

# GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-19-224](#), a report to the Subcommittee on Multilateral International Development, Multilateral Institutions, and International Economic, Energy, and Environmental Policy, Committee on Foreign Relations, U.S. Senate

## Why GAO Did This Study

As of December 2018, the UN had 14 ongoing peacekeeping operations with approximately 103,000 personnel. The United States is the single largest financial contributor to these operations, assessed by the UN to contribute an estimated \$1.7 billion in fiscal year 2018, according to State. It is also a member of the Security Council, the UN body tasked with maintaining international peace and security.

GAO was asked to review UN peacekeeping operations. In this report, GAO examines (1) the UN's process to establish and renew peacekeeping operations, including the tasks these operations perform; (2) State's assessment of the effectiveness of UN peacekeeping operations; (3) how the United States works within the UN to adjust peacekeeping mandates and associated resources; and (4) member states' concerns regarding the UN's performance information. To address these objectives, GAO analyzed UN and U.S. documents and interviewed UN and U.S. officials. GAO also interviewed officials at peacekeeping operations in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Haiti, Kosovo, and Lebanon. GAO selected these operations because they represent those that perform a variety of tasks and are located in diverse regions.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that State take additional steps to ensure that the UN (1) peacekeeping operations meet principles of effectiveness, (2) provides information on the estimated costs of mandated tasks, and (3) addresses member states' concerns about the quality of performance information. State agreed with GAO's recommendations.

View [GAO-19-224](#). For more information, contact Jennifer Grover at (202) 512-7141 or [groverj@gao.gov](mailto:groverj@gao.gov).

March 2019

## UN PEACEKEEPING OPERATIONS

### State Should Take Additional Steps to Work with the UN to Improve Effectiveness and Performance Information

#### What GAO Found

The United Nations (UN) Security Council establishes and renews peacekeeping operations by issuing resolutions, generally referred to as mandates, which can include a range of tasks, such as monitoring ceasefires and protecting civilians. Generally once or twice a year, the Security Council renews an operation's mandate and makes adjustments as needed.

#### UN Peacekeepers Patrolling in the Democratic Republic of the Congo



Source: United Nations photo by Michael Ali. | GAO-19-224

GAO's review of the Department of State's (State) assessments as of December 2018 and discussions with State officials found that UN peacekeeping operations generally do not fully meet U.S. principles for effective peacekeeping, which include host country consent and an exit strategy, among others. GAO's review of 11 operations found that all 11 met or partially met the principle of host country consent, while five included or partially included an exit strategy. State officials stated that they must continue to work with the UN to ensure peacekeeping operations meet principles of effectiveness, which they noted are key to success.

The United States works with the UN Security Council and member states to adjust peacekeeping mandates, but it lacks sufficient information to determine if associated resources accurately reflect these adjustments. State officials noted that they do not have this information because UN peacekeeping budgets do not estimate costs by mandated task. UN peacekeeping guidance states that when the UN changes a peacekeeping mandate, it should make commensurate changes to that operation's resources. Without information on estimated costs by task, member states have difficulty determining that resources for UN peacekeeping operations accurately reflect mandate changes.

The UN has taken steps to improve peacekeeping performance data, but member states have raised concerns about that information's quality, including its completeness and timeliness. Among other concerns, member states note that the UN does not have complete information to assess the performance of civilians, who comprised about 14 percent of peacekeeping personnel, as of December 2018. In March 2018 the UN began peacekeeping reforms, including those to improve performance data. However, according to State officials, these efforts are in the early stages and more work is needed. Without fully addressing member states' concerns about the quality of information, the UN is limited in its ability to improve the performance of peacekeeping operations.