

Introduction: success, failure, and organizational learning in UN peacekeeping

Basic questions and the argument in brief

Civil war is the most important and troubling problem in international life today. Aside from the tragic killing and injury of innocent civilians, violent civil conflicts inspire lingering, seemingly intractable ills such as state collapse, corruption, dire poverty, rampant injustice, dislocation, environmental degradation, and disease, all of which may in turn instigate renewed and spreading conflict, international crime, and terrorist activity.

Given the extreme, cyclical, and burgeoning problems associated with civil wars, what mechanisms do we have to stop such conflicts? The most oft-used mechanism is United Nations (UN) multidimensional peacekeeping. Multidimensional peacekeeping operations endeavor to rebuild the basic institutions of the post-civil war state. These missions are large and complex, involving sizable political, military, police, refugee, humanitarian, electoral, and often human rights components.¹ Despite the UN's own problems, and despite the difficulties associated with peacekeeping, we simply have not yet invented better international mechanisms to bring order to the anarchy of civil wars. It is therefore of critical importance that we analyze and improve our understanding of UN peacekeeping. When has UN peacekeeping been successful? What are the sources of success and failure? How can the UN learn to engage better in peacekeeping? What are the types of learning in which the UN engages? These are the critical questions asked in this book.

The book sets out to answer these questions in a systematic fashion, using methods in comparative politics and international relations to construct the research design and carry out case study comparisons.² The most important

¹ "Multidimensional peacekeeping" is also sometimes referred to as "multifunctional," "multidisciplinary," or "integrated" peacekeeping. A civil war is a conflict where organized sides contend for power within a single recognized state, and where there are more than 1,500 casualties.

² Since I am examining a small universe of cases, I employ qualitative, comparative methods, including the methods of agreement and difference to construct the basic research design, structured, focused comparison to compare the cases, and a descriptive model of organizational change in order to build my own argument. On these methods, see Mill, 1843; Skocpol and Somers, 1980; George and McKeown, 1985; Ragin, 1987; Dion, 1994;

finding is that UN peacekeeping tends to be more successful when the peacekeepers are actively learning from the environment in which they are deployed. In other words, rather than seeking to impose preconceived notions about how the missions should unfold, peacekeeping is at its best when the peacekeepers – both civilian and military – take their cues from the local population, and not UN headquarters, about how best to implement mandates.

The overall argument of the book is more nuanced. After studying and comparing the ten most complex cases of UN multidimensional peacekeeping, I argue that three conditions are necessary, and jointly they are sufficient, to explain success in UN peacekeeping. These three elements consist of, first, certain favorable “situational factors” of the country emerging from civil war; second, consensual but only moderately intense interests of the powerful members of the Security Council; and finally, “first-level” organizational learning on the ground, on the part of the UN peacekeeping mission. When this learning is inhibited, then the operation is unable to implement its mandate or help to construct new domestic institutions that will solidify the peace, even if the two other conditions for success are present. The first two conditions are modifications of arguments existing in the peacekeeping literature. The third factor has often been misunderstood, overlooked, or only partially explored. Therefore, I develop a descriptive model to depict first-level organizational learning in the field, within a given mission. I also develop a model of “second-level” learning, or learning that takes place at UN headquarters, in between missions, which is explored further in the concluding chapter.

Why another study of peacekeeping is necessary

This study focuses on what we can learn from the more *successful* cases of complex, multidimensional peacekeeping in civil wars. While the literature on UN peacekeeping has grown immensely since the end of the Cold War, only two edited studies to date have examined successful cases.³ Most scholarly comparisons, as well as media attention and UN “lessons learned” reports, examine primarily the disastrous failures.⁴ However, if one considers the civil

Collier and Mahoney, 1996; and George and Bennett, 2005. I draw on three main sources of data: (1) Over 100 interviews with central figures in peacekeeping that I conducted in New York City, Washington DC, Geneva, Nairobi, Zagreb, Sarajevo, and other parts of Europe, Africa, and North America. (2) Primary sources also consist of hundreds of UN documents collected at the sites mentioned above. (3) Secondary sources include the literature on peacekeeping, and case studies of each of the wars.

³ Doyle, Johnstone, and Orr, 1997; and Krasno, Hayes, and Daniel, 2003.

⁴ See, for example, Thakur and Thayer, 1995; Weiss, 1995; Mayall, 1996; Clarke and Herbst, 1997; Wesley, 1997; Moxon-Browne, 1998; Biermann and Vadset, 1999; Daniel, Hayes, and Oudraat, 1999; Jett, 1999; Walter and Snyder, 1999; Cousens, Kumar, and Wermester, 2000; Hillen, 2000; Boulden, 2001; Fleitz, 2002; Hawk, 2002; Cassidy, 2004; Whitworth, 2004; Berdal, 2005a; and Crocker, Hampson, and Aall, 2005.

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Lise Morje Howard

Excerpt

[More information](#)

INTRODUCTION

3

war context of the interventions, the interesting question is not why the UN fails, but why it succeeds. Failure is to be expected. If we define failure as a continuation or worsening of the internal conflict, then failure is the status quo, when the UN enters a civil war.⁵ If the status quo continues, then the UN, by almost any measure, fails. Failure can be caused by a variety of factors: the warring parties simply do not want to stop fighting and have the means to continue to fight; the major powers at the UN do not provide adequate funds or staff for the peacekeeping operation to function; or the UN is beset by internal rivalries and bureaucratic meltdowns. Success in civil war peacekeeping is unexpected and difficult because it involves external, multilateral actors who attempt purposefully to alter the actions of leaders and peoples in states emerging from war, as well as to restructure the institutions that enabled the outbreak of civil war. Moreover, as I develop below, there have been significant, surprising, but understudied successes in over half of the multidimensional operations.

While the lack of attention to success is reason enough to justify an additional study, another important factor is that the peacekeeping literature is largely descriptive. Most studies are not explicit about the reasons for choosing cases, establishing baselines for case comparisons, hypothesis testing, or categorizing and comparing causes.⁶ Many studies have eschewed social science methods in part because, until recently, there simply have not been very many instances of UN peacekeeping in civil wars, rendering large-*n* statistical studies difficult to construct. But at the same time, even qualitative case studies have tended not to draw on important comparative case study methods.

There have, however, been many valuable contributions in the peacekeeping literature that advance our understanding of certain concepts (especially “first-generation peacekeeping” versus other types of peace operations), describe highly complex processes, suggest tentative hypotheses, offer “lessons to be learned” for both policymakers and warring factions, and examine specific relationships between, for example, the UN and some of its member states.⁷

⁵ Peacekeepers are also often sent to the difficult cases, rather than the easier ones. See Fortna, 2004a, p. 281.

⁶ These comments do not apply to the civil war termination literature, which I address below under the subheading “situational difficulty.”

⁷ “First-generation” peacekeeping refers to missions where peacekeepers are interposed between warring states and observe cease-fires between the states; first-generation, or “traditional peacekeeping” missions were the most common form of peacekeeping before the end of the Cold War. On traditional peacekeeping, see Burns, 1963; Claude, 1967; Rikhye, 1984; and James, 1990. The most significant other type of peacekeeping is “multidimensional peacekeeping” in civil wars. While some would quibble about different definitions and the evolution of different types within this category, I would argue that the most important distinction in UN peacekeeping is simply between the traditional military observer operations *between* states, and the more complex operations *within* states, which sometimes may include the important component of a transitional authority. On the definitions and different “generations,” see Woodhouse and Ramsbotham, 2000; Thakur and Schnabel,

Some of the recent literature has focused on more general, theoretical issues in peacekeeping, such as the roles of psychology, norms, and culture.⁸ There is also an important emerging literature on the issues of administrative control and military occupation.⁹ Some of the basic substantive debates concern whether the consent of the parties is necessary, and the appropriate uses of force.¹⁰ I contend that consent is necessary for success in multidimensional peacekeeping, as elaborated below, but that the capacity to use force should continue to be developed outside of the institutions of the UN, as I address in the conclusion of the book.

Case selection

In the post-Cold War history of UN peacekeeping, there have been thirty-five UN sponsored peacekeeping operations in civil wars.¹¹ While each operation has unique traits, those that are the most multidimensional should be considered as a group because they all enjoy an underlying base of Security Council support in having the UN, as opposed to regional organizations, or single states, intervene to try to end the civil crises.¹² The multidimensional

2002; Last, 2003; and Chesterman, 2004. On the processes of peacebuilding, peacemaking, and intervention, see Galtung, 1976; Fetherston, 1994; Brown, 1996; Last, 1997; Zartman and Rasmussen, 1997; Otunnu and Doyle, 1998; von Hippel, 2000; Woodhouse and Ramsbotham, 2000; and Paris, 2004. On relations between the UN and specific member states, see Coate, 1994; Jockel, 1994; Ruggie, 1994; Morrison and Kiras, 1996; Coulon, 1998; MacKinnon, 2000; Dobbins, 2004; Orr, 2004; and Perito 2004. On lessons learned, see, for example, Durch, 1996; Biermann and Vadset, 1999; Byman, 2002; and Goulding, 2003.

⁸ See Britt and Adler, 2003; Callaghan and Schonborn, 2004; Whitworth, 2004; and Rousseau, 2005.

⁹ See Bhatia, 2003; Chesterman, 2004; Fearon and Laitin, 2004; Marten, 2004; and Edelstein, 2005.

¹⁰ On consent, see Ratner, 1995; and Daniel, Hayes, and Oudraat, 1999. On the use of force, see Pugh, 1996; von Hippel, 2000; and Findlay, 2003. On the issues of “when to intervene” and “ripeness,” see Zartman, 1985 and 1995, and works on “preventive deployment” by Schnabel, 2002; and Sokalski, 2003.

¹¹ See Appendix I. There have also been some non-UN missions conducted by regional organizations such as NATO or ECOMOG, or single-state missions conducted by the United States or France, but these are not numerous and thus it is difficult to trace learning or lack thereof, especially *between* the operations.

¹² The group of multidimensional operations includes both those with and without the official title of transitional administration. Even the operations that did not have formal transitional authority were extremely intrusive (as in the cases of Mozambique or Liberia), while some operations that had the formal title of transitional administration (as in Cambodia) proved to be comparatively less deep in administrative capacity. All the missions studied here engaged in a very similar, large set of tasks, and thus can be compared as one group.

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Lise Morje Howard

Excerpt

[More information](#)

INTRODUCTION

5

operations are also important to study, since they reflect the range of actions and capabilities that the UN has tried to develop over time. This helps us to understand which tasks the UN has been more, or less, effective at developing. Moreover one of the main positive aspects of multidimensional operations is their potential for integrating the many elements involved in ending highly complex civil wars.¹³

Ten of the thirty-five total post-Cold War operations in civil wars were highly complex in nature and were completed as of 2005, making a comparative evaluation of success and failure possible.¹⁴ Of those ten, six were largely successful – Namibia (UNTAG), El Salvador (ONUSAL), Cambodia (UNTAC, which is a mixed success), Mozambique (ONUMOZ), Eastern Slavonia, Croatia (UNTAES), and East Timor/Timor-Leste (UNTAET). The high number of successful cases is surprising, even for peacekeeping experts, since most often the objects of analytic study and media attention are the four major cases of failure in Somalia (UNOSOM II), Rwanda (UNAMIR), Bosnia (UNPROFOR), and to a lesser extent Angola (UNAVEM II). This book demonstrates that the public and scholarly perception of constant failure in UN multidimensional peacekeeping is incorrect and seeks to shed light on the sources of success.

While the book focuses on the completed cases, there are also some very interesting and important newer cases of multidimensional peacekeeping underway, and the progress of these missions can be evaluated in light of what we have learned from the older cases. Large UN peacekeeping operations in Sierra Leone, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Kosovo all began in 1999. Most recently, the UN has embarked on another wave of multidimensional peacekeeping operations beginning in late 2003 through the summer of 2004, in Liberia, Côte d'Ivoire, Burundi, and Haiti. These two more recent waves of operations are explored as a group in Chapter 9, where the main findings of the book, concerning the sources of success and failure, are applied to the newer complex missions. In all cases, the factors of first-level learning, Security Council interests, and situational difficulty appear to be determining the outcomes, and learning – or lack thereof – remains an important and decisive factor. But how, more specifically, do we evaluate success?

¹³ Dennis Jett argues that failure is caused by the over-ambitiousness or complexity of UN peacekeeping missions; see Jett, 1999, p. 6. While this may be true for some cases, civil wars have many different types of causes and consequences, and in order to end such wars, it has often been necessary to expand the scope of peacekeeping operations. As I demonstrate over the course of the book, the increase in operational complexity has in several cases increased the long-term chances of success in ending the civil war and creating a positive peace.

¹⁴ I have excluded the operations in Haiti from a full-chapter analysis, since the conflict in Haiti has not been categorized as a civil war. I do, however, explore the most recent multidimensional peacekeeping operation in Haiti in Chapter 9, since its mandate is so similar to the other recent operations, even if the situation is somewhat different.

Measuring success and failure

Measurements of success in peacekeeping vary significantly. Many authors bemoan “difficult to apply” standards, and that “there are no easy answers” to the question of how minimalist or comprehensive measurements should be.¹⁵ The difficulty in coming up with one set of standards is rooted in two problems: first, the problem of trying to devise a measure of peacekeeping success that includes both the interstate (traditional) and intrastate (often multidimensional) operations; and second, the extent to which phenomena outside the direct influence of the peacekeeping operation should be incorporated in the measures.

In looking to the first problem, interstate and intrastate wars are fundamentally different in nature, thus the ways in which the two types of wars end should be evaluated differently. In wars between states, while international negotiators might seek some formal agreement to help prevent the recurrence of war, there is absolutely no need to incorporate members from the warring factions into the new state, or to build institutions to ensure that domestic disputes do not re-escalate into violence. In intrastate wars, domestic institution-building is precisely what needs to happen if there is to be a stable, negotiated ending, rather than the total defeat of one side.

In terms of other scholars’ measures of success, probably the most often cited are Paul Diehl’s two measures of “limitation of armed conflict” and “resolution of the underlying conflict.” But Diehl defines his indicators only in terms of *interstate*, traditional peacekeeping, thus questions of, for example, disarmament, power-sharing, and post-civil war state institution-building are overlooked. Also, as Charles King argues, the nature of the “underlying conflict” often changes over time so that “the factors that ignite wars are not the same as the forces that keep them going.”¹⁶ Moreover, the measures assess primarily the performance of the warring parties, and while this is of course important, it leaves out an evaluation of the third-party involvement.¹⁷

Turning to the second problem, should peacekeeping operations be held responsible for events that they do not directly control? Roland Paris argues in favor of a very high standard of success: stable and lasting peace supported by market democracy.¹⁸ John Burton sets a similarly high standard for the construction of conflict resolution institutions that should be both permanent and robust.¹⁹ A. Betts Fetherston and Robert Johansen argue on behalf of broad criteria for evaluation such as “world peace, justice, and the reduction of human suffering.”²⁰ And Counsens, Kumar, and Wermester set goals for a self-enforcing cease-fire and peace, democracy, justice, and equity.²¹

¹⁵ See, for example, Dorch, 1996, p. 17; Hampson, 1996, p. 9; and Dorch in Druckman and Stern, 1997, p. 154.

¹⁶ King, 2005, p. 269. ¹⁷ Diehl, 1994, pp. 33–40; and Johansen, 1994.

¹⁸ Paris, 2004, Chapter 3. ¹⁹ Burton, 1987 and 1990.

²⁰ Druckman and Stern, 1997, p. 152. ²¹ Counsens, Kumar, and Wermester, 2000, p. 11.

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Excerpt

[More information](#)

INTRODUCTION

7

Stephen Stedman and George Downs have suggested more minimalist, general measures of success including the following elements: (1) whether the violence ended, and (2) whether the peacekeeping operation exited the country in a manner such that the cease-fire was “self-enforcing.”²² But similar to the maximalist standards cited above, these measures potentially miss many of the results that arise from purposeful third-party action. Stedman and others argue that mandates vary from one operation to another, and thus that they do not amount to an objective standard for comparison.²³

While it is true that mandates vary with each operation, and that at times certain provisions may appear open to different interpretations, the mandates tend to be written in fairly comprehensible language. Moreover, for the UN’s multidimensional cases, the mandates outline many similar or even identical tasks. The mandates contain phrases such as “cease-fire observance,” “civilian policing,” and “elections monitoring” with little variation. While the basic meaning of the words is clear, the specific interpretation, methods of implementation, and the amount of resources necessary to fulfill the tasks varies.

In order to capture both the results of UN action as well as very important phenomena that might lie beyond the UN’s direct control, I measure success in two simple but comprehensive ways. First, I examine success or failure in *mandate implementation* for the various tasks assigned to the mission. For each case, I compare the UN Secretariat’s mandate, as expressed in peace accords and Security Council resolutions, with the Secretariat operation’s interpretation and fulfillment of the mandate. It is not reasonable to expect that peacekeeping operations would be able to resolve civil crises beyond the standards set by the peace accords or Security Council resolutions, even though at times this has occurred. Success in mandate implementation is the most relevant and equitable standard to which the UN can be held, even if we might wish at times that standards set by the often hard-won, negotiated accords and Security Council resolutions were higher.

My second method of evaluation involves a broader assessment of the state of the country after completion of the UN intervention. This measure also takes into account the fact that sometimes the UN might fulfill its mandate, even though the conflict has not ended in a positive peace.²⁴ The evaluation incorporates some of the maximalist standards of institution-building and positive peace but does not go so far as to say that all missions that do not result in just, stable, market democracies are failures. Using the method of “structured focused comparison,” I ask a series of questions for each case that explore the extent to which institutions that the UN attempted to monitor, reform, or create

²² Downs and Stedman, 2002, p. 50.

²³ See Downs and Stedman, 2002, pp. 45–46; and Diehl’s comments in Druckman and Stern, 1997, p. 152.

²⁴ Positive peace includes such factors as “human rights, economic fairness and opportunity, democratization, and environmental sustainability.” See Barash, 2000, p. 129.

continued to function after UN guidance was withdrawn.²⁵ While the continued functioning or non-functioning of the institutions is beyond the UN's direct control after it has departed the country, local institutional capacity may result as a legacy of UN involvement, and it is therefore important to explore this dimension as well.²⁶

The sources of success and failure

Once measures of outcomes are established, it is possible to study the causes of success and failure. There are generally three lines of argument presented in the peacekeeping literature.²⁷ First, many contend that situational factors within the conflict – mainly the will of the warring parties to stop fighting – determine the ease with which the war ends, regardless of what the UN does or does not do. Second, some claim that outcomes are the direct result of conflict or consensus in Security Council interest or “political will.” Third, others argue that when the three rules of peacekeeping – consent, impartiality, and limited force – are followed, then missions are more successful.

Table 1 presents different hypotheses about the causes of success along the top row, and a list of the ten most multidimensional, completed cases in the far left column. The cases are divided into roughly two types, more successful and less successful, as indicated in the far right column. An unceremonious glance at the table quickly leads to the conclusion that none of the most common arguments – Security Council interest consensus/intensity, situational difficulty, or peacekeeping rules – holds up on its own for all of the cases. I argue that favorable situational factors (most importantly the consent of the parties), along with consensual but only moderately intense Security Council interest are both necessary but not sufficient conditions for success. In addition, I argue that a third, often unexplored, condition for success is first-level organizational learning in the UN Secretariat. Jointly, the three conditions are sufficient cause for the outcome of success, or if one or more of the conditions is not met, failure.

The situational difficulty

Many argue that the success or failure of a peacekeeping mission is the direct result of the “situational difficulty” of the civil war. “Situational difficulty” usually refers to various internal characteristics of the civil war that contribute

²⁵ This procedure was developed by Alexander George. See Appendix II, A for a list of the specific questions.
²⁶ Note that in Chapter 9, which examines the ongoing missions, this measure is not applied since the operations are still underway.
²⁷ Often these arguments are not elaborated separately, but listed together without being systematically explored to see how they link to, or cause, one another.

Table 1 *Mandate implementation: potential causes of success and failure*

Country (Dates)	Situational difficulty of civil war (10 easy, 1 difficult)	Security Council interest consensus	Security Council interest intensity	Peacekeeping rules followed (limited force, impartiality, consent)	Organizational learning (first level)	Outcome (of mandate implementation)
Namibia (4/89–5/90)	6	Usually	Moderate	Yes	Yes	Success
El Salvador (7/91–4/95)	7.5	Yes	Moderate	Yes	Yes	Success
Cambodia (2/92–9/93)	4	Usually	Moderate	Yes	Yes	Mixed Success
Mozambique (12/92–12/94)	7	Yes	Moderate	Yes	Yes	Success
Eastern Slavonia (1/96–1/97)	8.5	Usually	Moderate	No	Yes	Success
East Timor (10/99–5/02)	5	Yes	Moderate	Yes	Yes	Success
Angola (2/95–6/97)	6.5	Yes	Low/Moderate*	Yes	Some	Failure
Somalia (5/93–5/95)	3.5	Usually/No	High	No	No	Failure
Bosnia (2/92–5/95–12/95)	3.5	Usually/No	High	No	No	Failure
Rwanda (10/93–5/96)	6.5	Usually/No	Moderate*	Yes	No	Failure

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Excerpt

[More information](#)

to both the fueling and the eventual ending of the war. The most important characteristics, often cited in the literature, are the consent of the warring factions for the UN's operation, a detailed peace agreement signed by all sides, and the support or lack thereof from regional or neighboring (non-Security Council) states.²⁸ Of these factors, as will become clear in the following chapters, the consent of the warring parties appears to be the most decisive.²⁹ Other factors are also important; for example, a mutually hurting stalemate is often cited in the conflict resolution literature for determining when a conflict is "ripe" for resolution.³⁰ The number of fatalities and the duration of the war have been tested frequently in the civil war termination literature to see whether high or low scores tend to help or hinder the endings of civil wars; generally speaking, the fewer the fatalities and the less time a war endures, the easier it is to end it.³¹ Finally, the state of the country's infrastructure is not often cited as a facilitating or detracting characteristic of ending civil wars. However, during my interviews with peacekeepers in the field, they often suggested that this factor is very important for determining how easy or difficult it is for a peacekeeping operation to function well.³²

When one compares the overall measures of the situational difficulty, it becomes clear that scores and outcomes are uncorrelated.³³ For example, Namibia, a success by any measure, has a low situational difficulty score (meaning that it looked comparatively difficult to end, before the start of the operation), while Angola and Rwanda both had high scores, or looked fairly easy to end successfully, but both ended in failure.³⁴ I do not infer from these measures that situational characteristics are therefore insignificant for ending civil wars. Instead, I argue that certain permissive situational factors – especially the consent of the warring parties for the peacekeeping mission, the existence of a detailed peace agreement signed by all sides, and the support of regional powers – are essential components of this necessary but not sufficient factor

²⁸ See, for example, Marnika, 1996; Hillen, 1998, p. 176; Jablonsky and McCallum, 1999; Mersiades, 2005; and Whitfield, forthcoming.

²⁹ Werner and Yuen, 2005.

³⁰ On this point, see studies by Zartman, 1985 and 1995; and Kleiboer, 1994.

³¹ See Bercovitch and Langley, 1993; Mason and Fett, 1996; and Fortna, 2004b. Note that Doyle and Sambanis have found inconclusive evidence that the longer a civil war endures, the more difficult it is to end. See Doyle and Sambanis, 2000, p. 787. However, most statistical studies argue that, quite simply, the longer a war goes on, the longer it goes on.

³² There has also been some debate about whether ethnic, ideological, or resource-based civil wars are easier or more difficult to end in negotiated settlements. The results have been inconclusive, therefore, I have excluded this indicator. See Sambanis, 2001; Byman, 2002; Bercovitch and De Rouen, 2005; Collier and Hoeffler, 2005; and Humphreys, 2005.

³³ Appendix II presents a numerical summary of the different indicators, and the total score for each case, measured before the beginning of the UN peacekeeping operation.

³⁴ Several of the interview respondents noted that Angola and Rwanda appeared, before the start, to be "easy" operations, and thus the great powers did not think it necessary to devote significant resources to them.