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Effects of UN Peacekeeping Missions

Abstract

Of everything the United Nations does, probably one its most scrutinized programs is its peacekeeping missions across the globe. Even though humanity is experiencing an unprecedented level of peace, deadly civil wars still occur across the world, especially in developing nations. The UN has become involved in many of these conflicts, sending peacekeeping forces to the country in crisis. UN peace efforts are very important because they have the potential to save thousands of lives and preventing the further damages of war. It is for this reason that it is vital to examine the UN peacekeeping missions and evaluate the outcomes these have produced.

My research into this question will briefly look at the process of peacekeeping and its results based on reports after peacekeeping missions leave the nation in question. The overall question I seek to answer is "Do UN peacekeeping forces leave a civil war-stricken country in a better or worse condition since they have arrived?". Essentially I seek to assess the UN's effectiveness in peacekeeping overall. In order to find an answer to this question, I will examine various scholarly debates and papers all evaluating the UN's performance in various conflicts. These papers range in backgrounds and hypotheses but they break down these conflicts into various tests in order to identify the outcomes and come to a general conclusion. Each of these studies also highlights specific conflicts as examples in support of their argument, thus providing the research with more credibility, while still showing the vast complication of peacekeeping.

UN peacekeeping forces, in the majority of cases, fail to bring about stable peace in civil wars. I believe this because, from what I have seen, there seems to be a lot of civil wars that keep occurring or fail to stop, for example, Syria. While Syria has caught quite the attention and action of the UN, its war has no end in sight. Conflicts in various African nations such as Somalia fail to end as well, thus bringing me to what I hypothesize.

Keywords

Peacekeeping, UN, Civil War

Disciplines

International Relations | Peace and Conflict Studies | Political Science

Comments

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POL 103, Introduction to International Relations

Professor Hartzell

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Effects of UN Peacekeeping Missions

Of everything the United Nations does, probably one its most scrutinized programs is its peacekeeping missions across the globe. Even though humanity is experiencing an unprecedented level of peace, deadly civil wars still occur across the world, especially in developing nations. The UN has become involved in many of these conflicts, sending peacekeeping forces to the country in crisis. UN peace efforts are very important because they have the potential to save thousands of lives and preventing the further damages of war. It is for this reason that it is vital to examine the UN peacekeeping missions and evaluate the outcomes these have produced.

My research into this question will briefly look at the process of peacekeeping and its results based on reports after peacekeeping missions leave the nation in question. The overall question I seek to answer is “Do UN peacekeeping forces leave a civil war-stricken country in a better or worse condition since they have arrived?”. Essentially I seek to assess the UN’s effectiveness in peacekeeping overall. In order to find an answer to this question, I will examine various scholarly debates and papers all evaluating the UN’s performance in various conflicts. These papers range in backgrounds and hypotheses but they break down these conflicts into various tests in order to identify the outcomes and come to a general conclusion. Each of these studies also highlights specific conflicts as examples in support of their argument, thus providing the research with more credibility, while still showing the vast complication of peacekeeping.

I hypothesize that UN peacekeeping forces, in the majority of cases, fail to bring about stable peace in civil wars. I believe this because, from what I have seen, there seems to be a lot of civil wars that keep occurring or fail to stop, for example, Syria. While Syria has caught quite the attention and action of the UN, its war has no end in sight. Conflicts in various African nations such as Somalia fail to end as well, thus bringing me to what I hypothesize.

UN Peace Missions

The United Nations is determined to minimize or stop conflicts as much as possible, but tends to deploy peacekeeping forces to the more intense or difficult conflicts (Fortna, 2004). The UN sends peacekeeping forces into zones that are “hotbeds”, areas the public tends to look at in terms of the violent events prior to or during a conflict but not once the initiatives have begun to be put into place. Depending on the conflict at hand, the UN uses a variety of methods to achieve its goals, these can include advisors, observational units, or actual combat troops (UN, 2019). This gives the UN a great deal of flexibility as the organization can choose to employ some or all of these options. However, it is important to note that the UN has tended to use combat troops more recently than in the past due to positive results (Doyle, Sambanis, 2006). When the UN first began to experiment putting combat troops in conflict zones, they found they were able to bring about ceasefires and peace agreements more effectively than before. Through whatever means it chooses, the UN attempts to negotiate or hold peace in an area, typically creating ceasefires once it arrives in order to help jumpstart a peace process. Once a presence is established, the UN will stay in the area, keeping the conflicting groups in check and providing services to the population, including distributing food and medicine (UN, 2019). Depending on the conflict, the UN also might monitor elections following the end of the conflict. If the UN believes its job is complete, the peacekeeping forces will begin a transition period and then

finally withdraw, unless the situation requires them to maintain an extended/indefinite mission (UN, 2019).

Scholarship on UN Peacekeeping Forces

Numerous scholars have examined the question surrounding the UNs peacekeeping effectiveness and have utilized many different techniques in order to draw and conclusions. Through studies and tests, the majority of scholars have come to the conclusion that it is less likely for conflict to recur in nations where UN peacekeeping operations have been implemented (Fortna 2004). These studies take a variety of factors into account. Typically, outcomes are measured in a quantitative style (simply a point scale system). Once the researchers have labeled each of their factors they check off and assign points to conflicts that match or do not match each criterion. In the end, they reach a conclusion and present their findings as a distinct statistical conclusion. The studies also take a large amount of conflicts into consideration; the majority of time, scholars look at every conflict in which the UN involved its peacekeeping initiatives, no matter how big or small. These have been supported by researchers such as Nicholas Sambanis (2008) and Virginia Fortna (2004) who claim that their analyses support their arguments and show the effectiveness of the UN. However, these studies are still criticized; some researchers, such as Jeremy Weinstein (2008) and Séverine Autesserre (2019) have critiqued these findings, claiming that the UN peace forces are not effective and that the conflicts they leave are still there in one way or another.

In Support

Research has shown that areas where UN peacekeeping forces are deployed, the chance of conflict sparking up again drops by 70% as opposed to the UN having no involvement (Fortna 2004). These numbers are supported through quantitative analysis that examines multiple issues,

through different types of peacekeeping, and the year the missions occurred. Similar support can be found in research by Nicholas Sambanis and Michael Doyle (2006). While they don't propose a percentage reduction in the likelihood of conflict recurrence as does Fortna, they conclude that, in general, peacekeeping works but that it does have to be tailored to each cause as enforcement only works in some areas, while civilian actions only work in others (Doyle, Sambanis, 2006). Another study concludes that mediation by third parties, the majority being the UN, brings about the most peace agreements and that, opposed to simple intervention, bringing the conflicting groups together in terms of reconciliation will work the best (Frazier, Dixon, 2009). Even though these scholars differ as to the methods used to analyze the issue, they still all agree that the UN is, overall, effective.

Conflicts that supporters have highlighted include Côte d'Ivoire and the Yugoslav breakup. While each varies in time and method, their results have been enthusiastically touted as triumphs by the UN. Each country had various peacekeeping forces deployed and each had a period of ceasefires and treaties finally leading to a lasting peace. When Yugoslavia dissolved and conflict sparked between new established nations, the UN found itself trying to bring about a peace between groups that wanted the utter destruction of the other (Doyle, Sambanis, 2006). Agreements were brought about and military observers were sent but they proved to be ineffective and it was not until the UN had its peacekeepers and it sanctioned peacekeepers to act more in a combat role that peace finally came about. In Côte d'Ivoire, the UN looked on its past mission troubles and decided to begin its peace operations in a more aggressive manner, deploying combat troops more actively, in sometimes attacking roles in order to enforce peace agreements (Hultman, Kathman, Shannon, 2016). This proved to work, and the UN forces left in

2017 declaring their mandate met after elections were held and peace was established for a satisfactory amount time (UN, 2019).

Supporters note that the UN has been more effective recently as it learns from its past failures and corrects them. In their eyes, this makes the UN peacekeeping efforts even more crucial. One study points to a simulation it ran that found that if the UN had ceased its peacekeeping operations in 2001, “3–4 more countries had been in major conflict in 2013 relative to what the world saw given the actual level of peacekeeping activity” (Hegre, Hultman, Nygård, 2018). In response to critics of the UN peacekeepers, the supporters turn to their findings, noting how the UN forces have changed drastically over time and observing that since its recent success is a better reflection of its effectiveness. Supporters acknowledge the difficulties the UN finds itself in and repeatedly point out that forces are deployed in heavily affected regions, thus making their job all the more difficult. Even though tensions may still exist and, in some cases, peacekeepers have to be stationed permanently (Sambanis, 2008), overall the wars have ended and the mass killings and destruction have ceased. Even though more work must be done in nations, UN peacekeepers in missions stated as successes brought about peace.

In Criticism

Those who say the UN is not effective will point to the same operations the supporters highlight, emphasizing some of their more well-known and acknowledged failures. Many criticize the nations that the UN considers a successful withdrawal, noting that even though in large the war might cease, violence and stability can still be real issues in the more local municipal areas (Autesserre, 2019). This is a result of the UN looking at a situation from the top down, and not looking where the conflict finds its deep roots. Many of conflicts the UN involves itself in are in developing nations the origins of war, can be found in land, water, and traditional

power (Weinstein, 2002). This thinking brings a conflict against the quantitative research given by those such as Hultman and Fortna as they are looking at the results as if they were a simple ending rather than carefully looking into each nation and seeing the direct effects on a more ground level. This only strengthens the argument of critics that the UN is not looking properly deep into nations, only the basic shell. Mozambique is an example that the United Nations triumphs as a success story for its peace work, yet Jeremy Weinstein argues the opposite. He argues that the UN fails to look at the core of Mozambique and that violence is still very much present and that tensions between warring parties have not been properly frozen, making a renewed conflict very possible (Weinstein, 2008). The various peace missions to Yugoslavia drew much attention and it took years for a final agreement to be brought about. Critics highlight the mission's failure of properly forcing peace to the table and that the troops were very ineffective, failing to capture and stop the leaders labeled as war criminals by the UN (Downs, Stedman, 2002). Some war crimes, such as the infamous Srebrenica massacre, occurred after ceasefires and small agreements had been met by both sides and while UN troops were stationed very close by (UN, 2019), highlighting the failures of the forces to stop anything from happening. They also point out that the UN differentiates its mission goals in each conflict in which it is involved, setting what only it believes as a success. For example, if a simple ceasefire agreement has been met for a week, that is considered a success or, if peace is eventually established, ignoring the years or months of bloodshed in between (Aksu, 2003). In response to the supporters of the UN, critics ask various questions such as; If there is still violence and some instability in a nation after the UN has left could it's peacekeeping still be ruled as a success? If the UN sets its own goals and defines what constitutes a victory, can it still be considered a success? And even if a general agreement of an actual peace is met but when the UN was

deployed the conflict didn't stop for a considerable amount of time, wouldn't the nations have been left in a worse condition?

Conclusion

By looking at these studies and writings I was able to see both sides of the argument. As there have been numerous conflicts the UN has involved itself with there are plenty of examples for scholars to look at. But it is clear that no matter what research or writing you look at, that the entire notion of peacekeeping is very difficult and complex.

This investigation gave me an opportunity to examine a topic that I had before in my mind dismissed. Initially I found a lot of sources that went against what I had hypothesized. I enjoyed that factor as I was able to challenge my thinking and open myself up to experts who gave deep and insightful claims. However, when I kept looking, I found a lot of critiques as well. It is important to note how the majority of these critiques were not exactly scholarly and that actually, the majority of scholars agree the UN is able to maintain peace. The scholarly critics that I was able to find still brought forth very impassioned and convincing arguments. They brought into question the very notion of what is claimed as peace in the first place, and the negatives and positives that comes out of peace. The scholars explained that the conflicts at hand are so much more than just simple numbers, they have history and how the lower class struggles of the country are affected can be largely overlooked. Both sides showed the complex ways they valued a success versus a defeat and how that reflects upon the UN as a whole.

I had a feeling I would be challenged since I didn't know all that much to begin with; however, I had assumed there would be a clear side but that proved to not be the case. Even as both sides of the argument claim they are the clear victor, it's still very difficult to see what the

better conclusion was. I came to conclude that, in fact, in general the UN leaves a post-civil war-stricken country in a better condition than it had found it and that the UN peacekeeping forces are more effective than not. Even with the good arguments brought up by the opposition, I cannot argue against the basic fact that in the majority of cases the UN forces have ended wars and also prevented them. I seriously believe that without the UN numerous wars would have sprouted up and that those that were stopped might have continued to rage. This happens, especially recently, as the UN is seeing more success in the past couple decades. All sides of the question can mostly come to the consensus that the UN peacekeepers cannot be defunded and that they are still an important force that needs to be drastically improved. Even those who believe the UN creates mostly peaceful countries generally agreed the peacekeeping forces could be used much more effectively and expanded to truly stop warfare. To sum up, the UN peacekeeping forces are an important factor in ending civil wars and maintain peace, and they should not be ignored.

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