Enhancing peacekeeping deployment: structural and functional reforms from Rwanda and South Sudan case studies

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Abstract:

United Nations Peacekeepers endeavour to prevent the recurrence of violence and establish conditions conducive to enduring peace in countries ravaged by conflict. This document analyses methods to enhance the deployment and organisational structure of UN Peacekeeping missions, utilising two missions as illustrative case studies. It underscores the significance of the mission mandate, elucidating how it can facilitate support to peacekeepers during deployment rather than impede their efforts, and outlines the process for implementing necessary modifications. The study commences with an overview of UN peacekeeping and proceeds by providing background information on the missions in South Sudan and Rwanda, both serving as case studies. The central section investigates strategies for bolstering peacekeeping efforts, with an emphasis on the mission mandate and the deployment of peacekeepers. The case studies underscore the urgent necessity for reform in both the deployment and organisation of peacekeeping operations, notwithstanding some successes in mandate achievement. Although peacekeeping possesses substantial potential as a mechanism for restoring stability, its overall effectiveness remains constrained by existing deployment procedures and operational limitations. To address these issues more humanely and decisively in complex conflict scenarios, future missions must endeavour to surmount these challenges.

1.   Introduction

1.1.   Logistics of United Nations peacekeeping

In 1948, the United Nations (UN) created a multinational military force tasked with stabilising the world's most war-torn and unstable countries, called the UN Peacekeepers, also known as the Blue Helmets. The UN charter states that the UN Peacekeepers were created to "save future generations from the scourge of war. When deployed to a country, a mission mandate must be approved and signed by the country receiving the peacekeepers. The mission mandate lays out the goals and rules for peacekeepers and gives them the authority to act within the established mission mandate. The UN Security Council must also approve any missions and subsequent mandates. The host nation must be willing to receive the UN peacekeepers, which at times results in complicated and deferred missions (Principles of Peacekeeping | United Nations Peacekeeping, n.d.). Peacekeeping missions are discussed at important gatherings where countries meet to discuss possible new missions as well as how to improve troop effectiveness and safety. The Blue Helmets have a budget of more than $6.38 billion annually, permitting them to buy weaponry, pay personnel, and other equipment. The budget is allocated according to the specific missions (How We Are Funded | United Nations Peacekeeping, n.d.). Transportation and supplies are provided, but firearms are not to be utilised unless the Blue Helmets are immediately threatened, and no other choice is available.

1.2.   Historical context

The United Nations created the Peacekeepers to be deployed to countries that are unstable and on the verge of collapse. Peacekeepers should prevent tensions between parties and facilitate peace. The Suez Crisis in 1956 marked a significant milestone, as the area and boundaries were secured. The actions of Peacekeepers during the Suez Crisis mission would come to represent the principles and missions for which they are recognised today. The UN now has over seventy thousand active troops on the ground in several countries. Africa has been the most active continent for the Blue Helmets, with over 30 missions taking place there, in part owing to the varied ethnic cultures and people that have led to uprisings, coups, military control, and other violent and peaceful confrontations (Nomikos, 2022). The Blue Helmets are composed of troops from several countries that work with the UN. Service members are often drawn from the nations where the UN Blue Helmets operation takes place, helping to stabilise the territories being guarded and protected. Blue Helmets can only exist because of resources supplied by contributing nations, including cash, personnel, or other equipment. Without these resources to the UN, the Blue Helmets would be compelled to discontinue operations (Military | United Nations Peacekeeping, n.d.).

1.3.   Overview of conflict in Rwanda

The mission in Rwanda started in 1993 and constituted 2,500 peacekeepers entrusted with

assisting in the stabilisation of the region as it went through a government change with the Arusha Agreement - a peace agreement between the Patriotic Front of Rwanda and the Hutu Government of the Rwandan Republic. However, this mission turned out to be one of the most disastrous for the peacekeepers as the Hutus began slaughtering the Tutsi ethnic group, starting a genocide when a plane carrying Rwanda's president, Juvenal Habyarimana, was shot down near Kigali airport on April 6, 1994, driving tensions over the brink.

Over a million Tutsi and many fewer extreme Hutu were slaughtered by radical Hutus in the conflict. Since then, the UN has issued inconsistent reports, including one in 1999 documenting Blue Helmets abandoning their peace zones set up in schools and other buildings, leading to the massacre of people inside (Andersen & Engedal, 2013). According to an interview with peacekeepers deployed in Rwanda, they sought to safeguard innocent civilians.

As a result of the genocide, the economy of Rwanda suffered, with a 58% loss in GDP, and recovery took 17 years (Hodler, 2019). Before the genocide, Rwanda was already an impoverished nation, with 90% of the population surviving off the land, and farmers sometimes unable to care for their own families (Boudreaux, 2009). The devastation of the Rwanda genocide resulted in an estimated 2 million refugees fleeing. The return of these refugees influenced the initiation of the first and second Congo wars (Schimmel, 2021). The Rwandan peacekeeping mission was one of the most disastrous failures in the history of the Blue Helmets, as it did not prevent the deaths of hundreds of thousands of innocent civilians. When the extent of the genocide was revealed, the UN was heavily chastised, and the withdrawal of the Blue Helmets at a crucial time left the Tutsi population vulnerable, resulting in mass killings by the Hutu.

1.4.   Overview of conflict in South Sudan

According to the UN, the peacekeeping mission in South Sudan, which started on July 9, 2011, and is still going strong today, is one of the Blue Helmets' longest-running operational deployments, having cost up to USD 1.2 billion. (United Nations Peacekeeping, n.d.). Following a civil conflict, South Sudan became independent of Sudan in 2011. In 2011, UN peacekeepers were sent in to help bring about stability, but they failed to maintain it. Salva Kiir, the president and head of the government troops, and Riek Machar, the vice president of the rebel Sudan People's Liberation Army in Opposition (SPLA-IO), were at the forefront of a new civil war that broke out in 2013. A peace agreement was negotiated in 2015 but quickly collapsed. The transitional administration of National Unity was established in 2020 as a result of negotiations for a second peace agreement in 2018. The fighting has displaced 2 million South Sudanese civilians, and the UN Blue Helmets are now only safeguarding 200,000 civilians, leaving most unsecured. Despite signing the peace agreement establishing a new transitional government, fighting continued as implementing such an agreement has been difficult. (Tchie & Ali, 2021).

2.   Methodology

This article employs a qualitative analysis framework to explore the deployment and organisational structure of United Nations Peacekeeping missions. A comprehensive review of existing literature on UN Peacekeeping was conducted to establish a theoretical foundation. This included scholarly articles, UN reports, and historical documentation surrounding peacekeeping missions, focusing on their mandates, challenges, and successes. The research focused on two significant case studies: the UN Peacekeeping mission in South Sudan and the Rwanda mission. These cases were selected due to their contrasting outcomes and the lessons they offer regarding peacekeeping effectiveness and challenges. The case study of Rwanda examines the events leading up to and during the Rwandan genocide, analysing the failures and criticisms of the peacekeeping mandate and operational response. This case of South Sudan investigates the ongoing conflict in South Sudan, assessing the current UN deployment strategies and how they align with the mission's mandate.

Qualitative data were gathered from various sources, including UN Security Council resolutions, mission reports, and testimonies from peacekeepers and local populations. Interviews and firsthand accounts, where available, were utilised to gain insights into the experiences of those involved in the missions. The analysis centred around the mission's mandates, the logistical and operational challenges faced during deployment, and the effectiveness of the UN's responses to local conflicts. Key themes such as strategic planning, coordination among troop-contributing nations, and adaptability of the mission mandate were examined. Based on the analysis of the case studies, recommendations for improving the deployment and organisational structures of future peacekeeping missions were formulated. This included suggestions for more explicit mandates, enhanced logistical support, and frameworks for better collaboration among international and local stakeholders. By utilising this methodology, the article aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the complexities of UN Peacekeeping missions and offer practical solutions for enhancing their effectiveness in conflict-affected regions.

3.   The contrast between the Rwanda and South Sudan Missions

Comparable shortcomings between the missions in South Sudan and Rwanda show how organisational changes in peacekeeping are required. Both instances show how operational limitations and tight mandates can significantly reduce peacekeepers' effectiveness. Resolution 872 of the UN Security Council assigned peacekeepers in Rwanda the responsibility of monitoring the peace process, aiding the transitional government, and supporting the implementation of the Arusha Accords. (Refworld, n.d.) . However, peacekeepers were unable to step in and halt the massacre due to the mandate's limited reach. Even while some personnel refused orders and saved an estimated 30,000 lives, the number is still minimal when compared to the 800,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus who perished. The South Sudanese mission was also criticised. The effort, which began in 2011, was generally

seen to have failed to prevent the outbreak of civil conflict. The mission lacked the power or means to make a significant intervention, despite warning indicators and growing tensions. The inability to act decisively in both situations highlights the pressing need for future peacekeeping missions to have better operational capabilities and more flexible mandates.

The mission mandate in South Sudan was to protect civilians, ensure no human rights violations occurred, support humanitarian aid, oversee the peace agreement implementation process, and report violations of human rights laws. South Sudanese peacekeepers failed to defend the people, resulting in thousands of deaths and rapes. Again, this was owing in part to higher-ranking authorities' orders to use force only as a last resort and to prevent conflict. However, while the South Sudan mission did safeguard 200,000 civilians, it also meant that the remaining 2 million residents who left had no one to defend them, resulting in further fatalities. The South Sudan mission was a failure because its original mission failed, but unlike Rwanda, the UN did not back out and instead sent more troops after the outbreak of a new civil war in 2013. There are still additional peacekeepers in South Sudan today, demonstrating how the UN has learned from the Rwanda mission's disaster. Overall, peacekeeping improves South Sudan's economy, saving lives in both South Sudan and Rwanda, which would have resulted in even more deaths if the Blue Helmets had not been present. The UN should adopt a more comprehensive and adaptable mission directive as well as provide for greater openness for both the civilians and blue helmets.

4.   Peacekeeping in the future

This section highlights significant areas for improvement and focuses on the future goals of peacekeeping operations. To improve the overall efficacy and responsiveness of peacekeeping operations, it focuses on maximising soldier numbers, establishing suitable mission dimensions, upholding ethical standards, and updating operational guidelines.

4.1.   Adjustments needed for the deployment of peacekeepers

4.1.1.   Revising the mission mandate

The first adjustment to improve the deployment of peacekeepers should be to modify the mission mandate to give peacekeepers more autonomy. This would allow peacekeepers to respond to changing and complicated situations, such as protecting civilians from danger. In Rwanda, the peacekeepers who defied orders saved civilians, while most peacekeepers just followed the mission mandate, which led to the civilians being unprotected and vulnerable. If the peacekeepers had been given more autonomy, many civilians' lives could have been saved, and it would have possibly lessened the number of deaths that happened.

According to UN Security Council Resolution 872, ''Rwanda's peacekeepers' role was to assist the parties in implementing the agreement, monitor its implementation, and support the

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transitional government'' (Laegreid, 2017). Furthermore, the Blue Helmets' mission mandate in Rwanda was to protect and evacuate foreigners but not to interfere in the war between the Hutus and the Tutsi. This was due to fear that interference could hurt future peacekeeping operations. (Safari, 2010). Peacekeepers should be granted more autonomy with appropriate oversight to prevent abuse and ensure the smooth operation of other peacekeepers. This oversight would most likely have to be done by higher-ranking peacekeepers, but with more freedom, peacekeepers will be better able to adapt to changing situations.

4.1.2. Mission mandates should account for issues that arise

The second adjustment should be to provide general guidelines to the peacekeepers on how to deal with unexpected situations. The Rwanda and South Sudan mandates did not account for changing circumstances; the mission mandates instructed peacekeepers to evacuate foreigners but did not permit them to protect civilians (UNAMIR, 1999). For example, a Peacekeeper commander who was part of the active troops on the ground, Romeo Dallaire, says he had learned of a plan by the Hutu to start killing Tutsi people and that they "were going to conduct an outright slaughter and elimination of the opposition,". He informed several of his superiors of the massacre that was about to happen, including the Head of the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations, Kofi Annan, but said his pleas were not heard and that "Nobody was interested" (CNN.Com - Transcripts, n.d.). Because the mission mandates had a minimal scope for the Rwanda mission, the civilians were only saved when peacekeepers deviated from the established mandate. In the instance of Rwanda, the UN Security Council was unable to revise or approve a new mission mandate even though they were informed of the increasingly deadly situation.

This was not the only instance. According to the Associated Press, on July 17, "two armed troops in uniform pulled away a lady who was less than a few hundred meters (yards) from the United Nations camp's western entrance as armed peacekeepers on foot, in an armoured vehicle, and a watchtower looked on. According to one\ eyewitness, 30 troops from Nepalese and Chinese battalions witnessed the event." (NPR, n.d.). Further reports were submitted by civilians and US citizens who were apprehended by the South Sudan military in a residential compound. Both US and South Sudan citizens called the US embassy and the peacekeepers stationed there, both of whom declined to assist persons being attacked.

The examples above illustrate what can happen when the mission mandate remains unchanged. Peacekeepers are deployed to some of the world's most unstable countries, where situations can change daily and worsen within several hours. The mission mandate must include guidelines that address the environment in which peacekeepers operate daily and provide them with clear directions on how to handle challenging situations. The guidelines should be broad and allow peacekeepers to use them in their situation. This will prevent situations like the ones listed above from taking place, as guidelines would address such issues and inform the peacekeepers of what they should or should not do.

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4.2.   Peacekeeping mission mandate improvements

4.2.1. Additional freedom for peacekeepers to protect civilians

The mission mandate must be revised so that peacekeepers prioritise civilians above everything else and have the authority to use force to defend innocent lives if required. Moreover, peacekeepers should maintain regular contact with the UN Security Council, which should consider their comments. In the event of difficulties, such as the deaths in Rwanda, a new mission mandate should be developed, or soldiers should be permitted to assist civilians in whatever way they see fit. According to the UN Peacekeeping website, the number one goal of peacekeepers is to protect civilians. Based on that, peacekeepers should be able to carry out that goal as needed and within defined rules of engagement. The belief that beekeepers should be silent observers and use force in regions where a government is unstable does not permit that kind of silent vigilance. The mission mandate in South Sudan had similar issues, but with the difference that the UN had learned from its failures in Rwanda. The Blue Helmets were deployed in 2011, and their mission was to protect civilians and ensure that no human rights violations occurred.

Support humanitarian aid, oversee the peace agreement implementation process, and report violations of human rights laws. More specifically, the new resolution adopted in 1996 states advising and assisting the Government of the Republic of South Sudan, including military and police at national and local levels as appropriate, in fulfilling its responsibility to protect civilians, in compliance with international humanitarian, human rights, and refugee law. Although more detailed, it still has similar issues, as it does not provide peacekeepers with guidance on how to enforce and what advising entails. This, in part, led to the 2013 civil war, which peacekeepers could not prevent due to a lack of communication. After the Civil War broke out, the UN Security Council adopted a new resolution 2155, which was rare as they usually do not adopt new resolutions. This stated that peacekeepers may use "all necessary means" to protect civilians. Additionally, "the primary responsibility to protect civilians within its territory and subject to its jurisdiction, including from potential crimes against humanity and war crimes". While better than previous mission mandates like the one in Rwanda, the peacekeepers themselves were again unclear of what their role was and what "all necessary means" included. They often chose to follow the do no harm doctrine, which is part of the larger organising principles of the Peacekeepers and their mission mandates, and this led to civilians being raped and killed. The firsthand accounts of the actions of Blue Helmets have been conflicting. Rachel Mayikan, an English teacher in South Sudan, described the effectiveness of the peacekeepers in protecting civilians, stating that "It is the U.N. now who can protect us; last time they said they were not ready, but this time, they have to be" (Amer, 2024).

She alluded to stories that peacekeepers opted not to participate in violence and escaped, frequently abandoning the civilians they were intended to protect, resulting in the slaughter of

men and the rape of women. UN Peacekeepers were mandated to protect civilians within their territory, which left thousands of the most vulnerable civilians to be killed. Most peacekeepers often did not travel far outside of these territories, and civilians had very few means to get to these protected areas, leaving them vulnerable. The issue is that peacekeepers were unable to protect those who needed it most. If additional latitude had been given to the peacekeepers, more South Sudanese citizens may have been saved; however, 2 million were left without any form of protection. This mission mandate had similar shortcomings to the one in Rwanda, as it again was not defined. This left UN peacekeepers unclear about what they could or could not do and limited their actions mostly to within the territory they established, severely limiting the influence and protection of the peacekeepers. This led to the issue of how they would effectively protect and assist in forming a new government. Mission mandates must explicitly spell out what peacekeepers are allowed and not allowed to do and offer a framework for adaptability as circumstances change. Regular communication between UN officials and peacekeeping personnel would also help others not directly involved in the mission to comprehend the changes. This would prevent mandates that are outdated and unfit for the current situation of the mission or state of the country.

4.2.2. The Do-No-Harm policy must not hinder missions

The do-no-harm policy is also constraining peacekeeping missions. While UN blue helmets are designed to maintain and safeguard the peace, this is occasionally carried too far, as seen in Rwanda and South Sudan. In Rwanda, the mission mandate and the do-no-harm doctrine combined to prevent peacekeepers from becoming directly involved in protecting citizens, leading to the Tutsi having little protection, as mentioned in "Shaking Hands with The Devil" by Dallaire (2009). The Pentagon… estimated 8,000-10,000 Rwandans were being killed each day. The conditions worsen over time, leaving thousands to die due to the withdrawal of the UN, as they were instructed to leave, as they were not allowed to stop the genocide, as this interfered with the do-no-harm policy. This led to the citizens losing what little protection they had, and it became a slaughter. According to Dallaire, "There was an increase of corpse-eating dogs that we shot on sight as well as rats". These are just some of the brutal consequences witnessed by Roméo Dallaire. Friends turned against one another, causing distrust and fear among residents (Dorn, 2004).

In South Sudan, peacekeepers were also unable to prevent violence because of this doctrine, as protecting civilians would put them in a dangerous position where violence may occur. If the UN's mission is to protect civilians truly, the "do no harm" doctrine should be secondary to the goal of protecting civilians. In South Sudan, the "do no harm" doctrine has caused civilians to become vulnerable. Independent reports have found that bad leadership, as well as the avoidance of conflict, have led to the deaths of hundreds of citizens in South Sudan. The UN cited the third principle of peacekeeping to be "Non-use of force except in self-defence and defence of the mandate" (Kirk et al., 2024). The issue in South Sudan is that peacekeepers did not interfere when crimes were committed, enabling human rights rules to

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be breached and causing further suffering rather than preventing it. The UN must authorise troops to take more severe measures to protect civilians, which may result in bloodshed, but is better for the well-being of the people of that nation and, in the long term, the country's stability. As well as authorising additional troops if needed.

4.2.3.   The Chain of command must be more informed and involved

The chain of command and collaboration must be strengthened. More regular information should be sent to higher-ranking UN peacekeepers and their supervisors, allowing for greater openness when it comes to difficulties and how to handle them. Civilians should be more involved in operations since no peacekeeper can fully comprehend the culture of the country they are in, potentially leading to misunderstandings and blunders. Allowing civilians to participate in the mission by providing updates and taking part in essential conversations may lead to safer and more effective peacekeeping missions. By allowing UN Blue Helmets to remain in a country until it is deemed sufficiently stable and self-sufficient, UN goals are more likely to be realised. This can be seen in the South Sudan mission, where the presence of Peacekeepers yielded positive results, as they had a favourable influence on the South Sudanese economy. Analysis revealed that a 10% increase in troop strength enabled the production of an additional 600 tons of crops. This means that increasing the number of peacekeeping troops in South Sudan would boost food production, enabling more citizens to be fed while helping to stabilise the different regions (Caruso et al., 2017).

The UN peacekeeping force in South Sudan saved and protected thousands of lives, even though the 2013 civil war could not be prevented. The protection of civilians should be the utmost priority, and, in the future, there should be a new rule allowing peacekeepers to use more force to protect civilians, as in both South Sudan and Rwanda, the peacekeepers often did not want to use any force, resulting in unnecessary deaths. Additional peacekeepers would help ensure greater stability and civilian protection in South Sudan. Had they deployed more troops in 2011, the 2013 civil war might have been avoided. However, with limited forces and unclear mission directives, South Sudan experienced another civil war. It should be emphasised that the following enhancements are based on data and outcomes from current and previous UN missions, which are incredibly complex, and each mission may contain events, data, or other components that are not available to the public.

5.   Conclusion

The case studies of Rwanda and South Sudan highlight the pressing need for comprehensive reform in the deployment and organisation of peacekeeping operations globally. While there have been instances of success in peacekeepers fulfilling their mandates—such as facilitating ceasefires or protecting vulnerable populations—the complexities of these conflicts often hinder their effectiveness. Inflexible mission mandates, frequently dictated by political considerations rather than the ground realities, can severely limit peacekeepers' ability to

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respond swiftly and appropriately to evolving circumstances on the ground. Moreover, the concept of "do no harm" is often poorly interpreted and executed, leading to unintended consequences that exacerbate conflicts rather than alleviate them. For example, ineffective or absent communication between peacekeeping forces, local authorities, and the communities they serve can create mistrust, escalate tensions, and sometimes lead to tragic losses among civilians. In Rwanda, this lack of timely and clear communication contributed to the inability of peacekeepers to prevent the genocide despite being present in the country.

Although peacekeeping has the potential to function as a highly effective instrument for reestablishing stability and maintaining peace, its overall efficiency is continually undermined by current deployment procedures, which are often bogged down by bureaucratic constraints and a lack of adaptive strategies to the dynamic nature of conflict. The operational challenges faced by peacekeepers in South Sudan, for instance, illustrate how logistical issues and insufficient training in conflict-sensitive approaches can hinder their mission objectives. To address these multifaceted challenges associated with increasingly complex conflicts, future peacekeeping missions must prioritise flexibility in their mandates and invest in enhanced training and resources for their personnel. This includes fostering better communication strategies, encouraging local engagement, and adapting operational frameworks that allow for a more humanitarian and decisive response to crises. Only through such reforms can peacekeeping operations hope to fulfil their essential role in restoring order and building lasting peace in war-torn regions.

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