

Box 2.4 UN Peacekeeping Troop Reimbursement

One of the most contentious peacekeeping debates in 2011 revolved around the reimbursement rates paid to member states for the deployment of troops to UN peacekeeping operations, clearly demonstrating the divide between troop and financial contributors and testing the member state partnership on peacekeeping. This partnership has underpinned the growth in peacekeeping operations over the past fifteen years, with key actors demonstrating their willingness to provide the political and material support required for sustaining larger and more complex peacekeeping operations. However, political and economic tensions, notably the global financial crisis, have tested the limits of these agreements, demonstrated clearly in the intense negotiations in the past year over reimbursement rates.

Troop reimbursement is governed by the UN's Contingent Owned Equipment system, which determines member state compensation for providing resources to peacekeeping missions. Troop reimbursement rates are determined by member states and applied equally across

troop-contributing countries. Rates are determined for the deployment of troops, major equipment, and self-sustainment (the services that countries provide for their deployed troops).

These rates were last reviewed in 1992 and last increased in 2002, prompting calls from troop-contributing countries for their revision. Without an increase, and taking into account the costs of inflation, troop-contributing countries argue that they face a substantial financial burden in providing troops to UN peace operations, particularly in light of their expanding mandates. Troop contributors also call attention to the considerable difference between the costs of deploying UN peacekeepers compared with those of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan, noting that the annual cost of deploying ISAF troops is more than the cost of the past twenty years of UN peacekeeping operations combined.¹ Financial contributors, however, cite the continuing challenges of the global financial crisis when calling for improved efficiency and effectiveness.

In 2011 this debate became a major point of contention for peacekeeping negotiations within the UN. After months of consultations that were labeled “very difficult and at times unorthodox” by the chairman of the UN's administrative and budget committee, the committee approved a onetime supplemental payment of \$85 million to troop-contributing countries.² The General Assembly adopted the peacekeeping budget, including the ad hoc payment, the same day.

In addition, the General Assembly tasked the Secretary-General with establishing a senior advisory group to consider issues related to reimbursement rates. The group is comprised of five individuals with relevant experience, five representatives of troop-contributing countries, five representatives of major finance-contributing countries, and a representative from each of the five regional groups.

Without meaningful progress on the issue of troop reimbursement, the UN runs the risk of continued and protracted “unorthodox” debates around these issues, further exacerbating the divide between troop and financial contributors.

Notes: 1. Permanent Mission of India to the United Nations, “Peacekeeping: Taking Stock and Preparing for the Future—A Concept Note,” 8 August 2011.

2. UN General Assembly, “Following Days of ‘Very Difficult and Sometimes Unorthodox’ Negotiations, Fifth Committee Approves Budgets for 13 United Nations Peacekeeping Operations,” Department of Public Information, UN Doc. GA/AB/3994, 1 July 2011.