



**Resolved: United Nations peacekeepers should have the power to engage in offensive operations.**

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After the tragedy of World War II and the ineffectiveness of the League of Nations, the world came together to establish a body that could settle world disputes, protect human rights and keep the peace. The UN has had mixed success throughout the years and the limitations of its peacekeeping forces have come under increasing scrutiny. This topic analysis will serve to provide some background on UN peacekeepers and their mandates, analyze key terms in the resolution and provide some arguments debaters are likely to encounter on each side. A list of additional resources is also provided at the end to assist debaters with research.

**Background**

UN peacekeeping operations have been going on since the UN's founding more than half a century ago, but the character of those operations has changed over time. Until the end of the cold war the major role of peacekeeping troops was to observe cease-fire agreements in post-conflict environments. Once fighting between two countries had paused they would come in to protect diplomats, facilitate negotiations toward a lasting peace, and be objective observers that could verify both sides were upholding the cease-fire. There are three core principles that have historically defined UN peacekeeping operations<sup>1</sup>:

Consent of both parties - UN peacekeepers do not enter territory unless both sides of the conflict agree to have them there.

Impartiality - Peacekeepers do not support the interests or objectives of either side.

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1 <http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/operations/peacekeeping.shtml>

Their only concern is establishing a mutual and lasting peace.

Non-use of force, except for in self-defense or defense of the mandate - Peacekeepers

were generally lightly armed and only able to use force to protect themselves or protect civilians who were actively under fire<sup>2</sup>. They do not open fire first.

While there is a difference between peacekeeping operations and “peace enforcement” operations (using military force to restore peace when a conflict has broken out), the UN acknowledges that the line is often blurred<sup>3</sup>. This is especially true in conflicts between different groups within a single country, rather than between two separate nations. As a result the UN has authorized offensive operations by troops that are part of a larger peacekeeping operation on rare occasions. Most recently in 2013 the UN authorized a 3000 person Intervention Brigade as part of its MONUSCO peacekeeping mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). MONUSCO was empowered to "carry out targeted offensive operations through the Intervention Brigade ... either unilaterally or jointly with the (Congo army), in a robust highly mobile and versatile manner ... to prevent expansion of all armed groups, neutralize these groups, and to disarm them."<sup>4</sup> Security Council Resolution 2098 (2013) authorized this action<sup>5</sup>, and Resolution 2147 (2014) renewed its mandate a year later<sup>6</sup>. The authorization to engage in offensive action here was seen as a major change in the direction of UN peacekeeping forces - though the Security Council was careful to specify that this was a unique situation and was not intended to set a precedent<sup>7</sup>.

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<http://www.peacekeepingbestpractices.unlb.org/Pbps/library/Handbook%20on%20UN%20PKOs.pdf>

3 <http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/operations/peace.shtml>

4 <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/03/28/us-congo-democratic-un-idUSBRE92R0X820130328>

5 [http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/2098%282013%29](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/2098%282013%29)

6 [http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/2147\(2014\)](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/2147(2014))

7 [http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/2098%282013%29](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/2098%282013%29)

UN peacekeepers have had limited effectiveness over the last few decades, despite occasional successes. Defeat in Somalia in 1992 and failures to prevent the Rwandan genocide in 1994 or the widespread atrocities in Bosnia in 1995 have greatly tarnished the international reputation of UN peacekeepers. In addition there is widespread evidence of sexual abuse of women and children by peacekeepers which has further damaged their credibility<sup>8</sup>. Given these problems, it is even more essential than ever that UN peacekeepers be able to deliver effective results and protect the lives of civilians, which naturally brings us to January's resolution.

### **Resolutioanal Analysis**

#### “United Nations Peacekeepers”

In order to examine this term we need a bit of background, since not all military UN operations are “peacekeeping” operations. Peacekeeping operations aren't actually mentioned explicitly in the UN Charter, and they occupy an interesting legal space, largely due to some of the complications of the Cold War. There are two relevant portions of the Charter here, the first is Chapter VI. Chapter VI says that nations should settle their differences peacefully and should come to the UN for moderation if needed<sup>9</sup>. Chapter VI has no enforcement mechanism, all the UN can do is offer suggestions and provide impartial mediators. Chapter VII is the part of the Charter that allows the UN to use force. The Security Council “shall determine the existence of any threat to the peace, breach of the peace, or act of aggression” by any country, and has the authority to take military action “by air, sea, or land forces as may be necessary to maintain or restore international peace and security.”<sup>10</sup>

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8 [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/in\\_depth/7420798.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/in_depth/7420798.stm)

9 <http://www.un.org/en/documents/charter/chapter6.shtml>

10 <http://www.un.org/en/documents/charter/chapter7.shtml>

Full scale interventions under Chapter VII are rare (and during the Cold War were almost always vetoed by either the US or the USSR. Thus the UN started sending out Peacekeeping Operations that were designed largely to monitor cease-fires and protect UN negotiators, observers and other civilians. These operations fit fairly well into Chapter VI's mandate, since they were focused on enabling negotiations between conflicting parties and observing whether the conditions of those negotiations - such as cease-fire agreements - were being carried out. At the same time, these troops were armed and could become directly engaged in conflict if fired upon, and only Chapter VII gave the UN the authority to send combat forces. This led to former UN Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld informally referring to peacekeeping operations falling under "Chapter 6 and a half," since they fell in between what was authorized by Chapter VI and Chapter VII<sup>11</sup>.

In practical terms, what this means is that the rules of engagement for UN peacekeepers aren't outlined in the UN Charter specifically, and they can already be permitted to engage in offensive operations in the status quo - usually via Chapter VII authority - assuming that it is referenced in the resolution that sends them in. As mentioned earlier, the MONUSCO operation in the Democratic Republic of Congo has been engaging in offensive operations for the last year or so so we're not necessarily breaking new ground. From the wording of the resolution it seems that the question we're asking is whether that authority should be extended to all peacekeeping operations. In short, should the option to engage in offensive operations be available to all peacekeeping forces by default? Note that this doesn't mean that all peacekeeping operations would choose to utilize this power, that would largely be a decision made by the force's commander. The resolution is asking if the tool of offensive action should be included in the toolbox of options each commander has access to.

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11 <http://strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/parameters/Articles/1994/1994%20hillen.pdf>

## “Offensive Operations”

The US Marine Field Manual defines offensive operations as “Combat operations designed primarily to destroy the enemy. Offensive operations may be undertaken to secure key or decisive terrain, to deprive the enemy of resources or decisive terrain, to deceive or divert the enemy, to develop intelligence, and to hold the enemy in position. Forms of offensive operations include movement to contact, attack, exploitation, and pursuit.”<sup>12</sup> The common theme in all of these is that offensive operations involve taking the fight to your enemy rather than waiting for the enemy to attack you. This is distinct from defensive operations in that the acting force is able to engage the enemy at a time and place of their choosing – they have the initiative. The other major distinction is that offensive operations would involve UN troops opening fire first in a given engagement, rather than waiting until they’ve been fired at to respond. In the DRC offensive operations included artillery bombardment, air strikes, and snipers – largely in support of government forces.<sup>13</sup>

From a tactical standpoint, it is largely impossible to win a military conflict without offensive action. This isn’t really a problem if the goal of peacekeepers is to maintain peace in a post-conflict environment (monitoring a cease-fire, escorting diplomats, etc). When the conflict is still actively raging and one of the main objectives of peacekeepers is to protect civilians then it becomes much more important to be able to hunt down and destroy groups that actively threaten those civilians. Without the ability to take offensive action, peacekeepers are forced to spread themselves as thin as possible to cover as many vulnerable civilians as possible. There simply are not enough troops to

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<http://ofp.umbr.net/Other/milpubs/Operational%20Terms%20and%20Graphics%20%20%28MCRP%205-12a%29.pdf>

13 <http://africanarguments.org/2014/07/14/drc-assessing-the-performance-of-monuscoc-force-intervention-brigade-by-christoph-vogel/>

protect all threatened civilians - not by a long shot - so it becomes nearly impossible for peacekeepers to prevent massacres and such in large active-combat zones with purely defensive tactics.

This reality of how difficult it is for peacekeepers to protect civilians if they are limited to defensive actions really brings the central question of the resolution into focus: what should the role of UN peacekeeping forces be? There are two clear options:

1) A UN peacekeeping force should be a neutral group that can observe and mediate between all sides of a conflict, protecting themselves when necessary and civilians where possible, but is otherwise not engaged in the conflict, or

2) A UN peacekeeping force should be an active participant in conflicts using military action to dismantle/destroy groups that threaten civilians, human rights, and the official governments of the countries that have asked for their aid.

The Pro is likely to embrace the latter position, the Con the former. It's also important to remember that UN peacekeepers are not the only forces that can potentially intervene. Regional and national armed forces may also choose to enter combat zones to protect civilians. There are a host of potential problems that accompany those choices, however. Forces from individual nations or regional organizations rarely have the same perception of neutrality that the UN has, and the groups in conflict may not trust any group except the UN to bring military forces into their territory. Concerns about imperialism and colonialism can also quickly emerge depending on which countries wish to be involved. Despite this, the debate is not necessarily about whether or not we should attempt to protect civilians in dangerous areas, it may instead be about who is best suited and most able to do that protection - UN peacekeepers or someone else.

## Potential Arguments

As always, these arguments are designed to give you a starting point on this topic. They are the arguments I think debaters are most likely to encounter, but that does not mean they're necessarily the strongest or the most persuasive. Debaters should look into these and other arguments themselves to design their cases, but it would probably benefit all teams to at least be prepared to respond to the arguments outlined here.

### PRO

The Pro perspective is likely to be more pragmatic and focused on immediate impacts than the Con. The first argument Pro teams will likely make is that offensive action is necessary for success. The previous constraints on the use of force were designed for a world where nations declared war and made peace with each other. The vast majority of the conflicts the UN is involved in today are internal or unofficial conflicts. There is often an official (though corrupt) government and several different violent insurgent groups, often unofficially backed by neighboring nations. These groups do not respond to international norms, they don't care about UN resolutions or cultural sanctions, the only way to protect the people they are brutalizing is to take the fight to them. The governments often lack the equipment, weapons or expertise to fight and win these battles, and failing to eliminate the violent insurgent groups perpetuates the death and abuse of countless innocent civilians. To end the fighting we need to damage these violent groups enough that they come to the table to negotiate a cease-fire, and eventually peace. This is exactly what happened when the UN peacekeeping mission in the DRC was given offensive authority. In a matter of

months the largest and most violent rebel group - M23 - surrendered.<sup>14</sup> Peacekeepers need the authority to use offensive action, and empirically when we've given it to them it's worked.

The second area of argumentation the Pro is likely to engage in deals with UN legitimacy. One of the greatest powers of the UN is that it provides countries with a way to deal with troubling issues abroad without invading another country. Unilateral actions by one country to invade another are exactly the thing the world wanted to prevent when it established the UN, but if UN peacekeepers can't be effective we'll be inviting that kind of unilateral action. The basic idea is this - people are only willing to try to solve things via the UN if they think the UN and its peacekeepers can get the job done. The more peacekeepers are seen as ineffective or helpless the less likely nations are to try to go through them to solve problems. In a world where no one cares about the UN you'll have more countries invading others to try to protect their own people and interests and the chances that regional conflicts will spiral into global ones will escalate.

The third major argument the Pro may make deals with consistency. One of the major barriers to UN effectiveness is that every situation has a different set of mandates that commanders on the ground have to navigate. Standardizing parameters for the use of force decreases bureaucratic delay and confusion and makes it easier for the commanders of UN peacekeeping units to respond to conditions on the ground in a timely manner. Many of the critiques of UN ineffectiveness in the past are due to inconsistent and confusing bureaucratic oversight. By removing a key layer of that complexity we can greatly improve the effectiveness of UN peacekeepers and prevent tragedies like Rwanda and Bosnia from being repeated.

## CON

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14 [http://www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=S/2014/42](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2014/42)



While some Con arguments are also likely to be grounded in short-term pragmatic concerns, others are likely to focus on more ideological concerns. The first likely argument deals with other UN personnel. UN peacekeepers are only some of the personnel the UN deploys to troubled areas. Aid workers, doctors, diplomats and other non-combatants are often the most effective parts of UN missions. All of these groups rely on the fact that the UN is seen as a neutral party to protect themselves from attack by combatants on either side. As soon as the UN starts taking offensive action and bombing rebel groups those groups are going to have every reason to retaliate against the UN aid workers in the field and start killing them. Furthermore, once the UN is seen as an active participant in the conflict and not a neutral party, civilians in villages are going to start turning away UN aid workers out of fear that the village will be seen as collaborating with the enemy and destroyed by rebel forces.

The second likely Con argument expands on the issue of neutrality in a post-conflict environment. One of the UN's greatest strengths is that it can be seen as a neutral, unbiased and trusted mediator. If UN peacekeepers are monitoring a cease-fire and say one side shot first, people are likely to believe them. As soon as they start being the ones who can shoot first themselves the side they're shooting at no longer has any reason to believe the UN is going to be fair or neutral. Beyond that, negotiations almost always require some kind of mutually trusted mediator - a role the UN has been ideally suited to play. Once the UN starts trying to impose peace rather than keeping the peace it becomes impossible for them to play the role of the impartial mediator. In nearly every conflict some kind of agreement needs to be reached between the combatants in the end. Winning the war is useless if you can't negotiate the peace, and the UN can only help create peace if it isn't making war on one side.

The final Con argument will likely examine some potential alternatives. UN peacekeepers are not our only option for resolving military conflicts within countries. Regional organizations such as NATO and the African Union are ideally positioned to do so. The bureaucracy and politics of the UN will prevent it from ever being nimble and adaptable enough to fight ground wars, and rather than destroying the UN's image of impartiality to fight a war ineptly, we are far better off appealing to other forces. Let the UN focus on doing what they do best, facilitating negotiations and being a trusted, neutral monitor. Let regional groups with fewer restrictions wage the wars and protect the civilians. Just because someone needs to attack doesn't mean that actor should be the UN; they're not good at it and they sacrifice the one thing they do best by attempting it.



## Resources

### GENERAL INFO

UN principles and Guidelines for Peacekeeping Operations

[http://pbpu.unlb.org/pbps/Library/Capstone\\_Doctrine\\_ENG.pdf](http://pbpu.unlb.org/pbps/Library/Capstone_Doctrine_ENG.pdf)

### PRO

Offensive Action by the UN has been largely successful in the DRC

<http://africajournalismtheworld.com/2014/07/14/dr-congo-how-successful-has-the-uns-intervention-brigade-been/>

Military Perspective arguing for more offensive power for UN peacekeepers - older, but theoretically sound.

<http://strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/parameters/Articles/1994/1994%20hillen.pdf>

Peacekeeping parameters much change or the UN will lose all legitimacy - (specifies the need for offensive action on page 6)

[http://www.ipinst.org/media/pdf/publications/ipi\\_e\\_pub\\_rethinking\\_peacebuilding.pdf](http://www.ipinst.org/media/pdf/publications/ipi_e_pub_rethinking_peacebuilding.pdf)

Peacekeepers cannot be effective in Africa without the ability to engage in offensive operations

[http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/record-number-of-un-peacekeepers-fails-to-stop-african-wars/2014/01/03/17ed0574-7487-11e3-9389-09ef9944065e\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/record-number-of-un-peacekeepers-fails-to-stop-african-wars/2014/01/03/17ed0574-7487-11e3-9389-09ef9944065e_story.html)

### CON

Offensive in DRC has failed to get the FDLR to surrender <http://www.un.org/press/en/2014/sc11586.doc.htm>

Despite an early success UN action in DRC has failed

<http://www.bostonglobe.com/ideas/2014/11/28/congo-peacekeepers-war/zfBirYjxsokst0dZahfWCJ/story.html>

International Peace Institute's Critique of Offensive Operations by the UN

<http://www.ipinst.org/publication/policy-papers/detail/403-the-un-intervention-brigade-in-the-democratic-republic-of-the-congo-.html>

Offensive Action by UN Peacekeepers makes them a legitimate target in war under international law

[http://www.ipinst.org/media/pdf/publications/ipi\\_e\\_pub\\_legal\\_issues\\_drc\\_brigade.pdf](http://www.ipinst.org/media/pdf/publications/ipi_e_pub_legal_issues_drc_brigade.pdf)