

Increasing the efficiency and upholding order in the United Nations Peacekeeping Troops

United Nations Peacekeeping is often used to keep peace and order in regions like Haiti and Africa, but oftentimes they are blamed for their lack of efficiency and human rights abuses. The Security Council, with direct oversight over these forces, should enact measures to increase the effectiveness and the order of these troops.

Background Information

1. The mandate of the UN Peacekeeping troops

The UN peacekeeping troops were established in the UN Charter with a mandate to “help countries torn by conflict create conditions for lasting peace”, as stated on the official website. Under the Charter, the Security Council has jurisdiction over employment of peacekeeping forces, whether it is the ordering of operations or the management of troops. Peacekeeping was established with three main principles of action: consent of the parties, impartiality, and non-use of force except for self-defence and in advancement of their orders. Above all, it is important to note that peacekeeping is not the same as peace enforcement-- peacekeeping values the protection of civilians above all, while peace enforcement does not require cooperation with parties involved and uses tactical, strategic maneuvers that could turn violent if necessary.

Addressing international peace and security through mostly non-violent means does not always put peacekeeping troops into areas of imminent armed conflict; they are also used as a preventative measure, as stabilisation of post-conflict zones, and as reinforcements working in coordination with the UN as well as the conflict region’s leaders to foster recovery.

Currently, UN peacekeeping is the only existing way that allows the cooperation of forces from all regions in the world to tackle crises or conflicts wherever they occur, offering humanitarian, political and security responses.

2. The creation of Peacekeepers

UN peacekeepers are particularly placed to be neutral parties due to their nature of being comprised of multiple nationalities. However, it is worth looking at the ethnic compilation of troops in the context of member states’ reasons for contributing to UN forces. As of 30th April 2018, the main troop contributors are: Ethiopia, Bangladesh, India, Rwanda, Pakistan, Nepal. Yet a further look into UN data for an exemplar operation such as MONUSCO (Democratic Republic of the Congo stabilisation mission) shows that among the top contributors are Egypt, Bangladesh and Senegal, all of which are geographically close to the DRC. It can therefore be called into question whether member states supply more troops to maintain security especially when their own security is at risk; reasons for this could be related to gaining professional training from the UN for a more capable military, receiving financial support through troop reimbursements, and limiting the military’s ability to launch a coup. This poses the concern that UN peacekeeping effectiveness depend partially on the extent of instability in regions, a totally counterproductive relation. Such a link has also led to a decrease in troop commitments from stable and established countries.

Key Issues

1. Efficiency

Efficiency and effectiveness of a UN peacekeeping mission depends on various aspects of the mission mandate given by the Security Council itself: this determines the type of troops sent (police, contingent, experts, staff, volunteers), available funding and intervention strategy chosen. The biggest obstacle to efficiency of operations is not a lack of funding-- in fact, UN funds for peacekeeping have been constantly on the rise as number of operations increase-- but rather, the refusal of more flexibility in mandates. In past situations, troops have found their hands tied by Security Council orders, in addition to non-violence, such as in the disastrous 1994 Rwanda conflict where 90 UN troops were ordered back to base instead of protecting a school under fire due to the Council’s disbelief that it was a case of genocide.

Furthermore, there is also the issue of new, modern security concerns such as extremism and terrorism that require a different set of technical skills and mandates to combat. The UN has also looked towards preventative rather than reactive measures, preventing the symptoms of a crisis before it comes to fruition.

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Efficiency should also be tackled from the point of view of cost efficiency, management efficiency and the capability of troops. This would involve an exploration of the roles of more developed countries in peacekeeping initiatives.

2. Human rights violations

Appallingly, despite the principles of peacekeepers to protect civilians and uphold human rights, forces have been under scrutiny for multiple allegations of sexual abuse and exploitation of children. Over the past twelve years, according to an investigation of UN missions, there have been an estimated two thousand such allegations. In particular, over 100 troops from the UN Stabilisation Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) were investigated and later accused of creating a child sex ring, exploiting underage children in exchange for food and money. The main problem is of impunity-- the UN has made improvements with regards to screening and education of troops, but it remains powerless to prosecute peacekeepers for their crimes. At most, the UN is able to repatriate guilty peacekeepers while encouraging the contributing member states to hold them accountable for their crimes, yet as the MINUSTAH operation showed, often troops are not prosecuted at all.

This is a dire situation that must be combated on multiple levels in order to ensure the eradication of such immoral, unacceptable crimes in forces mandated to serve civilians under their protection. It is harrowing to note that in the first three months of 2018, 54 new allegations of sexual misconduct were filed, and only two of those are currently being investigated. The reputation and global trust in the UN peacekeeping forces are at risk if these activities continue without reform.

Major Entities Involved

1. USA

The United States has long been a great financial contributor to UN peacekeeping initiatives. In particular, the USA is a key partner to the UN in terms of capacity building, offering military support to train peacekeeping troops. Previously, the Obama administration has encouraged European states to take a greater leading stance in peacekeeping efforts; the Trump administration wants to reduce the USA's foreign aid and diplomacy budget by 31% while the Senate Foreign Relations Committee is calling for reforms in peacekeeping.

2. Germany

Germany is another primary contributor to peacekeeping funds, yet has been criticised for its restrained approach to troop contributions. Reasons for its participation are grounded in multilateral pressures as a world leader, yet Germany's culture of public scepticism towards military operations hinders its contribution. However, it has recently committed to the MINUSMA operation in Mali, and pursues an instrumentalist, selective approach to commitments in order to strengthen its international "responsible" reputation.

3. Morocco

Morocco is one of the most vocal members of the Non-Aligned Movement and believes that reform in peacekeeping must be sensitively and cautiously undertaken. Key worries centre on the transparency of information throughout member states of changes made to initiatives, implications on ground troops, and host countries' perception of UN troops. Morocco is a member of the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations that reviews ongoing mandates.

4. Sri Lanka

Sri Lankan forces were among the troops most heavily accused of human rights violations-- in only one incident during their deployment in Haiti, over 100 were investigated for child abuse. Sri Lanka has an unfortunate reputation for violations of international law as well as for offering impunity to its soldiers, thereby allowing such misconduct to continue.

5. Democratic Republic of Congo

The DRC is one of the countries on which peacekeeping operation MONUSCO is focussed. Here, UN forces attempt to protect peaceful anti-government civilian demonstrations and further democratic rights, yet were faced with violence and abuse carried out by the security

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Past UN Efforts

1. High-level Independent Panel on UN Peace Operations

Former Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon convened the High-level Independent Panel on UN Peace Operations in 2014, consisting of 16 independent members that oversaw reform and improvements needed for peacekeeping operations. Four areas of reform were determined: on the importance of political foresight, on the tailored strategy of responses, on a stronger global architecture for peace and on a better management system. Mandate can be found in Link 2.

2. S/RES/2272 (2016) against sexual exploitation by peacekeepers

Centres on repatriation measures to remove sexual offenders from peacekeeping troops, as well as going further to encourage investigation and subsequent punishment by the relevant Member State. Also requests that the Security Council and peacekeeping management have the foresight to collect evidence against abusers in addition to assessing the actions undertaken by member states. Gives the Security Council the right to condemn member states and possibly retract their troop contributions if found unwilling to uphold disciplinary standards within their soldiers.

3. Zero tolerance policy

Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has made steps towards prioritising victims' rights in sexual misconduct allegations. His February 2017 report on the UN's new approach to this matter (Link 3) stresses his "zero tolerance" policy, aiming for increased accountability, more punitive measures and improved engagement with member states and forces alike as a preventative measure. Guterres has also appointed two key figures for this purpose: the UN Special Coordinator and the Victim Rights Advocate.

Helpful Resources

On Efficiency

1. <https://www.brookings.edu/testimonies/united-nations-peacekeeping-and-opportunities-for-reform/>
2. <https://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/documents/High-Level-Independent-Panel.pdf>
3. <https://www.un.org/press/en/2017/gapk227.doc.htm>
4. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-38372614>
5. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/sep/17/un-united-nations-peacekeepers-rwanda-bosnia#img-1>
6. <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/reports>

On Human Rights Violations

1. <https://apnews.com/7ccc5fbc05124fa9b0f42ce2edb62d9d/AP-Investigation:-UN-troops-lured-kids-into-Haiti-sex-ring>
2. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2018/05/1008712>
3. <http://undocs.org/A/71/818>
4. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/03/04/un-stop-sexual-abuse-peacekeepers>

