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Evaluating Peace Operations

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1

Evaluating Peace Operations

In the eyes of many, the lasting image from the peacekeeping efforts in Somalia is the body of a US soldier being dragged through the streets of Mogadishu. Almost two decades after peace operations were first deployed there, Somalia is still a failed state, lacking a central government that controls all of Somali territory. From this perspective, the two UN operations there, as well as the US mission, were miserable failures. At the same time, peacekeepers provided food and medical care to hundreds of thousands of internally displaced Somalis and no doubt saved countless lives. From that vantage point, the peace operations were successful. What explains the great divergence in assessment? Clearly, much depends on the standards used to evaluate peace missions, as well as the evidence used to make judgments according to those standards.

Determining what constitutes success or failure in peace operations is a prerequisite for building knowledge about the factors associated with those conditions and for making good policy choices. Despite the centrality of these concerns, the literature on peacekeeping and related peace missions is not well developed in this respect. An abundance of attention has been given to the inputs (or independent variables) in peace operation studies, and considerably less (if any at all) is given to the outcomes (or dependent variables); that is, most studies focus on the factors thought to produce success rather than devoting attention to the criteria used to assess that success.

In this book, we take a step back and consider how peace operations are evaluated. Peace operations refer to the range of peace missions (traditional peacekeeping, robust peacekeeping, peacebuilding, peace

observation) performed by troops in operations organized by international organizations, regional organizations, or multinational groupings. Traditional military operations are not included here.

This assessment exercise is not as obvious as it may first seem. There are numerous decisions about choosing standards for success, depending on what one values in terms of outcomes for the peace operation. In the Somalia example above, a desire for human security and the preservation of life would lead to a different conclusion than if order and government authority were higher-order preferences. Most often, peace missions are designed to achieve multiple goals reflecting different value dimensions. Even with a clear set of preferences, it is sometimes difficult to determine whether the prescribed goals have been achieved. If humanitarian goals are paramount, should success be measured by the number of lives saved or the number of lives lost? Should these standards be qualified by the scope of the conflict or problem encountered? Does losing 1,000 lives among 1 million refugees constitute a success, whereas losing the same number when only 10,000 were at risk is a failure? Whichever operational standard is chosen, there are practical issues involved in gaining accurate information in a timely fashion about the effects of the peace operation; without that, theoretical conclusions and policy recommendations are impossible.

Our book initially raises problems associated with evaluating peace operation success. Yet the mere presentation of all the choices and difficulties involved is insufficient, as scholars and policymakers need some guidelines and solutions to understand peace operations, not merely a list of the barriers to that goal. Accordingly, we provide a decisionmaking template for assessing peace operation success that includes different goals or objectives on which operations may be judged, key questions to ask about the achievement of those goals and objectives, and operational indicators that may be used as evidence in answering those questions. We also discuss advantages and disadvantages associated with those questions and indicators as tools of scholarly and policymaking analysis. We do not provide a single standard and accompanying indicator of peace operation success, and indeed that is an illusory quest in any case. We do, however, provide the bases upon which analysts can choose, with concern for both validity and ambiguity, the best approaches to understanding peace operation success.

In this chapter we discuss the theory and policy issues addressed in this book. We specify the value our efforts add to the theory and policy-oriented research completed to date, setting the stage for the approach

and subsequent analysis taken in the book. The concluding section provides an overview of the chapters to follow.

Theoretical Importance

When one thinks of the theoretical contributions of a given scholarly study, the focus is typically on the independent or predictor variables. Innovations in models generally come from new variables or new configurations of old variables used to explain a phenomenon under scrutiny. Examples from analyses of peacekeeping include the goals of a mission, logistics, extent of host country cooperation, type of conflict and, more generally, various features of the conflict environment. Too often, what is to be explained is simply assumed or largely ignored once specified. Yet for theoretical development, and for policymaking, the dependent variable is equally important as those factors posited to account for its variation.

Many dependent variables are relatively straightforward and reflect strong scholarly consensus. For example, explaining the outbreak of interstate war is based on the shared understanding of what constitutes such a phenomenon, the general acceptance of indicators, and accompanying data to reflect those indicators. Although debate occurs over the thresholds for the onset of war (e.g., How many battle deaths constitute war?), these disagreements are relatively narrow within broad parameters of agreement about the war phenomenon (for example, see Sarkees and Wayman, 2010; Gleditsch et al., 2002). Such is not the case with peace operation success or failure, perhaps because research on this subject is less developed and more recent than war studies (and indeed war itself), which have a long and storied history. Peace operations have evolved significantly over the past several decades—in terms of the complexity of mandates, organization of forces, and technical logistics—and therefore it is difficult to compare traditional operations (e.g., the United Nations Emergency Force [UNEF I] after the Suez Crisis) with more recent peacebuilding operations (e.g., NATO's Kosovo Force [KFOR]). For these and other reasons, there is a lack of consensus on what peace operation success means.

Specifying what constitutes peace operation success is a prerequisite for theoretical development. If success is defined solely in terms of violent conflict (such as limiting or ending war), models with certain sets of factors may be constructed; for example, independent variables

may include the assets and organization of the peace force and the combatants or the conditions conducive to a cease-fire. Yet one might expect that a very different set of factors or a different process is at work if peace operation success means more than stopping conflict, but includes improvement in the lives of the local population. In that case, ethnic fragmentation and socioeconomic variables may become part of the explanatory story. Thus, theorizing about peace operation success requires a clear definition of that term, and as we note in subsequent chapters, there are several possible conceptual schematics that can be adopted.

Even with a clear conceptualization of peace operation success, precise indicators of that success are needed. In our view, theory is not merely a collection of hunches, hypotheses, or normative preferences, but a causally specified relationship that has received some empirical confirmation. This necessitates that the phenomenon to be explained has observable manifestations that can be measured and compared across cases; they need not be quantifiable, but they must be evident to the analyses and capable of systematic evaluation and replication.

Theory-inspired research depends on clear conceptualization and measurement of peace operations, which is an aspiration of many scholars (see Druckman and Stern, 1997; Paris, 2000). Clarity facilitates the assessment of various theories, both mid-range (e.g., expected utility theory versus prospect theory) and broad-based (e.g., realism versus liberalism), that may be used to describe and explain the impact of peace operations. It depends also on carefully constructed research designs that recognize time lags between independent and dependent variables as well as a variety of other considerations discussed below. Ultimately, few if any of the "open questions and directions for future research" (Fortna and Howard, 2008) in the peacekeeping literature can be addressed without clear conceptualization and measures of success and failure.

Policy Importance

Peacekeeping research has been largely atheoretical or has focused on the practical concern with developing strategies for conflict management and resolution, referred to by some analysts as "problem-solving theory" (Bellamy, 2004; see also Paris, 2000). Authors of numerous books and articles, scholars or practitioners, have emphasized the conditions for

peace operation success; the goal has been to identify what worked, rather than how or why it worked (e.g., Otunnu and Doyle, 1998). Similarly, the United Nations and many national militaries include "best practices" or "lessons learned" units. These agencies examine past practice in selected peace operations and seek to discern what went right or wrong, with an eye to changing policy to prevent a repeat of failures. In either case, analysts have sought to understand what makes for peace operation success in order to improve future operations.

Lessons about peace operation success depend fundamentally on the yardstick(s) used to assess that success. First, vague or poorly specified standards for success will produce findings or lessons that are flawed or unusable; if we do not know what constitutes success, it will be difficult to ascertain what conditions produce that success. Second, studies that use different benchmarks for success may reach different or even opposite conclusions. For example, allowing peacekeepers to use offensive military tactics, or permissive rules of engagement, could help secure areas and prevent human rights abuses (two standards of success) but increase civilian casualties (another element of success or failure) in the process. Conclusions drawn on only one set of standards will lead policymakers to adopt certain policies without being aware of the full consequences of those policies. Thus, using different standards of success—within and across operations—is appropriate because decisionmakers vary in their goals. Nevertheless, it is more often the demands for quick appraisals and bureaucratic accountability that lead decisionmakers to look at some success standards while ignoring others.

A broader and more complete specification of success will help avoid what are unintended or unanticipated consequences (see Aoi et al., 2007). Such consequences as sexual abuse and the spread of disease often occur because peace operations are part of larger peacebuilding projects. Another unintended consequence of peace operations is slow economic recovery, the result in part of the amount of attention devoted to security matters. Third, and at the same time, comparability of standards carries with it some costs. Not all peace missions should be evaluated by the same criteria. Peace operations deployed to civil wars might require different standards than those sent to interstate conflicts (Howard, 2008); more narrowly, different tasks given to peacekeepers will require specific measures or indicators to detect success. A one-size-fits-all approach may lead analysts to miss successes or failures that are specific to the kinds of missions performed or the contexts in which missions operate.

The previous discussion assumed a scenario in which analysts consider a past peace operation and then draw conclusions that will be used in the planning and execution of future operations. This is certainly a valid application and should be encouraged. Yet policymakers are often called upon to evaluate operations and make policy adjustments in real time during an extant operation. In these instances, the goal is not to understand success and failure for future planning but to ensure success in the present operation so that it does not become a "lesson learned" on failure for the future. In these cases, standards for success and failure are critical to peace operation commanders and the policymakers who have authority over them. If a cease-fire line is not holding, then changes need to be made. Having specific standards for peace operation success permits frequent assessments during the operation and adaptations over the course of the mission.

A proper specification of peace operation success thus yields a number of policymaking benefits. First, it is a prerequisite for valid inferences about what conditions are associated with success. Second, it can provide a broader, multifaceted assessment of peace operations. Third, it provides the necessary baseline upon which to make real-time judgments and accompanying policy changes. Of course, a template for peace operation success is not without its risks. Ken Menkhaus (2003) cautions against a scenario in which policymakers and military officials treat meeting benchmarks as an end in itself, a criticism that has been leveled at other public policy evaluation schemes, such as testing standards in the US education policy No Child Left Behind. Nevertheless, avoiding this trap merely requires that the standards be valid and meaningful. In education, tests must measure what students have learned, and in peace operations, success indicators must actually measure the outcomes and capture the values that policymakers regard as being paramount.

Bridging theory with practice is a goal of our analysis. By moving among questions regarding "what," "how," and "why," we hope to contribute to both the theoretical and applied literatures on peace operations. Both contributions turn on clear specification of the independent variables (process and context) and dependent variables (outcomes).

The Value Added to Current Approaches

There is an extensive literature on the conditions associated with peace operation success (for a comprehensive review of this literature, see

Diehl, 2008). This is not to say that the evaluation criteria are clear or valid, only that many scholars have pursued policy-oriented assessments of peace operations. One set of studies looks at whether peace operations have a positive impact, most notably whether they actually keep the peace or not. These studies focus attention on the dependent variable. Others include that assessment but also identify the correlates of success. These studies are more concerned with the independent variables. Both types of studies focus generally on the conditions for success rather than on the mechanisms responsible for the outcome (an exception is Fortna, 2008).

Although there is a significant knowledge base on peace operation success, we provide a number of improvements to address the limitations of those studies. Most analyses are not nuanced; they focus simply on whether peace operations in general have a positive effect. Our aim in this book is to provide a framework for guiding the research and practice on peace operations. We focus attention primarily on problems of evaluation (the measures or dependent variables) but also discuss aspects of the broader context within which peace operations occur (the influences or independent variables) as well as possible intervening or explanatory variables.

First of all, our work provides clear standards for assessing peace operation success. In the majority of extant works, there is an absence of indicators and often a lack of any conceptual specification of success behind them. Analysts discuss problems that peace operations encountered—for example, problems in unit coordination across a multinational force—and then proceed to offer solutions to those problems. In such circumstances, there is no standard upon which to judge how such concerns represent a problem for the mission, much less a basis to calibrate the magnitude of the difficulties. Authors seem to assume that success or failure is self-evident, or at the very least do not reveal the thought processes about those benchmarks that led to the conclusions in the study.

Beyond conceptual standards for peace operation success, we also provide numerous operational indicators that correspond to those standards. Even when analysts identify a conceptual definition of success, the operational measurement of that definition is often lacking or is suboptimal. Peace operation success could be defined by the achievement of a working justice system or a functioning civil society. These can be reasonable standards for success, but such assessments must define what they mean in practice. What criteria are used to indicate that a civil soci-

ety is functioning? In the absence of clear criteria that can guide coding of diverse cases, the replicability standard for social science is not met. More importantly from a policymaking perspective, the conclusions drawn are likely to be imprecise, incorrect, biased, or all of the above.

Third, we construct indicators of success independently of the factors thought to influence the desired outcomes. Some studies confound the inputs with the outcomes: that is, analysts often confuse the elements needed for success with the measures of success themselves. For example, one might judge whether a peace operation was successful or not by reference to whether adequate resources were allocated to the mission and its personnel (e.g., USGAO, 2003). Yet the provision of resources is a possible determinant of success, not a measure of whether success occurred or not. Applied studies refer to "measures of progress," which are short-term or interim indicators of success. Nevertheless, factors such as the establishment of training regimens for local police or the support of local religious leaders may be prerequisites for success. They are not successful outcomes themselves, unless they are the stated goals of the mission.

Fourth, our framework is designed to strike an appropriate balance between drawing broadly applicable conclusions and context-specific appraisals. Many studies of peace operation effectiveness have been based on single cases (e.g., Ratner, 1995; Mays, 2002; Olonisakin, 2007), throwing into question the generalizability of any conclusions. Yet more importantly for our purposes, the standards for success are highly specific to the context and operation at hand. One could note that this might enhance the validity of the assessments because of a more nuanced rendering of context. Such information is useful for the peacekeepers that are deployed on the mission but less useful as lessons for future missions. Policy analyses of lessons learned are predicated on applying conclusions from one context to another. Case-specific standards or indicators inhibit the ability of policymakers to take what they learned from one operation and adapt that to a different context. From a scholarly standpoint, researchers must be able to construct some common standards and indicators of success in order to compare performance across missions and to draw generalizations. Case-specific benchmarks inhibit the empirical verification of propositions and theories about peace operations and thereby stifle the development of general knowledge and patterns. Peace operation research is already a cluster of trees, to use one metaphor, and without comparable cross-mission indicators, the forest will not be apparent.

Finally, our work offers a multidimensional conception of peace operation success. There is a tendency to look at peace operation success in terms of single dimensions, even if the conceptual and measurement bases are strong. Policymakers and the public often desire clear-cut assessments (Was the operation successful or not?), which tends to lead to a single test. For example, one indicator of peace operation success is whether the armed conflict was or was not renewed (e.g. Enterline and Kang, 2002; Jo, 2006). Yet peace operations have many effects, and it is rare that any operation is uniformly a success or a failure. Rather, there are high and low points across a number of dimensions—for example, disarmament, the negotiation progress, the implementation of agreements, the functioning of legal and economic systems, and the quality of life. Policymakers need to be aware of such variation, including unintended consequences, in order to plan, adapt, and assess the outcomes of sending a peace operation to a troubled spot in the world. For example, not factoring in the incidence of rape or other criminal acts committed by peacekeepers misses an important local impact of the operation and could lead planners to ignore such concerns in future operations.

The Next Steps

In the remaining chapters, we walk through a process of defining standards for peace operation success. Chapter 2 provides a process and decisionmaking template for assessing success in peace operations. It begins by discussing several key elements in this evaluation: (1) stakeholders, (2) time perspectives, (3) baselines for assessment, (4) "lumping," and (5) mission types. The chapter continues with a framework based on the specification of broad goals, development of key questions related to those goals, and measurable indicators that assist in answering those questions. This framework provides the basis for the analysis in the following chapters.

Regardless of specific mission, peace operations share some core goals. In Chapter 3, we examine the broad goals of violence abatement, conflict containment, and conflict settlement. Drawing from the scholarly and policymaking literatures, as well as our own analyses, we identify the key questions involved in success on these generic dimensions, which are key indicators of success, as well as the benefits and limitations of such indicators for scholarly and policymaking analysis. References to specific

peace operations are used as illustrations. We also consider general goals for the peacekeepers themselves in this chapter.

Chapter 4 follows the scheme of its predecessor but concentrates on more specific missions associated with peace operations, specifically those that extend beyond traditional monitoring and interposition functions. Many of these emerged in the late 1980s and early 1990s and include election monitoring, disarmament, demobilization, and the like. Most were extensions of traditional peacekeeping and still form the core of many peace operations. Chapter 5 goes beyond many of those "new missions" to encompass those tasks that often fall under the peacebuilding rubric (Barnett et al., 2007). They include, among others, those concerned with local governance, local security, and the rule of law. They are among the newest concerns for peace operations and require different types of assessment indicators.

Chapter 6 discusses the features of the conflict context or environment that influence the success of missions. These features concern the characteristics of the conflict, the capacity of country governments to manage conflicts, and aspects of the country's local populations that impinge on the ways these conflicts unfold. Special attention is paid to the extent to which these features are malleable. Peacekeepers are likely to have more influence on certain features (e.g., external involvement in the conflict, border permeability) than others (e.g., type of conflict, geography). Implications for success will be discussed in terms of the way these features of the environment interact with mission goals and operations.

Chapter 7 concludes our analysis with a consideration of how to integrate and apply all the goals and indicators outlined in the previous chapters to real-world cases. We review different approaches to this task and then offer applications of two of those approaches. One is an empirical application to the various peace operations that were deployed during and after the civil war in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The other is a more theoretical treatment specifying the interconnections between the different success dimensions and indicators, as success on one dimension may have implications for achievement of another set of goals, something that is ignored if one treats the different missions as independent.