

Last, multilateral organizations, such as the Commonwealth, the Organization of African Unity, the Organization of American States, and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, are working, sometimes independently and sometimes in conjunction with the UN, to prevent new conflicts or end ongoing ones.

Peacekeeping

The most visible and spectacular type of UN action is still the deployment of peacekeeping missions. Since 1948, the UN has conducted about 40 peacekeeping operations, 30 of them within the past 12 years. Taking part in these have been over 750 000 military personnel, 1500 of whom gave their lives for the cause of peace.

Thousands of police officers and civilians have also served in these operations. It was in recognition of their contribution to world peace that the Blue Berets received the 1988 Nobel Peace Prize. In the minds of many people, the best symbols of the United Nations are the UN peacekeeping contingents at work in the four corners of the world.

In the beginning, in the late 1940s, the first United Nations peace soldiers were unarmed military observers posted along cease-fire lines in Kashmir and the Middle East. It was not until 1956 that organized units were deployed during the Suez Crisis: Lester B. Pearson, then Canada's Secretary of State for External Affairs, suggested using peace soldiers to separate the belligerents after they had agreed to

a cease-fire. This operation has been used as a model for almost all peacekeeping missions launched by the United Nations since that time. Mr. Pearson himself received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1957 for this contribution to world peace.

In recent years, UN peacekeeping missions have become much more complex. To traditional and essentially military tasks, such as supervising cease-fires, separating belligerents and maintaining buffer zones, have been added political and humanitarian activities. Civilian police officers, election observers, human rights observers and other civilians have joined the UN peace soldiers. Their duties include ensuring that food aid gets through, and helping former adversaries implement complex peace agreements.

Working with the United Nations agencies and other humanitarian organizations, the Blue Berets have helped refugees return to their countries, monitored respect for human rights, and undertaken mine clearance and reconstruction work. UN peacekeepers have also been used for disarming and demobilizing former combatants, training and supervising civilian police, and organizing and observing elections.

Every peacekeeping operation is sent in by the Security Council, which rules on the size of the operation as well as its general objectives and timetable. Since the UN does not have its own military forces, member states decide



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