

Book Project

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WHY AND HOW UN PEACEKEEPING COMPOSITION MATTERS



Global UN Peacekeepers Flows as of December 2010

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1. Main aims and themes

This is a book on United Nation (UN) peacekeeping missions in civil wars and on how their composition affects the UN capacity to protect civilians and stop the hostilities between belligerents. Quite interestingly, this is the first book to present an analytical framework and a unifying theory to study how different levels of interactions between peacekeepers and locals can influence UN missions' effectiveness. This book provides new empirical evidence based on large-N data analyses corroborated by original qualitative data. We show that the composition of a UN mission does matter at different levels of actors' interactions within the conflict resolution process. Diversity and difference in UN composition, though, have not unidirectional effects; they can be in some contexts detrimental and, in others, beneficial towards the mission's outcome. On the one hand, diversity in UN mission composition can lead to complementarity and, therefore, can provide a beneficial broad range of conflict resolution skills. On the other hand, mission's diversity, in cultural and normative terms, can have damaging consequences. Furthermore, UN composition can have impacts on peacekeeping effectiveness through the hierarchical relation between mission leadership and Blue Helmets on the ground. Finally, composition and diversity within the UN leadership (military and political) and, in turn, their coordination and interactions, can jeopardize a mission's capacity to fulfil its mandates. Whether the net effect of diversity in the composition of a mission is positive or negative is not obvious, it is context and level-specific and we treat it as an empirical question.

We believe this is a timely research question as in mid-June of 2015 the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Mon has received a new report aiming to assess UN peacekeeping missions.¹ The High-Level Independent Panel on Peace

¹ <http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/documents/High-Level-Independent-Panel.pdf>

Operations² appointed in October 2014 and chaired by Jose Ramos-Horta has produced this report. The main goal of this panel was to review the past UN peacekeeping operations in order to evaluate their performance and policies; in the UN's words its scope was to "make a comprehensive assessment of the state of UN peace operations today, and the emerging needs of the future". The last extensive review that led to substantial changes in UN peace operations was undertaken 15 years ago,³ after a report written by Mr Lahkdar Brahimi was published (the so-called and well known "Brahimi Report"). This new report has mostly focused on enhancing responsiveness of peacekeeping missions and increasing their interoperability with regional organizations. However, it does not question whether and how the composition, in terms of contributing countries, of a UN peacekeeping mission can affect the main goals of stopping fighting and protect civilians. In fact, the report briefly discusses the issue of diversity within UN peace operations and only at the leadership level. The panel suggests that the leadership of peace operations should be selected on "merit-based processes" and missions should have "leadership teams based on diversity and complementarity responding to needs on the ground". Though, this is as far as the report goes on discussing composition in UN peacekeeping missions. This lack of attention on how the composition of UN mission could matter is also echoed in the academic debate. In particular the debate within the quantitative literature on peacekeeping effectiveness has rarely considered organizational issues within an operation, and has mostly looked at whether the very presence of peacekeepers affects a number of outcomes, in particular the duration of peace (Fortna 2008). More recent works on UN peacekeeping have studied whether the size of a mission influences cooperation between Blue Helmets and locals (Ruggeri, Gizelis, and Dorussen 2013), violence against civilians (Hultman,

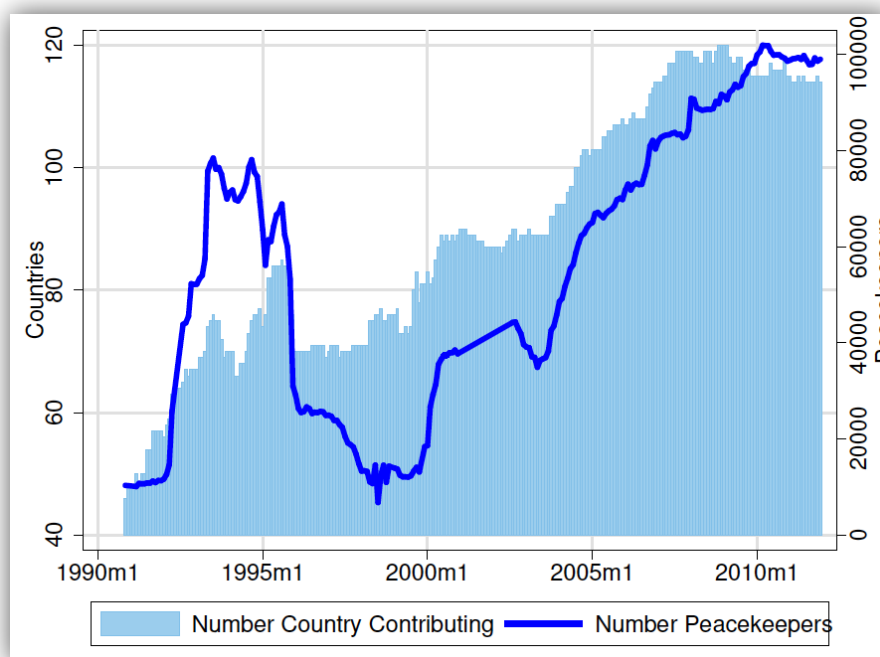
² <http://www.un.org/sg/statements/index.asp?nid=8151>

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

Kathman, and Shannon 2013) and battle deaths between belligerents (Hultman, Kathman, and Shannon 2014). As the abovementioned example shows, we have found a lack of attention toward UN missions' composition and we aim to fill this important lacuna. The neglect of composition in the studies of peacekeeping is unfortunate in terms of advancing insights about mission effectiveness, a topic that bears also important policy implications. A better understanding of such mechanisms appears crucial for detailed policy prescriptions.

We find this lack of attention toward UN mission composition very odd also because, as *Figure 1* clearly shows, both the number of countries

Figure 1: Countries Contributing and UN Blue Helmets



contributing to UN peacekeeping missions (light blue bars) and the total number of peacekeepers (dark blue line) have skyrocketed in the last two decades. In fact, in the early 1990s the UN could rely on a small pool of 40 countries supplying peacekeepers; whereas nowadays the UN peacekeeping mission are supplied by 120 different countries. In the same period from

Figure 2: UN Blue Helmets flows to Democratic Republic of Congo, December 2012



11,000 Blue Helmets around the globe, the UN peacekeeping mission has reached the incredible figure of around 105,000 UN peacekeepers in several continents. This dual empirical trend does not just indicate that more missions have been authorized or that countries have increased the number of peacekeepers dispatched to each single mission; it also implies that more countries are willing to meet the international community demand for UN peacekeepers and therefore, on average, each single mission has a higher number of individual donor countries. In fact, on average, a UN peacekeeping mission in Africa in the 1990s had 8 countries contributing, in the 2000s the average number of countries to one mission has reached 20 contributors, with the highest number in the Democratic Republic of Congo where peacekeepers, in December 2012, were coming from 56 different countries (see *Figure 2*).

Hence, UN peacekeeping missions have become very complex social organizations and the growth in the number of donors has brought new organizational challenges and coordination problems at both leadership and operational level; at the same time, diversity had produced a new set of complementary skills and perspectives. The above dynamics generate an array of novel research questions that our book project tackles:

- How does the new composition of missions influence their effectiveness?

- Is it advisable to have soldiers from few countries, or should the UN recruit peacekeepers from a variety of donors?
- Do Blue Helmets from far-flung countries have more difficulties in interacting with local societies - and thus getting the essential local support to achieve its objectives - than peacekeepers from culturally similar countries?
- Is the cultural distance between mission leadership and national contingents relevant in improving the mission capacity to stop conflict and protect civilians?
- Can differences – in terms of culture, norms and training – between political and military UN mission leaderships jeopardize missions' effectiveness?

Our book project addresses these questions by making the following contributions:

The first contribution is to present a unifying analytical framework for the study of United Nations peacekeeping operations that goes beyond the mere (though important) discussion and study on whether the presence or the size of Blue Helmets stop domestic conflicts. We unpack the UN peace operations and investigate how the composition and organisation of a mission at the internal level (i.e., within Blue Helmets or UN leadership), at the horizontal level (i.e., Blue Helmets and locals) and at the vertical level (i.e., Blue Helmets in relation with mission leadership) can influence civilians' protection and the level of violence between belligerents.

The second contribution is to highlight and elaborate an original theoretical framework based on our new analytical approach. We argue that missions' coordination costs, complementarity and strategic divergences created by different level of interactions between UN mission's components can be critical challenges for the success of a mission. Moreover, we integrate

an organizational/institutional framework within a rationalist explanation of peacekeeping effectiveness and we combine it with both the role of culture and norms in the conflict resolution process.

Our third contribution is empirical; we explicitly derive testable hypotheses from our theoretical framework and evaluate them using both quantitative and qualitative methods.

Our final contribution, we want to stress, is not “just” confined within the study of peacekeeping and Conflict Studies; it does contribute to a broader debate in Comparative Politics and International Relations. In fact, our approach, both in theoretical and empirical terms, goes beyond classic and, we would say, unnecessary divisions between rationality/culture frameworks and qualitative/quantitative approaches. We clearly stress that there is a mutual synergy in using insights from the theoretical literature based on rationalist approaches and on psychological, “ideational” and normative works.

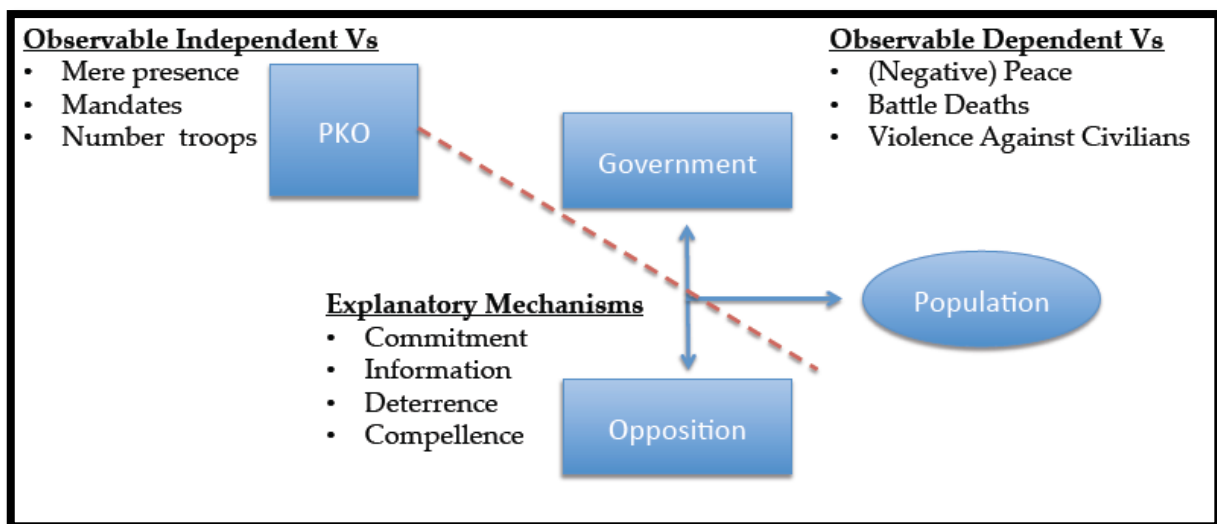
2. Relationship to the existing literature

Civil wars are the most fought conflicts in the contemporary world and make up more than 90 per cent of all armed conflicts since World War II (UCDP- Uppsala data 2014). We constantly observe the dramatic aspects of civil wars such as in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Syria, and Ukraine more recently. In parallel, peacekeeping organised by the United Nations (UN) has been ascribed as one of the most important tools in International Relations that has contributed to the decline of conflict in the past decades (Goldstein 2011). However, the questions of how exactly peacekeeping can stop violence and what is its real effectiveness have been recently under severe scrutiny (Autesserre 2010; Autesserre 2014b).

Previous literature has explored how the presence of peacekeepers can resolve commitment problems and help to minimize information asymmetry

between the belligerents, aspect that are the crux of conflict resolution in the academic as well policy debate (Kydd and Walter 2002). Moreover, more recent research has studied how the size, i.e. the number of peacekeepers deployed, is a central factor since provides both the signal to resolve and mitigate mistrust between the parties in conflict. According to the most recent quantitative literature on peacekeeping, the size of a mission contributes, together with the willingness, to its capacity to resolve (Hultman, Kathman, and Shannon 2013; Ruggeri, Gizelis, and Dorussen 2013). This research has convincingly explained how the presence (Doyle and Sambanis 2006), the mandate (Fortna 2008; Hultman 2013) and the size (Hultman, Kathman, and

Figure 3: Previous Literature and Theoretical Framework



Shannon 2013; Ruggeri, Gizelis, and Dorussen 2013) of peacekeepers can resolve the dilemmas among belligerents and, in turn, reduce the violence against civilians. Four different explanatory mechanisms can resolve the critical barriers to conflict resolution (Walter 1997; Dorussen 2014; Bove and Ruggeri 2015)

In *Figure 3*, we graphically summarise the analytical, theoretical and empirical propositions put forward by previous quantitative studies of UN peacekeeping. Starting from the analytical framework, previous research has conceptualized the interactive set up with four actors. There are three local

actors (government, rebels and population) and one external one, peacekeepers (PKO). Previous research on conflict dynamics has focused and studied analytically the possible interactions among the three local actors without unpacking the UN PKO and its possible interaction with the local actors (Cunningham, Gleditsch, and Salehyan 2009; Buhaug 2006; Eck and Hultman 2007). A common and problematic assumption of the quantitative research on UN peacekeeping (Doyle and Sambanis 2006; Fortna 2008; Hultman, Kathman, and Shannon 2013; Ruggeri, Gizelis, and Dorussen 2013) is that a typical UN peace operation is a rational unitary actor with its own set of preferences that can influence the conflict resolution processes by interfering with the possible strategic interactions of the three local actors.

Hence, this classic analytical framework leads to several theoretical propositions that can be summarized using four broad mechanisms. Firstly, peacekeepers can **deter** possible aggressive behaviour and prevent conflicts from spilling over from areas that are beyond the control of central leaders. Secondly, it is important to recognize that peace, or ceasefires, may provide opportunities for government and rebel authorities to re-arm and strengthen their local grip. As a consequence, the local presence of peacekeepers matters because it **commits** leaders to act in line with centrally agreed principles. Thirdly, government and rebel leaders often lack information about their relative strength in 'remote' areas, and providing **information** is a third mechanism by which peacekeepers can assist the peace process. Fourthly, a sizable deployment of peacekeepers, by imposing costs that outweigh the actors' potential gains, can **compel** them to stop fighting. Even a modest deployment of peacekeepers can suffice to provide information, but "compellence" will require a substantial presence.

Yet, previous quantitative research has studied whether the very presence of peacekeepers (i.e., *if*) or the number of peacekeepers (i.e., *how many*) can affect conflict outcomes, but has left completely unexplained

whether the composition of a peace operation (therefore *who*) and its relative organisation in relations with local actors (therefore *where*) do play a role and if so, how. However, a mission is composed of individual states, there are inevitable collective action problems, and what is individually rational for the national states might not be collectively rational for the international community. Our new analytical framework, together with its relative theoretical propositions, allows us to elaborate empirical expectations on these unexplained questions and evaluate them.

Our manuscript is clearly in conversation with previous books on peacekeeping published in recent years, but adds new analytical, theoretical and empirical elements that previous books have not developed yet and so far neglected. We are clearly within the tradition of two important books for the quantitative study of UN peacekeeping operations: *"Making War and Building Peace"* by Michael Doyle and Nicholas Sambanis published in 2006 with Princeton University Press and *"Does Peacekeeping Work?"* by Page Fortna published by Princeton University Press in 2008. As we highlighted in *Figure 3*, however, these very important books for the discipline are confined to an analytical framework that does not allow the authors to elaborate further theoretical propositions and empirical expectations on how UN missions' composition can influence the missions' fate. Furthermore, we clearly have benefited by books based on in-depth qualitative and ethnographic approaches (Pouligny 2006; Howard 2008; Sotomayor 2013) and their insights on the role of daily practices and how ideational factors (such as culture and norms) can influence interactions between Blue Helmets and locals. In these respects, we believe that the books by Severine Autesserre, *"The Trouble with the Congo"* (2010) and *"Peaceland"* (2014), both published with Cambridge University Press, are in open dialogue with our work. Finally, we see our manuscript clearly related to the recent book published by Oxford University Press *"How Peace Operations Work"* by Jeni Whalan (2013).

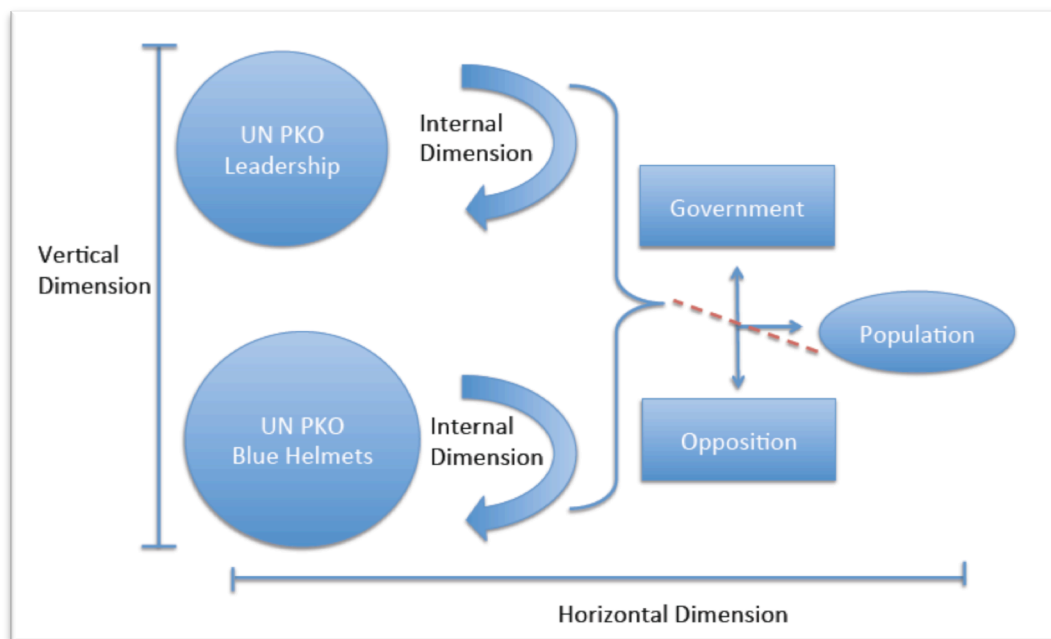
3. Given the above, its intellectual contribution

The rationalist approach on conflict resolution and peacekeeping has provided powerful explanations on why the presence and size of UN peacekeepers can affect the conflict resolution process. However, it did not attempt to unpack the organizational and logistical levels of UN missions' composition. Mainly ethnographic studies have started to elaborate how differences in terms of norms and culture can influence the daily practices of peacekeepers and, in turn, their interactions with locals (Rubinstein 2008). We are aware only of one quantitative piece that has attempted (though at aggregated level) to study how the locals react to peacekeepers' strategies and policies (Dorussen and Gizelis 2013). Most of the research looking at UN missions composition focuses on the military-civilians relations within the mission (Sotomayor 2013) and recent ethnographic work has analysed the daily practices of NGOs with locals (Autesserre 2014b). Therefore, our intellectual contribution is to study how composition of a UN PKO can affect both civilians' protection and conflict between government and oppositions. We do this by showing how different organisational dimensions can matter in order to adequately meet the mandate of a mission. These new dimensions can be obtained by unpacking the classic analytical unit. In fact, we argue that the UN PKO mission is not just about presence or size but it has two important analytical: the composition and organization of the leadership as well as of the Blue Helmets that are the boots on the ground that interact daily with locals.

Our new analytical framework, which we graphically represent in *Figure 4*, stems from the idea of unpacking the actors within a typical UN peacekeeping operation – the peacekeepers, their leadership, and the host country - to show how the relation between these elements and the diversity within and between them can influence the effectiveness of the peace operations. In particular, we investigate the above actors across three

dimensions, internal, horizontal, and vertical.⁴ First, two internal dimensions in the composition (in terms of heterogeneity/diversity) of the Blue Helmets deployed and of the mission leadership can affect conflict dynamics. Second, we highlight a horizontal dimension encompassing the diversity and distance between Blue Helmets and locals to investigate to what extent they can influence conflict resolution between belligerents and civilians' protection.

Figure 4: Analytical Framework



Finally, we show that there is a vertical dimension in terms of difference and distance between Blue Helmets and Leadership composition that can matter. Consequently, the different interactions among these several dimensions

⁴ The only study we are aware that has attempted a similar analytical conceptualization is by Rubinstein, Keller, and Scherger (2008). Besides the methodological differences - they use a qualitative anthropological approach - we conceptualize different actors, interactions, and interactive dimensions. We highlight three dimensions: internal (within Blue Helmets and within the UN leadership); horizontal (Locals and Blue Helmets); and vertical (between Blue Helmets and UN Leadership). They use the label *vertical* to indicate the interaction between international actors (NGOs, peacekeepers...) and locals and the label *horizontal* to describe interactions between international actors in a mission. We have opted for the label *vertical* for the interactions within a UN mission (leadership vis-à-vis Blue Helmets) to highlight hierarchical dynamics and possible principal/agents relations. Moreover, we wanted to avoid any "hierarchical flavor" when describing the interaction between Blue Helmets and locals, and therefore we opted for the label *horizontal* in this case.

imply numerous casual mechanisms that could have important effects on the dynamics of domestic conflict. We elaborate explanatory mechanisms for every single dimension. We start from the “bottom” by looking at the internal dimension of Blue Helmets composition and how this affects civilians’ protection. Then, we move on to explore the horizontal dimension in terms of weighted distances and differences between peacekeepers and the local population. Then, we move up to the vertical dimension and explore how distance and diversity between the UN mission leadership from the peacekeepers on the ground can influence the overall mission effectiveness. Subsequently, we focus on the internal dimension of the PKO leadership. We study how diversity and changes between the military and political components of the leadership can affect the mission’s performance.

Given that our book aims at filling a clear gap in the literature about UN peacekeeping missions, we believe that it could reach a relatively large readership. We expect that our book could be interesting for scholars working in the fields of International Relations and Comparative Politics, for undergraduate and graduate students studying Political Science and International Relations as well. Moreover, the policy implications about mission composition and the interactions between its different elements could be quite relevant also for practitioners and policy makers. This book has a perfect timing, in particular in light of the recent UN report we highlighted in the introduction of this proposal, and it can broaden and deepen the debate on this crucial issue. Additionally, it is a research work and therefore it will attract the interest of academics that are developing new theories to understand the phenomenon of conflict resolution. Our theoretical framework will leave many avenues for future research open, and we will sketch some of them. The empirical sections of the book will use both quantitative and qualitative methods, but our intention is making our analyses as accessible as possible using more data visualizations and figures than tables, consigning

technical details to footnotes and appendixes. Finally, we believe that using the UN missions in Africa and Asia as the core of our quantitative empirical sections can attract additional readers especially from scholars and students of African and Asian politics. To sum up, the book should be theoretically relevant for a broad readership in social sciences, but also empirically and methodologically interesting for faculty and students. Furthermore, the book shows how we can integrate both quantitative and qualitative methods, providing an example for scholars who are interested in moving toward a mix-method research design.

4. Research Design

Our methodological approach springs clearly from a quantitative tradition pioneered by Doyle and Sambanis (2006) and Fortna (2008) with the goal of using large-N data. We will use data on UN missions in civil wars from 1989 up to 2010 covering missions in Asia and Africa. Additionally, we will introduce a new dataset on UN PKO leadership. This is a new and original dataset on the political and military leadership of the UN peacekeeping missions where we coded nationalities of the Special Representatives of the Secretary-General (Head of Mission) and the Force Commanders. However, we do not restrict our empirical analysis only to statistics. In fact, we agree with authors that have stressed the need to triangulate quantitative with qualitative data (Lieberman 2005) and recently scholars working on peacekeeping using qualitative methods have highlighted the need to strengthen our empirical strategies combining different approaches (Autesserre 2014a). In fact, in the past few years we have collected qualitative material analysing primary sources such as documents and also interviews

done by other scholars.⁵ Additionally, we have also collected our own interviews with former UN personnel in New York, Stockholm, Brussels, Oxford and Amsterdam. We will conduct additional in-depth semi-structured interviews with former head of missions and force commanders at the UN Department for Peacekeeping Operations. We use these original interviews, documents and secondary sources to process trace with qualitative materials our explanatory mechanisms.

⁵ A very important source for us is the Oral Project of United Nations.
<http://www.unmultimedia.org/oralhistory/>

5. Brief Description of Chapters

I. Introduction

In the first chapter we introduce the readers to our main puzzle and show both the academic and societal relevance of this book. Moreover, we will show that our contribution is not “just” about studying peacekeeping but we engage with a broader debate in Comparative Politics and International Relations. We will present a summary of our new analytical framework and our theoretical propositions and empirical expectations that follow. Finally, we provide a brief description of the book structure and contents of each chapter.

II. Previous Research on UN Peace Operations

In this chapter our main goal is to review the substantive theoretical explanations on UN peacekeeping that have been developed since the 1990s. In fact, following the end of the Cold War, the UN started to deploy more peacekeeping missions, and a number of studies have investigated their effectiveness (Fortna and Howard 2008). We will, moreover, report and also graphically show (using data visualization and graphs) previous findings on how the presence of UN peacekeeping, the mandates of a mission and its size affect peace duration, violence against civilians and fighting between belligerents. All core objectives of UN missions today. Moreover, our aim is to review and summarise not only the quantitative research on UN peacekeeping but also to combine it with the insights from the qualitative and ethnographic studies on UN peacekeeping. Clearly we will stress and show how the issue of UN mission composition has been both under-theorized and empirically understudied.

III. Analytical and Theoretical Framework: How and Why Composition Matters

We first introduce our new analytical framework that unpacks the actors and dimensions of UN PKO. Our new analytical framework enables us to extend and develop mechanisms and explanations proposed within the rationalist framework such as commitment problems, information flows and deterrence capacity (Fearon 1995; Kydd 2010). We add organizational aspects of the missions and also normative and cultural differences to the abovementioned different mechanisms (Rubinstein, Keller, and Scherger 2008; Petersen 2011). We elaborate for all different dimensions (internal, horizontal, and vertical) different mechanisms and empirical hypotheses. Moreover, our focus on composition and differences between actors enables us to extend the classic rationalist approach to aspects of bounded rationality based on norms and culture (Petersen 2011) but also to issues of perceptions and misperception during strategic interactions (Jervis 1976) .

IV. Internal Dimension: Blue Helmets

For a given number of troops in a peace operation, is it advisable to have soldiers from a single country, or should the UN recruit peacekeepers from a variety of donor countries? Since 1990, the number of contributors to peace operations has grown threefold, and most operations have carried the mandate to protect civilians. This chapter explores the effect of diversity in the composition of a mission, measured by fractionalization and polarization indices, on its performance in protecting civilians in Africa and Asia in the period 1990–2010. It finds that mission diversity decreases the level of violence

against civilians, a result that holds when geographic and linguistic distances between countries are considered.

V. *Horizontal Dimension: Blue Helmets & Locals*

UN peacekeeping missions are complex social organizations, with soldiers having a variety of cultural origins and coming from several countries; in this environment, effective communication and interaction with the local population is often difficult, thus adversely affecting the mission's chances to get the essential local support to achieve its objectives. We explore how different distances of a peacekeeping mission from the local population, in terms of geography, culture and interests, can affect its performances in terms of civilians and combatants' casualties. We find that higher weighted distances between locals and peacekeepers, along geographic, linguistic or genetic lines, corresponds to higher levels of violence against civilians. Weighted genetic distance, used as a proxy of cultural distance, appears to be the most robust and consistent predictor among these distances. Whereas the horizontal distances between Blue Helmets and locals seem not to affect the battle related deaths.

VI. *Vertical Dimension: Blue Helmets and Mission Leadership*

Is the cultural distance between mission leadership and national contingents relevant in improving the mission capacity to stop conflict and protect civilians? In this chapter we investigate how the UN PKO leadership, in military and political terms, interact with Blue Helmets. We study how difference in terms of interests, language, culture and military norms between leadership and peacekeepers on the ground influence the mission capacity to protect civilians and stop fighting parties. We use an original and unique dataset where we have collected

information on all PKO Special Representatives Secretary-General and PKO Force Commanders in all the post-Cold War UN missions. Moreover, we use qualitative evidence to process trace causal mechanisms.

VII. *Internal Dimension: UN Mission Leaderships*

Can differences – in terms of culture, norms and training – between political and military UN mission leaderships jeopardize missions' effectiveness? In this chapter we focus on our second internal dimension of composition, the interactions between the political and the military leaderships of UN peacekeeping missions. Drawing from our unique new data presented in the previous chapter, we create indexes of diversity within mission leadership. We use regression models to gauge whether differences between Special Representatives Secretary-General and Force Commanders, in terms of political interests, language, and culture affect the capacity to protect civilians and resolve conflict. The statistical analysis will be backed by a number of original interviews with several diplomats and military that served in UN peace operations.

VIII. *Conclusions*

We conclude restating our contribution on three important levels: analytical, theoretical and empirical. We elaborate and highlight future avenues of research.

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