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UN Peacekeepers: Guardians of Peace or a Work in Progress?

Briefing for MPs on UN Processes #11.

Wednesday, 28 May 2025, 09:00 – 10:00 (New York) - In English and French

Since 1948, UN Peacekeepers, widely recognised by their iconic blue helmets, have been at the forefront of international efforts to sustain peace in conflict zones. Operating under challenging conditions, they aim to protect civilians, support political processes, and facilitate the rebuilding of war-torn societies. However, their missions are not without criticism or limitations.

UN Peacekeeping **missions** engage over 87,000 personnel from more than 120 countries and operate with an annual budget of \$6.45 billion. Their objectives include protecting civilians, supporting political negotiations, and enabling post-conflict recovery. Notable successes include missions in Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Cambodia. However, **challenges** persist, including allegations of misconduct, resource constraints, and operational inefficiencies. A most significant limitation of peacekeeping mission is their narrow mandate, which is mostly limited to maintaining peace after a ceasefire rather than actively intervening to prevent conflicts.

A frequent question concerns why peacekeepers maintain peace rather than enforce it. Primary reasons include:

- Legal restrictions - Chapter VI and VII of the UN Charter require host-state consent and limit the use of force except in self-defence.
- Mandate constraints - most missions are designed to monitor ceasefires and prevent escalations rather than actively engage armed groups.
- Resource and political constraints - robust enforcement would require substantial military capacity, which member states are often unwilling to provide,
- Risk of impartiality - if peacekeepers actively engage in combat, they may risk being seen as a partisan force rather than a mediator.

In recent years, **misconduct**, particularly allegations of sexual violence and exploitation, have undermined trust in UN peacekeepers. To address these issues, measures such as enhanced training on conduct and discipline, strengthened oversight mechanisms, and the establishment of the Office of the Special Coordinator on Improving the UN Response to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse has been implemented. Despite these efforts, challenges remain in holding perpetrators accountable, especially when troops hail from contributing countries with limited legal frameworks to address such misconduct.

The **gender dimension** of Peacekeeping is another critical area of focus. Women currently represent 6.6% of uniformed

Did You Know?

Top Contributors: Bangladesh, India, and Rwanda provide the most troops to Peacekeeping missions.

Cost: The Peacekeeping budget constitutes less than 0.5% of global military spending.

Gender representation: Women currently make up 6.6% of uniformed personnel.

personnel, with ongoing efforts to improve representation and integrate gender-sensitive recruitment practices. Gender equality in Peacekeeping not only enhances operational effectiveness but also fosters greater trust and cooperation from local communities.

Current **reform\ proposals** aim to revise mandates to include conflict prevention, strengthen accountability mechanisms, and leverage technological innovations. Building partnerships with regional organisations and NGOs is also seen as essential to enhancing the efficiency and impact of Peacekeeping operations.

This briefing will provide MPs with a comprehensive overview of Peacekeeping operations, exploring achievements, criticisms, gender perspectives, and reform opportunities. Questions will include:

- How can Peacekeepers better adapt to today's complex conflicts?
- What are the barriers to achieving gender parity among Peacekeepers?
- How can accountability be improved across missions?
- Are measures to address allegations of misconduct strong enough?

Speakers:

- **Mr. Jean Pierre Lacroix**, Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations
- **H. E. Ambassador Lok BahadurThapa**, Permanent Representative of Nepal to the United Nations
- **Dr. Ai Kihara-Hunt**, University of Tokyo, co-author of *The Future of Peacekeeping, New Models and Related Capabilities*.

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