

Conditions for Effective UN Peacekeeping: A Comparative Case Study of Namibia, Mozambique, Rwanda, and Somalia

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Abstract. Since the first deployment of military observers by the United Nations in 1948, peacekeeping operations have gradually developed into an important means for the United Nations to intervene in international conflicts and maintain peace. However, their effectiveness has long been questioned by the international community. Focusing on the core question of whether UN peacekeeping operations are effective, this paper adopts a comparative case study method to explore the key factors affecting the effectiveness of peacekeeping operations by analyzing four typical cases: Namibia, Mozambique, Rwanda, and Somalia. The study finds that UN peacekeeping has positive results under certain conditions, such as assisting in political transitions, promoting democratic elections, and rebuilding national governance systems. In the cases of Namibia and Mozambique, peacekeeping missions have been relatively successful with clear mandates, cooperation from the host countries, and support from the international community. The failures in Rwanda and Somalia highlight the constraints on mission effectiveness due to inadequate mandates, lack of cooperation, and lack of external support. The comprehensive analysis shows that the effectiveness of UN peacekeeping operations is highly dependent, and their success is based on the coordination of three core elements: the clarity and operability of the mandate, the cooperative attitude and political will of the host country, and continuous international support and resource provision. Finally, this paper suggests that in the future, the United Nations should further optimize the authorization mechanism of peacekeeping missions, enhance its response capabilities, and improve the efficiency of resource allocation under the framework of multilateral cooperation, so as to realize the transformation of peacekeeping operations from "formal deployment" to "substantive transformation."

Keywords: UN Peacekeeping, Effectiveness, Conflict Resolution, International Intervention, Comparative Case Study.

1. Introduction

Since the United Nations authorized the establishment of a Military Observer Group in its Resolution 50 (1948) to coordinate and oversee the implementation of the Israel-Arab ceasefire agreements, peacekeeping operations have emerged as a necessary development beyond the framework of the UN Charter. Over time, these operations have progressively expanded from surveillance-oriented, non-coercive measures to encompass humanitarian assistance and the establishment of political infrastructures, collectively referred to as "peace enforcement" missions. However, UN peacekeeping mandates remain highly controversial. On one hand, as the largest and most internationally represented intergovernmental organization in the world, the United Nations possesses international legal legitimacy, global representation, and coercive enforcement capabilities that are not available to other non-state actors. Undeniably, the United Nations plays an irreplaceable role in contemporary global governance. On the other hand, the effectiveness and coordination of its peacekeeping operations continue to be subjects of significant criticism, particularly in cases involving protracted conflicts, unclear mandates, or lack of local cooperation.

A growing body of literature has sought to evaluate the performance of UN peacekeeping missions from multiple perspectives, including mandate design, operational capacity, host-country engagement, and international political dynamics. Some scholars argue that peacekeeping missions are instrumental in reducing conflict recurrence and supporting post-conflict reconstruction, while others highlight persistent issues such as mission overstretch, lack of accountability, and dependence on

major power politics [1]. There remains no consensus on what constitutes “effectiveness” in peacekeeping, nor on how to measure it consistently across different contexts. This ambiguity has made comparative evaluation and theoretical refinement particularly challenging.

Against this backdrop, this thesis centers on the core research question of whether United Nations peacekeeping operations are effective, and under what conditions such effectiveness is most likely to be achieved. Employing comparative analysis and case study methodologies, it examines four representative missions—Namibia, Mozambique, Rwanda, and Somalia, to assess the conditions that influence mission outcomes. The analysis substantiates the argument that while UN peacekeeping operations can, to a certain extent, foster regional peace and stability, they impose significant demands on specific political, institutional, and environmental factors. By contrasting cases of relative success with those of notable failure, this study aims to clarify the prerequisites for effective peacekeeping and contribute to the ongoing debate on the UN’s role in conflict resolution.

2. The Foundations of UN Peacekeeping and Its Effectiveness

United Nations peacekeeping operations have served as a pivotal security mechanism within global governance since 1948, with their initial deployment commencing with the Security Council's dispatch of military observers to the Middle East. In the early phases of peacekeeping operations, the missions were frequently rendered rigid and stagnant due to the pervasive influence of the Cold War between the two superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union. In this context, the approach to peacekeeping began to shift toward resolving disputes through peaceful means. The first United Nations Emergency Force deployed during the 1956 Suez Crisis marked the inception of armed peacekeeping. Following the conclusion of the Cold War, the United Nations' peacekeeping operations experienced rapid expansion, with the nature of conflicts shifting from “inter-state friction” to “internal conflicts.” Consequently, peacekeeping missions have exhibited a multidimensional trajectory. In contemporary times, as domestic regimes undergo “peaceful evolution” across various nations, there has been a noticeable decline in the number of peacekeepers. However, new challenges persist, including interstate political divergences, financial constraints, and legitimacy crises.

The United Nations has articulated that its peacekeeping operations adhere to three fundamental principles: consent of the parties involved, impartiality, and the restriction of the use of force to self-defense or situations authorized by mandate. Nevertheless, despite the United Nations' professed adherence to the aforementioned fundamental principles, the actual attainment of successful peacekeeping remains debatable. For instance, Howard argues that the success or failure of UN peacekeeping operations hinges not solely on the achievement of military ceasefires, but more critically on whether “mandate implementation is ensured,” “organizational learning is manifested,” and “local realities are addressed.” In accordance with the document “Principles and Guidelines for United Nations Peacekeeping Operations,” the “effectiveness” of multidimensional peacekeeping missions is typically manifested in three dimensions: their ability to provide a secure environment, facilitate political dialogue, and rebuild national governance capabilities. Various criteria collectively form the academic benchmarks for assessing the effectiveness of peacekeeping operations, serving as the central foundation for subsequent case analysis and performance evaluation in this study. Therefore, evaluating the effectiveness of United Nations peacekeeping operations necessitates not only an assessment of the fulfillment of peacekeeping mandates but also a scrutiny of whether these operations genuinely contribute to sustained peace and assist in the restoration of essential political and governance functions within the local context.

3. Successful UN Peacekeeping Operations

3.1. Case One: Namibia

Namibia, having once been a German colony, was placed under South African provisional trusteeship following Germany's defeat in World War I, enduring the dual oppression of German

genocide and South African colonial rule. In this context, the United Nations adopted Security Council Resolution 435, which reaffirmed that Walvis Bay is an integral part of Namibia [2]. However, due to the linkage policy implemented by the United States during the Cold War, peacekeeping operations were rendered unfeasible between 1980 and 1988. Ultimately, the Geneva Accord, Brazzaville Agreement, and the Tripartite Agreement were signed by the end of 1988, culminating in the formal cessation of hostilities on April 1st of the following year. The central objective of the mission is to oversee the ceasefire, ensure the withdrawal of South African armed forces, guarantee the establishment and consolidation of a democratic regime in Namibia, and facilitate its transition towards democratization [3]. Thus, UNTAG is often hailed as the first major UN operation endowed with a robust civil mandate, and the inaugural successful instance of multidimensional UN peacekeeping [4].

The effectiveness of the Namibian peacekeeping case lies in the design of its political transition, wherein the United Nations, by meticulously crafting mechanisms for detailed elections, repatriation, legal reform, and power transfer, ensured the fairness and freedom of elections and facilitated Namibia's smooth transition to constitutional drafting and sovereign independence. According to statistical data, under the supervision of UNTAG, over ninety-seven percent of voters exercised their right to vote, thereby ensuring the full realization of their fundamental democratic rights [5]. As of today, Namibia's democratic governance continues to exhibit the continuity of a multiparty democratic system, unequivocally demonstrating the success of United Nations peacekeeping operations.

3.2. Case Two: Mozambique

Mozambique also stands as one of the exemplary cases of successful UN peacekeeping operations. Since achieving independence, Mozambique has experienced a prolonged internal conflict, primarily manifested in the protracted confrontation between the ruling party FRELIMO and the anti-government armed group RENAMO. As the ruling party was aligned with the Soviet Union, its socialist cultural policies were fundamentally incompatible with Mozambique's religious and cultural traditions, leading to frequent conflicts and societal fragmentation. Under the mediation of the Italian ecclesial organization Sant'Egidio, RENAMO and FRELIMO reached the Rome General Peace Accords in 1992, which mandated an end to hostilities, the organization of elections, and the reform towards a multiparty system [6]. On this basis, the Security Council adopted Resolution 797, formally establishing UNOMOZ to oversee the ceasefire, restructure the armed forces, and facilitate nationwide elections.

The effectiveness of the Mozambican peacekeeping case lies in, on one hand, the successful implementation of ceasefire and disarmament, as well as the resettlement of refugees; on the other hand, the successful conduct of national elections within Mozambique, allowing both FRELIMO and RENAMO to participate in the national assembly elections, thereby achieving a peaceful transition of power [7]. It is noteworthy that the Mozambican peacekeeping case does not rely on robust military intervention by the United Nations but instead employs minimal intervention based on consensus-building.

3.3. Summary of Success Factors

The successful peacekeeping missions in Namibia and Mozambique regarded as two of the most exemplary cases in United Nations peacekeeping operations. Although the two countries possess distinct political, economic, and cultural contexts, numerous commonalities can still be discerned within their respective paths to success. Firstly, as host countries of peacekeeping missions, both Namibia and Mozambique have, at different historical junctures, either actively consented to or passively acquiesced in to United Nations interventions and support. Although numerous controversies and divergences have arisen during this process, both parties generally acknowledge the leading role of the United Nations therein. Enhancement of the level of coordination between the two parties contributes to the implementation and enforcement of peacekeeping missions, including

humanitarian assistance, organization of domestic elections, and various measures aimed at maintaining political stability within both nations. Secondly, the United Nations Security Council has adopted clear mandates for its missions. Both the electoral supervision in Namibia and the demobilization and political reintegration in Mozambique were based on concrete and well-defined objectives within their respective peacekeeping missions. The Namibian peacekeeping operation was authorized under United Nations Security Council Resolution 435, with its core mandate focused on facilitating the withdrawal of South African forces and the organization of democratic elections [8]; conversely, the ONUMOZ operation in Mozambique was predicated upon a peace accord negotiated between belligerent parties, encompassing electoral processes, humanitarian assistance, and security sector reform [9]. These clear directives enabled the United Nations to concentrate its resources, minimize disruptions, and effectively implement its plans. Lastly, a stable international environment is indispensable. Even during the Cold War, major powers did not strongly oppose the implementation of peacekeeping missions in Namibia and Mozambique. The principal members of the Security Council maintained a largely consistent political stance, and the international community demonstrated a tolerant, if not supportive, attitude towards the peacekeeping process. This relatively supportive external environment furnishes the United Nations with favorable external conditions for the execution of peacekeeping missions.

Consequently, the successful experiences of Namibia and Mozambique in peacekeeping demonstrate that the tangible achievements of UN peacekeeping operations often hinge on a clear mandate and limited intervention by the UN, the host country's cooperation, and the alignment of international consensus. The absence of any of these factors would be insufficient, collectively forming the foundation of "conditional success."

4. Failures and Limitations

4.1. Case One: Rwanda

The failure of the 1994 Rwandan peacekeeping mission is widely regarded as one of the most severe humanitarian setbacks in the history of the United Nations. In the early 1990s, the Hutu-dominated Rwandan government engaged in protracted civil conflict with the opposition armed forces, predominantly composed of the Tutsi ethnic group, resulting in domestic social turmoil and severe hardship for the populace. The Arusha Accords, signed in 1993, were designed to achieve a cessation of hostilities and the establishment of a power-sharing arrangement. Although the agreement nominally secured a ceasefire, it failed to alleviate the deep-seated ethnic animosities between the two communities. The United Nations adopted United Nations Security Council Resolution 872 in conjunction with the treaty and established the United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda (UNAMIR). However, due to the refusal of cooperation within Rwanda for peacekeeping operations, coupled with limited resources and ambiguous mandates, the two ethnic groups were deeply affected by racial hatred, leading to a catastrophic genocide in April 1994. This resulted in approximately 800,000 deaths over a period of three months, exerting an explosive impact on the international community.

The international community has since expressed strong disapproval of the UN's failure in Rwanda, viewing it as a catastrophic lapse in peacekeeping responsibility. Dallaire recounts that, despite clear indications of impending ethnic violence as early as 1993, the United Nations opted to dispatch a peacekeeping force characterized by "insufficient armament and inadequate manpower [10]."

4.2. Case Two: Somalia

Following the outbreak of the Somali Civil War, the central authority rapidly disintegrated, plunging the nation into a severe period of turmoil. The United Nations adopted Security Council Resolution 751 in 1992, which established the United Nations Operation in Somalia (UNOSOM I). Initially, this resolution primarily emphasized supervisory functions, limited to humanitarian coordination assistance and urging an end to the civil war. However, as the internal conflict in Somalia

intensified, UNOSOM I proved incapable of managing the chaotic situation. Consequently, in 1993, the United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 814, which called for an expansion of the original objectives and mandated the use of all necessary means to compel an end to the hostilities.

Nevertheless, this early attempt at UN-led state-building ultimately failed. The primary reason lies in the United Nations' neglect of the internal realities of Somalia, resulting in an overly rigid application of external models that disregard the nation's unique historical and cultural characteristics. By imposing Western democratic systems onto countries whose politics, economy, and ideology are not yet capable of sustaining the development of liberal democracy, the peacekeeping operations were widely resisted in Somalia. Simultaneously, the participating nations in this peacekeeping mission failed to reach a consensus. Following the "Black Hawk Down incident" in 1993, multiple nations announced troop withdrawals, leading to a rapid depletion of resources for UNOSOM II. This incident also stripped the UN of its perceived neutrality, exposing it as an extension of U.S. military will, which further led to the Somali people losing confidence in United Nations peacekeeping operations.

4.3. Summary of Failure Factors

The failures of Somalia and Rwanda were not fortuitous; rather, they stemmed from the absence of several critical prerequisites. Firstly, the support of the host country is undoubtedly of paramount importance. In comparison to the peacekeeping operations in Namibia and Mozambique, Rwanda and Somalia exhibit an undeniably low level of support for such missions, which significantly impedes the effective implementation and deployment of peacekeeping forces. Simultaneously, due to the politically fragmented conditions within Somalia and Rwanda, the United Nations found it difficult to identify appropriate entry points for "political engagement," thereby increasing the probability of peacekeeping failures. Secondly, there is the issue of the authorization of United Nations peacekeeping forces. Somalia and Rwanda exhibit contrasting levels of mandate strength, with the former demonstrating a higher degree of authority, while the latter exhibits a relatively lower degree of empowerment. Due to the limited intervention authority of the Rwandan peacekeeping forces, they were unable to respond effectively to the genocide; meanwhile, the Somali peacekeeping forces, having overly idealistic objectives, failed to consistently implement their peacekeeping goals. Moreover, the influence of external factors is of paramount importance. Overall, the United Nations and major powers have maintained a passive attitude towards peacekeeping operations in Somalia and Rwanda, failing to provide an effective coordination mechanism and resource supply for these missions. These instances of mission failure furnish a crucial important cautionary examples for the evaluation of United Nations peacekeeping effectiveness.

5. Factors Influencing Effectiveness

Despite the disparate outcomes of UN peacekeeping operations across various regions, a comparative analysis of the missions discussed earlier reveals that their effectiveness hinges on the fulfillment of critical conditions. Firstly, it is imperative to delineate the clarity and boundaries of the United Nations' mandate. Vague task authorizations, unclear delineation of responsibilities, or discrepancies with actual circumstances can readily place peacekeeping forces in an awkward and passive position. In the Rwandan case, despite the deployment of UNAMIR, the Security Council's persistent refusal to grant it sufficient intervention authority rendered the force incapable of taking substantive action in the face of the genocide. In contrast, in Namibia, with clearly defined mission objectives and specific mandates, the peacekeeping force was able to systematically facilitate the political transition and electoral process. Authorization not only determines "what can be done" but also influences the decision to "dare to undertake" such actions.

Secondly, the level of host country cooperation and political framework of the host country. Successful cases typically exhibit a minimal framework of national order and political institutions, which, despite severe internal conflicts, still facilitate mechanisms for dialogue and negotiation. The

peace agreement in Mozambique provided legitimacy support for UN operations; in contrast, in Somalia, the United Nations was unable to establish cooperative counterparts and gradually came to be perceived as a participant in the conflict. Once local support is lost, peacekeeping operations will experience a comprehensive loss of control in terms of security, information, and public opinion.

Lastly, the international environment and resource supply. Even if the first two conditions are met, the eventual sustainability of a peacekeeping mission will be compromised if the Security Council and contributing countries fail to maintain consistent engagement. An illustrative example is the rapid withdrawal of U.S. support at a critical juncture in Rwanda, which led to near paralysis of peacekeeping functions. In contrast, the Namibia mission was supported by stable diplomatic coordination and sustained technical assistance, operating under the tacit approval of major powers, which enabled the peacekeeping mission to be carried out systematically and methodically.

In summary, the effectiveness of UN peacekeeping operations hinges significantly on the simultaneous fulfillment of these three conditions. UN authorization serves as a prerequisite, the host country's stance determines the extent of implementation, and international support is crucial for sustained engagement. These factors complement each other, and the loss of any one of them can lead to the failure of the entire mission.

6. Conclusion

This essay conducts a comparative analysis by examining cases from Namibia, Mozambique, Rwanda, and Somalia, centering on the core issue of whether UN peacekeeping operations are effective. A comprehensive analysis and research study have revealed that the efficacy of peacekeeping operations is not consistently stable; rather, it is contingent upon specific conditions, under which positive impacts may potentially be engendered. Therefore, this essay posits that under the conditions of clear authorization, host-country cooperation, and international support, UN peacekeeping is more likely to achieve political stability and humanitarian objectives, thereby maintaining regional stability and peace. These cases not only facilitate an understanding of the operational variations of peacekeeping mechanisms across diverse conflict types but also illustrate that the traditional model of "monitoring ceasefires" is increasingly inadequate for addressing the unique national circumstances of different countries in the contemporary era. Based on an analysis of failed cases in Somalia and Rwanda, this essay argues that, in future practice, the United Nations should continuously improve in terms of authorization limits, resource coordination, and cooperation mechanisms, aiming to enhance the speed of mission response and on-site execution capabilities. Meanwhile, the international community must reassess the distribution of responsibilities in multilateral interventions, ensuring that peacekeeping operations transcend mere formal deployments and genuinely contribute to the positive transformation of conflict-affected regions.

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