



## The peacekeeping paradox: as peace spreads, surge in demand strains UN resources

*In an often overlooked phenomenon, the resources needed to help keep the peace are being strained by so much peace to keep*

Recent headlines may seem to contradict it, but today fewer people are being killed by war than at almost any time in the past century. Some 25,000 were killed in armed conflict in 2002, barely one tenth the number killed each year during the 1990s. Even 9/11, and wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, have not reversed the decline in recent years.

There are two basic reasons for this decline in war deaths: fewer wars are starting and, many old wars are ending. Paradoxically, these positive developments are imposing a strain on resources, with new demands being made on UN peacekeeping that are in danger of not being met amid the mounting challenge of so much peace to keep.

This is particularly true in Africa. Wars in Angola, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Sudan – in which some seven million people have died - are over, or soon may be. Sierra Leone, recently home to rebels known for their horrific brutalities, is stable. Neighbouring Liberia seems to be moving in the same direction. Nor is the trend limited to Africa. Europe and East Asia, which lost some 60 million people in the wars of the last century, are almost entirely at peace. Even the smouldering Balkans, after the recent violence in Kosovo, is more stable now than since the breakup of the former Yugoslavia in 1991.

It is wise to remember that the positive trend could be reversed at any moment. Only one thing is certain: a large number of conflicts is moving towards resolution, and millions of lives are being saved. To ensure that some of these conflicts really do end and peace proves sustainable, new peacekeeping missions are getting up to speed in Liberia, Côte d'Ivoire, with yet another one to be deployed in Haiti.

Already, 15 UN-led peacekeeping missions on three continents have some 50,000 soldiers and police personnel wearing United Nations blue helmets, mainly from developing countries, such as Pakistan, India and Bangladesh. The numbers could rise to 70,000 or more by the end of this year. In the scheme of military activity, this is not much. Even if the bill for UN peacekeeping rises to \$4 billion a year, which is possible if the UN Security Council calls for new missions in all of the places currently under discussion, UN peacekeeping will still cost less than 1% of what the United States alone spends each year on defence. But in the UN context, the current surge will push the system to the outer limits of its capacity, creating major challenges in the areas of planning, force generation, logistics, procurement and command and control.

If the international community wants peacekeeping to be done, the support must be there to do it well – the men and women in uniform from developed and developing countries alike; the specialized military support services from those countries that have them, the financial resources, the strategic force reserves, the sustained commitment. There is a peace dividend to be had, but not without a clear-headed investment.

For further information:

Mr. David Wimhurst, Political Affairs Officer, UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations  
Tel: (1 212) 963-6316; E-mail: [wimhurst@un.org](mailto:wimhurst@un.org)