

60 Years of United Nations Peacekeeping

The United Nations Integrated Mission in Timor-Leste (UNMIT) is the fifth UN peacekeeping operation in 60 Years of United Nations Peacekeeping

The United Nations will observe 60 years of peacekeeping operations on 29 May 2008, the annual observance of the International Day of UN Peacekeepers, by paying tribute to all peacekeepers who have served since 1948 and commemorating those who died in the cause of peace in the past year.

United Nations peacekeeping began in 1948 with the deployment of unarmed UN military observers to the Middle East in a mission to monitor the Armistice Agreement between Israel and its Arab neighbors.

Today, more than 110,000 uniformed and civilian personnel are serving in 20 peace operations managed by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO). Since 1948, 63 peacekeeping operations have been deployed by the United Nations, 17 of them in the past decade alone. Over the years hundreds of thousands of military personnel, as well as tens of thousands of UN police and other civilians, from more than 120 countries have participated in UN operations.

More than 2,400 United Nations peacekeepers from some 118 countries died while serving under the UN flag during the past 60 years.

BACKGROUND

United Nations peacekeeping is a unique and dynamic instrument developed by the Organization as a way to help countries torn by conflict foster the conditions for lasting peace.

While the term "peacekeeping" is not found in the United Nations Charter, Dag Hammarskjöld, the second UN Secretary-General, found a way to define it within the framework of the Charter, saying that peacekeeping falls under "Chapter VI and a half" of the Charter, somewhere between traditional methods of resolving disputes peacefully (outlined in Chapter VI), on the one hand, and more forceful, less "consent-based" action (Chapter VII), on the other.

Over the years, UN peacekeeping has evolved to meet the demands of different conflicts and a changing global political landscape.

Born at a time when Cold War rivalries frequently paralyzed the Security Council, UN peacekeeping goals were primarily limited to maintaining ceasefires and stabilizing situations on the ground, providing crucial support for political efforts to resolve the conflict by peaceful means. Those missions consisted of military observers and lightly armed troops with primarily monitoring, reporting, and confidence-building roles.



THE EARLY YEARS

The United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO) and the UN Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan (UNMOGIP) were the first two United Nations missions deployed. Both of these missions, which continue to operate to this day, exemplified the observation and monitoring type of operation, and had authorized strengths in the low hundreds.

The earliest armed peacekeeping operation was the First United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF 1) deployed in 1956 to address the Suez Crisis. The UN Operation in the Congo (ONUC), launched in

1960, was the first large-scale mission, with nearly 20,000 soldiers serving at its peak. It also demonstrated the risks involved in trying to bring stability to war-torn regions – 250 UN personnel died while serving on that important mission.

In the 1960s and 1970s, the United Nations established short-term missions in New Guinea, Yemen, and the Dominican Republic, and started longer term deployments in Cyprus (UNFICYP) and the Middle East (UNEF II, UNDOF, and UNIFIL).

In 1988, United Nations peacekeepers were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. At that time, the Nobel Committee cited in particular the “young people from many nations...who, in keeping with their ideals, voluntarily take on a demanding and hazardous service in the cause of peace.”

THE POST-COLD WAR SURGE

As the Cold War ended, there was a rapid increase in the number of peacekeeping missions. With a new consensus and a common sense of purpose, the Security Council authorized a total of 20 operations between 1989 and 1994, raising the number of peacekeepers from 11,000 to 75,000.

Some of the missions were deployed to help implement peace agreements that had ended long drawn out conflicts – in countries such as Angola, Mozambique, Namibia, El Salvador, Guatemala and Cambodia – and to help the countries stabilize, re-organize, elect new governments and build democratic institutions.

The general success of these missions sometimes raised expectations for United Nations peacekeeping beyond its capacity to deliver, especially in situations when the Security Council was not able to authorize sufficiently robust mandates or provide adequate resources.

Missions were established in situations where the guns had not yet fallen silent and in areas such as the former Yugoslavia, Somalia and Rwanda where there was no peace to keep. These three high-profile peacekeeping operations came under criticism as peacekeepers faced situations where warring parties failed to adhere to peace agreements, or where the peacekeepers themselves were not provided adequate resources or political support. As civilian casualties rose and hostilities continued, the reputation of United Nations peacekeeping plummeted.

THE MID-1990S: A PERIOD OF REASSESSMENT FOR UN PEACEKEEPING

The setbacks of the early and mid 1990s led the Security Council to limit the number of new peacekeeping missions for the next several years. The Organization also began a process of self-reflection. In the meantime, UN peacekeepers continued their long-term operations in the Middle East, Asia, and Cyprus. The Council also authorized UN operations in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Haiti, Guatemala, and Angola.

21ST CENTURY SURGE

With a greater understanding of the limits – and potential – of UN peacekeeping, the United Nations was asked to perform even more complex tasks starting in 1999. The UN served as the administrator of the territories of Kosovo in the former Yugoslavia, and East Timor (now Timor-Leste), which was in the process of gaining independence from Indonesia.

In both situations, the UN was widely viewed as the only organization with the globally-recognized credibility and impartiality to take on the job.

Over the next decade, the Security Council also established large and complex peacekeeping operations in African countries such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Burundi, Côte d'Ivoire, the Sudan (in the south of the country and in Darfur), Eritrea/Ethiopia, and Chad and the Central African Republic.

Peacekeepers also returned to resume vital peacekeeping and peacebuilding operations where a fragile peace had frayed, in Haiti and the newly independent Timor-Leste.

With the establishment of UN missions in Darfur, Chad and the Central African Republic in the second half of 2007, the authorized strength of UN peacekeeping operations stands at 130,000 – an all-time high.

PEACEKEEPING EVOLVES

With the end of the Cold War, the strategic context for UN peacekeeping dramatically changed, prompting the Organization to shift and expand its field operations from traditional missions involving strictly military tasks, to complex “multidimensional” enterprises designed to ensure the implementation of comprehensive peace agreements and assist in laying a foundation for sustainable peace.

Today’s peacekeepers undertake a wide variety of complex tasks, from helping to build sustainable institutions of governance, to human rights monitoring, to security sector reform, to the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of former combatants.

The nature of conflicts has also changed over the years. Originally developed as a means of dealing with inter-State conflict, UN peacekeeping has been increasingly applied to intra-State conflicts and civil wars.

Although the military remain the backbone of most peacekeeping operations, the many faces of peacekeeping now include administrators and economists, police officers, legal experts, gender officers, de-miners, electoral observers, human rights monitors, specialists in civil affairs and governance, humanitarian workers, and experts in communications and public information.

Women have also taken on an increasingly important role in UN peacekeeping. More and more, they are represented in the military, police and civilian components of peacekeeping operations. In an historic event, the first ever all-female contingent to serve in a UN peacekeeping operation was deployed in 2007, when a 125-strong Formed Police Unit from India arrived in Liberia. Their presence has served to demonstrate the special contributions that women can make to law enforcement.

In the 1950s, the earliest peacekeepers tended to hail from Europe. During the 1990s, the profile changed as developed countries shrank their militaries following the end of the Cold War and/or became reluctant to commit their soldiers to UN-commanded operations. The largest troop contributors now are in South Asia (Pakistan, Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka, and Nepal) and Africa (Ghana, Nigeria). Arab and Latin American countries also provide significant numbers of troops. However, in 2006, Europeans returned to play a major role in UN peacekeeping in Lebanon, when UNIFIL was expanded following the conflict between Israel and Hezbollah.

Several countries that once hosted UN operations now contribute troops, including Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cambodia, Croatia, El Salvador, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Guatemala, Namibia, Rwanda, and Sierra Leone.

In addition, UN police related activities have increased in size and scope with 11,000 UN police deployed around the world, a number expected to increase to some 17,000 in the coming year as they build their presence in Darfur, Chad and the Central African Republic.

PEACEKEEPING REFORM

At the turn of the century, the UN underwent a major exercise in examining the challenges to peacekeeping in the 1990s and introducing reform. The Secretary-General appointed a panel on United Nations Peace Operations, composed of individuals experienced in conflict prevention, peacekeeping and peacebuilding, to assess the shortcomings of the existing system and to make specific and realistic recommendations for change.

The result, known as the “Brahimi Report” after Lakhdar Brahimi, the Chair of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations, called for renewed political commitment on the part of Member States, significant institutional change and increased financial support. The panel noted that in order to be effective, United Nations forces must be properly resourced and equipped to carry out their mandates.

The report called for increased staffing and more robust rules of engagement against those who renege on their commitments to a peace accord or seek to undermine it by violence. The Security Council, it said, must provide peacekeeping operations with **clear, credible, and achievable mandates**. And it insisted that Headquarters support for peacekeeping be treated as a core activity of the United Nations.

As a result, UN Member States and the UN Secretariat made major efforts for reform, including through the High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change, the 2005 World Summit, the reform strategy of DPKO entitled “Peace Operations 2010” and most recently the “Capstone Doctrine,” which DPKO has developed for strategic and tactical guidance of UN peacekeepers in the field.

The latest chapter in peacekeeping reform took place in 2007: Faced with the rising demand for increasingly complex peace operations, the United Nations grew overstretched and challenged as never before. To strengthen the UN’s capacity to manage and sustain new peace operations, the peacekeeping architecture was restructured in 2007, by bolstering the support for new activities in DPKO, establishing a separate Department of Field Support (DFS), augmenting resources in both departments and in other parts of the Secretariat dealing with peacekeeping and by creating new capacities as well as integrated structures to match the growing complexity of mandated activities.

Other reforms have come about in the field of Conduct and Discipline. Following allegations and investigations of sexual exploitation and abuse by UN peacekeepers, the Secretary-General declared a zero tolerance policy for any violation of UN rules, which includes a ban for UN personnel on sex with children 18 and under, and sex with a prostitute. The former Permanent Representative of Jordan, Prince Zeid Ra’ad Zeid Al-Husseini, produced a sweeping strategy to engage troop contributors, Member States, and the wider UN system in a new Conduct and Discipline architecture for peacekeeping. And in 2008, an UN-wide strategy for assistance to the victims of sexual exploitation and abuse by UN personnel was adopted by the General Assembly.

THE DAG HAMMARSJÖLD MEDAL

In 1997, to mark the 50th anniversary of peacekeeping the following year, the Security Council decided to establish the Dag Hammarskjöld Medal. Since then the medal has been awarded annually to the peacekeepers that have fallen while serving in the cause of peace the preceding year.

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF UN PEACEKEEPERS

By resolution 57/129 of 11 December 2002, the General Assembly designated 29 May – the day the first mission, UNTSO, was established – as the International Day of United Nations Peacekeepers, to pay tribute to all the men and women who have served and continue to serve in United Nations peacekeeping operations for their high level of professionalism, dedication and courage, and to honour the memory of those who have lost their lives in the cause of peace.