

Forum: Human Rights Council

Issue: Evaluating the effectiveness of United Nations peacekeeping operations in vulnerable regions

Student Officer: Loullwa Bayoumy

Position: Deputy Chair at The Human Rights Council

Introduction

The United Nations Peacekeeping Operations have long been pivotal in upholding international peace and security, especially in regions grappling with armed conflicts, political instability, and widespread human rights violations. Established under the United Nations Charter, these missions are guided by the principles of consent, impartiality, and the non-use of force except in self-defense or the defense of the mandate. Their primary objectives include preventing the escalation of conflicts, protecting vulnerable civilian populations, supporting the implementation of peace agreements, and facilitating the reconstruction of post-conflict societies.

Since the first peacekeeping mission in 1948, UN operations have evolved significantly, adapting to complex geopolitical landscapes. Today's peacekeeping missions are multidimensional, encompassing not just military efforts but also political mediation, humanitarian assistance, electoral support, and the promotion of human rights and the rule of law. Despite these advancements, the effectiveness of UN peacekeeping has been a subject of intense scrutiny. Challenges such as limited resources, ambiguous mandates, lack of political will from member states, and allegations of misconduct by peacekeepers have raised critical concerns about their ability to achieve lasting peace.

Moreover, the human rights implications of peacekeeping operations cannot be overlooked. While these missions aim to protect civilians and prevent atrocities, there have been instances where peacekeepers have failed to prevent human rights abuses—or, in rare cases, have been implicated in violations themselves. This raises ethical and operational questions about accountability and oversight within peacekeeping structures.

This report seeks to evaluate both the successes and limitations of UN peacekeeping missions, with a particular focus on their human rights impact in vulnerable regions. By analyzing case studies, identifying recurring challenges, and assessing strategic gaps, this report aims to contribute to the ongoing discourse on how UN peacekeeping can be reformed and strengthened to better fulfill its mandate in an increasingly volatile world.

Definition of Key Terms

Peacekeeping Operations (PKO)

Missions established by the UN to maintain or restore peace in conflict-affected areas through military, police, and civilian personnel.

United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO)

The first peacekeeping mission established by the UN to monitor ceasefires in the Middle East, particularly following the 1948 Arab-Israeli War.

North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)

A military alliance of countries, primarily from North America and Europe, that can take collective military action, such as the intervention in Kosovo.

Responsibility to Protect (R2P)

A global commitment to prevent genocide, war crimes, and human rights violations, often used to justify intervention in conflict situations.

Blue Helmets

The nickname for UN peacekeeping forces due to their distinctive blue headgear.

Civilians in Conflict

Refers to the non-combatant population who are often the victims of violence in conflict zones, whom peacekeeping missions are mandated to protect.

Hybrid Missions

Peacekeeping operations that involve cooperation between the UN and regional organizations (e.g., AU, EU), such as **UNAMID** in Darfur, combining both international and local efforts.

Humanitarian Aid

Assistance provided to save lives and alleviate suffering during and after emergencies or conflicts, often coordinated alongside peacekeeping operations to address the needs of displaced populations.

State Sovereignty vs. Intervention

The delicate balance between respecting the sovereignty of nations and the responsibility of the international community to intervene in situations where human rights are being violated (e.g., **R2P** doctrine).

Peacekeeping Mandate

A clear set of objectives and operational guidelines provided to peacekeepers, which may include monitoring ceasefires, disarming fighters, providing humanitarian assistance, and protecting civilians.

Conflict Resolution

The methods and processes used to address and resolve disputes or conflicts, typically involving negotiation, mediation, and peace agreements. Peacekeeping missions often support conflict resolution in post-war environments.

Conflict Zones

Areas experiencing armed conflict, civil unrest, or humanitarian crises, often where peacekeeping forces are deployed to stabilize the situation and protect vulnerable populations.

Key Issues

Challenges in Peacekeeping Operations

Many UN peacekeeping missions suffer from inadequate funding, leading to resource shortages, poor logistics, and understaffing. Troop-contributing countries often face financial constraints, limiting their ability to provide well-trained personnel and advanced military equipment. Rules of Engagement: Peacekeepers operate under mandates that sometimes restrict their use of force, even in situations where intervention is necessary to protect civilians. This has led to criticisms that UN forces are ineffective in preventing violence and mass atrocities. Accountability and Misconduct: Reports of sexual exploitation, abuse, and corruption involving peacekeepers have undermined trust in UN missions. The lack of strict accountability measures has allowed some violations to go unpunished, damaging the credibility of peacekeeping efforts. Sovereignty vs. Intervention: Many host countries resist foreign intervention, fearing a loss of sovereignty. Governments may place restrictions on peacekeeping operations, making it difficult for UN forces to operate effectively.

Political and Bureaucratic Challenges

Decision-making within the UN Security Council is often influenced by geopolitical interests, causing delays in mission deployments and reducing their effectiveness. Political disagreements among member states can hinder timely and decisive action.

Exit Strategies and Long-Term Stability

Many UN peacekeeping missions struggle with establishing long-term stability. Once peacekeepers withdraw, there is often a risk of conflict resurgence if local governance and security structures are not properly reinforced.

Major Parties Involved and Their Views

United Nations Security Council (UNSC)

The UNSC is the primary body responsible for authorizing peacekeeping missions. It consists of five permanent members (China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States) and ten rotating members. Permanent members often have differing views on intervention, largely influenced by geopolitical and national interests. Some members advocate for more proactive peacekeeping measures, while others prioritize state sovereignty and non-intervention policies. The UNSC's decisions significantly impact peacekeeping effectiveness, as all missions require its approval.

United Nations Peacekeeping (DPKO and DOS)

The Department of Peace Operations (DPKO) and the Department of Operational Support (DOS) oversee the administration and logistics of UN peacekeeping missions. They coordinate troop deployments, provide mission guidelines, and ensure compliance with human rights principles. However, resource constraints and bureaucratic inefficiencies often hinder their ability to respond rapidly to crises.

European Union (EU)

The EU has been an active supporter of UN peacekeeping operations through its Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) missions. The EU provides financial contributions, training, and logistical support to UN peacekeeping efforts, particularly in Africa and the Balkans. Additionally, the EU collaborates with the UN in implementing peacebuilding initiatives and post-conflict reconstruction. Despite these contributions, challenges such as coordination with UN agencies and differing political priorities sometimes hinder the efficiency of joint efforts.

African Union (AU) and Regional Organizations

The AU, along with regional organizations such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the European Union (EU), plays a crucial role in supplementing UN peacekeeping efforts. These organizations often provide additional troops, financial support, and diplomatic efforts to conflict zones. However, coordination challenges between the UN and regional organizations sometimes lead to inefficiencies in response efforts.

Host Nations

Governments of conflict-affected countries may either support or resist peacekeeping missions based on political interests and sovereignty concerns. While some host nations welcome UN interventions to restore stability, others view them as foreign interference. Government cooperation is essential for the success of peacekeeping missions, as national authorities control access to key operational areas and resources.

Troop-Contributing Countries (TCCs)

Countries that provide military and police personnel for peacekeeping missions play a significant role in operations. Developing nations such as Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, and Rwanda are among the largest contributors of peacekeeping forces. These countries often face logistical challenges but continue to contribute troops due to financial incentives and geopolitical considerations. The quality and effectiveness of peacekeeping troops depend on their training, equipment, and adherence to UN mandates.

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)

Humanitarian organizations such as Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) play a key role in monitoring peacekeeping

missions and advocating for civilian protection. These NGOs provide essential humanitarian aid, document human rights violations, and pressure international bodies to strengthen peacekeeping mandates. However, limited coordination between UN forces and NGOs sometimes hampers relief efforts.

Local Communities and Civil Society

Local populations in conflict zones are directly affected by peacekeeping missions. Their cooperation and perception of UN peacekeepers greatly influence mission success. If communities trust peacekeepers and view them as neutral actors, they are more likely to collaborate and provide crucial intelligence. However, past cases of peacekeeper misconduct have led to skepticism and resistance in some regions.

Development of Issue/Timeline

Date	Event	Outcome
29 May 1948	First UN peacekeeping mission (UNTSO - United Nations Truce Supervision Organization) established in the Middle East	Established the first UN peacekeeping presence, setting the foundation for future missions focused on conflict resolution and stabilization in regions of tension.
6 April 1994	UN failure to prevent Rwandan Genocide despite peacekeeping presence	Revealed critical weaknesses in the UN's capacity to intervene effectively in situations of mass violence, leading to calls for reform in peacekeeping mandates and strategy.
24 March 1999	NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) intervention in Kosovo with UN peacekeeping support	Signified a shift from traditional peacekeeping to more proactive, military-supported peace operations, pushing the boundaries of UN peacekeeping to address complex conflicts.
1 July 2003	Deployment of peacekeepers in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC - Mission de l'Organisation des Nations Unies en République Démocratique du Congo, later MONUSCO - Mission de l'Organisation des Nations Unies pour la Stabilisation en République Démocratique du Congo)	Aimed at stabilizing a country torn by civil war, though faced significant challenges due to ongoing violence and political instability, prompting adjustments in mission objectives.

31 July 2007	Establishment of UNAMID (United Nations-African Union Hybrid Operation in Darfur) in Darfur to address mass atrocities	Intended to protect civilians and alleviate humanitarian crises but struggled with resource limitations, logistical obstacles, and local resistance, impacting operational success.
15 July 2011	UNMISS (United Nations Mission in South Sudan) deployed to South Sudan following its independence	Focused on peacebuilding and state-building in the newly formed nation, confronting challenges of inter-communal violence and nationhood struggles, with mixed success.
25 April 2013	Deployment of MINUSMA (Mission Multidimensionnelle Intégrée des Nations Unies pour la Stabilisation au Mali) in Mali to counter terrorism and rebellion	Deployed to stabilize a fragile state amidst escalating terrorist threats, facing significant security challenges, particularly in remote areas, highlighting the need for comprehensive strategies.
30 June 2018	UN peacekeeping mission MINUJUSTH (Mission des Nations Unies pour l'Appui à la Justice en Haïti) concluded in Haiti	Marked the transition from a peacekeeping to a political mission, as Haiti had made substantial progress, yet left unresolved issues in governance and infrastructure.
27 March 2020	COVID-19 pandemic impacted peacekeeping operations globally	Disrupted peacekeeping missions with travel restrictions, quarantine measures, and health risks, causing delays and halting key operations while increasing logistical and security challenges.
15 August 2021	Taliban takeover in Afghanistan raised concerns over peacekeeping involvement	Highlighted the limitations of peacekeeping operations in politically unstable environments where local power dynamics and non-state actors overwhelm UN capabilities.
Present	Ongoing challenges in Mali, South Sudan, and Central African Republic peacekeeping missions	Ongoing efforts face multifaceted challenges, including political instability, armed conflict, and logistical constraints, with limited success in achieving long-term peace.

Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

Brahimi Report (2000)

Following the failures of several peacekeeping missions in the 1990s, including in Rwanda and Bosnia, the United Nations called for a comprehensive review of its peacekeeping operations. The Brahimi Report, named after its head, Lakhdar Brahimi, laid out a series of

recommendations to reform and strengthen peacekeeping. These included improving the rapid deployment of peacekeepers, enhancing the capacity for complex missions (such as multidimensional peacekeeping), better training and equipping of personnel, clearer mandates for peacekeeping missions, and increased funding. The report stressed the need for political will among member states to ensure the success of peacekeeping operations and emphasized the importance of integrated strategies that combine peacekeeping with political and development efforts. Many of the reforms, particularly the call for better mandate clarity and improved funding mechanisms, influenced later peacekeeping missions, although challenges execution remained.

UN Peacekeeping Reform (2017)

In response to the increasing complexity of conflicts, the growing demands on UN peacekeeping, and criticisms of the effectiveness of peacekeeping operations, the United Nations launched the "Action for Peacekeeping" (A4P) initiative in 2017. The A4P initiative aimed to revitalize and reform peacekeeping operations with a focus on improving efficiency, accountability, and safety for peacekeepers. The Initiative outlined several key actions: enhancing political solutions to conflict, ensuring peacekeepers have the necessary resources and mandates to act effectively, improving the safety and security of UN personnel, and strengthening partnerships with regional organizations and host countries. A4P emphasized a more dynamic, adaptable approach to peacekeeping, responding to the evolving nature of global conflict. Its call for increased partnerships with regional organizations, such as the African Union and the European Union, became a focal point for creating more sustainable and context-specific peacekeeping strategies.

Increased Regional Cooperation

In recent years, there has been a shift towards strengthening partnerships between the UN and regional organizations to improve the speed and effectiveness of conflict resolution and peacekeeping efforts. The idea is that regional organizations, which have more direct knowledge of local dynamics and are often more politically invested, can work in conjunction with the UN for more effective peacekeeping and conflict resolution. The African Union (AU) and UN have increasingly collaborated, particularly in regions like Darfur and South Sudan, where the AU has had a significant role in peacekeeping missions (e.g., the African Union Mission in Sudan (AMIS) and the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID)). The European Union (EU) has also collaborated with the UN in peacebuilding efforts, such as in the Central African Republic and Mali, where the EU provides significant logistical and financial support for peacekeeping missions. This regional cooperation has often led to faster, more contextually informed interventions. However, challenges in coordination, differing mandates, and political differences between regional organizations and the UN remain.

The 2005 World Summit Outcome and Responsibility to Protect (R2P)

In the aftermath of the 1990s conflicts, particularly the Rwandan Genocide and atrocities in Bosnia, there was growing international recognition that the UN needed to take more decisive action to prevent mass atrocities. In 2005, the UN World Summit Outcome

Document introduced the concept of Responsibility to Protect (R2P). R2P established that states have the primary responsibility to protect their populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity. However, if a state is unwilling or unable to protect its people, the international community, through the UN, has the responsibility to intervene — using diplomatic, humanitarian, and military means if necessary. The introduction of R2P has shaped UN peacekeeping by clarifying the conditions under which military intervention might be justified and has provided the UN with a broader mandate for humanitarian intervention in extreme situations, such as in Libya (2011). However, R2P's implementation has faced difficulties, with some arguing that it has been inconsistently applied or undermined by geopolitical interests.

The Capstone Doctrine (2008)

The Capstone Doctrine was a set of guidelines and policy documents developed by the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations to define the roles, responsibilities, and operations of UN peacekeeping missions in a more structured and systematic way. It came at a time when peacekeeping operations were becoming more complex, requiring a more robust approach to addressing multifaceted conflicts. The doctrine outlined the principles of UN peacekeeping, including consent of the parties, impartiality, and the use of force only in self-defense or to protect civilians. It also emphasized the need for multidimensional peacekeeping, integrating political, humanitarian, human rights, and development goals into peacekeeping strategies. The Capstone Doctrine remains a key reference for UN peacekeeping operations, guiding the conduct of peacekeepers and ensuring that missions are designed to promote lasting peace through comprehensive and coordinated approaches.

However, challenges have emerged in balancing the use of force with the core principles of impartiality and consent.

The Strategic Deployment Stocks (SDS) Initiative (2006)

In response to the need for more rapid deployment of peacekeeping forces, the UN established the Strategic Deployment Stocks (SDS) initiative in 2006. SDS aimed to stockpile critical equipment, including vehicles, tents, and medical supplies, in multiple locations around the world to facilitate rapid deployment in the event of a crisis. The initiative sought to reduce the delays typically associated with peacekeeping deployments, ensuring that peacekeepers could be on the ground quickly when Required. While the SDS initiative has improved the UN's ability to respond faster to crises, challenges in coordination, funding, and the political will of member states have occasionally hampered its full potential. Despite these challenges, the SDS has been an important step in enhancing the logistical flexibility of UN peacekeeping.

Peacekeeping and Technology: Drones and Surveillance (2013 - Present)

As conflicts become more complex and dangerous, UN peacekeeping operations have increasingly turned to technology to enhance their effectiveness. One significant development in this area has been the use of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), or drones, for surveillance and intelligence gathering. The UN first used drones for peacekeeping operations in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) in 2013 as part of the MONUSCO mission.

Drones have been used to monitor conflict zones, track military movements, and gather real-time data to inform decision-making and protect civilians. Drones have allowed for more precise, timely, and effective monitoring of peacekeeping operations. They have enhanced the safety of peacekeepers by identifying threats before they become imminent. However, their use has raised ethical and privacy concerns, and not all countries have supported their deployment in UN missions.

Possible Solutions

Mandate Strengthening: Empowering Peacekeepers with Clearer Rules of Engagement to Protect Civilians Effectively

A recurring challenge in UN peacekeeping operations has been the ambiguity or vagueness of mission mandates. When peacekeepers are deployed to areas where conflict is ongoing, having a clear and robust mandate is essential to ensure they can act decisively to protect civilians, prevent violence, and maintain stability. Strengthening mandates involves empowering peacekeepers with clearer rules of engagement (ROE) that allow them to take proactive action to protect civilians, particularly in high-risk environments. For example, peacekeepers could be given clearer authority to use force in situations where civilian lives are at immediate risk, such as during armed attacks on civilian populations or when terrorist groups are present. Stronger mandates would lead to more confident and decisive actions by peacekeepers, ensuring that they are not hindered by uncertainty or political hesitations. A clearer mandate could also help ensure that peacekeepers have the necessary tools and resources to enforce peace and protect human rights.

Enhanced Training and Accountability: Implementing Strict Monitoring Mechanisms to Address Misconduct by Peacekeepers

Allegations of misconduct, such as sexual exploitation, abuse, and corruption, have been serious issues within peacekeeping missions. While these represent a small fraction of the overall peacekeeping personnel, such incidents undermine the credibility and legitimacy of peacekeeping operations. To address these concerns, it's essential to implement strict training programs that emphasize ethical behavior, respect for human rights, and a zero-tolerance policy for misconduct. Training should include cultural sensitivity, conflict resolution, and human rights principles. Additionally, accountability mechanisms must be strengthened, such as independent oversight bodies, whistleblower protections, and clear disciplinary procedures. Enhanced accountability and rigorous training would help prevent instances of misconduct, promote respect for the rule of law, and foster trust between peacekeepers and local populations. The public trust in peacekeeping missions would be reinforced, and the UN could take more consistent actions against violators.

Sustainable Funding: Ensuring Reliable Financial Resources to Enhance Mission Effectiveness

One of the main challenges faced by UN peacekeeping operations is insufficient or unpredictable funding. Many missions experience delays in deployment or logistical problems because of budget constraints, while others face limitations in fulfilling their

mandates due to a lack of resources. Sustainable funding solutions involve establishing more reliable, long-term financial commitments from UN member states. This could include the creation of a peacekeeping funding mechanism that provides a stable and predictable stream of resources. Additionally, greater transparency and accountability in the allocation of funds could help ensure that money is used efficiently and that peacekeeping missions are adequately equipped to perform their duties. Reliable funding would ensure peacekeeping missions have the resources they need for timely deployment, proper equipment, and the capacity to respond effectively to evolving situations. It could also help attract and retain high-quality personnel and ensure missions don't face delays due to financial shortfalls.

Technological Advancements: Utilizing AI and Satellite Surveillance for Real-Time Conflict Monitoring

The increasing complexity of modern conflicts demands innovative solutions. In many cases, peacekeepers are faced with vast areas of operation and high-security risks that make traditional forms of intelligence gathering difficult and dangerous. Leveraging technological advancements such as artificial intelligence (AI), satellite surveillance, drones, and advanced communication tools could revolutionize peacekeeping efforts. AI can be used to analyze conflict data and predict potential hotspots or areas of escalation, while satellite surveillance and drones can provide real-time monitoring of conflict zones, allowing peacekeepers to respond quickly to emerging threats. Additionally, the use of digital tools for communication between peacekeepers, local governments, and civilians can improve coordination and information sharing. These technologies would increase the efficiency and effectiveness of peacekeeping operations, allowing for quicker decision-making and more informed interventions. They would also enhance the safety of peacekeepers by providing real-time intelligence on threats, terrain, and local conditions, enabling them to take proactive measures to protect civilians and themselves.

Improved Coordination with Humanitarian and Development Organizations

Peacekeeping operations often operate in environments where humanitarian needs are high, and where political, security, and development challenges intersect. Without coordination between peacekeepers, humanitarian organizations, and development agencies, missions can struggle to address the full range of needs in conflict zones. Peacekeeping missions should prioritize collaborating with humanitarian and development organizations to create integrated responses that address immediate security concerns while also supporting long-term recovery and rebuilding efforts. This collaboration could include joint planning, sharing of information, and mutual support in complex environments. A more integrated approach would help ensure that peacekeeping missions contribute to long-term peace and stability, by addressing both the security and development needs of conflict-affected communities. It would also prevent overlapping efforts and maximize the impact of each organization's resources and expertise.

Bibliography

- Adelman, H. (2000). *The Path to Peacebuilding: Conflict Transformation and Post-Conflict Peacebuilding*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Brahimi, Lakhdar. *Report of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations*. United Nations, 2000. <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/report-of-panel-united-nations-peace-operations-brahimi-report-a55305>
- Chesterman, S. (2002). *You, the People: The United Nations, Transitional Administration, and the Quest for Post-Conflict Legitimacy*. Oxford University Press.
- Cilliers, J. (2000). *UN Peacekeeping in Africa: Assessing Peacekeeping Operations in Africa*. Institute for Security Studies.
- Council on Foreign Relations. <https://www.cfr.org/> (Think tank with analysis and policy recommendations on international affairs, including peacekeeping)
- Daws, T. P. (2008). *United Nations peacekeeping: Appraisal and prospects*. Routledge.
- Evans, G. (1999). *The End of Human Rights: Ending Genocide in the Twenty-First Century*. University of California Press.
- Finnemore, M. (1996). *National Interests in International Society*. Cornell University Press.
- Forsythe, D. P. (1991). *The politics of peacemaking: United Nations peace operations*. Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Harrell-Bond, B. (1999). *Imposing Aid: Emergency Assistance to Refugees*. Oxford University Press.
- Howard, M. (2008). *The Weakness of the West: Why We Lose Wars in the Third World*. Oxford University Press.
- Human Rights Watch. <https://www.hrw.org/>
- International Crisis Group. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/>