

**ASSESSING THE (POST-EXIT) LEGACIES OF PEACEKEEPING OPERATIONS:
THE FOUNDATIONS OF A RESEARCH AGENDA**

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What is the legacy of UN multidimensional peacekeeping for ‘peacekept’ states and, more specifically, what implications does the closure of peacekeeping operations have for the capacity of peacekept states to perform their core functions? Taken together, the essays in this Forum shed light on these important questions from a variety of perspectives. More broadly, they underline the importance of charting the vicissitudes of states that have been, but are no longer, host to multidimensional peacekeeping operations. It may then be possible to establish what responsibility these operations and their closure may bear for the trajectories (positive and negative) of these states in the years following UN peacekeeping withdrawal.

While highlighting the importance of studying peacekeeping legacies, these essays also draw attention to the methodological difficulties of exploring these questions. The nature of such difficulties are various. This concluding essay will provide a brief overview of the principal challenges and suggest how they may be overcome—partially at least—with an eye towards laying the foundations for a feasible research agenda.

Challenges of Assessment

The first methodological difficulty that arises is the lack of consensus among analysts of peacekeeping operations regarding the relevant criteria for evaluating the effects of peacekeeping. The lack of consensus has received considerable attention in the academic literature.¹ Differences in evaluation can be attributed to a number of factors. They arise in part because the scale and complexity of these operations lend themselves necessarily to selective assessment. Analysts inevitably choose to focus on some effects or outcomes to the exclusion of others, even in their attempts at comprehensive analysis. Differences may also arise because analysts will often import normative assumptions, implicitly or explicitly, that will inform their expectations about outcomes and thus colour their judgements about operations—assumptions

¹ For an early discussion, see Downs and Stedman, “Evaluation Issues in Peace Implementation”. See also Call, “Knowing Peace When You See It”; Druckman and Diehl, “Peace Operation Success”; and Peter, “Measuring the Success of Peace Operations”.

about the nature and quality of peace, governance, etc. Differences may arise, too, for self-serving reasons: practitioners, for instance, may wish to cast the fruits of their efforts in the most positive light, thus ignoring or downplaying adverse effects. While in some cases there can be a certain value to employing distinctive evaluative criteria—when, for instance, ‘conventional’ criteria may be found to be wanting—the absence of common criteria militates against comparative analysis of cases and can produce divergent assessments. One analyst’s ‘undeniable [UN] success’ is another’s ‘failed state’—as illustrated through contrasting assessments of the impact of UN interventions in Timor-Leste, for example.²

Another challenge of assessing the legacies of peacekeeping is the difficulty of isolating the effects of peacekeeping from the effects of other intervening variables. Even if there is agreement among analysts regarding the trajectory that a peacekept state has followed in the aftermath of a peacekeeping operation, it may not be clear what have been the causal processes involved and, specifically, the extent to which a particular peacekeeping activity or activities may be responsible for these effects. Harder still is the difficulty of distinguishing the lasting effects of the peacekeeping intervention from the immediate effects of the peacekeeping withdrawal. These difficulties are compounded by the passage of time, which is important to factor in to ascertain the durability of any effects, but which also allows for the introduction of other intervening events post-exit and thus further blurs causal pathways.³ Is Cambodia’s ‘authoritarian turn’ years after the UN’s departure the consequence of insufficient emphasis on democratisation and rule of law on the part of UNTAC or the result of factors—indigenous and exogenous—manifesting themselves subsequently? Kheang Un’s contribution to this forum suggests that both are responsible. To further compound the difficulty of assessment, he observes that the UN’s role has been both deleterious *and* salutary.

A related point is that peacekeeping operations are typically complex, comprising numerous disparate mandates (e.g., ceasefire monitoring, humanitarian assistance, DDR, etc). The tendency of scholars evaluating peacekeeping operations has been to focus on the effects of one or another mandated activity rather than to take into consideration the possible interactive effects of several or all of an operation’s mandated activities. For instance, the sequencing of mandated activities (e.g., whether elections precede or follow DDR) may have an impact on the

² The assessments of the UN’s efforts in East Timor are those respectively of Jean Christian Cady, Deputy Special Representative of the UN Secretary General in East Timor, and Jarat Chopra, Head of District Administration for the UN in East Timor. Cady cited in Goldstone, “UNTAET with Hindsight,” 83; Chopra, “Building State Failure in East Timor,” 979.

³ See Caplan, *International Governance of War-Torn Territories*, Ch. 10.

effects of these activities. As Diehl and Druckman observe, this may not alter our judgements about the success (or not) of these activities but it may deepen our understanding of why they have the effects that they do.⁴

A third difficulty is the paucity of robust data or, for that matter, any data at all with regard to some aspects of state capacity following the withdrawal of peace operations. This is a problem for all states, where the instruments or processes for gathering data are weak, but it can be an even greater problem for conflict-affected countries. As discussed by John Gledhill in the introduction to this Forum, the United Nations and other international organizations are neither systematic nor comprehensive in their efforts to gather relevant data on countries in which they have previously been engaged. The scarcity of robust data means that analysts often have to rely on various proxies that may or may not represent the factors in question well or well enough. Moreover, the data that is available is often national aggregate data when what is needed, especially for very large states, is data for the specific conflict-affected region(s) of the states in question.⁵

The small number of relevant cases—less than 30 multidimensional UN peacekeeping operations since 1990 that have come to an end—poses a further challenge that cannot, however, be overcome. The chief disadvantage is that it is difficult to formulate generalizations on the basis of such a small number of cases. The primary advantage, however, is that it is possible to examine all relevant cases—and in considerable detail. Moreover, it creates an opportunity to establish a data bank to which more data can be added as more cases are generated.

Addressing the Challenges of Assessment

These then, in brief, are the principal methodological difficulties that a study of the legacies of multidimensional UN peacekeeping faces. How might these challenges be met, or at least mitigated? If one wishes to determine whether peacekeeping creates stable polities and institutions that endure when peacekeepers leave, the first task is to gather and report on data that reveal the functional capabilities of peacekept states before, during, and after UN peacekeeping deployment. As Jessica di Salvatore and Andrea Ruggeri suggest in their

⁴ Diehl and Druckman, “Multiple Peacekeeping Missions.”

⁵ The World Bank is making an effort increasingly to gather subnational data. See the World Bank Microdata Library at <http://surveys.worldbank.org/tools/microdata-library>.

contribution to this forum, literature drawn from Comparative Politics and cognate disciplines is useful in providing guidance about the defining characteristics of state capacity and offers justification for the choice of three functional areas (security capacity, governmental/administrative capacity, and productive/extractive capacity) to which it seems reasonable to add a fourth area—external relations—in view of the fact that the external dimension of state capacity is also an important one. For each of these functional areas it is possible to generate indicators of capacity.⁶ There can be considerable discretion in the selection of indicators and care must be taken to ensure that indicators provide a reasonable measure of capacity, bearing in mind that consensus may be lacking regarding the adequacy of some measures. While a number of existing indicators can be drawn on for this purpose, the nature of the assessment challenges are such that novel methods and approaches will be required.

In an effort to isolate the effects of peacekeeping operations and withdrawal, for instance, quantitative cross-case analysis can be employed that compares indicators of state capacity in countries that have experienced the deployment and withdrawal of UN peacekeepers with: (a) a set of ‘matched’ states that have experienced conflict but not hosted UN peacekeeping operations and; (b) a set of ‘matched’ states that have experienced conflict, then witnessed the deployment of UN peace operations, and continue to host UN operations.⁷ Quantitative cross-case analysis can be complemented by qualitative cross-case analysis, specifically, interviews with UN and national officials and focus groups with populations that have experienced the deployment and withdrawal of peacekeepers, all of which can provide valuable insights from elite and stakeholders’ perspectives.

In this latter regard, Liberia, Côte d’Ivoire, and Haiti afford unique opportunities for researchers to observe, document, and understand the consequences of peacekeeping exit. These countries, which have been host to some of the largest UN peacekeeping operations of the post-Cold War era, have recently seen the downsizing and withdrawal of UN forces. Large-scale surveys of the publics in these countries can provide insights into perceptions of state capacity in relation to each of the functional areas indicated above (except, perhaps, external relations), allowing distinctions to be drawn sub-nationally between the perceptions of citizens in regions where peacekeepers have deployed and regions where they have not deployed.

⁶ See Gledhill, “When State Capacity Dissolves”; Hanson and Sigman, “Measuring State Capacity”; Hendrix, “Measuring State Capacity”; Soifer, “Measuring State Capacity in Contemporary Latin America.”

⁷ See Gilligan and Sergenti, “Do UN Interventions Cause Peace? Using Matching to Improve Causal Inference.”

Large-scale surveys conducted again over subsequent years (e.g., 3-5 years out) would allow sufficient time for any impact of peacekeeping withdrawal to have effect and thus become manifest, bearing in mind that some processes—economic development, democratization—are longer-term processes and cannot be assessed easily in the short-term.⁸ Public perceptions are crucial to developing a clear understanding of post-exit conditions. Survey data can complement the views of national and international (especially UN) officials captured through interviews.

The challenge of distinguishing between nationally-aggregated and sub-national effects of peacekeeping and peacekeeping withdrawal can be addressed in other ways. One way is to collect subnational data on state capacity—for instance, by using a spatio-temporal grid structure and individuating grids that have experienced UN mission withdrawal.⁹ One can then compare indicators of state capacity in regions where peacekeepers have been deployed and withdrawn with (otherwise similar) regions where peacekeepers never deployed. In that way one can identify whether peacekeeper exit may have had an observable impact on state capacity and the delivery of public services in regions where peacekeepers were based.¹⁰

These are not the only research methods that can be employed effectively to assess the legacies of UN peacekeeping operations. The point to stress is the value of a multi-methods approach that employs quantitative, survey, and qualitative methods in the expectation that complementarity and triangulation can generate meaningful results. Large-N cross-national studies are valuable for identifying general trends and causal effects but they struggle to isolate and illustrate causal mechanisms. Qualitative case study research, by contrast, facilitates an understanding of causal processes but it can be difficult to generalize beyond the case(s) at hand. Surveys, meanwhile, can tell us a lot about individual preferences and perceptions but they focus on micro-dynamics and so they underplay macro-level factors. When used together, these diverse methods can allow us to create a complex causal narrative.

Conclusion

⁸ I am grateful to one of the reviewers of this article for this observation.

⁹ See, for instance, Tollefsen, Strand and Buhaug, “PRIO-GRID: A Unified Spatial Data Structure”.

¹⁰ Ruggeri, Dorussen and Gizelis, “On the Frontline Every Day?”; Ruggeri, Dorussen and Gizelis, “Winning the Peace Locally.”

Hundreds of thousands of personnel and billions of dollars are deployed each year by UN member-states in support of UN peacekeeping efforts in war-torn states. If we wish to know whether peacebuilding and statebuilding efforts build sustainable peace and states then we need to examine what happens to states after peacekeeping operations end. At present, however, our understanding of the legacies left by peacekeeping operations, after exit, is poor. The essays in this Forum set up a research agenda going forward. This essay, in particular, has identified some of the methodological challenges to conducting robust assessments. The challenges are significant but, as has been argued here, they can be mitigated if not overcome.

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