PEACE & SECURITY ISSUES

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UN PEACEKEEPING: A FORCE FOR
GLOBAL PEACE & STABILITY

Since the end of the Cold War, UN peacekeeping operations have expanded in size and scope, with complex responsibilities mandated by the Security Council, including protecting civilians threatened by violence, facilitating delivery of humanitarian aid, carrying out disarmament and demobilization processes, supporting democratic elections, and helping fragile states build more effective and resilient rule of law institutions.

The U.S., under both Republican and Democratic administrations, has long used its permanent seat on the Security Council to support the deployment of peacekeeping operations, because they are:

▷ EFFECTIVE AT SAVING LIVES AND CONTAINING CONFLICT

Armed conflict often features horrific abuses against civilian populations, fuels forced displacement, and provides potentially fertile ground for the growth of extremist groups and organized crime. As a result, the U.S. has a strong interest in ending conflicts and mitigating their effects. Multiple academic studies have attested to the effectiveness of peacekeeping missions in doing just that. A paper by Swedish and American researchers, for example, found that deploying large numbers of UN troops “significantly decreases violence against civilians” in the context of civil wars.¹ A 2019 book, Power in Peacekeeping, which analyzed more than two decades of research on the topic, found peacekeeping to be an “effective tool for saving lives and ending wars.” The book goes on to argue that if “we want less terrorism, more burden-sharing, and lower U.S. costs for counter-terrorism, it makes sense to invest in peacekeeping.”²

COST-EFFICIENT
UN peacekeeping operations are significantly less costly than other forms of military intervention. In 2018, using the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) as an example, the U.S. Government Accountability Office found that a U.S. operation of roughly the same size and duration would cost at least $5.7 billion, which is nearly eight times more than the $700 million the U.S. contributed to MINUSCA over the same time period. Overall, at $6.5 billion, the UN’s peacekeeping budget is equivalent to less than 1 percent of total annual U.S. defense spending.

AN EXAMPLE OF MULTILATERAL BURDEN-SHARING
UN peacekeeping harnesses the collective resources of the international community, ensuring that neither American taxpayers, nor the U.S. military, will have to take on the responsibility of safeguarding international peace and security alone. While the U.S.’s Security Council veto puts it in the driver’s seat on the decision to deploy peacekeeping missions in the first place, other UN Member States pay nearly three-quarters of the budget and contribute more than 99.9 percent of the troops and police who serve on them. In fact, the UN’s top five contributors of uniformed personnel—Ethiopia, Bangladesh, Rwanda, India, and Nepal—each provide thousands of troops, military observers, and police to UN missions, while the U.S. currently provides just several dozen.
KEY UN PEACEKEEPING MISSIONS CURRENTLY IN THE FIELD

There are 85,000 peacekeepers serving on 13 missions across sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East, southeastern Europe, and South Asia, constituting the second-largest military force deployed abroad. Several of these missions are profiled in greater detail below.

MALI
Since 2012, Mali has been convulsed by insecurity, including the rise of extremist groups linked to Al-Qaeda and ISIS. First deployed to the country in 2013, the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) has played a critical role in efforts to stabilize the region. They have facilitated free and fair presidential and parliamentary elections, helping the country return to democracy after a military coup; overseen a shaky peace agreement between the government and Tuareg separatists in the north; and perhaps most importantly, kept the extremists at bay, preventing them from reasserting control over northern population centers like Timbuktu, Gao, and Kidal. While the security situation in Mali and the wider Sahel region remains very difficult, the situation would be much worse if peacekeepers were not present.

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO
Originally deployed in July 2010, since August 2018, the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) has expanded its focus to include countering the threat from Ebola. The North Kivu province is currently in the throes of the second most deadly Ebola outbreak on record, and instability, including attacks on health workers, has seriously undermined the response. As a result, in addition to its normal stabilization activities, MONUSCO has stepped in to provide static guard deployments at Ebola transit, treatment, and coordinating centers; increased patrols to prevent security incidents and deployed quick reaction forces in response to attacks on health workers and facilities; and provided armed escorts to health partners. MONUSCO is also providing logistical and operational support to Ebola response efforts, including vehicles, generators, fuel, and communications support.

SOUTH SUDAN
The UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) was first deployed in 2011 to help promote stability and support state-building efforts in the world’s newest country. However, after civil war broke out in December 2013, leaving tens of thousands of people dead, driving millions from their homes, and sparking large-scale food insecurity, UNMISS was immediately forced to shift its focus to civilian protection. In an unprecedented move, UNMISS opened the gates of its bases in the capital, Juba, to assist those fleeing from violence. As fighting spread to other parts of the country, several other UNMISS bases did the same. Currently, UNMISS is providing physical protection to more than 200,000 civilians at six sites around the country, helping to protect and save the lives of many people who would have otherwise likely been directly targeted by the violence.

LEBANON
Since 2006, following a devastating month-long war between Hezbollah and Israel, the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) has been instrumental in helping to maintain calm between Israel and Lebanon. Following a 2019 visit to Lebanon, Representatives Tom Graves (R-GA), Adam Kinzinger (R-IL), and Vicente Gonzalez (D-TX) stated that, “The United Nations and its peacekeeping force play a vital and stabilizing role for the country.” UNIFIL does this by monitoring the border through regular patrols to detect ceasefire violations; deploying troops to locations when incidents occur to avoid a direct clash between the parties and ensure that the situation is contained; and through regular coordination and liaison activities, to help build confidence between the two sides and resolve disagreements. A key mechanism in this effort is the mission’s Tripartite Forum, which features monthly meetings between the UNIFIL Force Commander and senior officials of the Israeli and Lebanese militaries. This UNIFIL mechanism—the only forum where Israeli and Lebanese representatives meet at any level—is an important tool for facilitating communication and information-sharing and formulating peaceful solutions to disagreements, reducing the risk of flare-ups and providing an off-ramp when tensions escalate.
INTERNATIONAL TERRORISM

Terrorism and violent extremism pose a grave and persistent threat to international peace and security. As we have learned over the last two decades, terror networks operate in countries frequently beyond the reach of American access and influence, making a comprehensive, multilateral approach to this global problem necessary.

The UN is a critical partner in this challenge. For more than 15 years, the UN Security Council has enforced robust, legally-binding sanctions, including asset freezes, travel bans, and arms embargoes, targeting individuals, groups, and entities associated with Al-Qaeda. These measures were later expanded to include ISIS as well. UN sanctions imposed by the Security Council are considered the "gold standard" for coordinated international action. While the U.S. can impose unilateral sanctions, many countries will not adopt their own sanctions absent the important global legal imprimatur of a UN decision.

Besides imposing sanctions, the Security Council works to advance international legal norms against terrorism in other ways as well. In March 2019, for example, the Council adopted a resolution requiring countries to ensure that their domestic laws establish serious criminal offenses for the willful provision or collection of funds for the benefit of terrorist organizations.

In addition to denying terrorist groups the funds and weapons necessary to operate, the Council has also prioritized ensuring that terrorist leaders are brought to justice. To this end, in late 2017, the Council unanimously adopted a resolution establishing an investigative team, composed of both Iraqi and international experts, to help collect, preserve, and store evidence of war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide committed by ISIS in Iraq. At the time, international human rights lawyer and activist Amal Clooney stated that, “It’s been a long time coming; in the meantime, evidence has been lost and we’ve lost some opportunities along the way, but the fact that we have this resolution now means that justice is finally possible.” Since then, the team, known by its acronym UNITAD, has begun its work in Iraq, aiding efforts to, among other things, exhume mass graves of Yazidi civilians executed by ISIS in the Sinjar region.
OPIOIDS

A recent United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) report found that global use of deadly opioid drugs has reached a new high, and here in the U.S., the Centers for Disease Control and estimate that 130 people die from opioid overdoses every day. This makes the need for global collaboration on the opioid crisis more important than ever, which is why the United Nations and its agencies, like UNODC, the UN Commission on Narcotic Drugs, World Health Organization (WHO), and other entities work in close coordination with the U.S.

In early 2017, at the request of the U.S., the UN Commission on Narcotic Drugs voted to put international controls on two primary ingredients that are used to produce Fentanyl, a drug 50 times more potent than heroin and responsible for at least half the people who died of opioid overdoses in 2016. Later that year, WHO called for Carfentanil—a drug the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency has noted is showing up in more U.S. communities and is so powerful that it is flagged as a potential chemical weapon—to be subject to the strictest drug control classifications. Additional control under these classifications imposes the strongest possible regulations by prohibiting production and supply of substances except under license for specific purposes, such as medical treatment and research.

Other parts of the UN system are also playing a critical role in the fight against opioids. According to a January 2018 report by the U.S. Senate Homeland Security Committee, more than $800 million of opioids were shipped from China to the U.S. through the U.S. Postal Service over a two-year period. The U.S. has used its membership in the Universal Postal Union (UPU), a UN specialized agency, to push for stronger action at the international level to combat the trafficking of illicit drugs through the mail. Early in 2018, UPU announced a new training program designed to improve the detection and seizure of illicit substances. Separately, the U.S. used its membership in UPU to push for the exchange of advance electronic data (AED), allowing U.S. customs authorities to better monitor and screen high-risk packages. Eighty countries agreed to exchange this data by 2020—an important achievement, given that a 2018 law, the STOP Act—requires the application of AED to 100 percent of incoming packages by 2021.

HUMAN TRAFFICKING

A January 2019 UNODC report showed that the number of human trafficking cases detected during 2016 was at a 13-year high. The same report found that armed conflicts can increase vulnerability to trafficking as areas with weak rule of law and lack of resources to respond to crime provide traffickers with a fertile terrain to carry out their operations.

The UN system offers practical help to UN Member States to help fight these crimes. UNODC, for example, works to strengthen criminal justice responses to human trafficking and raise public awareness globally. In order to effectively combat trafficking, countries must adopt comprehensive legal frameworks criminalizing the practice. To achieve this objective, UNODC has provided legislative assistance to numerous countries that need help formulating anti-trafficking legislation of their own. UNODC also manages the UN's Voluntary Trust Fund for Victims of Human Trafficking, a funding mechanism that provides humanitarian and legal assistance, financial support, shelter, and vocational training to survivors around the world.

UN specialized agencies also play a role in efforts to counter trafficking for forced labor or sexual exploitation. For instance, the International Civil Aviation Organization offers training and guidelines for airlines to spot trafficking in air travel. The International Labor Organization's legally-binding Protocol on Forced Labor, meanwhile, aims to strengthen global efforts towards combating forced labor, trafficking, and slavery-like practices.
The UN serves as a key international platform for countries to work together to stem the proliferation of nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons. The UN General Assembly, Security Council, International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), and other bodies provide venues for countries to share resources and information, address breaches of international agreements, and build unified fronts against rogue states. The work of the UN in several specific areas is described below.

**SANCTIONING NORTH KOREA**

Beginning in late 2016, the UN Security Council significantly ratcheted up sanctions against North Korea over its expanding nuclear program. The Security Council unanimously adopted a series of U.S.-backed resolutions which:

- Targeted the central pillars of North Korea’s economy and banned Pyongyang from exporting coal, iron, textiles, seafood, lead, and agricultural products;
- Cut imports of refined petroleum by 89 percent;
- Required countries to expel North Korean guest workers, a critical source of hard currency for the regime; and
- Compelled countries to seize and impound ships caught smuggling prohibited items to and from North Korea.

At the time, then-U.S. Ambassador to the UN Nikki Haley stated that these actions represented “an unprecedented response” to North Korea’s nuclear program. They also helped set the stage for direct negotiations between the U.S. and North Korea, including two summit meetings between President Trump and Kim Jong-un in 2018 and 2019.

The UN Panel of Experts (POE) on North Korea, a body of independent experts that assesses the effectiveness and impact of the sanctions, plays a key role in monitoring international compliance with the Security Council’s directives, and providing the Council with critical information it needs when considering strengthening them. POE reports also serve as an important tool for pressuring sanctions violators, including governments and businesses alike, and can inform efforts by individual Member States, such as the U.S., to strengthen their own bilateral sanctions measures. In its most recent report, the POE detailed a number of North Korea’s sanctions evasion tactics, including deliveries of coal and oil through illicit ship-to-ship transfers, as well as its extensive use of cyber attacks to steal funds from financial institutions and cryptocurrency exchanges.

**MONITORING IRAN’S NUCLEAR PROGRAM**

In 2018, the U.S. decided to withdraw from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, or JCPOA, and reimpose unilateral sanctions on Iran. Despite this, the IAEA—a UN-affiliated agency that seeks to ensure the peaceful use of nuclear technologies—continues to monitor and verify Iran’s nuclear activities and report on its compliance with the terms of the deal. In the wake of the U.S. withdrawal, IAEA raised the alarm about Iran’s increasing violations of the pact, including a report in the fall of 2019 noting that agency inspectors had found uranium particles at an undeclared site in Tehran and verified that Iran had resumed uranium enrichment at its underground Fordow nuclear facility.
In January 2020, in response to the killing of Quds Force Commander Major General Qassem Soleimani in a U.S. drone strike in Baghdad, Iran announced that it no longer considered itself bound by any of the deal's restrictions on the number or types of centrifuges it can employ or the level of uranium enrichment it can pursue. At the same time, it left open the possibility of reversing course if the U.S. withdraws sanctions and stated that it would continue to cooperate with IAEA inspectors. While it remains to be seen whether Iran and the U.S. will eventually return to the terms of the JCPOA, IAEA will continue to play an essential role in providing the international community with a window into Iran's nuclear activities.

CONFRONTING THE USE OF CHEMICAL WEAPONS

In 1997, the Chemical Weapons Convention—a treaty that prohibits the development, production, and stockpiling of chemical weapons—came into force, and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), an agency charged with ensuring their elimination, was born. Under the terms of the treaty, OPCW inspectors have verified the destruction of more than 96 percent of the world's declared chemical weapons stockpiles.

The OPCW is also empowered to investigate alleged instances of chemical weapons use. In this regard, the organization's Syria fact-finding mission has been illustrative, confirming on multiple occasions the use of sarin, chlorine, and mustard gas during the Syrian civil war since 2014. While this investigative mechanism was previously only allowed to determine the facts regarding the use of chemical weapons, and not call out guilty parties, in June 2018 OPCW Member States voted overwhelmingly to allow the organization to begin attributing responsibility for chemical attacks in Syria. While Russia continues to use its veto on the Security Council to shield the Syrian government from punishment for its use of chemical weapons, such investigations nevertheless play an important role in isolating the regime and its backers and potentially laying the groundwork for future accountability.
In addition to peacekeeping operations, the UN operates special political missions (SPMs) engaged in conflict prevention, mediation, and post-conflict peacebuilding around the world. Authorized by the Security Council, SPMs are tasked with an array of responsibilities, including: supporting political dialogue and reconciliation processes; facilitating free and fair elections; monitoring human rights violations; and encouraging the development of effective rule of law institutions. Funded by Member State dues, SPMs account for nearly one-fifth of the UN regular budget. The work of several SPMs is highlighted below.

**Yemen**

The UN’s work in Yemen is not merely confined to addressing the humanitarian consequences of the conflict. The UN is also deeply involved, through the Secretary-General’s Special Envoy for Yemen Martin Griffiths, in efforts to navigate a negotiated, political solution to what has become a complex and multi-faceted conflict involving an array of local interests and factions, with the increasingly intense rivalry between Gulf Arab monarchies in the region and Iran layered on top. Special Envoy Griffiths was instrumental in brokering talks that took place in Sweden in December 2018 between the Houthis and the Yemeni government, the first time the two sides had met face-to-face in nearly 2½ years. While relatively modest in scope, the agreements they reached on a ceasefire and military redeployment from Hodeidah and several other key ports helped avert a devastating Saudi-led military assault on the city, and could set the stage for further diplomatic efforts to peacefully end the conflict.

Endorsed by the Security Council, these agreements also provided for the creation of a SPM, the UN Mission to Support the Hodeidah Agreement (UNMHA), consisting of 75 monitors charged with verifying the ceasefire and helping to calm tensions. While implementation of the Stockholm Agreements has been slow and all parties have alleged violations by their rivals, UNMHA has played an active role in helping to prevent an escalation of hostilities and served as a liaison between humanitarian organizations and military forces on the ground.

**Iraq**

The UN Mission in Iraq (UNAMI) works to promote political dialogue, human rights, and the creation of stable and democratic governing institutions. UNAMI also helps coordinate humanitarian and development assistance to the Iraqi people. Since the defeat of ISIS in 2018, humanitarian conditions in Iraq have remained dire. As a result, UN agencies such as the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) provided assistance to more than 1.4 million people across the country in 2019, including food, shelter for internally displaced civilians, and medical care. The UN Development Programme (UNDP) has financed more than 2,100 projects across five provinces to restore infrastructure and basic services destroyed during the fight against ISIS. These projects include:

- Rebuilding hospitals in Ramadi and Fallujah that will serve more than one million people in Anbar Province;
- Repairing a hospital in Hamdaniya which serves a community of 350,000, many of whom are religious minorities;
- Rebuilding and removing explosive hazards from a bridge in Fallujah, improving transport links for 350,000 people; and
- Rehabilitating electricity substations in eastern Mosul, improving access to electricity for 450,000 people.
AFGHANISTAN

The UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) carries out a number of activities critical to the country’s stability and development, a key U.S. priority. For instance:

- UNDP administers a trust fund that funds salaries to more than 150,000 police personnel and finances efforts to improve the force’s infrastructure and administrative systems, provide training to officers, and improve gender parity within the force;
- The UN Office on Drugs and Crime works to strengthen police capacity to enforce the rule of law, enhance border control management to prevent smuggling, increase institutional integrity of the justice system to combat impunity, and help Afghan government oversight bodies fight corruption; and
- UNAMA coordinates the activities of UN humanitarian agencies that helped to provide food to more than five million people affected by a severe drought, facilitate the reintegration of Afghan refugees returning from abroad, and assist in vaccinating millions of children against polio.

SOMALIA

For more than two decades, Somalia has been in a protracted state of political and humanitarian crisis, a situation further complicated by the presence of Al-Shabaab, a terrorist group linked to Al-Qaeda. In order to help stabilize the country and facilitate the formation of an effective central government, the U.S. has supported the work of the UN Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM) since 2013. UNSOM provides policy advice and technical assistance to Somali authorities on a number of critical state-building issues, including:

- Aiding efforts to create a new federal constitution;
- Building the government’s capacity to carry out security sector reform and strengthen the criminal justice system;
- Helping Somali authorities institute a nationwide disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration program for ex-combatants; and
- Assisting the country’s nascent electoral commission prepare for national elections slated for 2020.

UNSOM also coordinates its efforts closely with the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), a regional peacekeeping operation that, working alongside local Somali forces, has scored major territorial gains against al-Shabaab in recent years. The UN Support Office for Somalia, which works with UNSOM, provides crucial equipment and logistical support to AMISOM as it seeks to weaken Al-Shabaab and extend the Somali government’s authority throughout areas formerly controlled by the group.
IMPACT OF THE UNITED NATIONS OVER THE PAST 75 YEARS

Throughout the past seven decades, the UN has:

- Delivered more than 70 million metric tons of food to people in humanitarian emergencies
- Helped more than 50 million refugees successfully restart their lives
- Operated 71 peacekeeping and observer missions
- Provided over 100 countries with electoral assistance
- Supported efforts to lift more than 1 billion people out of poverty
- Procured vaccines for 860 million children
- Cleared landmines in some 30 countries or territories
- Promoted human rights through 80 treaties and declarations

And through all of the good that the UN does, it is a resoundingly good bargain for the U.S.:

0.2%
Funding for the UN amounts to 0.2% of the total FY'20 federal budget

$10 BILLION
U.S. companies have been awarded more than ten billion dollars in contracts with the UN since 2010