

## *Security Council*

### *MetMUNC XLVIII*

#### *Topic: Peacekeeping Reform*

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Peacekeeping has always been a vital part of the United Nations. Although the UN has the power to set forth resolutions for international disputes, these are no guarantees of peace. Thus, peacekeeping (along with the Security Council's other functions) gives the UN the substantive power to enforce its resolutions and prevent conflict between opposing armies or insurgent groups. Although peacekeeping is among the UN's most useful tools in keeping peace, it often falls short of its goals, and many advocate larger structural changes to the whole institution.



**Figure 1:** The blue helmet is a fundamental symbol of the UN's dedication to peace.

Peacekeeping has evolved greatly since the UN's inception. The first UN peacekeeping operation (PKO) was the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO), authorized in 1948 in response to the Arab-Israeli War. It consisted of a task force of hundreds of military observers to maintain and supervise ceasefires and to prevent isolated incidents from rapidly escalating.<sup>1</sup> Likewise, the United Nations Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan (UNMOGIP) was charged with supervising the ceasefire between India and Pakistan following

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<sup>1</sup> <https://untso.unmissions.org/background>

the First Kashmir War in 1947-1948.<sup>2</sup> Both of these operations were unarmed and purely meant to supervise armistice agreements. They were unique in that they were impartial and unbiased groups who could provide the international community with legitimate information about ongoing armed conflicts so that peace could be more easily reached. However, the first armed PKO emerged after the Suez Crisis in 1956. The First United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF I) was charged with overseeing the departure of French and British troops, and serving as a buffer between Egyptian and Israeli troops.

Ultimately, these operations could not maintain ceasefires indefinitely. In Israel and India/Pakistan, hostilities broke out several times over the subsequent decades despite the presence of observer squads. And in the Suez region, the UNEF forces could not prevent the 1967 Six-Day War. In that year, Egypt demanded that UNEF depart from their posts. As the buffer was situated on Egyptian territory, Egypt had the final say in whether UNEF could remain. Despite the efforts of Secretary-General U Thant, both Egypt and Israel refused to host UNEF forces any longer. Thus, all of the troops departed by June, with 15 killed after being caught up in a battle.<sup>3</sup> These instances highlight some of peacekeeping's most critical flaws:

peacekeepers can only enter and remain in states with the government's consent. Although this protects national sovereignty, it enables conflict to break out with peacekeepers unable to act.



**Figure 2:** UNEF troops march in the Suez region.

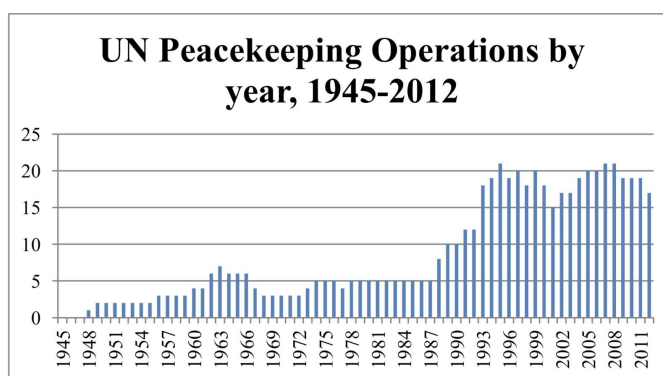
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<sup>2</sup> <https://unmogip.unmissions.org/background>

<sup>3</sup> <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/mission/past/unef1backgr2.html#three>

During the Cold War, peacekeepers were mostly squads of unarmed military observers or traditional blue-helmeted troops, yet this changed as the Cold War ended. The UN and the Security Council, no longer tied up by the Soviet and American superpowers, saw a greater role for their field operations: one more broad in scope than maintaining buffers and ceasefires. New personnel were included in missions which had a variety of responsibilities, ranging from organizing elections and protecting human rights to disarming militias. Because of these new roles, the size of PKOs grew dramatically, with task forces regularly being thousands of personnel strong. These changes, while allowing for peacekeeping to operate in more aspects of government and diplomacy, brought more responsibilities to PKOs which they could not handle.

The UN formed an unprecedented number of new PKOs in the 1990s. With a rapidly climbing budget, the total number of PKOs rose from 5 to more than 20 between 1987-1996.<sup>4</sup> In fact, the vast majority of the total number of PKOs since the UN's founding have taken place



**Figure 3:** The number of new PKOs rose dramatically in the 1990s.

since the 1990s. Although larger budgets meant more funding available for equipment, personnel, and other supplies, they brought more opportunities for failure.

Several PKOs of the early and mid-1990s infamously either failed in their mandates, unable to prevent the deaths of innocent civilians and peacekeepers, or succeeded in their mandates but at the cost of many human lives. For example, the PKO in Somalia (tasked with

<sup>4</sup>[https://www.globalgovernance.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/GGI-Factsheet-History-of-UN-Peacekeeping\\_October2012.pdf](https://www.globalgovernance.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/GGI-Factsheet-History-of-UN-Peacekeeping_October2012.pdf)

providing humanitarian aid following a ceasefire between opposing factions) resulted in the deaths of several peacekeepers, US soldiers, and potentially hundreds of civilians.<sup>5</sup> However, the most prominent examples of peacekeeping's failures of the 1990s are the PKOs in Yugoslavia and Rwanda.

In the 1990s, Yugoslavia became a hotbed of political turmoil and violence following Croatia and Slovenia's declarations of independence. The Security Council had declared many "safe areas" for Bosnian refugees, including the town of Srebrenica. The United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR), among other tasks, was assigned to protect these safe areas and the civilians inside. Yet, in 1995, the Dutch task force assigned to protect Srebrenica could not hold back the advancing Bosnian Serb army; the



**Figure 4:** More than 6,500 graves commemorate the victims of the 1995 massacre at Srebrenica.

peacekeepers either surrendered or fled. Once the Bosnian Serb army entered the town, they began rapidly gathering and separating the men from the women and children. The men were taken from Srebrenica and nearly 8,000 were killed; countless women and girls were abused and raped.<sup>6</sup> Years later in 1999, Secretary-General Kofi Annan expressed the UN's failure to prevent the massacre, citing the lack of supplies and resources given to the peacekeepers.<sup>7</sup>

Yet, the most colossal failure of peacekeeping in the 1990s was the Rwandan genocide. Although a PKO was already stationed in Rwanda (UNAMIR), it did not attempt to abate the killings perpetrated by Hutu extremists. In fact, the number of personnel was reduced from 2,548

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/event/Somalia-intervention>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/event/Srebrenica-massacre/Aftermath>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.globalpolicy.org/component/content/article/199/40909.html>

to 270 in April 1994, and although the Security Council requested more troops in May, it took nearly six months for countries to provide them.<sup>8</sup> Many member states, including the US, were reluctant to send more troops, remembering the deaths of peacekeepers and soldiers in Somalia. The lack of UN personnel in the region essentially permitted the atrocities to continue, with hundreds of thousands of Tutsis murdered and raped in that time.

These three instances represent the most critical shortcomings of peacekeeping. It takes time for member states to gather and deploy troops, and member states are not always willing to do so. This delay leaves task forces hanging in the balance, often unable to carry out their mandate with such few personnel. It also prevents the UN from swiftly changing mandates to adapt to new circumstances on the ground. Even if the Security Council were to rapidly draft a new mandate or amend a current one, it could take considerable time and diplomatic leverage to persuade member states to contribute troops. Also, what these three PKOs have in common is that there was no peace to keep in their situations. Instead of observing and maintaining a peace that had already been created, they were charged with intervening in and replacing ongoing armed conflict with peace. All three of these PKOs failed to accomplish this.

Following these and other failures, peacekeeping underwent a period of self-reflection and improvement. The Security Council commissioned thorough assessments of these PKOs to determine where they went wrong and how they could improve. This culminated in 2000 when the Secretary-General convened the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations, which drafted the Brahimi Report.<sup>9</sup> It comprehensively set forth suggested reforms for peacekeeping. A similar

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<sup>8</sup> <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/mission/past/unamirS.htm>

<sup>9</sup> [https://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=A/55/305](https://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/55/305)

report was issued in 2015, also addressing the shortcomings of peacekeeping and discussing potential changes.<sup>10</sup>

However, peacekeeping in the 21st century has not been free from failure or scandal. For instance, in 2012, the Congolese city of Goma (in which a PKO, MONUSCO, was operating) was seized by rebels. Despite MONUSCO's superior numbers, the PKO's mandate only allowed for the protection of civilians. France called this inaction "absurd," since MONUSCO (United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo) had the resources to act, yet UN spokesperson Eduardo del Buey claimed the 1,500 troops in Goma could not fire due to the risk of hurting civilians. Yet, the UN received reports that the rebels had abducted women and children from the city.<sup>11</sup> This illustrates another flaw of peacekeeping: forces cannot be dynamic and adapt to rapidly changing circumstances. They must wait for the UN bureaucracy to approve a new mandate, which can waste precious time in unexpected situations.

More chilling, however, are the countless accusations of sexual assault against UN peacekeepers. For instance, between 2004-2007, nearly 134 Sri Lankan peacekeepers in Haiti exploited and abused children in a sex ring. They were sent home but not imprisoned.<sup>12</sup> This was not merely an isolated incident. Since 2005, approximately 2,000 allegations of sexual assault were made against peacekeepers, with about 300 involving children, and accused peacekeepers rarely served jail time for their crimes. The situation is especially dire in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where MONUSCO continues to operate. More than 700 of the 2,000 allegations came from the DRC alone, notwithstanding the unknowable number of unreported

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<sup>10</sup> [https://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=A/70/95](https://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/70/95)

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-20405739>

<sup>12</sup> <https://apnews.com/e6ebc331460345c5abd4f57d77f535c1>

cases. Rape victims who become pregnant in the DRC face particular stigma, for they are often kicked out of their homes and ostracized due to their mixed-race children.<sup>13</sup> In other locations, such as Kosovo in 2004, peacekeepers were significant customers of prostitution and sex rings, turning otherwise small-scale operations into massive enterprises that exploited more and more women and girls.<sup>14</sup> The international community expects the best from peacekeepers, seeing them as bastions of peace and order in troubled regions. Yet, these instances of sexual assault and exploitation highlight severe structural flaws in PKOs. If PKOs are unable to prevent crimes from happening within their own ranks, how can they effectively create and maintain peace on the ground?

Peacekeeping is severely flawed as it stands today. The institution, dogged by its failures of the past and the ongoing allegations of sexual exploitation, is in desperate need of reform. The broad scope of peacekeeping has created unprecedented problems in its operations and within its ranks, so a massive reassessment of the whole institution is imminent. Some nations, like India (the largest donor of peacekeeping troops), have criticized the role peacekeepers play in active conflicts. In 2015, the Indian ambassador to the UN stressed that India would not accept its peacekeepers being involved in peace enforcement, rather than peace building.<sup>15</sup> India's comments raise considerable questions about the role of peacekeeping. Should it only be involved in already peaceful situations to prevent future conflict? Or, should it be a tool to enforce peace through active means? These and other questions highlight the many perspectives about what role peacekeeping has in conflicts today and how that role should change.

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<sup>13</sup> <https://apnews.com/69e56ab46cab400f9f4b3753bd79c930>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2004/may/07/balkans>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/sep/17/un-united-nations-peacekeepers-rwanda-bosnia>

Peacekeeping is of the utmost importance to the UN. In addition to upholding peace in troubled regions, the blue helmet is an unmistakable image of the UN's global reach and legitimacy. Without peacekeepers on the ground, the UN is fundamentally limited in its mission to promote peace and prosperity. Thus, the Security Council must consider substantial reform for the body. This committee session should explore the role of peacekeeping in the 21st century and what reforms are necessary to adapt to the changing times, including reforms that address crime occurring within PKO ranks. Such is necessary to protect the countless innocent civilians caught in the crosshairs of armed conflict and human rights abuses.

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**Questions to Consider:**

1. To what extent does your country participate in peacekeeping? How many troops or other workers do you contribute? Do you finance PKOs or provide supplies in lieu of sending people?
2. To what extent does your country contribute troops to conflicts through other means (i.e. through NATO or other military organizations)?
3. How do your government and population feel about peacekeeping? What changes do they propose?
4. What does your country feel is the role peacekeeping should play in 21st century conflicts?
5. Have any PKOs occurred in your country, and how do they affect local people?

**Helpful Links:**

- <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/reforming-peacekeeping>
- <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/our-history>
- <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/where-we-operate> (provides useful data about current PKOs)
- <https://time.com/5715972/un-leaked-report-sexual-abuse-peacekeepers/> (a recent article describing the UN's failed investigations into accusations of sexual exploitation)
- [India Times](#) (India expresses disapproval of the current mandate system and asserts that significant troop donors should have a role in drafting mandates)