

2015 Leaders' Summit on U.N. Peacekeeping

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On September 28, 2015, President Obama chaired the 2015 Leaders' Summit on U.N. Peacekeeping, part of his participation at the opening session of the 2015 U.N. General Assembly in New York. The summit outcome, as well as the President's new pledges for and guidance on U.S. support for U.N. peace operations, might elevate ongoing congressional interest in several policy issues related to U.N. peacekeeping, including U.S. assessed and voluntary contributions to U.N. peacekeeping costs, and concern over recent incidents of violence against civilians and sexual exploitation and abuse perpetrated by U.N. peacekeepers. These new developments could prove important to Congress as it conducts oversight regarding U.N. peacekeeping generally, any reform efforts undertaken by the United Nations, and possible budgetary effects of the President's new pledges to support U.N. peace operations.

U.N. Peacekeeping Missions

Operating under the authorities and principles set out in Chapters VI and VII of the U.N. Charter, U.N. peacekeeping forces undertake a multitude of activities related to cessation of armed conflict and assistance to societies emerging from such conflicts. "Peacekeeping" has been traditionally defined as operations in support of an existing agreement between warring parties to cease hostilities. [Many U.N. peacekeeping missions operate, however, in situations](#) where armed conflict is still occurring, or where humanitarian needs are great. Currently there are [16 U.N. peacekeeping missions](#) worldwide, involving over 120,000 military, police, and civilian personnel.

Peacekeeping Issues and Reform Efforts

Policymakers, including some Members of Congress, have long raised questions about the effectiveness of U.N. peacekeeping, inefficient bureaucratic structures, and perceived mismanagement. [Recent instances of violence against civilians and sexual exploitation and abuse](#) perpetrated by U.N. peacekeepers have been met with calls for increased accountability for personnel who commit crimes. As these perceived problems have been identified, some have contended that current funding levels are not sufficient to meet the broad mandates of U.N. peacekeeping operations. Others, however, maintain that current funding levels are sufficient, and that inefficiencies in the U.N. peacekeeping system must be remedied. Since 2000, the United Nations has undertaken a number of initiatives to [reform](#) U.N. peacekeeping in order to meet the challenges faced by U.N. peacekeeping missions and to improve their effectiveness. Most recently, in October 2014, U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon appointed the High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (the "Panel") composed of independent experts to assess the state of current U.N. peacekeeping operations and future needs.

In July 2015, [the Panel issued an assessment](#) of U.N. peace operations and recommended reforms and improvements, including:

- Reemphasizing conflict prevention and mediation;
- Expanding civilian protection capabilities;
- Clarifying peace operations' authorities to manage ongoing conflict and use military force;

- Sustaining supervision of peace agreements implementation and societies emerging from conflict;
- Crafting clear, achievable peacekeeping mandates;
- Improving U.N. peacekeepers' speed, capability, and performance;
- Strengthening partnerships with regional organizations, such as the African Union;
- Following through on policies to improve mission leadership and gender diversity;
- Holding U.N. peacekeepers accountable for violence against civilians and sexual exploitation and abuse, and improving consultation with host governments and local populations;
- Improving structural management and support of peace operations, including a more robust leadership structure within U.N. headquarters, and focusing administrative authority in the field; and
- Increasing resources for missions whilst improving pre-mission resource planning and linking continued resourcing to results-based mission assessments.

2015 Leaders' Summit on U.N. Peacekeeping

Over 50 U.N. member states participated in the 2015 Leaders' Summit on U.N. Peacekeeping, held on September 28, 2015. With the recommendations of the Panel as guidance, [participating countries produced a declaration](#) at the end of the Summit stressing the need for greater resources, reform and improvement of peacekeeping structure, organization, planning, leadership, training, and capabilities, zero tolerance and discipline for U.N. peacekeepers who perpetrate sexual exploitation and abuse, and protection of civilians as well as improved security for U.N. peacekeepers. At the Summit, over 50 countries made new [pledges](#) to support U.N. peacekeeping, including over 40,000 additional troops and police, 40 helicopters, 15 engineering companies, and 10 field hospitals. Significant pledged increases in support came from a number of European countries, as well as China, which pledged to create an 8,000-troop standby force and a permanent police unit.

New U.S. Pledges and Guidance for Support to U.N. Peacekeeping

At the summit, [President Obama announced](#) expanded [U.S. support to U.N. peace operations](#). The President stated that the United States would

- double its current contribution of 80 military officers;
- increase airlift, sealift, and other logistical support;
- provide technology to aid logistical and operational shortfalls, including force and civilian protection;
- make engineering support available to build infrastructure for new missions; and
- develop civil-military command exercises with the United Nations, and provide pre-deployment and in-mission training and mentoring, including counter-IED training.

In addition to and in connection with these pledges, the [President issued a memorandum](#) containing broad new guidance for U.S. government agencies, and indicating U.S. intentions to help implement the Panel's July 2015 recommendations. Stating that support for U.N. peacekeeping aligns with U.S. national security interests, including countering terrorism and preventing regional instability where conflicts occur, the memorandum identifies three new key areas of guidance:

- 1. Building partner capacity to support U.N. peace operations;
- 2. Contributing U.S. diplomatic support, enabling capabilities, and personnel; and
- 3. Leading and supporting efforts at the U.N. for systemic reform.

The memorandum requires the Departments of State and Defense, as well as the U.S. Mission to the United Nations to submit a plan to implement the new guidance to the National Security Council.