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An Analysis of the Reliability of UN Peacekeeping in the Context of Modern Global Conflicts

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Abstract

The purpose of this research project is to assess the reliability of UN Peacekeeping as a strategic conflict resolution tool in the context of modern global conflicts. This paper evaluates the efficacy of UN Peacekeeping on the strategic, operational, and tactical levels of operation, and analyzes its performance through the lens of Clausewitz's concepts of fog and friction. This paper concludes that the systematic challenges peacekeeping operations consistently face at each level of operation, coupled with the increasing complexity of contemporary global conflicts, calls into question the ability of UN Peacekeeping to reliably navigate and resolve modern-day global conflicts.

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INTRODUCTION

The international community relies on UN Peacekeeping to undertake complex global conflicts and resolve them peacefully and effectively; however, these expectations are both extremely challenging and rarely achieved. As global conflicts and peacekeeping operations become more complex, it is increasingly important to analyze the efficacy of the entities we task with resolving these issues. Thus, it is important to analyze UN Peacekeeping in the context of modern international conflicts and assess its reliability as a tool for contemporary global conflict resolution. This paper will analyze UN Peacekeeping performance at each of the three levels of war and discuss common issues through the lens of Clausewitz's concepts of fog and friction. In order to analyze these subjects, it is important to first define the relevant terms and concepts.

UN Peacekeeping

At the institutional level, peacekeeping is a multilateral diplomatic tool aimed at global resolving conflicts and preventing violence. Peacekeeping as it exists today was not specifically included in the 1948 Charter of The United Nations; rather than being precisely created, organized and established as a structured component of the UN, peacekeeping evolved out of necessity in a rather erratic and disorganized way.

Since the conception of UN Peacekeeping, the nature of global conflicts has changed significantly. The increasing prevalence of intrastate wars, failing states, and multidimensional global conflicts has significantly augmented the complexity of peacekeeping operations. Thus, it is important to evaluate the capability of UN Peacekeeping to reliably adapt to and resolve modern global conflicts.

Three Levels of War

Military organizations and operations are often discussed in terms of the three levels of war: the strategic level, operational level, and tactical level. Because modern UN Peacekeeping operations are essentially military operations, they must perform many of the same functions – and face many of the same challenges – as traditional state militaries. In the context of modern global conflicts, it is useful to assess the overall efficacy of UN Peacekeeping by analyzing its

performance at each of the three levels of war.

Clausewitz's Concepts of Fog and Friction

In his pivotal book, *On War*, Carl Von Clausewitz establishes his concepts of fog and friction, which are frequently cited in discussions of military operations and warfare. Because modern UN Peacekeeping operations are essentially military operations, these concepts are useful in discussions of the challenges facing peacekeeping operations in contemporary settings.

Friction can be explained as, "the tendency for unexpected events and operational challenges to erode a force's effectiveness, disrupt plans, and hinder communication" (Asal, 2014, p.478). International actors often perceive UN Peacekeeping as an ideal concept: an effective, united force that prevents war, promotes peace and protects human rights. However, in reality UN Peacekeeping operations are complex, multidimensional tactical endeavors comprised of many individual components and tasks, wherein "each of these individual tasks can be delayed, misapplied, or even fail in unpredictable ways due to an interaction of incompetence, misunderstanding, and/or unforeseen circumstances" (Asal, 2014, p.479).

Fog, on the other hand, "is a specific type of friction that has to do with the incompleteness and inaccuracy of information" (Asal, 2014, p.478). The fog of war has to do with uncertainties about the enemy; their intentions, strategies, capabilities, etc. However, in the context of UN peace operations, fog entails not only ambiguity about the various parties in the host country, but also about UN Peacekeeping in and of itself – a concept which lacks clarity to this day. In fact, according to the former Under Secretary General for the Department of Peacekeeping, "There is still no definition on what it (peacekeeping) entails" (Tsagourias, 2006, p.468). Clausewitz's fog and friction are important principles which help us conceptualize and attempt to understand the complexities of UN peace operations in modern global conflicts

STRATEGIC LEVEL

The strategic level is the level of war at which nations determine their overarching strategic objectives, establish doctrine and policy, and create internal structures to achieve these objectives. The strategic level of UN Peacekeeping involves the formation and revision of peacekeeping principles and doctrine, the coordination of internal structural organization, and the strategic planning of UN Peacekeeping policy. UN Peacekeeping has struggled with issues of definition and clarity since its emergence in 1948. While peace-

keeping still lacks a clear definition, it is most consistently explained by its three guiding principles which are: 1) consent of the parties; 2) impartiality; and 3) non-use of force except in self-defense and defense of the mandate (UN, n.d.). However, while these principles are intended to serve as UN Peacekeeping's principal sources of clarity, they are instead the source of immeasurable confusion. By analyzing issues related directly to the structure of UN Peacekeeping as defined by its guiding principles, we can better understand the challenges facing peacekeeping operations at the strategic level.

Peacekeeping Guiding Principles in the Context of Clausewitz's Fog and Friction

Fog and friction are important principles which help us conceptualize and understand the complexities of UN Peacekeeping operations. Discussing these concepts in the context of the guiding principles of UN Peacekeeping can help illuminate fundamental obstacles peacekeepers and policymakers face that result directly from the peacekeeping principles themselves.

The first pillar of the trinity of guiding principles is the consent of the parties to the conflict. For the UN to be able to intervene in a sovereign territory's affairs it must have the consent of the state's government and other main parties to the conflict. While this principle may have been straightforward at other times in history, the increasing prevalence of intrastate and multiparty conflicts has deeply challenged the concept of 'consent of the parties' due to larger numbers of small, warring factions within conflicts involving civil wars and/or failing states. The UN Peacekeeping website is quite transparent in acknowledging this issue;

"The fact that the main parties have given their consent to the deployment of a United Nations peacekeeping operation does not necessarily imply or guarantee that there will also be consent at the local level, particularly if the main parties are internally divided or have weak command and control systems." (UN, n.d.).

Additionally, the subjectivity of the idea of, "main parties to the conflict" invites us to question:

"Whose consent matters?"; who gets to decide whose consent matters and whose doesn't?; what happens when countries withdraw their consent?; and, how should the UN deal with parties who didn't explicitly consent? (Johnstone, 2011, p.175). These questions and more constitute the fog surrounding the principle of consent and account for the problems that result from it.

Legitimate, unqualified consent is unfortunately rare; "consent is often qualified in one of three ways: it is either unreliable, or brought about by external pressure, or open-ended" (Johnstone, 2011, p.170). In recent peacekeeping efforts in Burundi, Sudan, and the

Democratic Republic of the Congo, "Host governments have either called for premature withdrawal of missions or so obstructed the operations that fulfilling the mandate became, or is becoming, almost impossible" (Johnstone, 2011, p.168). The question of what to do in these situations is shrouded in fog, but the consequences of a lack of legitimate consent from all parties are clear. In the worst-case scenario, when consent is not clear, consistent or credible, it can result in attacks on UN peacekeepers. For example, the 2017 attack on MONUSCO personnel in the DRC and the 1993 attack on UNOSOM II personnel in Somalia both resulted from a lack of legitimate consent by all involved parties (Burke, 2017) (New York Times, 1993). The fog surrounding the idea of consent has resulted in the implementation of peace operations in areas where consent was not clear, consistent or credible, and peacekeepers have died as a result. Thus, we can see that the fog and ambiguity surrounding the concept of consent, and the issues that result from this fog, severely jeopardize individual peace operations and the concept of UN Peacekeeping as a whole.

The second pillar of UN Peacekeeping is impartiality, which has been ambivalent since its creation in 1956, especially in the context of the use of force. The complexity of this issue has increased continuously, "in response to the increasing prominence of intrastate conflict, and to expectations that peacekeepers will stop human rights abuses and protect civilians" (Levine, 2011, p.1). A study done by Professor Daniel H. Levine in 2011 demonstrates the varied perceptions of impartiality across different peacekeeping missions and among various peacekeeping personnel. He argues that, "definitions are similar but not the same, and that lack of consensus exists in the field as well as in official statements and analysis" (Levine, 2011, p.426). His research reveals a dense fog surrounding the strategic understanding of impartiality, the implications of which greatly jeopardize peace operations and peacekeepers' safety.

Additional issues concerning impartiality can occur even when mission mandates are quite clear. In some missions, such as MONUC in the DRC, part of the peacekeepers' mandate was to support national forces (Levine, 2011). However, this created a conflict of interest when, "national forces themselves violated human rights (and impartiality, implicitly, demanded that all rights violations be treated equally)" (Levine, 2011, p.428). This conflict raises a series of important questions: when a mission's mandate conflicts with UN guiding principles, to which guidelines are peacekeepers expected to adhere?; when confronted with spoiler groups and/or groups committing gross human rights violations, how are peacekeepers still supposed to remain impartial?; what if their impartiality towards conflicting parties impedes the peace process? Levine confirms this observation, warning, "Failure to make expectations about impar-

tiality clear, especially as they relate to use of force, can cause direct operational problems for missions" (Levine, 2011, p.429). Fog surrounding the meaning of impartiality and its correct execution, and frictions resulting from conflicting perceptions of impartiality can both directly impact peacekeeping operations by creating disunity, frustration, and confusion among peacekeepers.

The third pillar of the UN Peacekeeping trinity is limited use of force. This is arguably one of the most important – and most contested – principles of UN Peacekeeping, and has evolved significantly over time. Dr. Daniel S. Blocq explains this shift;

"Until recently, peacekeepers were formally not authorized to use force to prevent massive atrocities. At last the United Nations is changing the mandates for peacekeeping operations. The UN peacekeeper is now authorized to use force to protect civilians, but he or she is left with no specific guidelines" (Blocq, 2006, p.210)

Peacekeepers should expect to find specific operational guidelines regarding the use of force in the Rules of Engagement. However, the UN is not an autonomous actor; many factors converge to form the principles and bodies that constitute it. Since the UN doesn't exist independently, neither do the Rules of Engagement; rather, "they are an amalgamation of political, legal, and military-operational requirements" which are established through "national policy and international law" (Blocq, 2006, p.205). Unfortunately, both of these entities are, "ambiguous in relation to peacekeeping", and lack cohesive guidelines (Blocq, 2006, p.205).

With no consistently reliable guidelines regarding the use of force, peacekeepers constantly operate in a dense fog which severely jeopardizes their objectives and potential efficacy in achieving them. Furthermore, peacekeepers lacking clarity and confidence greatly magnify the potential occurrence of friction (tasks failing in unpredictable ways due to, "incompetence, misunderstanding, and/or unforeseen circumstances") (Asal, 2014, p.479). Ambiguous instructions regarding the use of force lead to subjective interpretations and inconsistent implementation, which puts civilians and peacekeepers in danger. This ambiguity threatens the potential success of individual peace operations and the very concept of UN Peacekeeping as a whole.

In summary, while UN Peacekeeping's fundamental principles are meant to be its principal source of clarity and structure, they are instead highly ambiguous and inconsistently implemented. The entire concept of UN Peacekeeping is shrouded in fog and plagued by frictions. As the basic doctrinal structure of UN Peacekeeping is uncertain in and of itself, this ambiguity contaminates all other strategic-level operations and results in inefficiencies which extend throughout UN Peacekeeping operations. The UN's failure to create

and maintain a clear, consistent and credible doctrine, along with its inability to establish organized internal structures and coherent principles and policies demonstrates its lack of efficacy at the strategic level.

OPERATIONAL LEVEL

The operational level is the level of war at which strategic objectives are translated into campaign plans and major operations. The operational level of UN Peacekeeping involves large-scale coordination and preparation of peacekeeping operations; it is the stage where the principles of peacekeeping are manifested in the form of mandates and mission plans. Mission approval and establishment of the mandate are the responsibilities of the UN Security Council, while operation planning, financing, monitoring, and administrative functions are concerns of the General Assembly and Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations (UN, n.d.).

Many of the issues that occur at the strategic level trickle down to the operational level. For example, the lack of clarity regarding the principle of impartiality – which is derived from larger structural problems that exist at the strategic level – can result in issues at the operational level regarding coordination and planning of specific operations and mission plans.

Because modern UN Peacekeeping operations are essentially military operations, they face many of the same operational-level challenges as traditional national military operations including campaign planning, troop organization and mobilization, establishment of mission protocols, and logistical planning. All of these operational-level functions require adequate military intelligence; without it, one cannot effectively plan any aspect of a military campaign.

Yet UN Peacekeeping has historically had a complex relationship with intelligence, the complications of which have created countless operational-level challenges for decades. While intelligence is only one specific aspect of mission planning, it is crucial to many – if not all – functions at the operational level, and thus serves as a representative case study to analyze when discussing the efficacy of UN Peacekeeping at the operational level.

Analysis of the Evolution and Current Status of UN Peacekeeping Intelligence

One of the most critical types of fog UN peacekeepers face is a lack of information. As peacekeeping missions become more complex – and more perilous – reliable information and acute situational awareness are necessary for success and survival. Unfortunately, the UN's willingness to employ intelligence in peacekeeping missions has historically been slow and reluctant. While it has increasingly

integrated intelligence into recent missions in an effort to improve decision-making, mitigate violence, and protect the lives of peacekeepers and civilians, UN Peacekeeping intelligence capabilities are still far from adequate.

It is impossible to thoroughly understand the status of peacekeeping intelligence today without understanding its history, just as it is impossible to appreciate its evolution without acknowledging its humble beginnings. In fact, humble is an understatement; “the intelligence component in peacekeeping was considered taboo during the Cold War because of its association with Great Powers espionage practices”, indeed so taboo that, “the use of the term ‘intelligence’ was banned” (Kuele & Cepik, 2017, p.45) (Rietjens & Dorn, 2017, p.199). At that time, the idea of any sort of, “intrusive gathering of information” was rejected, as the UN was still establishing its legitimacy and, “felt it could not afford to lose credibility or tarnish its image as an impartial mediator” (Rietjens & Dorn, 2017, p.199). This rejection of intelligence in peacekeeping operations contributed to a significant lack of information on the operational and tactical levels, resulting in dangerous conditions and sometimes disastrous consequences.

The consensus on peacekeeping intelligence began to change at the turn of the century after the Brahimi Report (2000) called for the, “increased collection and analysis of information on the relevant actors in a given mission area” and after a tragic bombing attack on a UN compound in Baghdad (2003) revealed the urgency of improving intelligence capabilities (Nordli & Lindboe, 2017, p.5) (Dursma & Karlsrud, 2019). As peacekeeping missions became increasingly complex and dangerous, the UN began to gradually embrace the idea of utilizing intelligence to improve the safety and efficacy of its peacekeepers. In 2006, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations began allowing, “all-source information gathering using military, police and civilian personnel”, which is still largely in effect today (Dorn, 2009, p.806).

However, UNPK intelligence capabilities remained far behind the rest of the world and prevented the adequate performance of necessary operational-level functions. For instance, while reconnaissance drones (UAV's), were “first deployed on a large scale in the Vietnam War”, use of surveillance drones in UN Peacekeeping operations wasn't permitted until 2013 (IWM Staff, 2018) (Katombe, 2013). The greatest advancement of peacekeeping intelligence occurred during the UN mission in Mali (MINUSMA) with the creation of a new military intelligence unit called the All Sources Information Fusion Unit (ASIFU) in 2014 (Rietjens & Ruffa, 2019).

As peacekeeping intelligence continued to develop, so did the necessity for it to be more structured and effective. However, offi-

cial policy wasn't established until the creation of the first UN Peacekeeping Intelligence Policy in May 2017 (Duursma & Karlsrud, 2019). Even after this policy was finally created, numerous issues remained. The Policy, characteristic of many official UN documents, is vague and "avoids the more controversial aspects related to the challenges of maintaining impartiality found in the traditional understanding of intelligence" due to the contentious perceptions of intelligence in the UN (Nordli & Lindboe, 2017, p.7). This inevitably creates and sustains fog surrounding the structure and intentions of peacekeeping intelligence.

Multiple UN reports have emerged in response to the policy's enactment calling for further development and clarity, including the Cruz Report (2017) which asserted that current missions, "lack the basics, especially human intelligence, networks of informants, situational awareness, and capacity to communicate with the population" (Cruz, 2017, p.6). Even so, the UN has not published any adjustments or improvements to the policy thus far.

The evolution of intelligence in UN Peacekeeping continues to be vital to the success of peacekeeping operations and the safety of peacekeepers and civilians. And, while the, "implementation of intelligence within a UN mission has been widely criticized", there is, "a near unanimous assessment from the existent literature is that an intelligence function is required in UN peace operations" (Rietjens & Ruffa, 2019, p.20) (Nordli & Lindboe, 2017, p.5). Accurate information, situational awareness, and informed decision-making are all necessary conditions for a successful mission, and intelligence is the only way to achieve any of these goals. The current status of peacekeeping intelligence is one of continuous, albeit reluctant, development; it is slowly evolving but has a very long way to go to adequately support UN operational-level processes with sufficient intelligence.

In sum, the lack of adequate intelligence significantly impairs sufficient operational-level planning, and the UN's reluctance and/or incapacity to resolve this issue, despite its serious impacts, indicates significant inefficiency. Furthermore, while intelligence is only one dimension of UNPK operational-level functions, the implementation issues and lack of timely improvement its history demonstrates can be seen in many other components of UN Peacekeeping efforts; thus, it serves as an accurate representation of the UN's lack of efficacy at the operational level.

TACTICAL LEVEL

Finally, the tactical level is the level of war at which operational objectives are physically implemented through the planning and execution of battles and military engagements. In the context of

UN Peacekeeping, the tactical level consists of the planning and execution of specific political, military, and logistical aspects of the mission and the deployment of peacekeeping forces to fulfill the operation's mandate. Tactical planning is the responsibility of the Head of Mission, the Department of Peace Operations, and the Department of Operational Support (United Nations, n.d.). Again, because modern peacekeeping missions are essentially military operations, they require many of the same tactical-level functions as traditional state-led military operations: establishment of operational guidelines for soldiers; strategic plans to achieve the mission's objectives; formation and consistent execution of daily operation protocols; successful completion of military directives; etc.

Additionally, UN Peacekeeping operations face a myriad of unique problems that most other militaries never encounter, many of which are manifestations of inefficiencies and issues that originated at the strategic and operational levels. Innumerable tactical challenges exist in peacekeeping operations but, in the interest of time, this section will focus specifically on tactical challenges that are derived directly from the multinational composition of peacekeeping forces.

Challenges that Result from the Multinationalism of Peacekeeping Forces

While it is easy to conceive of the Blue Helmets as a single, united force, it is important to remember that the UN is not an autonomous actor, and its peacekeeping forces are not a unitary entity. The UN Charter does not allow for a standing army, so member states voluntarily contribute soldiers for PKOs (UN, n.d.). UN Peacekeepers are primarily soldiers of their national army; "they wear their countries' uniform and are identified as UN peacekeepers only by a UN blue helmet or beret and a badge" (UN, n.d.). The multinational composition of peacekeeping forces poses endless obstacles to the successful implementation of tactical-level operations.

The most obvious issue resulting from the multinational composition of UN Peacekeeping forces is the prevalence of language barriers. Blue Helmets come from all over the world, and while soldiers are most often grouped with other soldiers from their home country, the coordination of troops who don't share a common language is an immense tactical issue. Peacekeeping operations also necessarily, "involve interaction between military personnel and local populations as well as interaction between militaries and with NGOs from various parts of the world" (Tomforde, 2010, p.450). An inability to easily communicate with local actors and allied organizations presents obvious challenges for any military force, but is an especially large obstacle for the Blue Helmets who are expected

to promote peace and remain nonviolent, if possible. Inevitable language barriers resulting from the multinationalism of UN Peacekeeping forces aren't the only obstacle posed by the fragmented composition of the Blue Helmets. The multinational nature of UN Peacekeeping operations makes intercultural interactions inevitable, which can result in miscommunication, especially in conflict situations. While it is common to underestimate the importance of cultural dimensions in a military operation, research shows that frequent, "operational problems arise due to cultural misunderstandings between peacekeepers from various countries" (Tomforde, 2010, p.450). Intercultural communication issues, both among soldiers and between Blue Helmets and local populations, can result in disastrous, and even deadly, consequences for peacekeepers and civilians. For example, the deaths of US and Malaysian soldiers in Somalia in 1993 under UNOSOM II, while caused by multiple factors, have been attributed partially to cultural misunderstandings and insufficient intercultural communication (Razak et al., 2018, p.88). Thus, it is important to not undervalue the gravity of cultural dimensions within peacekeeping operations, as "competency constraints and cultural differences are vital issues in military operation" (Razak et al., 2018, p.89).

Other tactical challenges derived from the multinationalism of UN Peacekeeping forces involve the training and mission execution of international soldiers. A study of multiple national armies' performance of day-to-day operations during the UNIFIL II peacekeeping mission in Lebanon documented, "systematic variations in the way French, Ghanaian, Italian, and Korean units implement the mandate of the UN mission in Lebanon in their daily military activity" (Ruffa, 2014, p.199). This obviously creates significant tactical issues and prevents the UN Peacekeeping force from successfully achieving its mandate. Thus, lack of consistency in training can result in considerable disunity among peacekeeping forces and create barriers to communication and tactical success.

In sum, while UN Peacekeeping missions face the same tactical challenges as traditional state armies in their execution of military operations, they also must contend with countless tactical challenges unique to the nature of UN Peacekeeping. Many challenges on the tactical level are derived from issues that have trickled down from the strategic and operational levels, while others are unique to the planning and execution of on-the-ground operations. One of the most significant challenges facing UN Peacekeeping operations is the inevitability of a fragmented army due to its necessarily multinational composition. This causes various issues including, but not limited to, language barriers, intercultural communication challenges, inconsistent training, and variations in the ways in which individual state armies implement the UN mission's

mandate. While some of these tactical issues are unavoidable within the current requirements of the UN Charter, others result from systematic failures at all levels of the UN Peacekeeping structure, resulting in frequent mandate implementation issues and an overall lack of efficacy at the tactical level.

CONCLUSION

While UN Peacekeeping has achieved commendable successes throughout history, it is far from a perfect system and is unfortunately plagued with inefficiencies at every level of operation. Issues established at the strategic level – most notably a significant lack of structural and doctrinal clarity – create far-reaching fog and friction throughout the entire organization. Issues established at the operational level – both problems derived from strategic level shortcomings and specific operational problems, such as a drastic lack of intelligence capabilities – encourage further confusion in peacekeeping operations. Finally, issues at the tactical level – those derived from strategic and operational level issues and those specific to the tactical level, such as a necessarily fragmented multinational peacekeeping force inhibiting communication – cause serious implementation issues and prevent the successful execution of the mandate.

In conclusion, UN Peacekeeping faces significant challenges at each level of war – strategic, operational and tactical – which cause fog and friction throughout the entire organization. The UN's current and historic incapacity to overcome these challenges has resulted in an overall lack of efficacy at each structural level (each level of war) of UN Peacekeeping. Thus, while UN Peacekeeping has seen some past successes in its history, the systematic challenges it consistently faces, coupled with the increasing complexity of global conflicts – driven by the increased prevalence of intrastate wars, failing states, and multidimensional global conflicts – calls into question UN Peacekeeping's ability to reliably deal with modern-day global conflicts.

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