Global and regional trends in multilateral peace operations, 2009–18

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Commentary / Backgrounders

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On the International Day of United Nations Peacekeepers, the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) is releasing new data on multilateral peace operations. This topical backgrounder summarizes the main findings from the data on the year 2018 and the decade 2009–18. It also serves as a preview of the chapter on multilateral peace operations in the 50th edition of the SIPRI Yearbook, which will be published in June 2019.

On this day, SIPRI is also launching a new map of multilateral peace operations. It can be downloaded here. The map features all the multilateral peace operations that are currently active (as of 1 May 2019), as well as a number of missions and operations authorized and/or conducted by the UN and regional organizations that do not fall within the scope of the SIPRI definition of a multilateral peace operation.

Multilateral peace operations in 2018
At first sight, it might appear that 2018 was a relatively uneventful year for multilateral peace operations—at least with regard to the deployment of missions and personnel.

Fewer operations and little change in personnel deployed

First, there were fewer multilateral peace operations in 2018 than there have been in most recent years. Sixty missions and operations active globally during 2018 qualified as multilateral peace operations according to the SIPRI definition. This was three fewer than in the previous year and the lowest number of peace operations active in one year since 2013. The UN conducted 21 multilateral peace operations in 2018, various regional organizations and alliances led 33, and 6 were carried out...
by ad hoc coalitions of states (see figure 1). Geographically, 24 were deployed in Africa, 3 in the Americas, 5 in Asia and Oceania, 18 in Europe and 10 in the Middle East. More details on each operation can be found in SIPRI’s online table (pdf).

![Number of multilateral peace operations, by type of conducting organization, 2009–18](image)

**Figure 1.** Number of multilateral peace operations, by type of conducting organization, 2009–18.

Second, there were relatively few new multilateral peace operations or mission closures in 2018: one new mission was deployed and two ended. This is in contrast to 2017 in which five new peace operations began and four ended.

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Mission Iraq (NMI) was the only new peace operation in 2018. When it was formally launched, on 31 October, the expectation was that it would initially consist of approximately 580 personnel and be fully operational by early 2019. However, NATO has released few details on the progress of the deployment of the NMI and it has not been possible to verify the strength of the NMI at the end of 2018, or determine whether it has attained full operational capability since then. The UN deployed an ‘advance team’ to Yemen in December 2018 to begin monitoring aspects of the Stockholm Agreement, which had been reached between the Government of Yemen and the Houthis in that month, but it was not until January 2019 that it was upgraded to a peace operation (the UN Mission to Support the Hudaydah Agreement, UNMHA).

The UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Preventive Mission in the Kingdom of Lesotho (SAPMIL) were the only peace operations that ended during the year. UNMIL ended in March 2018 after a deployment of almost 15 years. SAPMIL ended after almost one year of deployment.
consisted of a force of approximately 200 personnel, ended in November 2018 after a deployment of only one year.

Third, there was also little fluctuation in the number of personnel deployed in all multilateral peace operations globally. There was a minimal decrease of 0.8 per cent over the course of the year, from 145 911 to 144 791 (see figure 2). Although the number of personnel in the field decreased for the third year in a row, the decline in 2018 was smaller than in 2017 and 2016, when the number of personnel decreased by 4.5 per cent and 5.7 per cent, respectively. Of the personnel deployed in multilateral peace operations at the end of 2018, 86.4 per cent (125 100) were military personnel, 8.1 per cent (11 697) were police and 5.5 per cent (7994) were international civilian staff. Approximately two-thirds of all personnel deployed globally (95 488) were serving in UN peace operations and approximately one-third (49 303) in non-UN peace operations. Geographically, at the end of 2018, 72 per cent (104 238) were serving in peace operations in Africa, 11.9 per cent (17 296) in Asia and Oceania, 9.5 per cent (13 698) in the Middle East, 5.6 per cent (8126) in Europe, and 1.0 per cent (1433) in the Americas (see figure 3).

**Figure 2.** Number of personnel deployed in multilateral peace operations, 2009–18.
Little change in the ranking of the largest peace operations and contributors

Fourth, the ranking of the largest multilateral peace operations and contributors of personnel remained the same by and large in 2018. The African Union (AU) Mission in Somalia remained the largest multilateral peace operation, which it has been since 2015 (see figure 4). It maintained a personnel strength of approximately 21,000 throughout the year, despite an initial decision by the UN Security Council to cut the military component of AMISOM by 1000 by 31 October 2018. (The Security Council later decided to postpone this deadline until February 2019.) The significant downsizing of the UN/AU Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID) during 2018, from 14,886 to 8971 personnel, was the only notable change in the size of the largest multilateral peace operations. (As a consequence, UNAMID went from being the third-largest peace operation in 2017 to the eighth largest in 2018.) Ethiopia remained the largest troop-contributing country (TCC) to multilateral peace operations in 2018 (see figure 5). The NATO-led Resolute Support Mission (RSM) in Afghanistan and its main TCC, the United States, reinforced their positions as the fourth-largest multilateral peace operation and the second-largest TCC, respectively. This seems likely to change in the next few years, depending on whether, when or how fast the USA implements a plan, announced in December 2018, to reduce its military footprint in Afghanistan by half.
Largest multilateral peace operations on 31 Dec. 2018

- AMISOM
- MONUSCO
- UNMISS
- RSM
- MINUSMA
- MINUSCA
- UNIFIL
- UNAMID
- UNISFA
- KFOR

Note: AMISOM = AU Mission in Somalia; MONUSCO = UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo; UNMISS = UN Mission in South Sudan; RSM = Resolute Support Mission; MINUSMA = UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali; MINUSCA = UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic; UNIFIL = UN Interim Force in Lebanon; UNAMID = UN/AU Hybrid Operation in Darfur; UNISFA = UN Interim Security Force for Abyei; KFOR = Kosovo Force

Source: SIPRI Multilateral Peace Operations Database (29 May 2019)

Figure 4. Largest multilateral peace operations as of 31 Dec. 2018.
Figure 5. Top 10 military contributors to multilateral peace operations on 31 Dec. 2018

Multilateral peace operations in 2009–18

Although there were comparatively few notable developments in the field of multilateral peace operations in 2018, a closer examination of the data reveals that the reversal of two important long-term trends in the deployment of multilateral peace operations, which began in 2015–16, continued in 2018.

Drop in personnel deployed in UN operations; increase in non-UN operations

First, the number of personnel deployed in UN peace operations decreased for the third year in a row in 2018. The number of personnel in UN peace operations fell by 2.9 per cent during 2018, from 98 354 to 95 488.[i] As a consequence, it reached the lowest level in the entire 2009–18 period. As recently as April 2015, the number of personnel serving in UN peace operations peaked at almost 115 000 following several years of consecutive growth. Between 2016 and 2018, the UN cut the number of personnel it maintained in its peace operations by almost 20 000, significantly reducing the number of UN peacekeepers in its operations in Darfur, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Haiti, and withdrawing altogether from Côte d’Ivoire and Liberia. In addition, the new peace operations established by the UN in recent years have been relatively small, primarily political missions. These developments notwithstanding, UN peace operations still accounted for 66 per cent of all personnel deployed in multilateral peace operations globally at the end of 2018.
At the same time, the number of personnel deployed in non-UN peace operations increased by 3.7 per cent during 2018, from 47,557 to 49,303. This was a result primarily of the strengthening of the NATO-led RSM in Afghanistan (from 15,046 to 16,910 personnel). While this increase was not sufficient to offset the decrease in the number of personnel serving in UN peace operations, it should be noted that the data for non-UN peace operations does not include prominent new security initiatives such as the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) against Boko Haram and the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel (JF-G5S). These operations, which have a combined authorized strength of approximately 15,000 personnel, do not qualify as multilateral peace operations as defined by SIPRI.

Africa still the key region for deployment despite a drop in personnel

Second, the number of personnel deployed in multilateral peace operations (UN and non-UN) in Africa also decreased for the third consecutive year in 2018. In addition, 2018 was the first year since 2009 in which no new multilateral peace operation was established in Africa. The number of personnel deployed in multilateral peace operations in Africa decreased by 1.9 per cent during 2018, from 106,240 to 104,238. This was the lowest level in five years. Between 2009 and 2015, the number of personnel serving in multilateral peace operations in Africa increased from approximately 80,000 to 120,000, after which it began to decrease. However, it should be noted that while this downward trend in the overall size of multilateral peace operations in Africa in recent years clearly reflects the drawing down or withdrawal of large UN missions in Africa, it does not—as mentioned above—take into account the authorization and deployment of the MNJTF and the JF-G5S. Moreover, despite the recent decreases in personnel, multilateral peace operations in Africa still accounted for 72 per cent of all the personnel serving in peace operations globally at the end of 2018.

Decline in fatalities in UN peace operations

The International Day of UN Peacekeepers is also the occasion on which the UN honours and pays tribute to those who have died while serving in a UN peace operation. At a wreath-laying ceremony on 24 May 2019, the 98 personnel involved in UN peace operations who died in 2018 were awarded posthumously the Dag Hammarskjöld Medal. Of these 98 fatalities, 27 were hostile deaths—that is, fatalities caused by malicious acts (see figure 6). All the fatalities caused by malicious acts were of military personnel serving in UN peace operations in Africa, namely the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA), the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali, the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) and the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS). In addition, 20 of the 27 who died due to malicious acts were from African countries. The other seven were from countries in South Asia.
Figure 6. Fatalities in UN peace operations, 1990–2018.

The number of hostile deaths was much lower in 2018 than in the previous year, when there were 59 hostile deaths in UN peace operations, including 15 troops from Tanzania in a single incident in eastern DRC in December 2017. Indeed, the number of hostile deaths in 2018 was the lowest in one year since 2012, which was before MINUSMA was established. Since it was established in July 2013, MINUSMA has suffered more hostile deaths per year than any other contemporary UN peace operation. This explains to a large extent the relatively high—albeit not unprecedented—annual numbers of hostile deaths in 2013–18.
Fatality ratios for uniformed personnel in UN peace operations, 1990–2018

Note: MINUSMA = UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali
Source: SIPRI Multilateral Peace Operations Database (29 May 2019)

Presenting fatalities as a ratio of the number of serving personnel provides a better indication of the relative deadliness of UN peace operations in a given year than absolute numbers because the number of personnel deployed can vary significantly from year to year. The annual ratio of hostile deaths among uniformed personnel in UN peace operations in 2018 was 0.3 per 1000.[ii] For all UN peace operations excluding MINUSMA, it was 0.21 per 1000. The annual ratios of hostile deaths were much lower in 2018 than in 2017, when they were 0.61 per 1000 (including MINUSMA) and 0.42 per 1000 (excluding MINUSMA). That said, the number and annual ratio of hostile deaths in 2017 was very high, even by post-2013 standards and is therefore not necessarily a useful benchmark. In addition, whereas the number of hostile deaths was lower in absolute terms in 2018 than in the other years in the 2013–18 period, the annual ratios of hostile deaths (including and excluding MINUSMA) were quite similar to those in 2013–16, when the UN was deploying a larger number of uniformed personnel (see figure 7).

[i] All UN figures include the African Union/UN Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID).

[ii] Annual fatality ratios for UN peace operations (fatalities per 1000 uniformed personnel) were calculated by dividing the number of deaths among uniformed personnel (military and police) by the average number of uniformed personnel deployed in UN peace operations per month, multiplied by 1000.
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STOCKHOLM INTERNATIONAL PEACE RESEARCH INSTITUTE

SIPRI is an independent international institute dedicated to research into conflict, armaments, arms control and disarmament. Established in 1966, SIPRI provides data, analysis and recommendations, based on open sources.

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