

Who Is Dying for Peace? An Analysis of UN Peacekeeping Fatalities

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Since 1948, over 2,400 peacekeepers have made the "supreme sacrifice" while serving in UN operations. Thus the UN has suffered a historical average of forty fatalities of uniformed and civilian peacekeepers per year. A more precise analysis reveals significant variations and trends that may help identify the causes and, hopefully, help prevent future losses.

With the end of the Cold War and the advent of modern multidimensional peacekeeping, the number of deployed peacekeepers jumped from the traditional level of about 10,000 to a peak almost eight times that number. Unfortunately, the number of fatalities experienced an even greater jump. The year 1993 was the worst for peacekeeping fatalities in UN history. In the dangerous operations in Somalia, Bosnia, Cambodia, and other UN locations, 225 personnel lost their lives, about half from malicious acts. Fortunately, the situation in peacekeeping has improved tremendously since 1993. In 2006, there were 107 deaths, even though the number of peacekeepers in the field was 10 percent greater than in 1993.

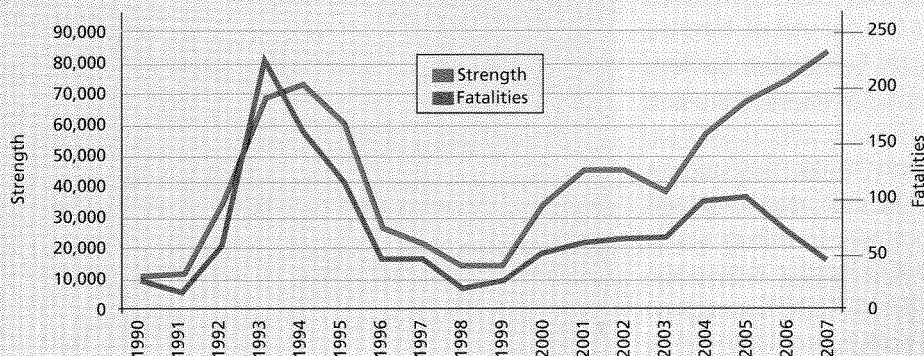
Malicious acts accounted for only 16 percent, while illness had become the prime killer, at 57 percent, for both military and civilian personnel. Accidents accounted for most of the remaining 27 percent.

The annual fatality rate for uniformed personnel has declined steadily since 1993, from 3.30 deaths per 1,000 serving, to 0.97 in 2006; a further decrease in the fatality rate, to 0.47, was projected for 2007. This encouraging trend is particularly pronounced in the new century: though the number of uniformed peacekeepers increased fivefold from 2000 to 2007, the number of fatalities did not rise accordingly, and even declined in recent years (see figure below).

For civilians working in UN operations, unfortunately, the same trend has not been observed. The fatality rate for international civilians increased from 1.0 per 1,000 in 2000, to 2.2 in 2006. The fatality rate for UN personnel hired locally was even higher, at 2.6 in 2006. Thus it is more risky to be a civilian in the field than to be a soldier. In 2006 the

fatality rate for civilians was more than double that of uniformed personnel.

Throughout the history of the UN, fatalities have been significant for both the developed and the developing world. India and Canada have suffered the most military fatalities (122 and 114, respectively, to the end of 2006). The United States and Argentina have experienced the greatest number of UN police fatalities (12 each). For international civilians, US and Indian fatalities top the list (12 and 7, respectively). The 2006 overall fatality rate for the developing world, however, was 77 percent higher than that for the developed world. This is especially significant because almost 90 percent of troops in the field are from the developing world. In recent years, illness has become the main cause of death. The UN would do well to directly address this issue of rising illness. A more thorough analysis of fatality statistics might be an important first step.



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Note: Figures for 2007 have been extrapolated from DPKO Situation Centre data available as of 30 September 2007.