9 Conclusion

Local-Level Conflict and the Future of International Intervention

> I look upon the United Nations as the only organization that holds out any hope for the future of mankind. The United Nations must therefore face up to its responsibilities, and ask those who would bury their heads like the proverbial ostrich in their imperialist sands, to pull their heads out and look at the blazing African sun now travelling across the sky of Africa's redemption.
>
> Kwame Nkrumah (1909–1972)
> First Prime Minister of Ghana
> Speech to the UN General Assembly

> If today we speak of peace, we also speak of the United Nations, for in this era, peace and the United Nations have become inseparable. If the United Nations cannot ensure peace, there will be none. If war should come, it will be only because the United Nations has failed. But the United Nations need not fail. Surely, every man of reason must work and pray to the end that it will not fail.
>
> Ralph Bunche (1904–1971)
> American diplomat and prominent UN official
> Nobel Lecture, December 11, 1950

This book argues that United Nations (UN) peacekeepers are uniquely capable of confronting the main challenges associated with civil war violence in the twenty-first century. It combines evidence from original cross-national data on every peacekeeping operation (PKO) deployed between 1999 and 2020 in sub-Saharan Africa with an in-depth case study of UN peacekeeping in Mali to back up this claim.

I have framed this book with the words of Kwame Nkrumah and Ralph Bunche in order to foreground their vision of the UN's key role in creating a peaceful transition from colonialism to independence for the African continent. Both supported the UN's first peacekeeping mission with substantial military power, the UN Operation in the Congo (ONUC), in 1960: Nkrumah by sending 770 Ghanaian troops and Bunche by serving in several leadership roles in the operation. The UN Security Council tasked ONUC with overseeing the peaceful withdrawal of Belgian colonial forces and maintaining the territorial integrity of

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the newly independent Congo. Although ONUC nominally achieved its goals and fulfilled its mandate, domestic factions forced peacekeepers to take sides in the conflict that developed following independence, triggering a crisis within the UN. Determined to keep the UN out of conflicts, the Security Council did not approve another robust PKO until the end of the Cold War.

Although the promise of UN peacekeeping remains somewhat unfulfilled, this book documents how UN peacekeepers have successfully limited the impact of the communal disputes that drive the majority of violence in conflict and postconflict settings. Undeniably, the world would look a lot worse without the UN. Bunche was the first to suggest sending troops from foreign countries to conflict and postconflict settings to keep the peace. He believed these troops would succeed precisely because their diversity would lead locals to perceive them as impartial (Howard 2019*b*). This idea had limited support at the time, mainly from anti-colonial leaders like Nkrumah. The Security Council and the 193 member states of the UN General Assembly have since fully embraced the once-radical notion of peacekeeping. Moreover, as I have laid out in this book, peacekeeping largely works as Bunche and Nkrumah hoped – as an impartial contrast to colonial intervention.

I begin this conclusion by briefly revisiting my theoretical framework and highlighting the differences between my explanation of peacekeeping outcomes and those put forward in previous political science studies. I also summarize the findings from the empirical tests reported throughout the book. Next, I discuss how these findings may apply beyond Mali, the book's principle focus of empirical analysis, and beyond the practice of UN peacekeeping more generally. I follow this discussion with an analysis of my book's implications for research on conflict, international relations, and political science. Finally, if we accept that impartial peacekeepers succeed in limiting the outbreak of communal violence, how can we maintain peacekeepers' impartiality, and how can we safeguard the gains from UN peacekeeping's local-level success after they leave? I end by answering these important questions, offering specific policy recommendations to explain how the international community can build peace from the bottom up.

Revisiting Localized Peace Enforcement Theory

The book's main claim is that UN peacekeepers reduce communal violence. In Chapter 3, I presented my localized peace enforcement theory, which maintains that UN peacekeeping increases individuals' willingness to cooperate across social groups, incentivizes the peaceful resolution of communal disputes, and reduces communal violence. I posit that the

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UN is particularly effective at peacekeeping because domestic groups perceive it as impartial due to a combination of unique institutional characteristics – multilateralism, diversity, and the nonuse of force. The theoretical model outlined in the book suggests three mechanisms through which impartial peacekeepers reduce communal violence; each is formulated as a set of hypotheses (see Figure 3.1). In this section, I review each set of hypotheses and discuss the evidence the book has offered in support of each.

The first set of hypotheses concerns the beliefs of individuals engaged in a dispute. If there is a dispute between two individuals from different social groups living in the same community, impartial peacekeepers initially *increase* individuals' beliefs that others will reciprocate their attempts at cooperation to resolve the dispute (Hypothesis 1a). In Chapter 6, I presented the results of a lab-in-the-field experiment conducted with 512 Malians in the capital, Bamako, which supports this hypothesis. The evidence suggests that participants in the experiment believe that members of another ethnic group are more likely to reciprocate their attempts to cooperate if they believe the UN is present to enforce the dispute.

Next, my theory posits that impartial peacekeepers *decrease* individuals' beliefs that others will escalate their dispute violently (Hypothesis 1b). In Chapter 6, I discussed the results of a survey experiment administered to 874 Malians in 8 rural neighborhoods of Bamako and 12 villages in central Mali. The survey presented respondents with a vignette replicating a typical communal dispute over land. I randomized whether respondents were told UN or French peacekeeping patrols discovered the dispute and asked them to evaluate the likely outcomes. I found that UN patrols decreased their perceptions of the likelihood of violence, regardless of the ethnic makeup of the disputants.

Localized peace enforcement theory then implies that this twofold belief change about others' likely behavior will then *increase* individuals' willingness to cooperate (Hypotheses 2a–2c). The lab-in-the-field experiment presented in Chapter 6 illustrates that *some* types of peacekeeping have a strong, positive effect on local residents' willingness to cooperate in a conflict setting. Whereas the UN treatment increased participants' willingness to cooperate relative to the control group, the France treatment had no substantive or statistically significant effect. I find that UN peacekeeping is especially effective among individuals who have few other reasons to cooperate – those with low social trust, little contact with members of other ethnic groups, and low trust in formal governance institutions. I also present evidence that the UN treatment in the lab experiment has a larger impact among individuals who have had previous interactions with peacekeepers outside the lab than among those

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who have not. Follow-up interviews confirmed that the most important channel through which the UN increases individuals' willingness to cooperate was beliefs about the UN's impartiality.

Finally, the theory predicts that as more members of a community become more willing to cooperate to resolve disputes, this will *decrease* the incidence of communal violence (Hypothesis 3). I offer cross-national support for this theory in Chapter 8; I test it using my original cross-national RADPKO dataset of UN personnel deployed in fourteen peace operations, which contains nearly 400,000 observations. I demonstrate that the deployment of UN peacekeepers is associated with a decrease in communal violence. I also document that peacekeepers' effectiveness varies based on their national origin. The deployment of UN peacekeepers likely to be perceived as impartial by local populations is associated with a decrease in communal violence. I find no evidence of such an association with peacekeepers who are believed to be biased.

Since cross-national observational data cannot distinguish between competing theoretical mechanisms or identify the causal effect of UN localized peace enforcement, I test Hypothesis 3 using the case of Mali. Chapter 5 introduces the case and presents qualitative evidence consistent with my theory from forty-eight interviews conducted with local leaders in Mali. In Chapter 7, I draw on georeferenced data on peacekeeping deployments and communal violence to test my theory in the area near the Mali–Burkina Faso border. I compare the escalation of disputes in Burkina Faso (which has no peacekeepers) versus Mali (which has a Chapter VII UN peacekeeping mission) and find that UN peacekeepers have reduced the incidence of violence in Mali by more than half. Next, I conduct an in-depth investigation into peacekeeping on the Malian side using data on the nationality of peacekeepers deployed to Central Mali. I find that perceptions of the bias of certain peacekeepers likely explain their inability to contain communal violence.

Beyond UN Peacekeeping

The empirical analysis presented in this book has focused on UN PKOs in postcolonial states in sub-Saharan Africa. Does my argument about impartiality also apply to non-UN interventions? Does the evidence discussed in Part II of the book extend beyond Mali – or beyond sub-Saharan Africa? The primary concern is that there may be important selection effects at play – that is, the UN may choose to intervene only in conflicts where it can be impartial and where an impartial local-level enforcer can be effective.

However, my theory applies to any PKOs in which international actors are engaged in local-level peacekeeping. This includes noncolonial

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settings in sub-Saharan Africa (e.g., Liberia), noncolonial settings in other regions (e.g., Kosovo), and colonial settings in other regions (e.g., Afghanistan and Iraq). Yet when applying localized peace enforcement theory to peace operations beyond the cases presented in this book, two factors must be taken into consideration. First, international actors' historical and contemporary policies shape domestic beliefs about peacekeepers' bias. Second, the theory should not be employed to analyze peace operations that are not truly localized, which rules out most PKOs before 2000.

Given the challenging nature of the PKO in Mali, the logic undergirding my theory likely generalizes to other peacekeeping settings involving different types of social groups. Beyond Mali, the study's main results link the micro-level operations of UN peacekeepers to the robust macro-level finding in the scholarly literature that UN peacekeeping maintains order after conflict (Walter, Howard and Fortna 2021). The potential success of local-level peacekeeping also gives UN member states a compelling reason to maintain operations abroad – a challenging electoral proposition for democratic politicians in recent times (Marinov, Nomikos and Robbins 2015). The conditional aspects of the results – that the UN is more effective in low-trust settings and when it has more contact with local residents – could also help us understand past peacekeeping failures. For example, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), UN peacekeepers have succeeded in bringing armed groups to the negotiating table but have struggled to contain communal violence. Peacekeepers have notoriously resisted connecting with the country's local population, especially in isolated areas (such as Kivu) where residents distrust other ethnic groups as well as government institutions (Autesserre 2010). My findings suggest that peacekeepers in the DRC won't be able to prevent communal violence unless they patrol these areas more often.

More broadly, my results generalize to other settings and other kinds of international interventions as well. Communal disputes pervade fragile settings around the world, and preventing the onset of communal violence is integral to the mandates of UN missions stationed abroad. While no other international actor has deployed troops as frequently as the UN, it is not the only foreign intervener that has sought to limit communal violence. Communal disputes have threatened the goals of French interveners in Mali as well as in the Central African Republic and Chad. Sectarian conflicts driven in part by communal disputes similarly challenged the US military in Afghanistan and Iraq. Compared to these interveners, UN peacekeepers differ in important ways that make them seem more impartial and ultimately more effective. Yet the components of my theory that relate to impartiality are not necessarily specific

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to the UN. For example, local ethnic groups may perceive other multilateral organizations such as the European Union as relatively impartial as well. African regional organizations like the Economic Community of West African States have the additional benefit of excluding troops from former colonizers. Whether such interventions are as effective as those undertaken by the UN is a promising avenue for future research on conflict.

Implications for the Field

The primary scholarly implication of the book's findings is that researchers in international relations, conflict studies, peace science, and political science more broadly have focused too much on top-down violence and the problem of credible commitment between armed groups, and not nearly enough on bottom-up violence and the problem of cooperation between civilians. This imbalance has caused us to underestimate how important impartiality is to modern PKOs. I illustrate in this book that perceptions of impartiality explain why UN peacekeepers are, on balance, more effective than other interveners at preventing communal violence – and why UN peacekeepers from some countries are more effective than others. These findings suggest at least three areas for future research.

First, a more comprehensive analysis of the sources of perceptions of bias in conflict settings would productively inform scholarship and practice. Social psychology research has long investigated the sources of bias, especially studies of social identity theory. An emerging strand of the international relations literature has drawn on this work to examine how violence creates perceptions of bias. Yet conflict and peace studies have largely overlooked the role of historical factors in producing lingering perceptions of bias in conflict and postconflict settings. As I argue in Chapter 2, scholarship in comparative politics as well as sociology, history, and anthropology has long suggested that colonialism, ethnic power relations following independence, and postcolonial policies generate perceptions of international actors as biased in favor of certain minority groups.[1]

Second, future work should investigate the conditions under which communal peace aggregates up to the national level. For example, researchers could examine the relationship between localized peace enforcement and armed group activity in conflict and postconflict settings. I argue in Chapter 3 that localized peace enforcement could theoretically reduce armed group activity by increasing intergroup

[1] See inter alia Wimmer, Cederman and Min (2009).

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cooperation. When the UN incentivizes the peaceful resolution of communal disputes, civilians no longer need to rely as heavily on armed groups for support. Prior work has provided various evidence that is consistent with this claim (Ruggeri, Dorussen and Gizelis 2017; Fjelde, Hultman and Nilsson 2019; Hultman, Kathman and Shannon 2020) but has not offered systematic evidence of such an aggregation effect: It has not yet made an explicit connection between communal disputes and armed group violence.

Third, the gains from localized peace enforcement give states the opportunity to develop domestic institutions as part of a broader statebuilding enterprise. As Lake and Fariss remind us, peacekeeping should be expected "only to be a temporary fix to limit the violence while other routes to enduring peace are pursued" (2014, p. 17). Critically, they find that UN PKOs do not increase public goods provision. Future empirical studies should explore whether statebuilding can succeed following local-level peacekeeping. I have shown that UN PKOs enhance security at the local level. If locals credit local institutions with realizing these security gains, PKOs will increase state legitimacy. Yet if they attribute the increased security entirely to the UN, localized peace enforcement will not affect state legitimacy.

Policy Implications

This book establishes that impartial peacekeepers prevent the outbreak of communal violence, which has two important implications for the practice of peacekeeping. First, given the importance of perceptions, *policymakers must ensure that PKOs are impartial*. International actors can only promote intergroup cooperation and facilitate the peaceful resolution of communal disputes when local populations believe they are relatively impartial. The second implication is that since communal peace in my analysis relies on the presence of UN peacekeepers, *the international community must design peaceful transitions out of PKOs*. I conclude the book by discussing each implication in turn.

Keeping Peacekeeping Impartial

My findings underscore the enduring importance of impartiality to the success of UN PKOs. How do we ensure they remain impartial? Domestic populations generally perceive UN peacekeepers as more impartial than troops from foreign interveners. However, as my analysis of Togolese and Senegalese peacekeeping in Mali (Chapter 7) reveals, locals may consider peacekeepers from some neighboring countries to be more impartial than others. The UN is careful not to deploy former

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colonial occupiers as peacekeepers, but my results suggest it should also take local ethnic cleavages into account when making operational decisions about deployment. Moreover, the cross-national results (Chapter 8) suggest the UN should consider a division of labor in the deployment of personnel based on national origin. Since they are not assumed to be biased due to a colonial past, non-Western UN personnel are best suited to intensive localized operations. Western personnel are best allocated to campaigns in more violent areas where they contend directly with rebel groups. Given the vast number of UN personnel from non-Western states, this might also suggest an effective way to maximize limited contributions from Western states without increasing the budgets of UN missions.

As I explained in Chapter 2, a key component of domestic perceptions of the UN is its commitment not to use force. If this commitment wavers, peacekeepers will lose their greatest advantage – impartiality. The UN currently faces two major threats to the nonuse of force. First, due to the challenging nature of some recent deployments, there have been recent efforts inside and outside the UN to move PKOs toward counterinsurgency operations. Within the UN, both the Kigali Principles developed primarily by Rwandan President (and former military leader) Paul Kagame and the report written by the retired Brazilian Lieutenant General Carlos Alberto dos Santos Cruz and his team have pushed for more active use of force in PKOs (Howard 2019*a*). Voices outside the UN call upon the Security Council to authorize PKOs in conflict settings, including Afghanistan, where it would need to deploy troops in active combat operations. This would be a mistake. Local perceptions of the international community rapidly shift against interveners in countries with counterinsurgencies (Lyall, Blair and Imai 2013).

In a second major threat to the UN's commitment not to use force, sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) by UN peacekeepers against local populations turns domestic groups against them, much like the use of force does. For this reason, SEA is perhaps the greatest crisis facing local-level UN peacekeeping in the twenty-first century. I demonstrate in this book that local perceptions are key to peacekeeping effectiveness; thus SEA is not merely a normative concern for the UN. Because peacekeepers' actions fall under the jurisdiction of their home governments, many commit SEA with impunity; incidents of SEA have been linked to gender inequities in contributing countries (Karim and Beardsley 2017). Ironically, the diversity of troop-contributing countries that makes the UN special has also exacerbated its SEA problem: Many countries send nonprofessional soldiers; allegations are hard to pinpoint; and the judicial process is vague, diffuse, and decentralized, making charges unlikely to stick (Beber et al. 2017). The unique advantages of UN PKOs hinge

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on the UN's ability to limit SEA by peacekeepers in the future (Anderlini 2017). To its credit, the UN has published a series of reports on measures to address SEA, but the fact that it continues is unacceptable, both because of its direct impact and because it undermines the positive impact of every PKO.[2]

Withdrawing Peacekeepers at Mission's End

The theoretical framework and empirical evidence I present in this book demonstrate that the physical presence of UN peacekeepers is necessary for individuals in fragile contexts to peacefully resolve disputes. How can peacekeepers withdraw from such settings without jeopardizing peace and stability? How can the international community help? The effectiveness of localized peace enforcement relies on long-term statebuilding to lock in short-term gains generated by intergroup cooperation. While localized peace enforcement disincentivizes violent forms of conflict resolution, only the presence of UN-bolstered security and judicial institutions can incentivize peaceful and legal forms of conflict resolution. This book demonstrates that the UN can prevent communal violence long enough to allow domestic institutions to flourish on their own, creating a path to building peace from the bottom up. However, there is no guarantee that domestic institutions will necessarily develop, even when given the opportunity.

On the international side, the UN must couple localized peace enforcement operations with security sector reform and institution building in postconflict settings. Statebuilding after local-level peacekeeping presents several challenges, however. For example, Russell and Sambanis argue that a fundamental institutional dilemma arises when the UN becomes involved in this way (Russell and Sambanis 2022): Interventions that build state governance institutions might crowd out local leaders, thereby exacerbating the tensions they seek to eliminate. Such operations might jeopardize state legitimacy since they do not give local leaders a chance to develop a reputation for effective action. If that is the case, the book's findings suggest the UN may need to choose between the local security gains generated by localized peace enforcement *or* promoting state legitimacy. Lake's work on statebuilding suggests another dilemma – that statebuilders only devote enough resources to statebuilding when it is in their interest to do so, inevitably picking a preferred side to ensure their interests are followed (Lake 2016, 2020).

[2] www.un.org/preventing-sexual-exploitation-and-abuse/content/secretary-generals-reports.

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I have argued that local-level peacekeeping succeeds precisely because local populations perceive UN peacekeepers as impartial enforcers who do not prefer one side over another. However, it is much easier to remain impartial in a communal dispute than in the development of state institutions, which by definition are associated with the government. Power-sharing or power-dividing institutions may offer a solution, given that they distribute political power among different parties (Lake and Rothchild 2005; Hartzell and Hoddie 2006; Matanock 2017). UN peacekeepers can help ensure that domestic parties succeed in creating such institutions (Walter 2002; Matanock 2017; Matanock and Staniland 2018; Nomikos 2021). Another option is the development of formal institutions. For example, Robert Blair has established that the UN can help build the rule of law through top-down peacebuilding operations (Blair 2020).

Ultimately, this book suggests that local-level peacekeeping can lay the foundation for sustainable peace in war-torn states such as Mali. Yet, to foster long-term reconciliation, local societies must use the gains from UN-enforced cooperation to create domestic institutions and restore social trust in order to sustain peace even after the peacekeepers have gone.

The Future of UN Peacekeeping

In June 2023, the government of Mali asked the UN to end the PKO that had been deployed there since 2013. On June 30, 2023, the UN Security Council unanimously voted to heed the government's wishes and passed a resolution to withdraw all UN forces. Postconflict governments around the world and critical contributing countries have increasingly challenged the need for UN PKOs. The UN must adapt to these changing circumstances if it wishes to continue playing an important role in peacebuilding around the world.

This book makes the case that an emphasis on local-level PKOs offers a way forward. The benefits of localized patrols can be realized in ways that can complement the role of governments. The Malian government, in demanding the withdrawal of the UN, criticized what it perceived as the heavy-handed approach of such interventions. This stems from the UN's reliance on the government to conduct many of its operations, which in many ways mirrors the colonial systems that indirectly governed countries through a local agent. It is no wonder, then, that governments and local populations would react so negatively to increasing pressure from the UN to host its peacekeepers. Local-level peacekeeping presents a different path that insulates the UN from politics at the national level, which would allow it to implement more successful PKOs in the future.

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