



United Nations Peacekeeping

Teaching Guide and Resources



This teaching guide provides a historic overview of UN Peacekeeping and its evolution throughout the years. Students will explore key information on the work of UN Peacekeepers around the world. They will engage in discussions about the peacekeeping missions as a whole before focusing on missions in certain countries or regions of the world. This will allow them to think about the world's current geopolitical challenges (mainly around land and natural resources) and what role they could play in improving the situations.

<p>Key Question: How do peacekeeping missions help the UN fulfill its goal of maintaining peace and security around the world?</p>	<p>Grade Level:</p> <p>8-12</p>
<p>Overview: This project-based lesson introduces students to the concept of peacekeeping as well as its manifestations on the ground. By examining the role of peacekeepers, the various jobs they perform, and their challenges and accomplishments, students will gain a deeper understanding of the practical ways in which the UN operates around the world, and in particular, will learn about the UN's work in maintaining peace and security worldwide.</p>	<p>Subjects:</p> <p>Modern History; Social Studies; Political Science</p>
<p>Goals:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Students will be able to explain what peacekeeping missions are. ● Students will be able to connect the operation of peacekeeping missions to the broader goals of the UN. ● Students will practice research, synthesis of information, critical thinking, and analytical writing skills. 	<p>Keywords and Concepts:</p> <p>The United Nations peacekeepers; Peace and Security</p>

Time: 1 X 90 min OR 2 X 45 min

Introduction: Ask the students if they have ever heard of the "Blue Helmets" and have students make an inference on who the peacekeepers are. Introduce the concept of peacekeepers: show the students one or more of the peacekeeping videos and relay background information based on the texts provided in this guide. Discuss with the students: would you like to serve as a peacekeeper? Why?

What is UN Peacekeeping?

UN Peacekeepers provide security, political, and peacebuilding support to help countries make the difficult transition from conflict to peace.



Source: [UN Peacekeeping](#)

Role of the Security Council

The Security Council determines, on a case-by-case basis, when and where a UN Peacekeeping operation should be deployed. The criteria of the Council are:

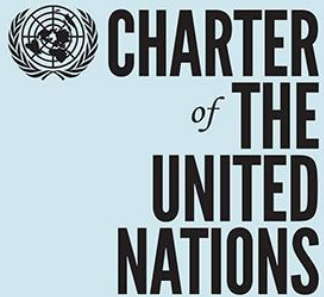
- There should be a ceasefire between the parties,
- There should be a clear political goal between them,
- A precise mandate for a UN Peacekeeping operation can be formulated.
- Reasonable guarantees can be obtained from the main parties or factions regarding the safety and security of UN personnel.



Meeting of the Security Council © UN photo

Source: [UN Peacekeeping](#)

The Birth of UN Peacekeeping



Peacekeeping has evolved since its early days. When the founding document, the United Nations Charter, was signed in 1945, peacekeeping was not mentioned in it. The first UN military observers' mission was only authorized and deployed to the Middle East by the Security Council in 1948.

Source: [United Nations: Peace, dignity, and equality of healthy planet](#)

Since the UN did not have a standing army or police force on its own, it was decided that military and police personnel from UN Member States (countries) would work as peacekeepers in peacekeeping missions around the world. These peacekeepers are members of their own national service first and are seconded to work with the UN. They wear their countries' uniforms and are identified as UN Peacekeepers by a UN blue helmet or beret.

Source: [Ask Dag](#)

The Story of the UN Blue Helmet

The need for a distinctive dress for UN personnel emerged in 1947 with the appointment of the UN Mediator and the subsequent creation of the UN Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO).



In 1956, the UN Emergency Force (UNEF) was established as the first UN peacekeeping operation. Troops from different countries wore their national uniforms and added distinctive UN armbands and shoulder patches to identify them as UN Peacekeepers. "The blue beret and helmet were created by Secretary-General Hammarskjöld during the formative days of UNEF," Urquhart writes, "What was needed was distinctive headgear easy for a distant sniper to recognize. A UN-blue beret seemed to be the answer, but it was impossible to procure enough berets in time. American plastic helmet-liners, however, were available in quantity in Europe, and were ready, spray-painted UN blue, in time for the first UNEF detachments to wear on their entry into Egypt."

Source: [What is the origin of the blue helmets worn by UN Peacekeepers?](#)

Brief History of UN Peacekeeping

The Early Years: UN Peacekeeping was born at a time when Cold War rivalries frequently paralyzed the Security Council. Peacekeeping was primarily limited to maintaining ceasefires and stabilizing situations on the ground, providing crucial support for political efforts to resolve conflict by peaceful means. Those missions consisted of unarmed military observers and lightly armed troops with primarily monitoring, reporting, and confidence-building roles.



UN Emergency Force in the Sinai Peninsula, Yugoslav troops on patrol duty 1957 © UN photo

The Post-Cold War Surge: With the end of the Cold War, the strategic context for UN Peacekeeping changed dramatically. The UN shifted and expanded its field operations from “traditional” missions, involving generally observation tasks performed by military personnel, to complex “multidimensional” enterprises. These multidimensional missions were designed to ensure the implementation of comprehensive peace agreements and assist in laying the foundations for sustainable peace.



United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP) in sentry duty (guarding duty) 1973 © UN photo



United Nations Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) surveys a road (demining) in the northeast of Mali 2021 © UN photo

UN peacekeepers were now increasingly asked to undertake a wide variety of complex tasks, from helping to build sustainable institutions of governance to human rights monitoring, to security sector reform, to the disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration of former combatants.

Source: [History of Peacekeeping Operations](#)

The nature of conflicts also changed over the years. UN Peacekeeping was originally developed to deal with interstate conflict but was increasingly applied to intrastate conflicts and civil wars.



United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) assist in the renovation of a local school 2008 © UN photo

Who Are the UN Peacekeepers and What Do They Do?



Military peacekeepers serving with the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) 2021 © UN photo

Since 1948, more than 70 peacekeeping operations have been deployed by the UN. Over the years, hundreds of thousands of military personnel and tens of thousands of UN police and other civilians from more than 120 countries have participated in UN Peacekeeping operations.

Peacekeepers (also known as 'Blue Helmets') are women and men from various member states (countries), who help countries navigate the difficult transition from conflict to peace. Although they serve under the UN flag, peacekeepers are not UN soldiers. They represent their Member States and usually join as an integral unit from their home countries' armed forces or police.



United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) women peacekeepers 2021 © UN photo



United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) doctors helping a local patient 2005 © UN photo

UN Peacekeepers come from all walks of life, with diverse cultural backgrounds, and from an ever-growing number of Member States. When they serve under the United Nations, they are united by a commitment to maintain or restore world peace and security. They share a common goal to protect the most vulnerable and provide support to countries in transition from conflict to peace.

Examples of peacekeeping operations

For additional information you can consult these links:

- [Past peacekeeping operations](#)
- [Current peacekeeping operations](#)
- Examples of two peacekeeping operations in [Côte D'Ivoire](#) and [Liberia](#).

Source: [Our Peacekeepers](#)

Service and Sacrifice



Nobel Peace Prize

More than 3,500 UN Peacekeepers from some 120 countries have died while serving under the UN flag

In 1988, the Nobel Committee awarded the Peace Prize to the United Nations Peacekeeping Forces because *“The peacekeeping forces of the United Nations have, under extremely difficult conditions, contributed to reducing tensions where an armistice has been negotiated but a peace treaty has yet to be established”*.



United Nations Peacekeeping Forces received the Nobel Peace Prize 1988 © UN photo

Source: [Service and Sacrifice](#)

Principles of UN Peacekeeping

There are three basic principles that guide the work of peacekeepers:

1. Consent of the parties

- The fundamental role of peacekeepers is to keep the peace. They do not invade or attack. Peacekeepers can therefore only be deployed with the consent of the government of the country to which they are sent, as a part of a larger peace process. This gives peacekeepers the necessary legitimacy to carry out their tasks.
- However, sometimes the principle of consent is not easy to maintain: the local government might be weak or divided, and there might be armed groups in the country who do not agree on the presence of peacekeepers and might possibly try to attack them. This can pose a great challenge to the work of peacekeepers and complicate their mission.

2. Impartiality

- Impartiality, meaning not showing a favorable attitude towards one particular side of a conflict, is crucial to maintaining the consent and cooperation of the local leadership and population. However, impartiality should not be confused with inactivity. United Nations peacekeepers should be impartial in their dealings with the various sides of a conflict, but they are far from inactive; they have a mission to fulfill, and they need to work towards it without hesitation.
- The principle of impartiality can be understood using the example of a referee: a good referee is impartial, meaning that they must not show favoritism towards one team. But the referee cannot be inactive; his or her responsibility is to maintain the rules of the game and oversee the conduct of the teams. If a team violates the rules, the referee must intervene and impose a penalty, even if it seems unfair to the team.

3. Non-use of force except in self-defense and defense of the mandate:

UN Peacekeeping forces are not a 'UN army.' Generally speaking, peacekeepers should not use force, as their role is to help maintain peace. However, sometimes peacekeepers must use force to protect themselves, to protect civilians, or to make sure that their missions can be carried out. The need to use force usually arises when peacekeepers are faced with an unstable situation where armed groups are present. A UN Peacekeeping operation should only use force with the authorization of the Security Council and as a measure of last resort. It should always use the minimal amount of force necessary to achieve the desired effect while making sure that the government or relevant political parties on the ground still consent to the activities of the peacekeepers and their presence. It should be remembered that the use of force by a UN Peacekeeping operation always has political implications and can often give rise to unforeseen circumstances.

Source: [Principles of Peacekeeping](#)



United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) 2021 © UN photo

Peacekeeping Missions: Research Projects for Grades 8-12

Research a past or present peacekeeping mission [on the UN Peacekeeping Website](#):

Depending upon grade level and personal preference, choose one of the research questions for students to explore individually or in small groups. This can be done over the course of one lesson, or as two in-class sessions. You can choose a specific peacekeeping mission for the students or have them choose one based on personal interest. Have the students prepare a presentation to show their research and conclusions.

Students can consider the following questions: What conflict was it established to pacify? When was the mission established? How many peacekeepers were deployed, and where did they come from? Has the mission changed over the years, and how? If it ended, what were the circumstances? Have peace and security returned to the area to which the mission was deployed? What are the **limits of peacekeeping missions** in their work to ensure peace and security? What are **the challenges they face** and how can they overcome them?

Have students present their work to the class. Based on the students' projects, lead a class discussion focusing on these questions: What are some peacekeeping missions' achievements and challenges? If the students explored past missions, how did the nature of peacekeeping evolve over the years? Do you think that peacekeeping operations are a crucial part of the UN's work? Why or why not?

Where do you see your role in world peace? Did your perspective change after working on this project? Why or why not? Consider your role:

- In preventing these crises from happening.
- In representing your country as a diplomat in the UN Security Council.
- In serving as a UN peacekeeper.

What are the benefits of having more women serve as peacekeepers?

Discuss at least two benefits, using relevant examples from past or current peacekeeping missions. Check sources like this one to support your argument: <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/promoting-women-peace-and-security>

Challenge question:

Identify a world conflict related to natural resources, water scarcity, climate change, or land, using this website:

<https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/conflict-and-natural-resources>

Can a peacekeeping mission help in alleviating the situation? How? Are there geopolitical challenges to having a peacekeeping mission being deployed there? If so, what are they? (Hint: consider the membership of the Security Council and the role of the Council in deploying peacekeepers).



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