3 The Evolution of Peace Operations
Learning Lessons and Creating Norms

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When Canadian Foreign Minister Lester B. Pearson won the 1957 Nobel Peace Prize for his role in proposing and supporting the UN's first peacekeeping force in 1956, he said in his acceptance speech (1957):

> The United Nations Emergency Force may have prevented a brush fire becoming an all-consuming blaze at the Suez last year, and it could do so again in similar circumstances in the future. We made at least a beginning then. If, on that foundation, we do not build something more permanent and stronger, we will once again have ignored realities, rejected opportunities, and betrayed our trust. Will we never learn?

It seems that the United Nations does learn, since over 70 peacekeeping missions have been created since the United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF) was established. Moreover, the character, capabilities, and roles of UN missions have expanded considerably. How exactly has UN peacekeeping evolved over time? What are the means and mechanisms for this evolution?

To answer these questions, the general steps for the creation of new practices and their solidification into norms (customs) can be applied to the peace operations (POs) of the United Nations. New practices are initially advocated by *norm entrepreneurs* and diffused through argument, example, inspiration, and action, especially by thought leaders who seek to improve existing practice. Their ideas gain greater salience when they are seen to solve a particular crisis or problem of the day, as was true when Pearson helped resolve the Suez Crisis of 1956 through the creation of the UN's first peacekeeping force. UNEF was a major step in the evolution of POs, building on the earlier peacekeeping missions that employed only unarmed observers.

Once a new innovation gains prominence and acceptance, it becomes institutionalized in bureaucratic practice, as did the notion of armed peacekeeping forces under the United Nations. The *norm cascade* usually results in the new norm becoming so natural that it is taken for granted and ceases to be identified as unusual or innovative (Howard and Dayal 2018). Thus,

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peacekeeping became established in practice, as did the word itself, which entered into the mainstream discourse in the late 1950s (though written hyphenated as peace-keeping for the following four decades).

Norm creation for ethical norms like peacekeeping usually starts with an idealized view about how things *ought to be*, based on generalized yet contextual assessments of what is right or wrong (good or bad), such as the contrast between a peaceful society practicing non-violent conflict resolution tools and a warmonger society immersed in constant tit-for-tat violence. Through peacekeeping, the international community has made it easier for conflicting parties to come to peace and utilize innovative tools to implement peace agreements, though the United Nations cannot force them to do so.

Ethical norm development requires the expression of conscience, and usually the assertion of principle over power, i.e., the "force of law over the law of force." It fosters higher moral standards over lower modes of behaviour. From ideals, ethical norms gain adherents and support due to their ideational attractiveness, as well as their obvious benefit (less death and destruction). Peacekeeping is an example of this, which shows an alternative and additional use for military forces internationally.

3.1 Military Forces Under International Control

Traditionally, the purpose of national militaries is to defend the territorial integrity and political independence of the nations they serve. In human history, nations faced with warring or threatening neighbours naturally sought additional security through alliances against that external threat. It was only with the emergence of international organizations (IOs) that such *collective defence* expanded to *collective security*. The commitment (on paper at least) was that all member states agree to help maintain peace, even against aggressors *within* the collective. This Wilsonian principle was central to the useful but ultimately ill-fated League of Nations, which only failed when Member States chose not to implement the League Covenant provisions to respond to the aggression by fascist and imperialistic governments in the 1930s. Collective security is even more central to the United Nations, which has performed much better than its predecessor, though still far from perfect.

The UN Charter recognizes not only the interests and possible contributions of each Member State, but it also emphasizes the special position that the great powers demanded for themselves in the cooperative system created in 1945. Therefore, UN action could not jeopardize the major interests of the major powers, i.e., the P5 or Permanent Five members of the Security Council (Howard and Dayal 2018). This now looks like a major historical mistake.

In a major conceptual innovation, Chapter VII of the UN Charter envisioned that Member States would place their armed forces at the service of the United Nations to maintain and enforce international peace and security. The Security Council, which was given primary responsibility in this sphere, was equipped with a Military Staff Committee to oversee the use of these

forces. However, this unifying idea failed to survive a more potent and divisive force: the Cold War between communist and capitalist nations, which prevented UN members from effectively using such arrangements. The result is that today, the United Nations is without the pledged armed forces envisioned in the UN Charter for enforcement purposes.

After World War II, some governments and diplomats, such as Canada and its Foreign Minister Lester B. Pearson, were still seeking to implement the Charter's provisions for standby military contributions to enforce UN decisions. Units within the Canadian military were pledged in the late 1940s to the United Nations and saw UN action in the Korean War, 1950–53, which was the first instance in world history where a collective security organization repelled aggression using military force. Pearson also chaired UN meetings for the establishment of standby UN forces to act under Chapter VII, though such proposals were never implemented.

Peacekeeping evolved from these efforts, though it was more accidental than pre-planned. Ironically, it was not the divided Security Council that gained control of UN forces in the field; it was the UN Secretary-General (UNSG) who assumed operational control (OPCON in military parlance) of UN peacekeeping forces. Over time, these forces expanded to reach the maximum deployment in 2016 of 108,000 uniformed personnel in conflict zones under the UNSG OPCON, more than any national leader at the time, including the US President. But the normative emergence and acceptance by all states of peacekeeping forces did not come solely through deliberate planning. The quirks of fate played a role, with nation-states accepting the necessity of UNSG control because there was no better alternative under the circumstances that arose in the decades after World War II.

3.2 The Evolution of Peacekeeping Norms (Dorn 2011)

UNSG Dag Hammarskjöld is commonly credited with the expression: "peacekeeping is not a job for soldiers, but only soldiers could do it." But the idea that soldiers could be used to keep the peace had important precedents. The League of Nations had carried out a half-dozen peacekeeping-like operations. For instance, League soldiers provided stability during elections in the highly industrialized Saar region that the League of Nations governed for 15 years from 1920 until the inhabitants voted to join Germany in 1935. Despite the League experience, the concept of peacekeeping operations (PKOs) was, surprisingly, not included in the UN Charter. But it continued and expanded in practice.

Experiencing both successes and failures, UN peacekeeping has evolved considerably over time. However, the term "peacekeeping" is more identified with the older (traditional) types of missions that emerged soon after World War II. In the 2010s, the United Nations adopted the term POs to encompass both PKOs and special political missions (SPMs). The latter are usually smaller and do not include armed military forces.

The mandates of PKOs have become more complex. Over the decades, conflicting parties and the UN Security Council have generally given peacekeepers more access, more responsibilities, and pledged more cooperation, on paper at least. After the Cold War, there was a dramatic increase in the number of PKOs, as well as an expansion in the mandates. In the 1990s, for instance, the number of new missions was double the number created in the previous four decades since the first mission in 1948.

Figures 3.1 and 3.2 are maps of the locations of missions up to 2000 and of the missions a quarter-century later.

A review of all UN PKOs shows they can logically be divided into four broad functional categories, corresponding roughly to four "generations" over the almost 80-year history. Each new category or generation brought new types of mandates and new functional capabilities as the normative expectations around peacekeeping evolved and broadened. This includes: broader monitoring objectives, larger and better-armed forces, the employment of more advanced technologies, the rise of "peacekeeping-intelligence" (PKI), explicit mandates regarding the Protection of Civilians (POC), robust combat operations for peace enforcement, numerous Women Peace and Security (WPS) initiatives, and policies around how to interact with and limit the use of child soldiers.

During this historical and functional evolution, each generation of operation created or developed a new norm and expanded the level of responsibility from the previous generation or type, though the capacity in the field (or at UN headquarters) was not often commiserate with the requirements or the expanded mandates. Constructivist norm theorists would reason that each substantive change resulted from the *intersubjective* evolution of the underlying norms (e.g., people's common understandings of how PKOs should function). This does not mean simply that older types of mandates and missions were no longer possible, but the new missions usually had expanded functions as people expected more. The simpler, older missions became the minority as new types of missions evolved.

3.3 Four-Generations Model

As peacekeeping was becoming established, the UN's Department of Public Information (c. 1960) produced a poster that well described the first generation of UN operations:

> UN OBSERVERS. Their beat—no man's land. Their job—to get the facts straight. A frontier incident, an outbreak of fighting … Which nation is responsible, whose story is true? The UN must know. So its peace patrols keep vigil to prevent flare-ups, supervise truces, investigate and report. Already this vital work has helped to end bloodshed, bringing a promise of peace to millions of people.

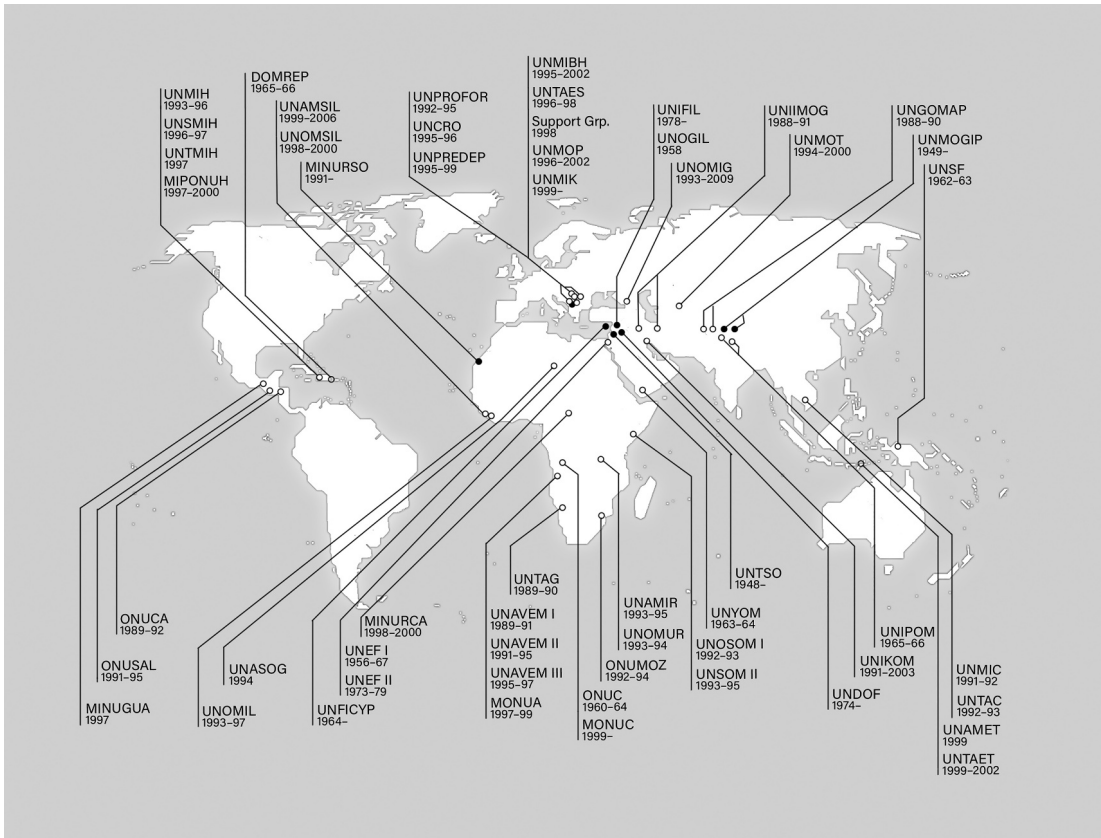

Figure 3.1 Map of UN peacekeeping missions started in the twentieth century.

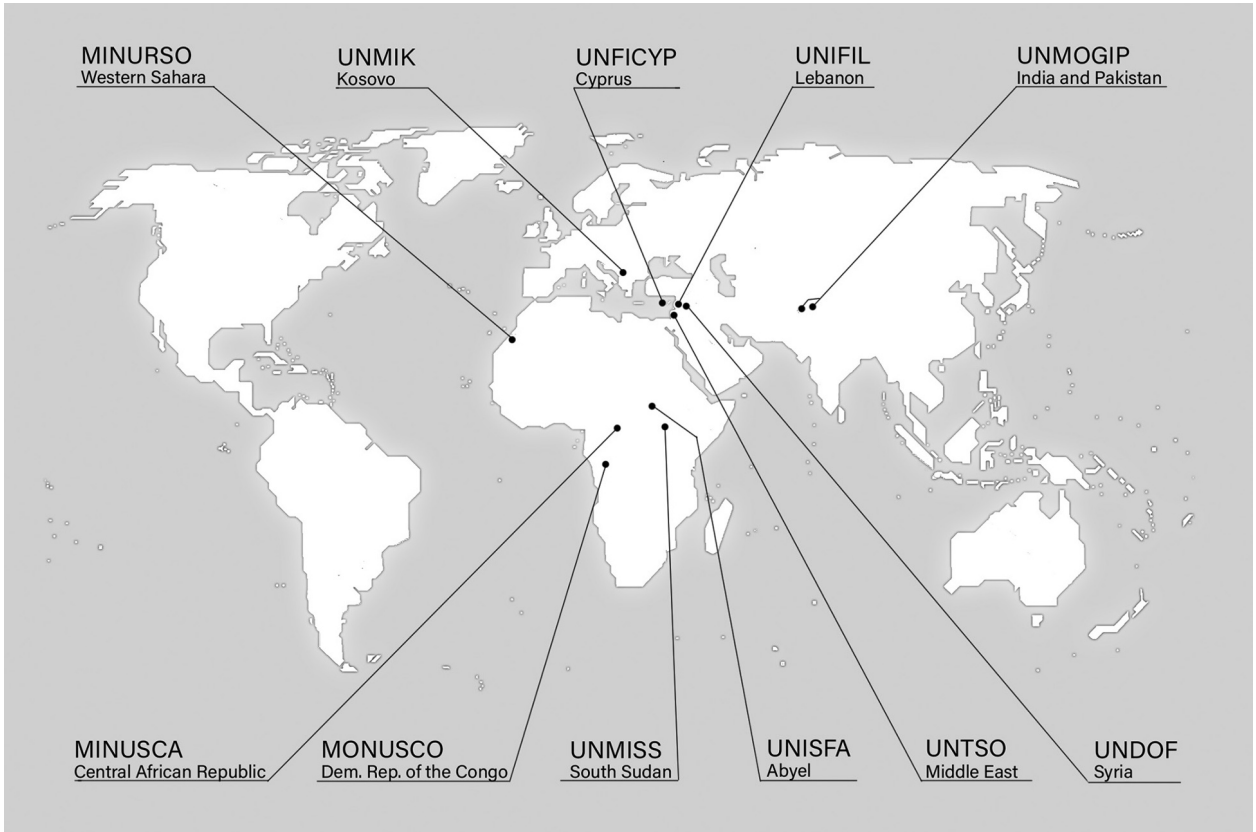

Figure 3.2 Map showing UN peacekeeping operations in 2025.

(*Sources:* United Nations, 2025.)

This quote characterized the function of "observer missions." The primary purpose of such missions was, and still is, to observe and report on the deployments and activities of the armed forces of two or more conflicting states, usually to verify compliance with ceasefire agreements negotiated between states with UN mediation. Sometimes the mission's name, as well as mandate, included the ambitious term "supervision," but conditions rarely put these UN operations in such an elevated position over the parties. The unarmed UN observers on the ground, however, have opportunities to help de-escalate and contain violence. They attempt to influence parties to quell violence using advice, aid, investigation, and mediation. They also operate as an international "trigger" function, bringing violations that threaten international peace and security to the attention of the UN Security Council (UNSC) and the world more generally. The first official UN PKO, which is still functioning, is the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO).

UNTSO was created by the UN Security Council to oversee a ceasefire the Council had called for in May 1948 during the first Arab-Israeli War. The Swedish Count Folke Bernadotte was appointed as UN Mediator in Palestine at that time. To help him report on the observance of the ceasefire directly to the Council, UNTSO was created to provide military observers through an UNTSO Chief of Staff. Furthermore, to help the mediator and his small mission with political, logistical, and other matters, the UNSG appointed an able member of the UN Secretariat, Dr. Ralph Bunche, as an advisor and his personal representative.

When Bernadotte was killed by an extremist Israeli group called the Stern Gang, responsibility for UNTSO fell to Bunche (Bunche 1948). The mission's Chief of Staff then reported directly to Bunche, who was already reporting to the UNSG, unlike Bernadotte, who had reported directly to the UNSC. When Bunche left the mission, the Chief of Staff became the head of the mission but continued to report to the UN Secretariat in New York. This was an important and useful but accidental evolution. As much of the logistical support for UNTSO was obtained through the Secretariat in New York, the chains of command and support both went through the Secretariat, instead of directly to the UN Security Council. Hence, through this evolution, the Secretary-General gained authority over UN field missions and would appoint successive Chiefs of Staff, including Major-General E.L.M. "Tommy" Burns from Canada in 1954 (Burns 1962).

Having the Secretary-General hold responsibility for field missions also helped solve a major political problem that had plagued other early UN missions and commissions established by the Security Council after World War II, e.g., in Greece, Indonesia, Korea, and Palestine. These early missions were composed of and led by selected member states, often with a balance between states from the East and the West, i.e., communist and capitalist countries. The representatives on these early commissions would need to wait for instructions from their national capitals on how to vote or act, leading to a slow and often intractable decision-making process in the field. The effect was to

frustrate those serving on the missions, as Eastern and Western nations were mostly at odds, especially as they brought their Cold War disputes to the field operations (Wainhouse and Bechhoefer 1966). Having the UNSG oversee field missions helped to avoid this extreme politicization and polarization. Though the Secretariat was subject to Cold War pressures, it could act as a buffer for field operations. UN Headquarters in New York became the main venue for resolving political issues centrally rather than in each field location in isolation.

But the soldiers in observer missions were still contributed nationally and were unarmed. In the decade following the signing of the UN Charter, diplomat Lester B. Pearson and others had been calling for the implementation of the provisions of the UN Charter for armed standby military forces under the UN Security Council. Though countries like Canada earmarked specific forces for UN duty, the institutional mechanisms to employ such forces ground to a halt because of the East-West divide. Despite this, Canada explored with like-minded countries various ways to improve the enforcement power of the world organization.

When the Suez Crisis came crashing down on the United Nations—with the invasion of Egypt by Israel, followed quickly by further invading forces from France and the UK in late October 1956—Pearson saw a way to advance both the cause of creating UN forces and resolving the immediate crisis. In the early morning hours of 2 November 1956, he proposed "a truly international peace and police force … large enough to keep these borders at peace while a political settlement is being worked out" (Pearson 1956). He backed his proposal with a commitment that Canada would provide substantial forces to the operation.

The General Assembly (GA) had become seized with the Suez crisis after a referral from the Security Council under the "Uniting for Peace" formula (another UN innovation). Under the Uniting for Peace resolution of November 1950, the Assembly in effect claimed it could do "by recommendation virtually everything the Security Council could do" (Combs 1967). This innovation was utilized to transfer the Suez question from the Security Council, which was immobilized by vetoes from France and the UK, to an emergency session of the Assembly, where the majority rules. In response to Pearson's proposed emergency force, the Assembly requested Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld to submit a detailed plan for such a force. The Assembly then created the UNEF in resolution 1000 (ES-I) of 5 November 1956.

So, with crisis came opportunity. Pearson and Hammarskjöld adapted the vague pre-existing concept of standby UN forces to propose something concrete and specific when the diplomatic opening appeared. It was an evolutionary moment in international peace and security.

Pearson's proposal satisfied both the needs for realist and liberal responses: it helped avert the trans-Atlantic rift that had developed because the United States was firmly against the invasion by Israel, France, and the UK; the proposal also helped promote the ideal of a stronger United Nations. Media reports highlighted the dire nature of the conflict, including the prospect of Soviet forces backing Egypt, leading to a larger and potentially nuclear war.

Pearson had the support of many states, including the large majority that pushed for decolonization (including the United States), and he gained the begrudging support of the three invading countries (Israel, and the two colonial powers, France and the UK).

The new force was more than an observer mission; it was armed and much more extensive than anything the United Nations had yet created for maintaining peace, aside from UN Commandin Korea—which had been UN-sanctioned but was a US-led enforcement effort (war) that was not provided with direction or logistics from the UN Secretariat.

Major-General Tommy Burns, who was then serving as chief of staff of the UNTSO mission with several hundred UN military observers, was called upon to serve as the first Force Commander of the UN's first peacekeeping force. The troops numbered some 5,000. Unlike the unarmed officers serving in observer missions, the armed peacekeepers in these operations included non-commissioned members who were deployed in preformed units (e.g., battalions), not as individual UN observers on secondment from national forces as was the case previously.

This major normative leap in the mandate for PKOs is underrated in the literature. While it is natural to consider peacekeeping forces and observer missions together as traditional PKOs, the new forces represent a substantial increase in deployment size, complexity, capability, and mandate (Oksamytna and Karlsrud 2020).

UNEF was deployed to the Sinai to separate the Egyptian army from the withdrawing forces of Israel, France, and the UK. In this and other "second-generation" operations, UN troops were *interposed* between conflicting national armed forces. By separating combatants physically, these UN forces reduced the number of military contacts between belligerents, limited flare-ups, and allowed more effective monitoring of the tense but UN-demarcated zones ("no man's land") between the parties.

To prevent parties from violating a ceasefire or gaining new territory, the UN peacekeepers keep constant watch over the positions of the combatants. They try to anticipate any forward movements from agreed positions, sometimes even placing themselves in the way of such advances to slow them down.

In his pioneering proposal to the GA for the proposed emergency force, Pearson was the norm entrepreneur who managed to convince an initially reluctant Secretary-General, Dag Hammarskjöld. But once Hammarskjöld saw the workability of the idea, he was the thought leader who set out its basic principles (UN Secretary-General 1956). He performed critical normative work for this new generation of UN forces. This and future traditional missions were to be:

- under the operational control of the Secretary-General;
- recruited from Member States other than the permanent members of the Security Council, i.e., China, France, the Soviet Union, the UK, and the United States, who were excluded from direct on-the-ground participation due to their Cold War strategic involvement in most disputes in the world;

- paid/subsidized by the United Nations, with UN headquarters providing financial compensation (a given amount per soldier and per piece of equipment);
- impartial, i.e., the forces would not favour one side over the other in the conflict; and
- non-offensive, using armed force only in self-defence.

Hammarskjöld negotiated with Egypt an agreement that became a model for future Status of the Force Agreements (SOFAs) that the United Nations signs with host states. The SOFAs cover a wide range of issues, including the peacekeepers' freedom of movement and their legal immunity in-country (to prevent undue pressure from the host state). The forces also need the consent of the host state to be deployed. For this reason, observer missions and peacekeeping forces could be withdrawn at the request of the host government, as transpired when Egypt demanded the UNEF's withdrawal in 1967, just as Egypt was preparing to launch a war. This showed how traditional operations are of limited value once the parties are determined to engage in serious fighting. While critics suggest this is a fundamental weakness of PKOs, it still demonstrated a major change in state behaviour that allowed the UNSG to control armed international forces for peacekeeping duties on national territories.

More particularly, the UNEF force helped limit the possibility of an accidental escalation for a decade, and it served as the model for a follow-up operation, UNEF II (1973–79), that was created after the next war. Similarly, other interposed forces helped bring greater peace in other conflict areas like Yemen, Cyprus, and, towards the end of the Cold War, helped end the Iran-Iraq war. Even after the Cold War, these types of missions served a purpose in more conventional disputes, e.g., as with the United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea 2000–08.

3.3.1 Norms Commentary

The major shift in norms and practices in the early evolution of UN peacekeeping was almost accidental. The shift in power to the Secretary-General over military personnel in the field came as an improvisation due to historical necessity, after the assassination of the UN Mediator for Palestine. However, this normative change required some harmonization of the intersubjective experience of the nations and organizations. Furthermore, institutionalization does not come without contestation. The creation in 1956 of UNEF, the first PKO by the UN General Assembly clashed with the norm of Security Council responsibility for mission establishment. In addition, France abstained on the creation in 1964 of the UN Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP) because France

> was skeptical about the propriety of the Council delegating so much power to the Secretary-General; France let it be known that it hoped UNFICYP would not set a precedent for the Council to abdicate its responsibility in matters of international peace and security.
>
> (Tandon 1967)

But UNFICYP did indeed reinforce the norm of UNSG operational control of armed forces. Though major powers and Cold War politics limited the range of acceptable UN action, the enhancement of authority of the Secretary-General (and the Secretariat) came as a natural and creative result of the deadlock between the nations of the East and West during the Cold War. Adaptation was required, and this period of severe constraints on the United Nations, particularly in comparison with the expectations of the UN Charter, resulted in some unexpected opportunities for norm entrepreneurship.

While the UNSG gained significant new powers not prescribed in the Charter, including operational control over armed forces, the consent of the host state remained for the initial deployment of forces. State sovereignty surrendered only a bit of its strong normative power; the principle of consent for the initial deployment is a cornerstone of UN operations, as without it, a UN operation would be an invasion. Still, once in the country, the United Nations assures itself of freedom of movement in accordance with the SOFA. Consent is not needed for every activity. Furthermore, consent itself can be influenced by the United Nations (Gagnon 1967).

3.4 Modern Missions

The third generation of UN operations (multidimensional) arose from the changed character of most conflicts following the Cold War, as described in a general fashion in Table 3.1. The norms of conflict changed sharply, and so did the UN operations designed to deal with them. Internal conflicts increased in both number and intensity, and the Cold War politics between East and West no longer limited UNSC action. The United Nations became much more involved *within* states rather than just between them, with peacekeeping contributing to "a rise in negotiated settlements and a decline in military victories" (Stanton 2020). The ideals of the United Nations at its formation were reanimated as Cold War animosity ended. Other normative changes began as UN conduct evolved. UN missions now included soldiers from the P5 (permanent members of the Security Council).

The United Nations Security Council placed peacekeepers between many kinds of warring factions, with roles to foster sustainable peace, not just monitoring ceasefires, and to assist in the difficult task of nation-building. Civil wars tend to decentralize control, and even in the aftermath, the governments are usually very weak, leaving a power vacuum for external and transnational actors to fill, sometimes detrimentally. So, peacekeepers find themselves having to substitute for effective governmental control (Ruggeri, Dorussen, and Gizelis 2017). This required multidimensional peacekeeping, encompassing a wide range of functions and methods, adding to the traditional observation and interposition between armed forces, to include also the delivery of humanitarian aid, human rights monitoring and promotion, supervision of elections, and oversight of selected government functions. While the previous two types of operations monitored mainly military

Table 3.1 From Cold War to hot wars: Different types of operations for different times

	Cold War	*Post-Cold War*
Predominant conflicts	*Inter*state, inter-alliance	*Intra*state, internal
Origins	Ideology; Power bloc rivalry	Ethnic/tribal/religious animosities, secessionism
Main threats	Armed cross-border attack or invasion	Civil war, human rights violations (including genocide and torture), terrorism
Goals	National security; international stability; conflict management	Assurances of human security; conflict resolution; comprehensive multidimensional peace agreements; conflict prevention
Means	Deterrence; negotiation of ceasefire; traditional peacekeeping (observation and interposition); Chapter VI of UN Charter	Cooperation, mediation, modern multidimensional peacekeeping (traditional peacekeeping plus humanitarian action, disarmament, elections, enforcement, sanctions, economic assistance, peacebuilding); transitional administrations; Chapters VI & VII of UN Charter
Locations	State boundaries	Throughout a nation or region
Peacekeepers	Soldiers (non-P5, i.e., not the permanent members of the Security Council)	Soldiers, police, civilian monitors, and experts (elections, human rights); including P5; close collaboration with non-military UN elements, civil society and humanitarian partners

activities, the new missions became involved in a wide diversity of activities, including political, humanitarian, police, judicial, electoral, economic, and human rights activities.

The United Nations not only had to disengage and disarm the fighting forces of the conflicting parties but also to reform the security sector as a whole, including the war-driven agencies like the internal affairs agencies. New training was required for border guards, prosecutors and judges, and even officials in intelligence agencies. In missions in Cambodia (UNTAC 1992–93), Bosnia (UNMIBH 1996–2003), East Timor (UNTAET 1999–2002), and Kosovo (UNMIK 1999–present), the tasks expanded to include the supervision of entire departments of government, including defence and foreign affairs. The United Nations found itself at the forefront of efforts to fight crime, control cross-border smuggling, and enforce Security

Council-mandated sanctions. Even the conception of what was included in the core principles of peacekeeping evolved. No longer was it enough to focus on simply keeping hostile armed forces separated. The focus expanded to stop hostile armed groups from targeting civilians and limit the exposure of children to armed conflict. This new generation of peacekeeping still aimed to enhance international security, but it was guided towards the liberal notion of human security (Börzel and Zürn 2021).

The post-Cold War period has been dominated by multidimensional missions. During the Cold War, only one mission could be characterized as such (UN Operation in the Congo, 1960–64), but over 30 have been launched since the end of the Cold War. In 1989, the pioneering operation in Namibia catalysed the independence of Namibia through an election, and this facilitated the subsequent election in South Africa and the end of the apartheid regime. Major powers, including permanent members of the Security Council (the P5), actively participate in multidimensional operations.

The 1990s saw major achievements but also major tragedies. Among the achievements were the mission in Cambodia, which managed to neutralize the Khmer Rouge through elections, and various missions in Central America, which helped bring an end to the pernicious civil wars in that region. Among the tragedies of that era were the experiences of UN missions in Bosnia, Rwanda, and Somalia, which were unable to prevent a number of mass atrocities, though they had some mitigating effects.

At the end of the 1990s, the fourth type of PO, emerged in the form of "transitional administration." In such cases, the United Nations found itself not merely supervising a peace accord but governing an entire territory during a transitional period. This includes responsibility over governments, including defence, policing, courts, banking, and education. The main cases of transitional administrations are the missions in Kosovo (UNMIK) and East Timor (UNTAET). While East Timor became self-governing in 2002, Kosovo remained under United Nations administration, gradually reducing its authority after elections and after Kosovo's unilateral declaration of independence in 2008.

Because the Transitional Administration precedent has not been repeated, it would be misleading to call it a new generation of peacekeeping. Nevertheless, working examples, if not a new norm, have been created for the future. Transitional administrations can be created again as a way to manage governance transition while assuring peace and security, both internationally and within fractured nations.

Despite the setbacks in the 1990s, the number of UN peacekeepers increased dramatically in the first decade and a half of the twenty-first century. The change in numbers overall and in most multidimensional missions is an indicator of the evolution of peacekeeping. In a traditional observer mission, some 500–1,000 military personnel were typically deployed. With UNEF, the strength jumped to 6,000, and similarly for other interposed forces. In the post-Cold War period, the number of uniformed peacekeepers

(military plus police) in multidimensional missions deployed with over 10,000 per mission— with some 80,000 in the field at the 1990s peak. After the United Nations completed its missions in Cambodia (1993), Somalia (1994), and Bosnia (1995), the total number of peacekeepers fell back to 10,000, which was the Cold War average. But in the twenty-first century, the demand for peacekeepers grew dramatically in two "surges:" The first to handle the two transitional administrations (in East Timor and Kosovo); the second for the missions in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Darfur region of Sudan. The number of uniformed UN peacekeepers exceeded 100,000 for the first time in 2010. The new peak was attained in 2016: 108,000 uniformed peacekeepers. Adding civilians attached directly to peace missions, both international and local, the total number of peacekeeping personnel reached 125,000. Then the Trump administration (2017–21) pushed to reduce the expense and size of UN missions.

The number of uniformed peacekeepers (military and police) post-Cold War is graphed in Figure 3.3, showing the two surges—one in the early 1990s and the second after 2000—and the decline since 2016.

In the 1990s, the developed and developing worlds (i.e., Global North and South) contributed approximately equal numbers of peacekeepers to UN operations, but since 2000, the largest contributing nations of uniformed personnel (about 80%) have been from the developing world.

Armed force remains a valuable deterrent, but minimum force only should be applied in POs, given the inevitable resentment that comes after injury,

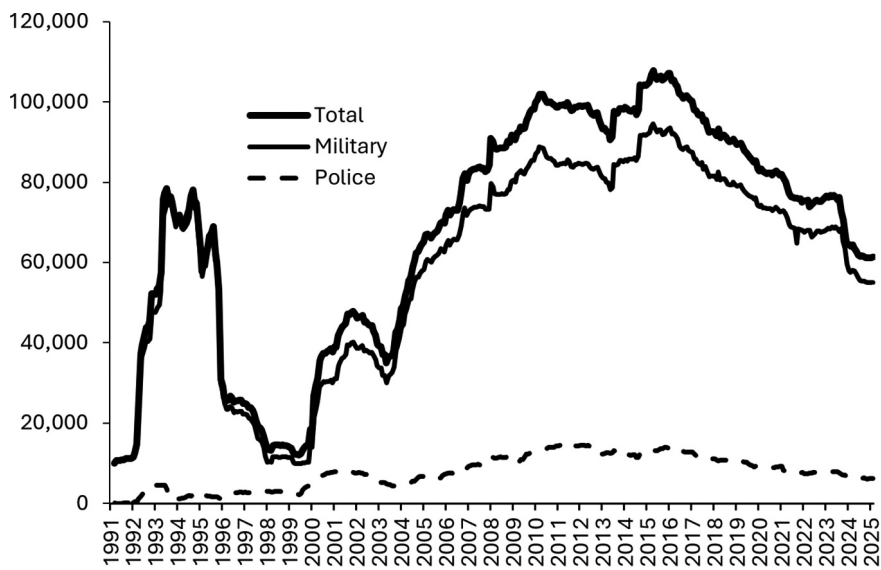

Figure 3.3 The number of uniformed personnel in UN peacekeeping since 1991. (Graph by the author. Data from the United Nations, 2025.)

death, and destruction. This places critical importance on the role of information and public messaging around UN operations at both the tactical and strategic levels. For the United Nations, this "information power" is often a more important tool than "military force." And when the use of force is required, information—specifically PKI—plays a central role in determining when and where to apply force, and for what specific purpose (e.g., POC, and mandate enforcement). Expanding the UN's information horizon has allowed it more options across the spectrum from soft to hard power. Multidimensional UN operations generally aim to be robust as well as flexible. The adoption of a doctrinal PKI Policy (United Nations 2017) was a major step in the normative acceptance of intelligence in PO. The increased use of armed force meant that PKI was essential.

3.5 Use of Force in Robust Operations

The call to use armed force became impossible to ignore, especially after the tragic experiences in Bosnia, Somalia, and Rwanda in 1993–95. However, it took many hard lessons for a new norm of peacekeepers using force to emerge. Since the turn of the century, the Security Council mandated the POC with authorization to use "all necessary means," and POs made more use of armed force, moving to peace enforcement on occasion. Attack helicopters became a potent symbol of robust peacekeeping. However, the underlying challenges of using force remained, and many were concerned about the UN's vulnerability to retaliation, especially since missions had expanded to include many non-military components that could not defend themselves.

This move towards justice and civilian protection supported liberal internationalist ideals and seemed to move the United Nations towards an era of post-national liberalism (Börzel and Zürn 2021). It had already begun earlier, for instance, when the Security Council recognized the 1994 Rwanda genocide as a "threat to international peace and security" (UNSC Resolution 955 (1994)), though it acted too late to deal with that threat. Partly in response to UN failures, in resolution 1296 (2000), the Council recognized that the targeting of civilians and the denial of humanitarian access may constitute "threats to international peace and security." Because the term (along with "threat to the peace") is used in the UN Charter as a trigger for Council action, the resolution suggested that the Council would use force to protect civilians and humanitarian workers. Indeed, an earlier resolution 1265 (1999) suggested that it would consider this when giving mandates to new missions.

Scores of UN combat actions were undertaken in the D.R. Congo (Dorn 2023), including some with attack helicopters (Dorn 2014, 241–253). The mission in Haiti in 2006–07 also showed that force could be successfully used to take on gang-rule in difficult places like Cité Soleil (Dorn 2009), though the small Kenyan force in Haiti from 2023 onwards does not have the means to do this kind of robust operation.

The United Nations had to be realistic that any conflicting party could undermine, spoil, and derail peace processes and humanitarian initiatives. In the twenty-first century, the UN's move towards greater reliance on the use of force meant that aspects of realism (force) were playing a more significant role to support liberal (peaceful) goals. In one view, "[i]t was the activation of peace enforcement on a broad scale that moved the UNSC into the age of postnational liberalism" (Börzel and Zürn, 2021).

Still, there was pushback from some UN Member States who considered that UN missions had been overextended, not only in the matter of the use of force but in many other ways as well. The mandates of the UN Security Council (so-called "Christmas tree mandates") may be appealing, but they were pushing missions in so many directions as to make the mandates unimplementable. Part of the solution was to call for the sequencing of mandates, if not their reduction. But the reality remains that since peace is multidimensional, so must also be the POs of the United Nations.

3.6 Conclusions

This chapter shows how some general yet simple concepts for norm creation and implementation can be applied to show the evolution of POs. A major example is the normative step in 1956, when military forces were first put under the operational control of the UNSG. Then, after the Cold War, peacekeeping became multidimensional, moving far beyond ceasefire monitoring and separation of conflicting military forces.

This chapter also shows how international norms are more easily embraced when they meet both liberal and realist tendencies, as was the case in the Suez crisis. In this way, crises are more likely to give rise to new initiatives that gain the support of a wider range of actors, including key individuals (left and right of the political spectrum), states (liberal and illiberal), non-governmental organizations (especially norm entrepreneurs), and the media. The urgency allows the actors to break from their usual modes of thinking and behaving. The end of the Cold War caused the United Nations to further innovate its peacekeeping work by creating multidimensional POs as a new norm.

More generally, UN norm development can proceed through the usual progression of steps: recognition of a problem (especially during a crisis), novel proposals for potential solutions, negotiation, adoption, signature (or voting), and implementation (including possible measures for verification and compliance). Nevertheless, resistance towards norms development is inevitable in the global interstate system founded on the sovereignty of each state and the special position of the permanent members of the Security Council (a recognition of realism). As such, political disagreement is apt to be endemic at the United Nations, as featured most strongly during the Cold War when the scope of UN action was much reduced. Still, even then threats to the great powers gave rise to innovations, like UN peacekeeping forces in

1956. This concept gained strong normative valence. Furthermore, peacekeeping became an international activity that brings a degree of national pride, as nations contribute to the global initiative that helps them gain moral, political, and financial gain, as well as increased global security.

Whilst the recognition of a new norm's potential to benefit individual nations and the collective good is important for its successful development within the UN system, more imperative is the assurance it provides to the great powers that its progression will not jeopardize their interests. Furthermore, the new norm means that its costs should not exceed what the international community is willing to contribute, in both lives and finances. For this reason, certain norms such as state sovereignty, which lies at the heart of national interest, often stand against new and emerging UN norms, surrendering only partially their strong power to an emerging norm. So certain norms that are designed for the collective good, but that put into question state sovereignty, such as UN transitional administrations after conflicts, have had a hard time competing.

Although these sovereignty tensions narrow the window of opportunity for global norm development, the United Nations has acted as an instigator for change at key moments. For instance, the normative evolution of peacekeeping strengthened its validity as an instrument of UN policy and international conflict management. The shift in power to the Secretary-General for control of deployed armed military personnel in POs was a major normative advancement. It required an adjustment of the intersubjective experience of the nations, but UN peacekeeping forces are now an established and accepted feature of the international community.

While no new PKOs have been created for almost a decade under UNSG António Guterres, a strong foundation remains for potential future deployments. And as the United States, under President Trump or a future administration, takes a "hands-off" (isolationist) approach to international conflict management, the United States and other nations may need to throw the "hot potatoes" (difficult conflicts) to the United Nations to manage. And if the great powers now engaged in competition need to reach out to the United Nations, the world organization has a useful toolbox containing useful tools developed during the Cold War upon which to construct new instruments. Fortunately, the United Nations has proven capable of developing new norms for peacekeeping.

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