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Social Sciences
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PERSPECTIVE

A Multifaceted Approach for a More Relevant Peacekeeping

Introduction

Although not originally envisioned in the UN Charter, peacekeeping has proven to be a cornerstone of the United Nations' mission, contributing to the avowed ideals of organization and multilateralism more generally—peace, human rights, and development. Peacekeeping has undergone a remarkable evolution since its inception in the wake of World War II. Initially envisioned as a neutral force monitoring ceasefires between states, it has morphed into a complex apparatus addressing a wider range of conflicts, often intrastate. Drawing on the conceptual framework of SG Boutros-Ghali's report *An Agenda for Peace*, peacekeeping can be understood to range from preventive diplomacy and peacemaking at one end of the spectrum to peacebuilding at the other. Completing the circle, addressing root causes is required to prevent the accumulation of latent violence which can transition to destabilization and to secure the substantial institutional changes entailed in effective peacebuilding. This essay argues that the continued relevance of peacekeeping hinges on its ability to embrace a multifaceted approach that incorporates peacemaking, peacebuilding, and reform alongside its traditional role.

Background

Whereas first generation peacekeeping involved a minimum level of intrusion, reflecting the prioritization of the principle of non-interference, multilateral support for peace has transitioned from monitoring to multidimensionality, as a pragmatic and often ad hoc response to the pressing demands of cases of conflicts. The traditional peacekeeping model, built on principles of consent, impartiality, and minimal use of force (Doyle, 1997), proved inadequate in the face of increasingly

complex conflicts marked by non-state actors, human rights abuses, and fragile statehood (Fortna & Weidmann, 2018). The Cold War era, with its bipolar power structure, provided a certain predictability to interstate conflicts, allowing for the deployment of lightly armed observer missions. However, the post-Cold War era witnessed a surge in intrastate conflicts, often fueled by ethnic tensions, resource scarcity, and weak governance. These conflicts presented a significant challenge to the traditional peacekeeping model.

Recognizing these limitations, the UN broadened the mandate of peacekeeping missions, incorporating elements of peacemaking (actively mediating conflicts) and peacebuilding (addressing root causes) (Diehl, 2008). This shift towards multidimensional peacekeeping is evident in missions like the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA). MINUSMA tackles not only ceasefire monitoring but also protects civilians, supports elections, promotes human rights, and assists in restoring the rule of law (United Nations Peacekeeping, n.d.). This exemplifies the need for a multifaceted approach to peacekeeping that goes beyond traditional monitoring functions. Peacekeeping missions with these expanded mandates face a multitude of challenges, often operating in highly volatile environments with limited resources. However, studies have shown the positive impact of this multidimensional approach. A 2018 research paper by Fortna and Weidmann found that peacekeeping missions with peacebuilding components are associated with a lower risk of conflict recurrence (Fortna & Weidmann, 2018). This highlights the importance of proactively addressing the underlying grievances that fuel violence, such as poverty and social exclusion, alongside traditional peacekeeping activities.

Proactive Approaches to Conflict Resolution

Peacemaking, the process of actively mediating conflicts and facilitating peaceful settlements, plays a crucial role in preventing violence and paving the way for lasting peace. Peacekeeping missions can contribute to peacemaking by fostering dialogue between warring parties, facilitating ceasefire agreements, and providing a secure environment for negotiations (Paris, 2004). For example, the UN Mission in Colombia (UNMC) played a critical role in facilitating the peace agreement between the Colombian government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) in 2016 (United Nations Office for Drugs and Crime, n.d.).

Peacebuilding, on the other hand, focuses on addressing the root causes of conflict by promoting sustainable development, strengthening institutions, and fostering reconciliation. This includes activities such as supporting democratic processes, promoting human rights, and addressing social and economic inequalities. Peacebuilding efforts conducted alongside peacekeeping missions can help create a more conducive environment for lasting peace by tackling the underlying grievances that fuel violence (Mac Ginty, 2010). The United Nations Peacebuilding Architecture (UNPBA) provides a framework for coordinating peacebuilding efforts across different UN agencies, programs, and funds. However, resource constraints and a lack of coherence between peacekeeping and peacebuilding activities continue to pose challenges (Mac Ginty, 2010).

The Impact of Peacekeeping on Gender Equality

Peacekeeping missions have traditionally been male-dominated, with limited participation of women. However, in recent years, there has been a growing recognition of the importance of women's involvement in peacebuilding processes. Studies by the UN Women department have shown that including women in peace negotiations and decision-making processes leads to more sustainable peace agreements (United Nations Women, 2023). This multifaceted approach to peacekeeping requires integrating gender equality throughout its activities.

Peacekeeping missions can play a crucial role in promoting gender equality. To begin with, it's necessary to deploy more female peacekeepers. Research suggests that female peacekeepers are often better equipped to engage with local communities, particularly women and children, and can play a vital role in protecting women and girls from violence (Shepherd, 2020). Additionally, strong support should be given to removing obstacles and incentivizing the participation of women in local governance and civil society. Including women in peacebuilding efforts ensures that their perspectives and needs are represented, leading to more inclusive and sustainable solutions.

Gender-based violence both reflects and contributes to the violence of political and civil conflicts. Peacekeeping missions can contribute to preventing and responding to gender-based violence by training peacekeepers on gender issues, supporting local women's rights organizations, and advocating for accountability for perpetrators. By integrating gender equality into all aspects of peacekeeping operations, beyond programming rhetoric, the UN can create a more effective and legitimate approach to building lasting peace. This requires not only increasing the number of female peacekeepers but also ensuring they are deployed in leadership positions and have meaningful roles in all stages of peacekeeping missions (Shepherd, 2020).

The Role of Technology in Peacekeeping

Technological advancements are increasingly being utilized in peacekeeping operations. Some examples demonstrate the manner in which peacekeeping is evolving, but also shed light on potential threats to peace posed by technological advances. For instance, drones can be used for rapid, effective, and low-cost aerial surveillance and monitoring for ceasefire violations. Drones can provide valuable real-time information on troop movements and potential threats, allowing for a more proactive approach to peacekeeping (Jarman, 2018). At the same time, drones can be easily weaponized and can function to disguise or insulate aggressors who can remain a great distance from kinetic action.

Also, consider the impact of social media. On the one hand, it can be employed to monitor hate speech and identify potential conflict triggers. By analyzing social media trends and identifying inflammatory rhetoric, peacekeeping missions can take preventive measures to de-escalate tensions (Carmichael, 2019). At the same time, social media has been effectively used to stoke the flames of pre-existing ethnic and religious tensions. Moreover, it is now commonly used as a tool by autocrats to promote their own image while monitoring the mobilization of opposition actors.

Finally, given the large-scale use of big data analytics to monitor marketing and consumer processes, it undoubtedly could also be used to help predict and prevent violence. Advanced data analysis can help identify areas at high risk of conflict by examining factors such as poverty, social inequality, and political instability (Bicknell, 2020). The downside is that the information provided by big data analytics can easily become programmatic, marginalizing social policies and reinforcing existing inequities.

While technology offers significant potential for improving the effectiveness of peacekeeping, ethical considerations and the risk of misuse also need to be addressed. The use of drones raises concerns about civilian casualties and potential violations of privacy. Similarly, social media monitoring can be intrusive and lead to censorship if not implemented with proper safeguards (Clement, 2018). Moving forward, it is crucial to develop clear guidelines and regulations for the use of technology in peacekeeping operations. This requires collaboration between governments, technology companies, and civil society organizations to ensure that technology is used responsibly and ethically to promote peace (Mueller, 2020).

Peace Enforcement and the Limitations of the Security Council

While peacemaking and peacebuilding are crucial to preventing conflict and fostering sustainable peace, there are situations where robust enforcement action becomes necessary to deter atrocities and uphold human rights. The Responsibility to Protect (R2P) doctrine, endorsed by the UN in 2005, mandates the international community to intervene in cases of genocide, ethnic cleansing, crimes against humanity, and war crimes if a state fails to protect its own population (International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty, 2001).

However, the effectiveness of R2P has been hampered by the veto power of permanent members of the Security Council, often leading to paralysis in the face of human rights abuses. For instance, the international community's failure to take decisive action in response to the Syrian Civil War is a stark reminder of the limitations of the Security Council (Weiss, 2016). This underscores the critical need for Security Council reform. Proposals for reform include expanding the permanent membership to reflect the changing geopolitical landscape and limiting the veto power to prevent its abuse. A more representative and accountable Security Council would be better equipped to authorize timely and decisive responses to humanitarian crises (Thakur, 2008).

Empowering Regional Organizations

The limitations of the UN Security Council, often hamstrung by geopolitical maneuvering and the veto power of permanent members, necessitate a more responsive and adaptable approach to conflict resolution. Regional organizations, with their deeper understanding of local contexts, cultural nuances, and historical relationships, are uniquely positioned to fill this gap. Empowering regional organizations is a strategic imperative for a world facing complex and evolving security challenges. By leveraging their regional expertise, fostering closer collaboration with the UN, and

enhancing their capacity for peacebuilding, regional organizations can play a pivotal role in preventing and resolving conflicts.

The African Union (AU) stands as a prime example of a regional organization actively shaping peace and security on the continent. The AU has deployed numerous peacekeeping missions, including the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) which has been instrumental in combating the militant group Al-Shabaab (African Union Mission in Somalia, n.d.). This success story highlights the effectiveness of regional intervention, particularly when tailored to the specific socio-political realities of the conflict zone. Furthermore, the AU Peace and Security Architecture (AU PSA) provides a comprehensive framework for conflict prevention, management, and resolution, demonstrating a commitment to long-term peacebuilding efforts (African Union, 2024).

Beyond Africa, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) offers another compelling example. ECOWAS has a proven track record of intervening in conflicts within its member states, contributing to the restoration of peace and stability in countries like Liberia and Sierra Leone (Economic Community of West African States, n.d.). This regional approach fosters a sense of ownership and shared responsibility for maintaining peace, fostering a more sustainable security environment. The organization's emphasis on preventive diplomacy, through mechanisms like early warning systems and conflict mediation, further demonstrates its commitment to proactively addressing the root causes of conflict (Adebajo, 2014).

Empowering regional organizations requires a multi-pronged approach. First, increased financial and logistical support from the UN and member states is crucial. Currently, regional peacekeeping missions often face resource constraints, hindering their effectiveness. Enhanced financial and logistical backing would allow these organizations to deploy robust and well-equipped peacekeeping forces, capable of deterring violence and protecting civilians.

Second, fostering closer collaboration between the UN and regional organizations is essential. Information sharing, joint training exercises, and coordinated planning can significantly enhance the effectiveness of both entities. The UN Security Council could leverage the expertise and experience of regional organizations by delegating greater authority for conflict resolution in specific contexts. This collaborative approach, outlined in the UN Secretary-General's 2020 Agenda for Peace and Security, is key to ensuring a more unified and efficient global response to conflict (United Nations, 2020).

Third, strengthening the capacity of regional organizations for peacebuilding activities is vital. This includes supporting initiatives that address underlying grievances, promote human rights, and foster inclusive governance. Regional organizations are well-positioned to understand the specific needs and challenges of their member states, enabling them to tailor peacebuilding efforts accordingly. Investing in regional peacebuilding initiatives can contribute to long-term stability and prevent future outbreaks of violence (Lake & Rothschild, 2012).

However, empowering regional organizations does not negate the need for continued UN reform. The Security Council's limitations necessitate a more representative and accountable body capable of authorizing timely and decisive responses to humanitarian crises. Regional organizations,

alongside a reformed UN Security Council, can form a robust and complementary framework for maintaining international peace and security.

Conclusion

Peacekeeping has evolved significantly since its inception, adapting to the complexities of contemporary conflicts. However, to remain relevant in the face of ever-changing challenges, peacekeeping must not simply adapt, but transform. This transformation necessitates a multifaceted approach that incorporates peacemaking, peacebuilding, and reform alongside its traditional role of monitoring ceasefires. Integrating gender equality throughout its activities is also crucial. Technological advancements offer promising tools for enhancing peacekeeping effectiveness, but ethical considerations and the risk of misuse must be addressed. Finally, empowering regional organizations can provide a more responsive and effective approach to conflict resolution in specific contexts. Recognizing the limitations of the UN Security Council and advocating for its reform is also vital to ensure a more robust and legitimate framework for maintaining international peace and security. By adopting a multifaceted approach that is proactive, inclusive, adaptable, ethically grounded, and constantly evolving, peacekeeping can continue to ensure the relevance of the UN and the multilateralism needed to address the myriad of conflicts that are likely to result from competition for resources, advancement of economic interests, and rapid shifts in the technological paradigm.

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