

Speech: “UN peacekeeping missions are not meant to stay the same. They are meant to evolve alongside the conditions on the ground”

Thank you Mr President and thank you Jean-Pierre, Marc-André and Masud for your briefings.

I want to begin by paying tribute to the bravery and sacrifice of the men and women of UN Peacekeeping. They represent the very best of this organisation. We owe it to them, and to those that they protect, to ensure that peacekeeping operations have the right capabilities for the mission at hand. That means the right people, with the right equipment and skills, carrying out the right mandate.

How often do we actually meet that standard? How often instead do we hear of peacekeeping operations having to rely on whichever forces are available, rather than on the forces best suited to the mission?

Our ultimate goal must be to give the UN the freedom to tailor the forces it deploys according to the unique circumstances of each mission’s mandate. We’ve made a good start towards that goal, including at the UN Peacekeeping Defence Ministerial in London last year. But as our Canadian colleagues pick up the baton, it is clear that there is more to do. Let me outline three steps which we need to take.

First, we shouldn’t be afraid to innovate. We know there are persistent gaps of niche capabilities, like attack helicopters, specialist engineering skills, medical skills. We shouldn’t accept this as an unavoidable reality, but instead, we should look to countries to work together to rotate the provision of that scarce capability. This could mean one country providing those skills, while another supplies the supporting logistics, sharing the burden and increasing the availability of that niche asset. These innovative ‘smart pledges’ will be one of the issues that the British Defence Secretary will be raising in Vancouver.

Innovation also means incorporating modern technology to make peacekeeping more responsive and more effective. We’ve already made some progress on using unmanned aerial vehicles, but there are more technologies that we could be harnessing. To do so effectively, we need to be able to anticipate the future requirements of missions, and that brings me to my second point, Mr President.

Put simply, UN peacekeeping missions are not meant to stay the same. They are meant to evolve alongside the conditions on the ground. As a mission’s objectives are achieved and as political processes progress, force requirements will also change. And we should be able to anticipate those

changes and be agile enough to provide the capabilities required.

This means moving away from setting arbitrary troop ceilings and instead moving towards a tailored approach, that relies on better information on what capabilities are actually needed, and when, so that we are more focussed on the effect that we want the peacekeeping mission to deliver.

For example, next month we'll be discussing the MINUSCA mandate. Many here will no doubt advocate for an increase to the troop ceiling. But the UK is more concerned that the mission has the right troops. For us that means troops who are agile and mobile, willing and capable of moving to where they are needed at short notice.

We know that this approach works, we have seen it in action elsewhere. I'd like to praise MONUSCO and the Pakistani contingent there for their agility in relocating troops to hotspots where they're really needed for the protection of civilians.

To help us anticipate future force requirements, we need rich, real-time data from the UN to inform Council decision making. That analysis needs to be used also to inform force generation decisions. So we welcome the call in resolution 2378 for the collection and analysis of data on peacekeeping performance. It's a really important step forward; and let us all work with the UN to make it a reality.

My final point is that we can't lose sight of long-term planning and strategic force generation. This includes more partnerships, more training, more capacity building, so that we are moving beyond the immediate force generation, to future strategic force generation, so that we are preparing for future needs, not just filling the current capability gaps.

And as we do so, let us not forget that the military force is only one of the three pillars of a mission. As missions become more involved in political work, we will all need to think about how we generate the civilian component and the policing component so that missions can play an impactful role not just in keeping the peace, but in building and sustaining it too.

Thank you.