

Sixty Years of UN Peacekeeping

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Sixty years ago this month, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 50, authorizing the first UN peacekeeping mission and forever altering the manner in which the international community would approach and address conflict. Through sixty-three subsequent operations, UN peacekeeping has evolved, its role has expanded, and its impact, while uneven, has been undeniably positive.

The UN missions in Somalia, UNISOM I (1992-1993) and UNISOM II (1993-1995) worked to protect vulnerable populations in areas of armed conflict.

The first UN peacekeeping missions were empowered to separate opposing armed forces in Cyprus and in the Golan Heights. Over the last six decades, the role of UN peacekeepers has evolved as the UN has become increasingly engaged in addressing a broader range of peace and stability issues, including intra-state conflicts. The impetus behind that evolution was the gradual recognition by the international community that the UN must do more than simply keep the peace – it should also address the underlying factors that might otherwise result in resurgent conflict.

This evolution has resulted in UN peacekeepers assuming a variety of new and positive roles, such as promoting the development of civil society in Liberia, monitoring the human rights situation in Guatemala, observing elections in Cote d'Ivoire, supporting a regional peace accord between Democratic Republic of Congo and its Great Lakes neighbors, and assisting security sector reform in Haiti.

Clearly, the UN's "blue helmets" have never been more important than they are today; since 2001, the number of authorized peacekeepers has nearly tripled, from under 40,000 to almost 120,000. They are stationed around the world in places such as Timor-Leste, Liberia, Congo, Sudan, Kosovo, Georgia, and Haiti, helping citizens of those countries make the transition to stable and democratic governance. They have recently concluded operations in Burundi and Sierra Leone, successfully creating space for political reconciliation now being pursued with the advice and assistance of the UN's Peacebuilding Commission. It should also be noted on this important anniversary that UN peacekeepers and civilian personnel assume these assignments with professional pride and often at considerable personal risk. In saluting this personal commitment, we recall the more than 2,400 UN peacekeepers who have given their lives in the pursuit of international peace and stability.

A new UN peacekeeping mission in Somalia would be a welcome development and the Security Council is actively considering preparations for such a mission. While deployment of peacekeepers is not a substitute for political dialogue and reconciliation, a peacekeeping mission is an essential part of an overall solution to the ongoing conflict in Somalia.

Although UN peacekeeping operations do not by themselves resolve underlying political conflicts, in every instance they contribute in some measure to mitigation and resolution of conflict and the resulting protection of civilians. Such a contribution is most urgently needed in Darfur, where the United States is committed to ending the violence through an inclusive political settlement. As a key step toward that goal, the United States supports the rapid deployment of 26,000 peacekeepers to Darfur under the UN-Africa Union Mission in Darfur (UNAMID), as authorized by the UN Security Council. To advance that effort, the

United States has been actively engaged in the deployment, training, and equipping of African peacekeepers.

In fact, since the birth of the “blue helmets,” the United States has led efforts to ensure that UN peacekeepers are properly prepared and equipped to defend themselves. In particular, the Global Peace Operations Initiative (GPOI) and the Africa Contingency Operations and Training Assistance (ACOTA) programs have, since 2005 and 1997 respectively, contributed over \$500 million toward building peacekeeping capacity and support of UN deployments. In the Security Council and through our contributions to the UN, the United States promotes UN peacekeeping mandates that are clear, credible, and limited to what is achievable. The United States consistently supports efforts to ensure that the UN peacekeeping mechanism is able to respond quickly and effectively to new and evolving crises, by incorporating cross-cutting strategies and integrating a broad range of programs to build sustainable peace.

Sixty years after UN peacekeeping became an essential tool in the promotion of global peace, the United States remains an unwavering proponent and supporter. Year after year the American people fund upwards of a quarter of UN peacekeeping costs – nearly \$1.5 billion in 2007 alone. As we mark this anniversary, we salute the UN’s peacekeepers, who today as much as in 1948 represent an effective, efficient, and ultimately successful means of promoting global peace, security, and stability.