertise are emphasized.

Scholars argue that such arrangements represent a form of "pragmatic peacekeeping", where operational flexibility and political feasibility take precedence over expansive liberal agendas (Dunton et al., 2023; Karlsrud, 2023). These models align with the preferences of both host states and rising powers, who advocate for sovereignty-respecting and context-specific interventions.

However, while regionalization enhances adaptability, it also raises concerns about normative dilution, particularly in relation to human rights standards and accountability mechanisms. Thus, Somalia exemplifies how multipolarity encourages innovation while simultaneously challenging the normative coherence of UN peacekeeping.

3. Syria: Security Council Paralysis and the Limits of Multilateralism

The Syrian conflict provides a stark illustration of how great power rivalry can lead to institutional paralysis within the UN system. Since the outbreak of the conflict in 2011, the UN Security Council has been deeply divided, with repeated vetoes by Russia and China blocking resolutions perceived as enabling interventionist measures.

As a result, the UN has been unable to establish a comprehensive peacekeeping operation in Syria, despite the scale of the humanitarian crisis. Instead, international responses have been fragmented, involving

ad hoc coalitions, unilateral interventions, and limited UN humanitarian mechanisms.

This case underscores the limits of liberal institutionalism in a multipolar order, where the absence of consensus among major powers undermines the UN's capacity to act collectively. It also highlights the erosion of norms such as the Responsibility to Protect (R2P), which have been increasingly contested by non-Western powers emphasizing sovereignty and non-interference (von Einsiedel, 2015).

The Dual Dynamics of Multipolar Peacekeeping

Taken together, these cases illustrate the dual impact of multipolarity on UN peacekeeping.

- The Mali and Syria cases demonstrate how great power rivalry and sovereignty claims constrain UN action, leading to mission withdrawals, mandate limitations, or outright institutional paralysis.
- In contrast, the Somalia case highlights how multipolarity can encourage adaptive responses, including regionalization, hybrid models, and pragmatic operational strategies.

This duality reinforces the central argument of this article: UN peacekeeping in a multipolar world is neither in decline nor fully resilient, but rather undergoing a process of transformation. It is increasingly shaped by negotiation, compromise, and geopolitical realities, functioning as both a site of contestation and an adaptive instrument of global governance.

Conclusion

This article has examined how the transition to multipolarity reshapes United Nations peacekeeping between great power rivalry and the imperatives of global governance. The analysis reveals a dual dynamic: multipolarity constrains collective action through intensified P5 competition, normative contestation, and Security Council divisions, while simultaneously prompting adaptive, pragmatic, and hybrid responses that seek to preserve the institution's relevance in a fragmented order.

On the constraining side, great power rivalry has contributed to Security Council paralysis, diluted mandates, funding uncertainties, and accelerated mission drawdowns — most visibly in the unanimous termination of MINUSMA in 2023 following host-state demands and shifting external alignments. Large-scale multidimensional operations have declined, with peacekeeping personnel numbers falling significantly from mid-2010s peaks. Ambitious liberal peacebuilding elements (democratization, transformative governance, robust civilian protection) are increasingly sidelined when they risk P5 disagreement, rendering peacekeeping more politically contingent.

Yet the same pressures have catalyzed adaptation. The UN has pivoted toward nimbler models emphasizing host-state consent, regional partnerships (particularly with the African Union), and hybrid arrangements that combine UN political or logistical support with regionally led stabilization efforts. UN policy initiatives, including the *New Agenda for Peace* and the *Pact for the Future* (2024), explicitly call for realistic mandates, enhanced multilateral coordination, and a rebalancing of normative

and operational priorities to respond to multipolar realities. This pragmatic turn accommodates divergent great power interests — including rising powers' emphasis on sovereignty and non-interference — while retaining core utility in conflict management.

The future legitimacy and effectiveness of UN peacekeeping will hinge on its ability to navigate this tension. If constrained too severely by rivalry, peacekeeping risks becoming marginal or captured by bilateral interests, undermining its multilateral character and normative foundations. Conversely, successful adaptation could position it as a flexible instrument capable of sustaining peace in complex, internationalized conflicts amid geopolitical polarization. However, over-pragmatism carries risks: diluted norms on human rights and civilian protection may erode the UN's moral authority and long-term credibility, particularly among Global South actors who demand both sovereignty respect and effective protection.

To reconcile these dynamics, several institutional reforms are recommended. First, enhanced P5 dialogue mechanisms — such as informal “P5-plus” consultations on peacekeeping doctrine or regular strategic foresight exercises — could rebuild minimum consensus on mandate parameters without compromising core principles. Second, strengthened coordination with regional organizations, building on the *Pact for the Future* commitments, should include clearer division of labor, joint planning, and predictable funding for hybrid operations. Third, the UN should recalibrate normative-operational priorities by investing in nimble,

observer-heavy models (drawing lessons from UNTSO and recent future-of-peacekeeping studies) that prioritize monitoring, reporting, and political good offices over large troop deployments. Finally, broader UN reforms — including Security Council working methods and predictable assessed contributions — are essential to mitigate funding volatility exacerbated by great power retrenchment or competition.

In an increasingly multipolar world, UN peacekeeping cannot return to the liberal internationalist ambitions of the unipolar era, nor can it afford to become a mere reflection of great power spheres of influence. Its enduring value lies in its capacity to serve as a negotiated bridge between rivalry and governance — a pragmatic yet principled tool for conflict management. Sustaining this role will require continuous adaptation, political will among member states, and a renewed commitment to multilateralism that acknowledges power realities while upholding the Charter's foundational purposes. The coming years will determine

Policy Recommendations

The transformation of UN peacekeeping in a multipolar world requires coordinated responses from multiple stakeholders, including major powers, the United Nations system, regional organizations, host states, and the broader international community. The following recommendations aim to enhance the legitimacy, effectiveness, and adaptability of peacekeeping operations in an increasingly fragmented global order.

1. Permanent Members of the UN Security Council (P5)

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The P5 must prioritize minimum consensus-building mechanisms to mitigate paralysis in peacekeeping decision-making. Regular informal consultations—such as “P5-plus” dialogue platforms—should be institutionalized to facilitate early coordination on mandate design and crisis response. Additionally, restraint in the use of the veto in situations involving mass atrocities should be encouraged, consistent with ongoing initiatives on veto accountability.

2. United Nations Secretariat and Peacekeeping Institutions

The UN Secretariat should adopt more flexible and modular peacekeeping models, emphasizing smaller, rapidly deployable missions, observer-based operations, and political engagement over large-scale troop deployments. Building on initiatives such as the *New Agenda for Peace*, the UN should strengthen its capacity for preventive diplomacy, mediation, and early warning, thereby reducing reliance on reactive interventions.

3. Regional and Sub-Regional Organizations

Regional actors, particularly the African Union, should be further integrated into peacekeeping frameworks through formalized partnerships and predictable funding arrangements. Joint planning mechanisms, shared command structures (where feasible), and enhanced logistical coordination with the UN can improve operational effectiveness while ensuring local ownership.

4. Host States

Host governments must commit to cooperative engagement with peacekeeping missions, ensuring access, security guarantees, and political support for mandate implementation. At the same time, peacekeeping mandates should be tailored to reflect local realities, balancing sovereignty concerns with the need to protect civilians and sustain peace.

5. Donor States and International Community

Major financial contributors should ensure predictable and sustainable funding for peacekeeping operations, avoiding abrupt budget cuts that undermine mission effectiveness. Investment in capacity-building for regional forces, as well as support for hybrid missions, will be essential in adapting to multipolar realities.

6. Normative and Governance Reforms

Across all stakeholders, there is a need to recalibrate the balance between normative commitments and operational pragmatism. While adapting to geopolitical constraints, the UN must preserve core principles such as civilian protection, impartiality, and adherence to international humanitarian law. Strengthening accountability mechanisms and transparency will be critical to maintaining legitimacy.

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