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# Keeping watch: Monitoring, technology and innovation in UN peace operations

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# The evolution of peace operations

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The League of Nations . . . should be the eye of the nations to keep watch upon the common interest, an eye that does not slumber, an eye that is everywhere watchful and attentive.

US President Woodrow Wilson, Paris Peace Conference, 25 January 1919<sup>1</sup>

The United Nations has done far more than its predecessor, the League of Nations, to keep watch over the peace and security of the world. In fact, no other organization in history has as much experience in monitoring peace agreements and treaties as the United Nations. Since World War II, it has verified fragile peace arrangements between numerous conflicting parties:

- colonial powers and independence-seeking groups;
- “communist” and “capitalist” forces, usually parties fighting proxy wars for the superpowers during the Cold War;
- rebel groups and governments in Central America and in the former Soviet Union after the Cold War;
- warring states in the Middle East;
- armed factions in Southeast Asia (Cambodia and East Timor) after periods of genocide;
- ethnic groups in Africa, Asia and Europe;
- superpowers seeking international confirmation of their troop withdrawals (e.g. US withdrawal from the Dominican Republic in 1965 and Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan in 1988–1989).

Missions that the United Nations sends to the field “to prevent, manage, and/or resolve violent conflicts or reduce the risk of their

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recurrence” are broadly called peace operations, though the United Nations retains the older term “peacekeeping operation”.<sup>2</sup> The UN definition of peacekeeping (peace operation) has changed several times, but the following contains the basic elements:<sup>3</sup>

Peacekeeping is the deployment of international (UN) military, police and civilian personnel to a conflict area with the consent of the parties to the conflict, acting impartially in order to:

- stop or contain hostilities;
- supervise the carrying out of a peace agreement;
- assist with humanitarian relief, human rights compliance, and nation-building.

United Nations peacekeepers, sometimes called “Blue Helmets”, “Blue Berets” and even “Blue Caps” (civilian peacekeepers) because of the colour of their headgear, have monitored areas and activities from disputed borders to entire countries, from cease-fires to disarmament and demobilization, and from human rights to national elections. These soldiers and civilians have served as “early warners” of war, investigators of complaints,

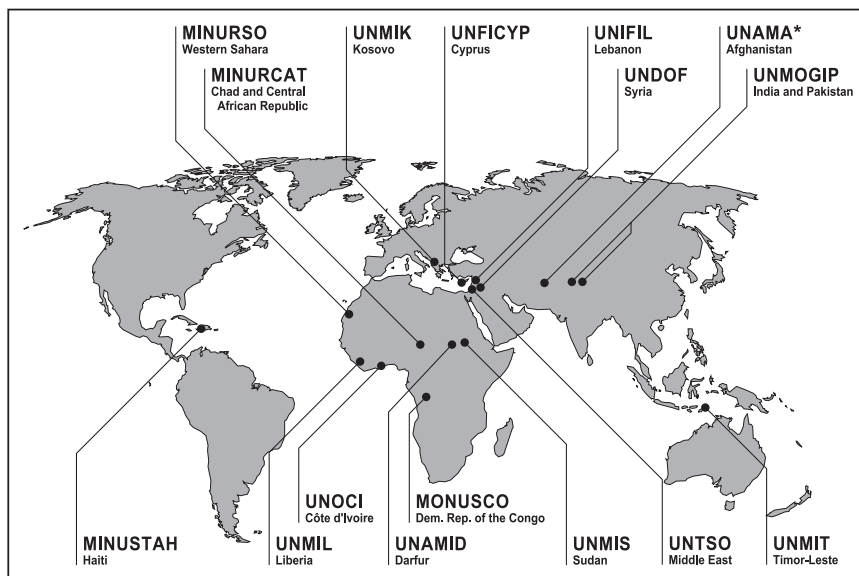


Figure 2.1 Missions administered by the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations.

Source: Based on UN Map No. 4259 Rev. 11(E), January 2010 (DPKO 2010b), updates available at <<http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/bnote.htm>> (accessed 6 January 2011).

Note: The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA, marked with \*) is technically a “political mission” though it is led by DPKO.

verifiers of compliance, evaluators of human rights, and witnesses to raging conflicts. They have also been called upon to intervene forcefully to prevent a build-up of tensions and the escalation of violence.

Experiencing both successes and failures, UN peacekeeping has evolved considerably over time, though the term peacekeeping is more identified with the older (traditional) types of mission. The mandates have become more complex and the monitoring tasks more elaborate. Over the decades, conflicting parties have generally given peacekeepers more access and more responsibilities and, on paper at least, pledged more cooperation. Particularly after the Cold War there was a dramatic increase in the mandates and number of UN peace operations in the field. In the 1990s, for instance, the number of new missions was double the number created in the previous 40 years. A map showing the current UN peace operations is shown in Figure 2.1, with abbreviations for the missions. A list of all UN operations (1948–2010) with their full titles is provided in Appendix 1, along with brief descriptions of the monitoring and other mandates.

A review of all UN peace operations shows that they can logically be divided into four broad functional categories corresponding roughly to four “generations” over its 60-odd year history.<sup>4</sup> Each new category or generation brought new tasks and additional monitoring requirements.

## Four types of peace operation

### *Observer missions*

UN OBSERVERS. Their beat – no man’s land. Their job – to get the facts straight. A frontier incident, an outbreak of fighting . . . Which nation is responsible, whose story is true? The UN must know. So its peace patrols keep vigil to prevent flare-ups, supervise truces, investigate and report. Already this vital work has helped to end bloodshed, bringing a promise of peace to millions of people.

UN poster, Department of Public Information, c. 1960<sup>5</sup>

The oldest type of peace operation is the “observer mission”, characterized by the above quotation. The main purpose is to observe the deployments and activities of the armed forces of two or more conflicting states, usually in relation to a cease-fire agreement that is often negotiated between states with UN mediation. Sometimes the mission name, as well as the mandate, includes the ambitious term “supervision”, but conditions rarely put these UN operations in such an elevated position over the parties. The unarmed observers on the ground, however, had many opportunities to help de-escalate and contain violence. In addition to the “observe and report” function, they attempt to influence parties to quell violence using advice, aid and mediation.<sup>6</sup> The first official UN peacekeeping

operation, which is still operating in the Middle East, was the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO). A full list of observer missions is provided in Appendix 1, Table A1.1.

### *Interposed forces*

The second type of operation was first formed in 1956 when a “UN force”, not simply an observer group, was deployed to the Sinai to separate the Egyptian army from the invading forces of Israel, France and the United Kingdom. This proved to be the key to end the Suez crisis. In this and other “second-generation” operations, UN troops were interposed between conflicting armed forces. These forces typically number in the thousands, whereas observer missions usually number in the hundreds. Unlike soldiers in observer missions, the peacekeepers in these operations are armed. Also they are deployed in preformed units (e.g. battalions) not as individual observers on secondment. By separating combatants physically, these more robust forces reduce the number of military contacts and flare-ups and allow more effective monitoring of the tense zones (no man’s land) between the parties. To prevent parties from violating cease-fires or gaining new ground, the UN peacekeepers must keep constant watch over the positions of the combatants and try to anticipate any forward movements of military forces from agreed positions, sometimes even placing themselves in the way of such advances.

In his pioneering report to the General Assembly on the proposed United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF), UN Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld set out the basic principles that have guided this type of operation (UN Secretary-General 1956). The Force was to be:

- under the command of the Secretary-General (as the earlier missions, including UNTSO, had by then become);
- recruited from member states other than the five permanent members of the Security Council (i.e. China, France, the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom and the United States were excluded from direct, on-the-ground participation owing to their Cold War strategic involvement in most disputes in the world);
- paid by the United Nations, except for the salaries of troops, which would continue to be covered by the contributing states, though the United Nations made a contribution per soldier;
- impartial, i.e. the forces would not favour one side over the other in the conflict; and
- non-offensive, using armed force only in self-defence.

Hammarskjöld negotiated with Egypt<sup>7</sup> an agreement that was to become a model for future Status-of-Forces Agreements (SOFAs), which the United Nations signs with host states. The SOFAs cover a wide range of

issues, including the freedom of movement and legal immunity of the UN peacekeepers.

Almost all of the traditional operations (i.e. the first and second types) have required and received invitations from the host state. The observer missions and forces could hence be withdrawn upon request of the host state, as did indeed transpire when Egypt requested the withdrawal of UNEF prior to the 1967 war. Thus the operations are of limited value once the parties are determined to engage in serious fighting.<sup>8</sup>

### *Multidimensional operations*

The third generation of UN operations (multidimensional) arose from the changed character of most conflicts following the Cold War, as described in a general fashion in Table 2.1. With internal conflicts increasing

Table 2.1 From Cold War to hot wars: Different types of conflict and peace operation

	Cold War	Post-Cold War
Predominant conflicts	<i>Interstate</i> , inter-alliance	<i>Intrastate</i> , internal
Origins	Ideology; power bloc rivalry	Ethnic/tribal/religious animosities, secessionism
Main threats	Armed attack or invasion	Civil war, human rights violations (including genocide and torture), terrorism
Goals	National and international stability; conflict management	Human security; conflict resolution; comprehensive multidimensional peace agreements; conflict prevention
Means	Deterrence; negotiation of cease-fires and troop withdrawal agreements; traditional peacekeeping; Chapter VI of UN Charter	Cooperation, mediation, modern multidimensional peacekeeping (traditional peacekeeping PLUS humanitarian action, disarmament, elections, enforcement, sanctions, economic assistance, peacebuilding); Chapter VII of UN Charter
Locations	State boundaries	Throughout a nation or region
Peacekeepers	Soldiers (non-P5, i.e. not the permanent members of the Security Council)	Soldiers, police, civilian monitors and experts (elections, human rights); including the P5

in both number and intensity, the United Nations became much more involved *within* states. The United Nations sought to foster a sustainable peace between warring factions, not just a cease-fire, and to assist in the difficult task of nation-building. This required multidimensional peace-keeping encompassing a wide range of functions and methods, including the traditional observation of armed forces, the delivery of humanitarian aid, human rights promotion, and the supervision of elections. Whereas the previous two types of operation monitored mainly military activities, the new missions needed to monitor a wide diversity of activities, including political, humanitarian, police, judicial, electoral, economic and human rights activities. The United Nations had not only to disengage the fighting forces but also to reform the security sector as a whole, especially since unreformed agencies posed a threat to the fragile peace process. New training was required for border guards, prosecutors and judges, and even for officials in intelligence agencies. In some missions the tasks expanded to include the supervision of entire departments of government, including defence and foreign affairs. The United Nations found itself at the forefront of efforts to fight crime, control cross-border smuggling and enforce sanctions.

Though a forerunner operation (ONUC) was staged in the early 1960s in the Congo, over 30 multidimensional operations have been launched since 1989, when the pioneering operation in Namibia (UNTAG) was created. Major powers, including the permanent members of the Security Council (the P5), actively participated in such modern operations.

### *Transitional administrations*

At the end of the 1990s a fourth type of operation was created for the purpose of “transitional administration”. In such cases, the United Nations finds itself not merely supervising a peace accord but actually governing an entire territory during a transitional period. The main cases of transitional administrations are the missions in Kosovo (UNMIK) and East Timor (UNTAET). Although East Timor became self-governing in 2002, Kosovo officially remains under United Nations administration.

The number of UN peacekeepers increased dramatically with each new type of operation. In an observer mission, some 500–700 military personnel were typically deployed. With UNEF (1956), the strength jumped to 5,000; similarly for other interposed forces. With the rise of multidimensional peacekeeping at the end of the Cold War the number of uniformed peacekeepers (military plus police) grew to over 10,000 per mission – with some 80,000 in the field at the 1990s peak. After the United Nations completed its missions in Cambodia (UNTAC, 1993), Somalia (UNOSOM

II, 1995) and Bosnia (UNPROFOR, 1995) – peacekeeping in Bosnia was taken up by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) – the total number of peacekeepers fell back to the 10,000 mark. But in the twenty-first century, the demand for peacekeepers has grown dramatically in two “surges”: the first to handle the two transitional administrations (UNMIK and UNTAET); the second for the missions in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC) and in Darfur (UNAMID). The number of uniformed UN peacekeepers exceeded 100,000 for the first time in March 2010. Today, the United Nations deploys more soldiers to the field than any other entity except the United States government. The developed and developing worlds contributed approximately equal numbers of peacekeepers to UN operations in the 1990s, but since 2000 the main contributing nations of military and police personnel have been from the developing world.<sup>9</sup>

The number of uniformed peacekeepers (military and police) after the Cold War is graphed in Figure 2.2, showing the two surges since 2000. The

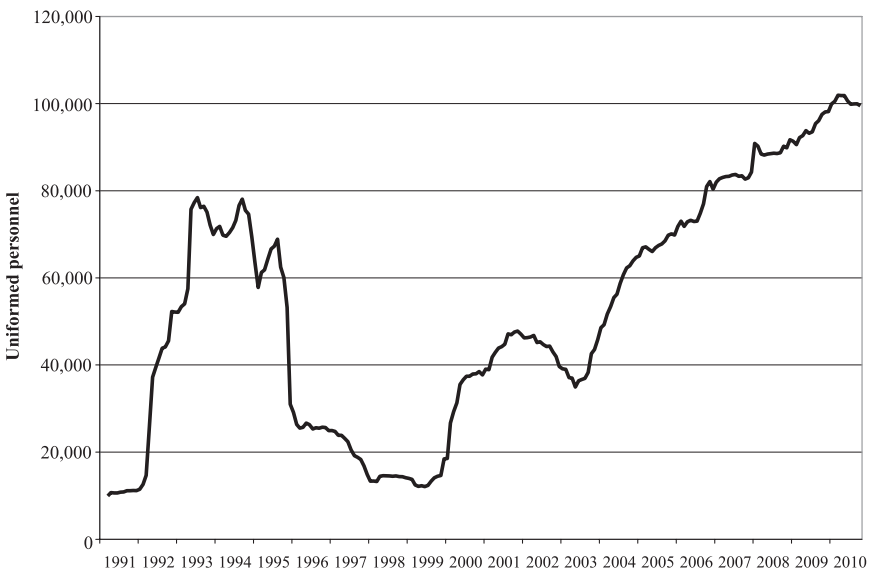


Figure 2.2 The number of uniformed personnel in UN peacekeeping since 1991.  
*Note:* I designed an earlier version of this chart while on sabbatical at the United Nations, using DPKO data mostly available at <<http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/contributors/>>. The chart was published (with permission) and is continuously updated by the United Nations on its website at <<http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/documents/chart.pdf>> (accessed 6 January 2011).



numbers in the field were at an all-time high by 2010. Adding the civilians (both international and local), the total number of personnel in peacekeeping was an unprecedented 125,000.

The purpose and methods of each of the four major categories of peace operation are summarized in Table 2.2. The 70-plus operations are listed within each category in Appendix 1, providing the “alphabet soup” of UN acronyms and indicating the monitoring activities of these missions. Since the first operation was created in 1948,<sup>10</sup> the vast majority (over two-thirds) were launched after the end of the Cold War.<sup>11</sup> Though the third type, multidimensional missions, is the most common, there are still missions of the other types in operation today, as shown in Appendix 1.

All UN peace operations must maintain a delicate balance between the conflicting parties in order to keep the peace. The United Nations cannot appear to be dominant or it will be accused of being an “occupying” force. Still, in many conflicts where parties respect military strength above all, some force may well be necessary to keep the peace. Various forms of dominance may be needed, especially in multidimensional operations and transitional administrations. This was exemplified in the non-UN mission run by NATO in Bosnia and Herzegovina – IFOR/SFOR (Implementation Force / Stabilisation Force) – where “information dominance” quickly became a key component of mission success (see Chapter 7). In UN multidimensional operations of the twenty-first century, the United Nations finally began to make use of “information power”, creating its own analytical centres within its field missions (Dorn 2010).

Armed force remains a valuable deterrent, but minimum force only should be applied, given the inevitable resentment that comes after death and destruction. So, for the United Nations at least, “information power” is a more important tool than “military force”. And when the latter is required as a last resort, information also plays a central role in determining when and where to apply force. Multidimensional UN operations generally aim to be robust as well as flexible. Expanding the United Nations’ information horizon allows it more options across the spectrum from soft to hard power.<sup>12</sup>

As UN operations evolved across the four types, the monitoring and information requirements grew. These needs must be reviewed before exploring the appropriate technologies to match the missions. Historically, the United Nations has used a host of methods, including observation posts, checkpoints, foot and vehicle patrols, and occasionally aerial reconnaissance, but few technological means. This is surprising given the importance of monitoring.

Table 2.2 Four types or “generations” of UN peace operation

Type of operation	Purpose	Means and methods	First missions
<b>Observer missions</b>	Determine if parties are respecting a cease-fire or other peace agreements, and assist in local settlements	Monitoring through foot and vehicle patrols, observation posts, checkpoints, etc. Mostly UN military observers	UNTSO (1948–) in the Middle East was the first official mission of this type; UNMOGIP (1949–) in Kashmir followed shortly thereafter
<b>Interposed forces</b>	Prevent or put an end to combat between opposing armies	Placing peacekeeping troops, mostly battalions, between combatants. Using patrols, checkpoints (fixed or mobile), searches, escort, show of UN presence/force	UNEF (1956–67), stationed between Israeli and Egyptian forces, was the first peacekeeping force
<b>Multidimensional operations</b>	Oversee or assist in the implementation of a complex peace agreement, which may involve disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of former combatants, humanitarian assistance, electoral assistance, human rights, civilian police, mine clearance, etc.	All of the above, plus protection of assembly areas and civilians, storage and destruction of surrendered weapons, escorts and protection of key personnel/facilities, oversight of police forces and other parts of the security sector, etc. Uses military, civilian police and civilian peacekeepers	ONUC (1960–4) was the first of this type; UNTAG (1989–90) in Namibia pioneered this type of mission in modern times; UNTAC (1992–3) in Cambodia saw a large increase in UN roles and responsibilities

Protection of civilians (vulnerable populations)	Humanitarian aid convoys, road clearing, evacuation plans for vulnerable persons, securing sites such as refugee camps and designated territory. Uses military forces and civilian police, humanitarian workers, etc.	UNPROFOR (1992-5) in Bosnia had responsibility for “UN Protected Areas” but did not have the means; these missions work in close cooperation with humanitarian agencies (e.g. UNHCR); virtually all missions created in the twenty-first century included this mandate
Govern a territory during a transition to independence and self-governance	Comprehensive missions covering all aspects of society (from military and legal to education and sanitation). Uses soldiers, police and administrators of all types	UNMIK (1999-) in Kosovo and UNTAET (1999-2002) in East Timor are the main examples. Earlier, UNTEA (1962-3) in West New Guinea (Indonesia)

**Transitional administrations**

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*Notes:* UNTSO – UN Truce Supervision Organization; UNMOGIP – UN Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan; UNEF – UN Emergency Force; ONUC – UN Operation in the Congo; UNTAG – UN Transition Assistance Group; UNTAC – UN Transitional Authority in Cambodia; UNPROFOR – UN Protection Force; UNHCR – United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees; UNMIK – UN Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo; UNTAET – UN Transitional Administration in East Timor; UNTEA – UN Temporary Executive Authority.

## Notes

1. Quote in Wilson (1986: 265).
2. This definition of peace operation is drawn from *United Nations Peacekeeping Operations: Principles and Guidelines*, the “capstone” document of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Department of Field Support (DPKO and DFS 2008). NATO uses the term “peace support operations”, which include the following types of operation: peacemaking, peacebuilding, humanitarian assistance, peacekeeping, peace enforcement and prevention. The following are my brief explanations of the terms: peacemaking – negotiations for a sustainable peace; peacebuilding – creating the physical and social infrastructure for peace; humanitarian assistance – providing the means for human beings in distress to survive; peacekeeping – providing security, cease-fire verification and military assistance; peace enforcement – using force to press parties to abide by their agreements and international law; and prevention – to stop a conflict from starting or escalating. Official NATO definitions can be found in NATO (2010b).
3. This definition of peacekeeping is based on one taken from the UN website <<http://www.un.org/Depts/dpko>> in February 1999.
4. The peacekeeping literature usually considers only two categories or generations: traditional peacekeeping and second-generation (or modern) peacekeeping. This breakdown ignores the fact that “traditional” peacekeeping is itself divided into two categories: observer missions (first used in 1946–1948 in Greece, Indonesia, Korea and Palestine) and armed forces interposed between conflicting parties (first used in 1956 in Egypt). Similarly, modern (post–Cold War) missions are of two types. In the 1990s, the range of functions increased dramatically to include many non-military functions. This constituted multidimensional missions. At the turn of the century, another jump was made, with some new missions actually governing entire territories during a transitional period (transitional administration). Hence the concept of four types or generations of peacekeeping, introduced for the first time here, is more precise than the usual two.
5. The UN poster is visible in a photograph from the UN Department of Public Information (1960).
6. In all generations of peacekeeping operations, the United Nations tries to prevent or reduce fighting through negotiation, mediation and the exercise of its “good offices”, but it can succeed only to the extent that the parties allow.
7. David Ben Gurion, the Prime Minister of Israel, stated in parliament that “on no account will Israel agree to the stationing of foreign forces, no matter how called, in her territory, or in any of the areas occupied by her” (United Nations 1996: 45). Although UNEF was not stationed on Israel, UNTSO continued to operate there (with its headquarters still in Jerusalem) and the UN Interim Force in Lebanon later worked in areas occupied by Israel in Lebanon.
8. The United Nations Iraq–Kuwait Observation Mission, which occupied territory on both nations, is an exception. The Security Council created the mission under Chapter VII and, under international law, it cannot be withdrawn without the authorization of the Council, even if the states (i.e. Iraq or Kuwait) demand its removal. Some other missions (e.g. UNOSOM in Somalia) have had similarly strong mandates.
9. In 1995, the developed world (as represented by the nations of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) accounted for 51 per cent of UN uniformed peacekeepers; 10 years later, the contribution had fallen to only 8 per cent (my computations). After 1995, NATO began to take on major peacekeeping responsibilities, starting in Bosnia and later in Kosovo. The European Union also deployed short-term forces in 2003 and 2006 to the Democratic Republic of the Congo in support of the ongoing UN-led peace process.

10. UNTSO, created in 1948, is considered by the United Nations to be its first peacekeeping operation, since it came under the control of the UN Secretary-General. Earlier missions of the United Nations, though not under the Secretary-General's control, could also be considered as peacekeeping operations, namely the Commissions sent to Greece (1946), Indonesia (1947) and Korea (1947). In those multinational missions, the personnel directly represented states and not the United Nations as a whole.
11. The end of the Cold War is taken to be 1988, even before the 1989 fall of the Berlin Wall. It became clear in 1988 that the Soviet Union, under Mikhail Gorbachev, was no longer going to participate in the superpower arms race. In December 1988, Gorbachev announced unprecedented and unilateral cuts to the Soviet armed forces. Earlier, in February 1988, the Soviet Union declared it would start repatriating troops from Afghanistan under UN observation. The Soviets had begun constructive engagement in the UN Security Council since 1986. On 17 September 1987, Gorbachev made his dramatic proposals for strengthening the United Nations, including wider use of peacekeeping forces and enhanced monitoring powers for the UN Secretary-General. See Mikhail S. Gorbachev, "Reality and the Guarantees of a Secure World", *Pravda* and *Izvestia* article available in UN Secretary-General (1987).
12. For a creative and broad overview, see Steele (2010a).