

Peacekeeping

Dr John Karlsrud
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The aim of peacekeeping is to preserve peace, normally after a peace agreement has been achieved. It has evolved from a primarily military activity, observing cease-fires and separation of forces after inter-state conflict, to multidimensional missions taking on a range of civilian tasks. Peacekeeping is conducted by both the United Nations and by regional organisations, but will usually be underpinned by a UN Security Council mandate. UN peacekeeping is not mentioned in the UN Charter, yet it has become one of the most versatile, well-known and oft-used features of the world organisation. The core principles of peacekeeping have been to maintain its impartiality, obtain the consent of the main parties to the conflict, and use minimum levels of force except in self-defence or in defence of the mandate.

Since the end of the Cold War, UN peacekeeping has been rapidly changing and evolving. The thaw between the superpowers in 1990s allowed an increasing number of UN peacekeeping operations to be authorised. Operations were increasingly deployed to deal with internal conflicts, given more expansive mandates, and varying degrees of civilian authority in addition to supervising elections, starting with Namibia in 1989 and Cambodia in 1993. Following failures to protect civilians in Somalia, Bosnia and Rwanda at the beginning of the 1990s, operations were also given increasingly robust mandates, starting with the operation deployed to Sierra Leone in 1999 (UNAMSIL).

Change and reform of UN peacekeeping

In June 2015 126,247 military, police and civilians were serving in 16 UN peacekeeping operations at an annual budget of US\$8.47 billion. These multidimensional peacekeeping operations not only provide security to preserve the peace, but also partake in peace and statebuilding activities at national and local levels, including:



***Dr John Karlsrud** is Senior Research Fellow and Manager of the Training for Peace programme at the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI). He is the author of *Norm Change in International Relations: Linked Ecologies in UN Peacekeeping Operations* (Routledge, 2016) and *The UN at war: examining the consequences of peace-enforcement mandates for the UN peacekeeping operations in the CAR, the DRC and Mali* (Third World Quarterly, 2015). He previously served as Special Assistant to the UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General in the Central African Republic and Chad (MINURCAT) and has done research and field work in Bosnia, Chad, Haiti, and South Sudan.*

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- strengthening state institutions and extending state authority through supporting elections;
- supporting security sector reform and strengthening the rule of law, e.g. by support and training of the police and the judiciary conducting disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) of former fighters;
- enhancing state-society relations by facilitating reconciliation talks, training, deploying and housing local authorities;
- facilitating the inclusion of marginalised groups, women and youth.

As a result of this evolution, there are an increasing number of dilemmas about how to implement peacekeeping operations without violating its core principles. In 2013, MONUSCO - the UN peacekeeping operation in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) – had a mandate to ‘neutralise’ several identified rebel groups and effectively became a party to the conflict. The tendency to authorise operations to support the government with the extension of state authority can also put operations in a difficult position with local populations. The UN operation in Mali (MINUSMA) has repeatedly been attacked since its deployment, with more than 40 peacekeepers being killed in hostile acts.

Increasing attacks on UN peacekeepers and accusations that the UN has not been doing enough to protect civilians, particularly in DRC, Central African Republic and South Sudan, led to the Secretary-General appointing a high level independent panel to review UN peacekeeping in 2014. In their June 2015 report, the panel reaffirmed the key principles of peacekeeping, emphasising that all conflicts are political and should be accompanied by a political strategy. They asked the Security Council and member states to match mandates with resources and modern capabilities, and drew a line at UN peacekeeping operations being given counter-terrorism tasks.

Regional organisations

Regional organisations are increasingly mandated by the UN Security Council to conduct peace operations under Ch. VIII of the UN Charter: for example, NATO’s International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) mission in Afghanistan from 2001 to 2014, the EUFOR operation in Chad in 2008-09, and the ongoing African Union mission in Somalia (AMISOM). These operations are most often engaged in peace enforcement and operate prior to, and sometimes in parallel, with UN peacekeeping operations. However, as seen with the example with MONUSCO in the DRC, the line between peacekeeping and peace enforcement has been increasingly blurred over the past couple of decades.

Financing peace operations

The UN Security Council is reluctant to make access to assessed contributions (funded by member states) standard practice, despite a general consensus that the peace enforcement operations, such as African Union deployments, are those which the UN cannot and should not undertake. Recently, there has also been a shift towards greater regional involvement in peacekeeping operations. In January 2015 the African Union agreed that states in the region would assume responsibility for at least 25% of operation costs. Such involvement will require closer and more strategic cooperation, as the Secretary-General has made clear when asking member states to urgently consider how they

can respond to this initiative. Nevertheless, deep concerns over conduct and effectiveness will remain key to continuing financial provision from the UN (UN 2015b: 11).

Sexual and gender based violence (SGBV)

Since the adoption of Security Council resolution 1325 in 2000, UN peacekeeping operations have sought to prevent and mitigate SGBV, albeit with little success. SGBV is a recurring problem in conflict, with frequent reports of sexual exploitation and abuse adding to the poor track record that UN peacekeeping has in this area. In 2015, the Secretary-General took an unprecedented step and dismissed the head of the UN peacekeeping mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) for not taking action to prevent repeated instances of gross sexual exploitation and abuse by peacekeepers. In his report on the recommendations of the panel the Secretary-General promised to “repatriate contingents where there is a demonstrated pattern of abuse or non-response to allegations of misconduct” (2015b: 49).

Key readings

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Questions to guide reading

1. What are the key principles of peacekeeping and what separates peacekeeping from peace enforcement? How do changing global trends of the nature of conflict affect peacekeeping?
2. How has UN peacekeeping evolved? Who have been and who are the key actors in UN peacekeeping today? Who are the main troop and financial contributors? What role do European and Western countries play in UN peacekeeping?
3. What are the largest and most important peacekeeping operations today? To which countries may future peacekeeping operations be deployed and what issues should be considered before deployment?
4. How is sexual and gender based violence (SGBV) used in conflict? How can it be stopped? And what are the consequences when peacekeepers are perpetrators of sexual exploitation and abuse?