

The Utility of Peacekeeping in the Post-Cold War Era

Sarah Lewis

With 63 operations around the world¹, United Nations (UN) peacekeeping is an institution which embodies those principles of the UN that are championed worldwide including impartiality and the pursuit of peace. Although the details of each operation are conflict-specific, the wider principle of peacekeeping has remained intact for six decades, suggesting that there is some utility in such operations. This paper evaluates the effectiveness of peacekeeping in a post-Cold War world by understanding changes in peacekeeping from its inception to the present day. This evaluation will show that there is utility in continuing peacekeeping operations in the post-Cold War world although a new understanding of what peacekeeping should entail and achieve needs to be developed and accepted. It will be established that peacekeeping operations, traditionally conceived, are no longer effective at maintaining impartiality and protecting an already established, even if fragile, peace. Peacekeeping operations are now merely a facet of larger UN-sponsored intervention operations and can only effectively promote peace in conflict zones as part of a larger operation. Peacekeeping as it was classically conceived no longer exists since there is no real need for it, and yet the concept has remained for decades even amidst the changing global political landscape. This is because as a part of a larger, more complex operation, peacekeepers can continue to offer continuity to UN principles across decades, particularly the principle of the UN as an impartial institution promoting peace.

There have been many inherent changes to peacekeeping operations since the Cold War, and many problems that hinder the ability of these forces to achieve their objectives. Peacekeeping operations continue to be effective at saving lives and advancing the peace process within very specific conflict regions. They are not, however, always

effective at maintaining impartiality or halting ongoing conflicts. To maintain continuity in this discussion, references made to "peacekeeping" refer to United Nations peacekeeping missions so that this discussion can consider the effectiveness of the principle of peacekeeping put into action. Maintaining this continuity is also important because the term "peacekeeping" has become somewhat ambiguous² and, this way only one peacekeeping context (UN forces) must be established. Missions by a single country or coalitions of states set their own standards and are therefore different from UN peacekeeping forces, and will not be considered here, even if they consider a component of their operation to be keeping the peace. Borrowing from O'Neill and Rees (2005) this discussion will consider UN Peacekeeping to be operations conducted by the UN "involv[ing] international military, police and civilian personnel, and [have] as their general objective, the restoration and maintenance of international peace and security."³ Even given this definition, there continues to be ambiguity between

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UN operations where peacekeeping includes both missions that do not allow for the use of force (Chapter VI), as well as some that are sanctioned under Chapter VII of the UN Charter, which allows for engagement and the use of force in times other than in self-defence⁴.

Of important note is that this discussion will reserve judgment on the effectiveness of the United Nations as an intergovernmental institution; focusing solely on the utility of the principle of peacekeeping put into action. Although this is a

² Often we talk of operations working to keep the peace, but these may not be UN-sanctioned Peacekeepers.

³ O'Neill and Rees (2005), 7

⁴ (Matheson, 2006: 100). Engagements under Chapter VI involve the "pacific settlement of disputes" whereas Chapter VII allows for more peace enforcement missions where action is mandated "with respect to threats to the peace, breaches of the peace, and acts of aggression." (UN.org, *Charter of the United Nations*).

¹ There are currently 16 active operations (UN, "Peacekeeping," 2008).

critical aspect of the effectiveness of UN peacekeepers, this paper aims to determine the effectiveness of peacekeeping during, and after, the Cold War to determine if there is utility in continuity to engage peacekeepers in today's conflicts.

TRADITIONAL PEACEKEEPING: COLD WAR ERA

During its early years, in the midst of the Cold War, the principle of UN peacekeeping, designed to rectify a stalemate at the UN, faced challenges of its own. It is by a UN Security Council resolution that a peacekeeping force can be sent into a conflict, and the format of the Security Council allows for any of the five permanent members: the United States (US), Soviet Union (Russia post-Cold War), China, Britain, and France⁵, to veto decisions or operations of which they do not approve. Throughout the Cold War, the UN was unable to effectively engage in collective action because of the East-West division that existed within the Security Council as a result of the Cold War between the US and the Soviet Union.⁶ Peacekeeping was created as a way to overcome the stalemate that was plaguing the Security Council at the hands of the two great power rivals who could simply veto any operation they deemed to be unfavourable to them. The aim of this peacekeeping initiative was to maintain fragile ceasefires and stabilize conflict areas so that tension could then be resolved diplomatically. By keeping small regional conflicts (proxy wars) contained, the US and the Soviet Union would not become involved in escalating conflicts; the end result was thought to be a nuclear third world war. As such, neither state supplied troops to UN peacekeeping forces in an effort to maintain their non-involvement. This inhibited UN forces since the US and the Soviet Union were the strongest states militarily after World War II, but this was deemed a necessary sacrifice for international security.

These early missions consisted of military observers and lightly armed troops whose primary tasks were to monitor the situation and report back to the

political leaders, all with the aim of supporting any pre-existing ceasefires or peace agreements.⁷ It should be noted that forces only entered a conflict region once limited peace or a ceasefire had been reached, and they also required the support of all members of the conflict to ensure the force's impartiality and to honour the principle of consent. In order to establish the effectiveness of peacekeeping in the post-Cold War era where the nature of conflicts are much different than those before and the main goal of peacekeeping operations is different, it should be determined if peacekeeping was ever an effective means of maintaining peace and order in conflict regions. O'Neill and Rees (2005) explain that the policies of consent, impartiality and non-use of force appeared morally supportive of peacekeeping operations, yet in practical application these often hindered UN forces.⁸ Forces were to be employed in situations where all parties to the conflict were interested in restoring peace but for some reason or another, were unable to do so without an impartial third party⁹. This would ensure that keeping the already established peace was the object of the mission rather than a military intervention to end the conflict, sometimes referred to as peace-making. This was also important because it ensured that forces were not seen as invading forces, but protection for innocent civilians and help for those parties to the conflict to pursue a resolution. As many good points as this policy of impartiality had, it was also a hindrance to putting the principle of peacekeeping into action. The effectiveness of missions can only be judged based on those conflicts to which peacekeepers actually responded, posing a problem for helping to resolve armed conflicts where UN forces were not welcomed.

The UN documents the first peacekeeping mission as that of 1948 in the Middle East when the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization in Palestine (UNTSO) was established to supervise a truce already in place, in an effort to end the Arab-Israeli war.¹⁰ Mere observer missions like UNTSO,

⁷ UN, "Peacekeeping," 2008.

⁸ O'Neill and Rees (2005), refer to the principle of consent as "one of peacekeeping's major weaknesses," (29).

⁹ O'Neill and Rees, 2005: 33.

¹⁰ 50 Years of United Nations Peacekeeping Operations. Panel Discussion. United Nations Headquarters, 11 June 1998.

⁵ UN, "The Blue Helmets," 2005: 4.

⁶ O'Neill and Rees (2005), 1.

were much less demanding than more complex conflicts such as the Suez Crisis¹¹ in 1956 which required far more activity on the part of peacekeepers, including overseeing the withdrawal of invading forces. As the first Emergency Force to be deployed under the banner of the UN, the mission to Suez in 1956 (UNEF 1) is an exemplar of Cold War UN Peacekeeping. The immediate objective of this mission was to create a situation whereby a peace agreement could be reached and maintained, while overseeing the withdrawal of the invading forces and the creation of a buffer zone in the conflict region.

Considered a success for having helped resolve the immediate crisis at Suez, UNEF was able to help resolve the specific conflict of 1956 for which it was deployed, yet holding true to the principle of consent, UNEF withdrew from Egypt at the request of the Egyptian government in the spring of 1967, even in the midst of intense tension in the region between Israelis and Palestinians.¹² Yilmaz (2005) argues that although there were a few missions in which UN peacekeeping forces were ineffective in completing their mission including Cyprus in 1974 and Lebanon in 1982, UN peacekeeping operations between 1948-88 were largely successful in that they reduced conflict¹³ and protected lives. UNEF 1 was a pre-condition for securing both the cease-fire and the withdrawal of the invading forces in Suez, making it an invaluable asset to the resolution of that crisis. Most importantly, peacekeeping operations were effective in keeping the US and the Soviet Union out of smaller conflicts, thus also protecting international security.

A NEW AND COMPLEX PEACEKEEPING: POST COLD WAR

With the end of the Cold War, there was no longer a need for UN peacekeeping operations to keep the great powers out of conflicts. Peacekeeping operations however remained in demand because

they were now considered generally helpful aids to the resolution of conflicts. The number of UN peacekeeping missions soared dramatically as a result of the changing global political landscape at the end of the Cold War. Ethnic conflicts became more prevalent and internal wars within countries, rather than between them which was common during the Cold War, emerged as a result of failed states,¹⁴ which increased the demand for UN operations. A number of such conflicts emerged from the collapse of the Soviet Union, when particular nations or regions were vying for independence.¹⁵ A significant portion of new UN missions that began after the Cold War were dispersed throughout these formerly US or Russian-controlled areas, or to newly independent regions that had been previously part of the Soviet Union.

Free of the tension within the Security Council that had existed between Eastern and Western rivals during the Cold War, the situation seemed promising for the UN to be able to more effectively undertake even more peacekeeping missions in the post-Cold War world. This optimism was sparked by the hope that both the US and Russia would now be able to supply UN forces, making those forces stronger than they had been.¹⁶ Since each state was no longer as interested in protecting its own sphere of influence in the same way it had throughout the Cold War period, both states were also no longer as committed to managing security within those same regions by themselves,¹⁷ opening the door to the possibility of collaboration within the Security Council. This involvement by the great powers also meant the overarching purpose of peacekeeping operations was no longer valid (to keep the US and Soviet Union out). It is for this reason that the utility of peacekeeping operations is often questioned because the very purpose and objective of peacekeeping no longer applies.

¹¹ Suez Crisis – in 1956 Egypt's President Gamal Abdul Nasser nationalized the Suez Canal, much to the chagrin of Britain, France and Israel, who proceeded to invade Egypt and occupy Egyptian territory. (50 Years of United Nations Peacekeeping Operations. Panel Discussion. United Nations Headquarters, 11 June 1998.)

¹² UN, "The Blue Helmets," 1996:54.

¹³ Yilmaz, 2005, 16

¹⁴ Failed state – one where governmental authority and public infrastructure has been suspended (UN, "The Blue Helmets," 1996: 4)

¹⁵ Matheson, 2006: 105.

¹⁶ As MacQueen (2006) points out, there was now no obvious reason why the US and Russia could not participate in the peacekeeping process as well, since the Cold War was over and the risk of a third world war was not as high (130).

¹⁷ MacQueen, 2006, 129.

Even given this optimism for cooperation, operations after the Cold War have tended to be much more complex and multi-dimensional than before, now including humanitarian work, overseeing elections, and a number of reconstruction operations, all of which has made the pursuit of a straight-forward goal of the mission much more difficult. Mingst (2008) differentiates between traditional peacekeeping, and the now complex peacekeeping where both military and numerous civilian personnel partake. This complex peacekeeping is often more dangerous than traditional missions because not all parties in the conflict have necessarily consented to UN presence, and force is sometimes utilized by those making up the operation.¹⁸ Both of these new characteristics of peacekeeping operations are new to the post-Cold War era, and are problematic if the theoretical concept behind UN peacekeeping operations (impartiality, consent, non-use of force) is to remain as it was throughout the Cold War era.

The complex post-Cold War operations are also much more multi-dimensional than traditional ones were, since they consist of political, economic, humanitarian, and social components in addition to the military component.¹⁹ They can include confidence-building measures, power-sharing agreements, and electoral support,²⁰ and are no longer seen as a strictly military endeavour, but rather a coordinated, multi-dimensional, intervention. As a result of this, the distinction between keeping and enforcing peace can become blurred.²¹ Matheson (2006) explains that although UN operations maintain the mandate of impartiality, many of the conflicts in which they are now engaged are such that the UN force becomes a direct party in the conflict²² which in effect negates impartiality. This in itself is cause for a few dilemmas. Firstly, if a UN force intervenes in a conflict without consent of all parties, it is in effect

choosing a side, or inserting itself as a third adversary. For any government fighting against an insurgency or rebel group, the peacekeepers are effectively choosing to side with the government's adversary when they intervene without governmental consent and vice versa. Secondly, by using force and becoming engaged in active fighting, the line between keeping peace and making peace by enforcing a resolution decided upon from outside state actors becomes quite blurred. With these new conditions and dilemmas, UN peacekeeping has had to choose between maintaining the traditional conception of peacekeeping operations, or moving in a new direction to ensure the utility of these operations continues.²³ The problem is that when force is used to establish order in a situation where

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no cease-fire or peace agreement has been reached, the UN and/or its member states taking part in the operation risk being accused of acting in a colonial manner,²⁴ or intruding on a state's sovereignty.

The UN currently has an operation active in Darfur, Sudan, named UNAMID.

This resulted from the signing of the Darfur Peace Agreement in May of 2006.²⁵ The government of Sudan accepted the presence of UN peacekeepers in June of 2007, which involved the implementation of a three-phased approach for a joint mission with the African Union which was already deployed in the area. The mandate has since been extended to July 2009, with the protection of civilians, contributions to humanitarian assistance and security, and the promotion of human rights and the rule of law as just a few of the many tasks and responsibilities entrusted to the force.²⁶ The complexities of the mission, as well as the hindrance of the principle of

¹⁸ Mingst, 2008, 330.

¹⁹ UN, "The Blue Helmets," 1996: 5.

²⁰ Yilmaz, 2005:15, 19.

²¹ O'Neill and Rees, 2005: 1.

²² Matheson, 2006: 128.

²³ As Yilmaz (2005) explains: "this, then, [has] made UN peacekeeping forces face a serious dilemma: remaining passively impartial or establishing order, even at the cost of the use of force" (24).

²⁴ Yilmaz, 2005: 25. This is particularly relevant in the post-Cold War era since the US and Russia have begun to contribute to UN forces, with missions that may be going to regions that were once under the sphere of influence of either state.

²⁵ UN, "Darfur," 2008.

²⁶ UN, "Darfur," 2008

consent, are evident in this scenario. The UN force waited until it had consent from the Government of Sudan before deploying a mission to the conflict zone (years after the conflict began), and even though they have since begun their mission, they have encountered a lack of cooperation at the hand of the same government which has resulted in a number of set-backs. This is yet another incidence of the force being either impeded by the principle of consent, or becoming another party to the war if it continues to act even without the permission of one side; e.g.: the government.

Yilmaz (2005) argues that another problem faced by UN peacekeeping is that it is not able to keep pace with developments in international security that demand action.²⁷ Although the US military is at present the most powerful in the world, its contributions to UN forces are not as readily available since the US currently has its military personnel deployed in its own unilateral and coalition missions, such as Afghanistan and Iraq, as part of its War on Terror. As of September 30, 2008, the US was actively supplying 0.3% of the UN Peacekeeping Forces.²⁸ Since the main contributors to UN peacekeeping operations are then developing countries with limited resources and less qualified personnel²⁹ the second-rate nature of this organization calls in to question its utility, especially since the UN remains reliant on the participation of its member states for any mission to field enough personnel and materials. This was evident in Rwanda in 1994, where too few troops and supplies were not able to accomplish their main goal to oversee a lasting peace agreement between the Rwandan government and the rebel force, the Rwandese Patriotic Front. Any use of the operation in Rwanda as a case study would no doubt determine that peacekeeping is set for failure. The failure of the force in Rwanda goes back to the bureaucracy of the UN and a lack of support from the main states contributing to the mission. Much of this lack of support came from the fact that Rwanda was not a country of high value to the world's major powers, nor was a conflict here much of a threat to

international security.³⁰ Rwanda was proof once again that the success or failure of UN peacekeeping operations rests significantly with the cooperation and support of the world's greatest powers; whoever those may be at the time, not merely a moral principle.

Even considering these dilemmas for post-Cold War peacekeeping, there have been many successes. The UN proclaims that since the first mission in 1948, 63 missions have been undertaken which have worked to disarm hundreds of thousands of former combatants and have allowed citizens in over 45 countries to participate in free and fair elections.³¹ Yilmaz (2005) argues that in fact peacekeeping is often a "necessary element of conflict management" and continues to play an important role in the process of peacemaking. If peacekeepers are successful in protecting lives and preventing conflict escalation, then they have been successful in their mission.³² Perhaps the reality is merely that peacekeeping is now a component of a conflict intervention, rather than the solution in itself.

TODAY'S PEACEKEEPING OPERATIONS: ARE THEY EFFECTIVE?

Determining the effectiveness of UN peacekeeping in any era, but particularly in the post-Cold War context depends on the interpretation of "peacekeeping." Is it to keep the conflict from escalating and protect lives in the process, or is it to end the conflict completely? Based on the choice of interpretation, different missions will be labeled "successes" or "failures." For example, UN peacekeepers have not been able to successfully end fighting in Darfur. They have certainly protected the lives of civilian non-combatants though, which is the main premise of UNAMID's mandate.³³ During the Cold War, peacekeeping existed to keep the major powers out of conflicts, and they did succeed in doing that. Now that the same threat to international security no longer exists, the concept of peacekeeping must adapt to suit international demands if it is to remain. As of late, it had taken on

²⁷ Yilmaz, 2005, 21.

²⁸ This includes police, military observers, and troops which total 309 people contributed by the United States of a total UN Force of 88,754 people (UN, "contributors," 2008).

²⁹ Yilmaz, 2005: 23.

³⁰ Dallaire, Romeo. *Shake Hands with the Devil*, 71. 2003. Vintage Canada.

³¹ United Nations Peacekeeping, 2008.

³² Yilmaz, 2005: 18 - 19.

³³ UN, "Darfur," 2008.

a more humanitarian objective, where protecting innocent lives has been the main goal, and in that, most peacekeeping operations have been successful.

Peacekeeping seems to resemble nothing of its traditional self, but is the “new” form of peacekeeping better or worse? MacQueen argues that peacekeeping has not undergone any qualitative transformation, although it has undergone a significant quantitative change, in that many more missions have been deployed in the post-Cold War period than were prior to that.³⁴ The political landscape in which the UN is now deploying peacekeeping operations has changed significantly from the Cold War context, with internal ethnic conflict predominantly defining present-day missions, rather than ideological clashes like before. Peacekeeping classically conceived is not effective in the present political landscape since many of these new conflicts require the use of force, and with many more parties than simply two state governments involved, consent from all parties is not always possible.

Returning to the idea that perhaps today peacekeeping can be merely a component of a larger conflict intervention, the UN has been forced to adapt the purposes of its peacekeeping operations to meet global needs post-Cold War. It is difficult to argue that UN peacekeeping is effective today, because that original concept really no longer exists, and yet peacekeeping operations continue to take place. The term is still used because it connotes a familiar sense of morality and impartiality, but forces labeled as such do much more today than work to keep the peace. Their involvement in “nation-building” initiatives has expanded their missions and history has not yet ruled on the true effectiveness of this change.

Given these new aspects (eg: overseeing of elections, ensuring no human rights violations, etc.) necessary to conflict resolution in UN operations, the peacekeeping component cannot be separated from other sections of the operations, and its effectiveness goes hand-in-hand with the effectiveness of the larger mission. As these missions become more multi-dimensional, they will

require more time to complete, and will no doubt encounter controversy as they become entwined in more areas of the society in which they have been deployed. It is evident however, that the blue berets³⁵ will remain a significant aspect of any force deployed to a conflict zone, if only for the moral assurance they provide; that an impartial party is looking out for the interests of the innocent, and working toward securing a lasting peace in the region. This is evident from the fact that UN peacekeeping operations have continued over six decades which suggests that there is something worthwhile in such forces. As a result, they will no doubt continue to

be an important facet of larger intervention operations sponsored by the UN. Peacekeepers working singlehandedly however, are no longer effective in a post-Cold War theatre at respecting the same policies of impartiality, consent, and the non use of force which were the basis of the inception of peacekeeping. They can however, still positively influence the pursuit of peace in any conflict zone if they work to support the adversaries and do not themselves become a direct party to the conflict. In conclusion, peacekeeping operations resemble nothing of their classic selves, and yet they remain an integral part of any intervention in conflict regions; if merely for the reassurance to civilians that the sight of the blue beret provides.

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³⁴ MacQueen, 2006: 234.

³⁵ The Blue beret has become the internationally recognised symbol for peacekeepers because of the blue hats worn by UN peacekeepers, regardless of their nationality.