

# foreign policy *in focus*



Interhemispheric Resource Center  
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## Peacekeeping and the United Nations

The Clinton administration came into office espousing support for UN peacekeeping. Characterizing his policy as “assertive multilateralism,” President Clinton appeared enthusiastic about the creation of a small UN “quick-deployment force” and seemed unwilling to commit U.S. forces to UN operations. UN peacekeeping activism expanded rapidly between 1988 and 1994.

After a period of enthusiastic U.S. backing, problems emerged and Washington’s support declined. The UN encountered severe challenges in some of its largest operations (Somalia, Bosnia, Rwanda, among others) and found itself confronting an onslaught of bad publicity in the U.S. Many in Washington blamed the UN

for the deaths of 18 U.S. Rangers in Somalia, even though they were part of a non-UN, unilateral U.S. military operation and were under direct U.S. command.

Polls show that a large majority of the U.S. public continues to support peacekeeping. Brushing aside the UN’s peacekeeping successes, however, the prevailing focus in Congress was and remains the failures. After intense public and policy maker debate during 1993-95, UN peacekeeping was sharply discredited. Current policy in

Washington leans toward non-UN, U.S.-led “coalition” peacekeeping such as the IFOR deployment in Bosnia, as well as the creation and funding of an all-African crisis-intervention force, which would ensure that no U.S. troops were put at risk.

Between 1988 and 1994, UN peacekeeping expenditures grew thirteenfold to \$3.3 billion, as 29 new missions were initiated. The number of peacekeeping troops soared from about 15,000 to almost 80,000 (with another 10,000 civilian personnel). Of those, less than 4% were from the U.S. Except for a short-term commitment as part of the UN operation in Haiti, almost all the U.S. peacekeeping forces served in the preventive (and safe) UN deployment in Macedonia.

The Clinton administration began to sound the peacekeeping retreat in late 1993, after the Somalia crisis triggered vehement criticisms of administration policy on Capitol Hill. A Presidential Decision Directive (PDD 25), signed by President Clinton on May 3, 1994, reflected the newly skeptical attitude. It stated that “peace operations are not and cannot be the centerpiece of U.S. foreign policy. When our interests dictate, the U.S. must be willing and able to fight and win wars, unilaterally whenever necessary.”

PDD 25 establishes several highly restrictive conditions to determine whether the U.S. will in the future a) vote for a new UN operation, b) contribute U.S. troops, and c) commit these troops to missions that might involve combat. Administration policy also demands that “an endpoint for U.S. participation can be identified.”

Several bills drafted by Republican lawmakers have sought to impose even stricter limits than those already embraced by the president for U.S. support of UN peacekeeping. They would require onerous presidential reporting and certification requirements before the U.S. could vote for and participate in new UN peacekeeping missions. Such provisions formed the heart of proposed legislation such as the “National Security Revitalization Act,” the “Peace Powers Act,” and the “U.S. Armed Forces Protection Act.” None of them have so far become law (because of presidential vetoes), but they have set the terms of the debate, and the administration’s funding requests for peacekeeping continue to be slashed by Congress.

Prodded by Congress, the administration unilaterally (and in contravention of international law) cut the U.S. share of UN peacekeeping expenses from 30.8% to 25% beginning in 1996, and it intends to negotiate a further cut to 20%. The Clinton administration has offered a plan to pay U.S. peacekeeping arrears over five years, beginning with a 1997 installment of \$142 million. But in October 1996 Congress approved only \$50 million for a first payment and attached conditions that have been widely condemned by other governments.

### Key Points

- UN peacekeeping activism expanded in 1988-1994 as 29 new missions were launched.
- Current policy in Washington leans towards non-UN U.S.-led “coalition” peacekeeping.
- Bills drafted by Republican lawmakers have sought to impose even stricter limits than those already embraced by the president for U.S. support of UN peacekeeping.

Political pressures in Washington have prevented U.S. support for UN peacekeeping as an effective alternative to traditional unilateral security policies. Yet if a new system of multilateral engagement is to take hold, the support of the U.S., the sole remaining superpower, is crucial to remaking a peacekeeping system still handicapped by the cold war legacy.

Both the Clinton administration and its congressional critics have skirted the crucial challenges posed by the demand for outside intervention in the post-cold war period. Besides the fragmentation of the current UN peacekeeping system (units are often smaller than required, national contingents have little joint experience, etc.), these include problems inherent in peacekeeping efforts that respond to internal rather than cross-border conflicts, peacekeeping in the absence of agreed-upon cease-fires, and the use of force in peacekeeping efforts. Furthermore, UN peacekeeping is undermined by the uncertain financial and political support of member governments, and the U.S. failure to pay its peacekeeping assessments has worsened the situation.

The U.S. has on occasion prevented the dispatch of peacekeeping missions in a timely fashion. When the Rwandan genocide was occurring in 1994, for instance, the U.S. blocked a Security Council decision to send a UN force to halt the killings. When the U.S. finally relented, other governments proved unwilling to provide sufficient troops quickly enough, and the U.S. refused to provide either personnel or equipment for immediate deployment.

U.S. insistence on special prerogatives—insisting that U.S. units not be put under UN command and that they maintain separate reporting channels to U.S. military authorities, as stipulated by PDD 25—further undermines the already weak coherence of multilateral peacekeeping missions. These prerogatives were applied in Somalia, with disastrous results. The UN peacekeeping force there was riven with national rivalries, and other troop contributors were deeply resentful of the privileges claimed by the U.S. in its parallel non-UN command.

PDD 25 insists that a predetermined “exit strategy” and a date-certain exit of U.S. units be decided when a mission is initiated. But establishing an inflexible deadline

is impractical and risks undermining the whole effort. Moreover, it contradicts the patient, long-term commitment that often is crucial for successful peacekeeping and conflict resolution.

When the U.S. abruptly pulled its forces out of Somalia in early 1994, it doomed the UN’s separate peacekeeping effort. In Bosnia, the Clinton administration had, at the outset announced a one-year limit to its troop presence to enforce the Dayton Peace Agreement, but it is now forced to reconsider its “exit strategy.”

This dismal situation is compounded by the increasing delinquency of a number of governments in paying their UN peacekeeping dues. The U.S. is by far the leading deadbeat. It was responsible for half the total peacekeeping arrears of about \$2 billion in late 1996. Further, much of the UN’s regular budget is also in arrears. In September 1996, the U.S. arrears in regular dues totalled \$714 million—74% of the UN budget’s debt.

To cover the shortfall, the UN has been forced to borrow from peacekeeping funds. This means delaying reimbursements to governments—most often poor countries—that contribute personnel to peacekeeping operations. This has made a number of these countries more reluctant to make contributions.

U.S. policy toward UN peacekeeping has brought angry reactions from leaders in many other countries, including close U.S. allies. They perceive that the U.S. wants it both ways: to withhold money it legally owes, yet demand to call the shots (by dominating the Security Council and by conditioning payments on “reforms” that other UN members may not support).

In a pointed play on the 18th-century American anti-colonial battle cry, Britain’s UN ambassador argued that there should be “no representation without taxation.”

As other nations grow exasperated at the U.S. attitude toward UN peacekeeping, the credibility and influence of U.S. diplomacy is increasingly at stake.

## Key Problems

- Both the Clinton administration and its congressional critics have skirted the crucial challenges posed by the demand for outside intervention in the post-cold war period.
- The U.S. has on occasion prevented the dispatch of peacekeeping missions in a timely fashion.
- The U.S. has established an inflexible peacekeeping deadline, which is impractical and risks undermining the whole effort.
- Close allies of the U.S. perceive that it wants it both ways: to withhold money it legally owes, yet demand to call the shots.

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Although UN peacekeeping has frequently been mischaracterized and often scapegoated beyond recognition in recent U.S. political debate, the existing UN system is in fact in considerable need of reform and improvement. The U.S. should support a broad range of measures that the U.S. should support to make peacekeeping an effective tool that advances both U.S. and global interests. U.S. involvement in peacekeeping should be based on principles of multilateralism and the assertion of global leadership, not only the global projection of its own national power.

- 1) The U.S. should give priority to providing the UN with the means to identify potential crises, mediate the disputes, and hence try to prevent disputes from escalating into armed conflicts. It would be useful to establish impartial standing forums that routinely hear grievances, both within and among nations. The U.S. should also support the establishment of a center for early-conflict warning. Regional conflict-resolution committees could be set up by the Security Council in conjunction with regional organizations.
- 2) Early warning and mediation will not always work. Peacekeeping will still be needed, even with a stronger focus on prevention. The U.S. should

support establishment of a two-tiered UN force.

The first tier, responsible for traditional peacekeeping tasks, would consist of a permanent, directly recruited and specially trained force that would be neither equipped nor mandated to use force except in self-defense. This tier should encompass at least 10,000 military, police, and civilian personnel.

The second tier, responsible for preventive deployments and the establishment of safe areas to protect civilian populations, would comprise units with greater military capability, be composed of more militarily capable units. They would remain under the jurisdiction of national governments but be available to the UN on short

notice and undergo specialized, joint training.

The first step in establishing this UN force would be to set up a pilot unit. In the U.S., Washington should establish a program to recruit individuals who wish to volunteer for UN peacekeeping service.

- 3) The U.S. should, as a growing number of governments have already done, conclude a standby agreement with the UN. Under these agreements, governments designate specific personnel and equipment that will be on call for peacekeeping service. (The U.S. endorsed the concept, but has ruled out earmarking any of its own units for that purpose). Such an agreement might provide equipment that most other nations would be unable to commit—cargo planes, transport ships, and satellite and other communications equipment.
- 4) The U.S. should help formulate practical rules of engagement that ensure greater cohesion among different national contingents and reduce the likelihood that national units work at cross-purposes. It should accept those rules and the efforts towards greater cohesion on the same terms as all other national units.
- 5) To ensure that the international community has a sufficient reservoir of competent peacekeeping personnel who are skilled in negotiating and mediating, the U.S. should support specialized training programs. The UN might formulate a core curriculum, basic standards, and procedures. It could designate a few experienced countries in different regions of the world to host training courses. The U.S. should strengthen its own peacekeeping training, kept unambiguously separate from traditional military (that is, combat) training.
- 6) The U.S. should support the creation of a single, annual UN peacekeeping budget from which all missions and support functions would be funded, in addition to a sufficiently endowed reserve fund to cover unexpected expenses.
- 7) The U.S. should pay its peacekeeping arrears expeditiously and pay new assessments on time and in full, without conditions and without unilateral reductions or withholdings.

*Written by Michael Renner, Worldwatch Institute.*

## Key Recommendations

- The U.S. should give priority to providing the UN with the means to identify potential crises, mediate the disputes, and hence try to prevent disputes from escalating into armed conflicts.
- The U.S. should support establishment of a two-tiered UN force.
- The U.S. should conclude a standby agreement with the UN under which it will designate specific personnel who will be on call for peacekeeping service.
- The U.S. should help formulate practical rules of engagement that ensure greater cohesion among different national contingents.
- The U.S. should support creation of a single, annual UN peacekeeping budget and pay its peacekeeping arrears.

# sources for more information

## Organizations

### Global Policy Forum

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### Project on Peacekeeping and the United Nations

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