



# Peacekeeping Works

*An assessment of the effectiveness of UN peacekeeping operations*

The increase in the deployment of UN ‘blue helmets’ is a key driver of the gradual decline in the number and severity of armed conflicts worldwide since the mid-1990s. This brief summarizes a study that assesses the complete, long-term effectiveness of UN peacekeeping operations. It shows a remarkably strong combined effect of UN operations’ ability to contain the lethality of wars as well as preventing them from reerupting or spreading.

## Brief Points

- Peacekeeping reduces the level of violence in conflict
- Peacekeeping decreases the duration of conflict
- Peacekeeping increases the longevity of peace
- An ambitious but feasible UN peacekeeping policy would reduce wars by two thirds compared to a reversal to a Cold War situation
- In short, peacekeeping works

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## Winning the war on war

Over the past two decades, there has been a dramatic increase in both the funds spent and troops sent on UN Peacekeeping Operations (PKOs). Joshua Goldstein, in his award-winning book *Winning the war on war*, argues that this increase in peacekeeping is directly responsible for the strong decline in the number of armed conflicts globally over the same period.

Several studies have identified particular pathways through which UN PKOs are effective peacebuilders. PKOs substantially decreases the risk that conflicts spread from one country to another; de-escalates conflict; shortens conflict duration; and increases the longevity of peace following conflict. These pathways, however, have always been studied in isolation from each other.

Researchers at PRIO and Uppsala University have now conducted a *comprehensive* assessment of the effectiveness of UN peacekeeping along all the proposed pathways. We find that studies that limit themselves to individual pathways significantly underestimate the positive impact of peacekeeping.

Figure 1 summarizes our results. If the UN and the international community were willing to issue PKOs with strong mandates and with substantial budgets – 800 Million USD per year – the risk of armed conflict in the world in the next 25 years would be reduced by up to two thirds relative to a hypothetical scenario where the UN reduces its PKO activities to the Cold War level.

We estimate this policy to gradually increase annual UN PKO budgets to about twice the current size. Still, UN PKOs are among the most cost-effective interventions in the international community's quiver. An average PKO costs USD 3.2 billion over its lifetime. In comparison, the costs of a civil war in terms of lost economic production has been estimated to be in the range of 10 percent of a conflict country's GDP – on average about USD 9 billion. These 9 billion USD only include the direct economic costs to the country in question. In order to arrive at the true cost of conflict one must also add the wider cost to neighboring countries and to the international community, as well as the human suffering due to conflict. All inclusive, a civil war can easily cost as much as USD 50 billion.

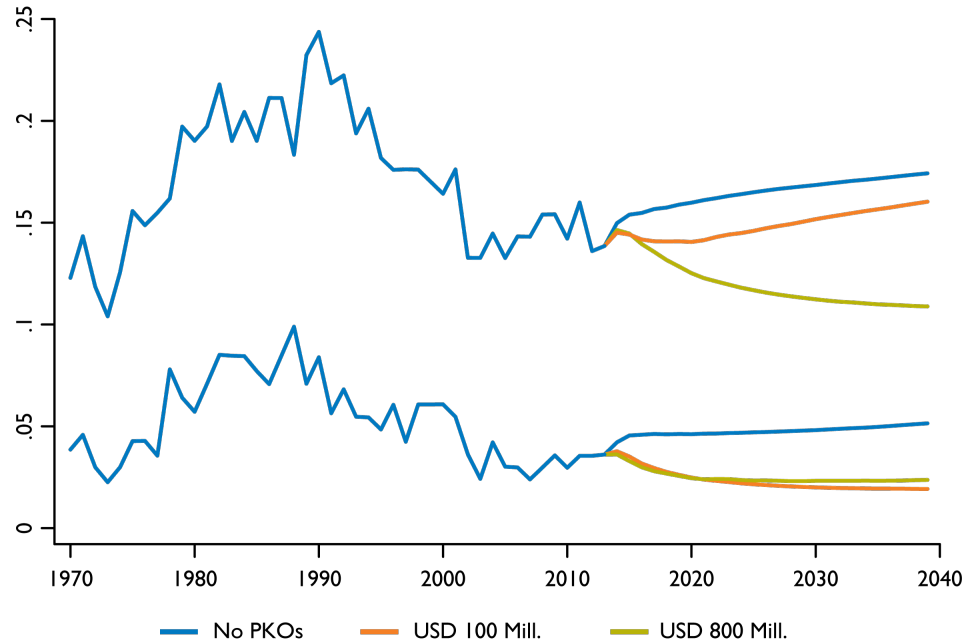


Figure 1: PKO budget scenarios. Proportion in conflict (major or either), globally, both scenarios.

## UN Peacekeeping – a brief overview

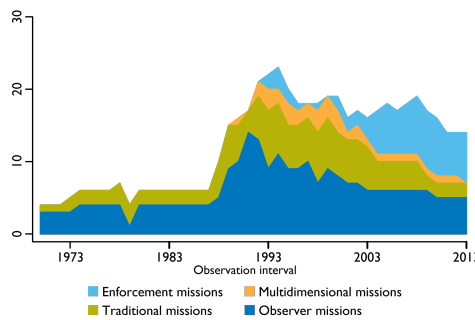


Figure 2: Number of UN PKOs, by mandate. PKO classification from Doyle & Sambanis 2000.

Figure 2 shows the number of PKOs deployed from 1970 to 2013. The number of PKOs deployed remained low and stable throughout the Cold War. Since 1990 the world has seen a substantial increase in the number of PKOs deployed.

We group PKOs into four types of mandates based on Doyle and Sambanis' book *Making war and building peace*. They classify PKO mandates into four categories. First are 'Observer missions' (such as UNMOT in Tajikistan and UNMOP in Croatia) which are restricted to observing actions such as a truce, troop withdrawal, or a buffer zone. Second are 'Traditional missions' (such as UNPRESEP in

Macedonia and UNIFIL in Lebanon) that have some additional tasks such as patrolling a buffer zone and assisting in negotiating a peace agreement. Third are 'Multidimensional missions' (e.g. UNMIT in Timor-Leste and ONUSAC in the Republic of the Congo), often referred to as 'second-generation operations', whose mandates are extended to include activities intended to address the roots of the conflict, such as economic reconstruction and institutional transformation such as reform of police, army, judicial system, and the holding of elections. And fourth are 'Enforcement missions' (exemplified by UNMIS in Sudan and UNPROFOR in Croatia and in Bosnia and Herzegovina) do not require the consent of the warring parties, and therefore must draw on the authority of UN Charter articles 25, 42, and 43 to apply force when needed.

As is clear from Figure 2 there has been a gradual shift over the last two decades from more restrictive to more robust PKO mandates. Our study shows that it is mainly the more ambitious PKOs that are "winning the war on war".

As peacekeeping has grown more common and more ambitious, it has also become more expensive. Figure 3 shows how much the UN has been spending on peacekeeping from 1970 to 2013. In 2013 the UN allocated just

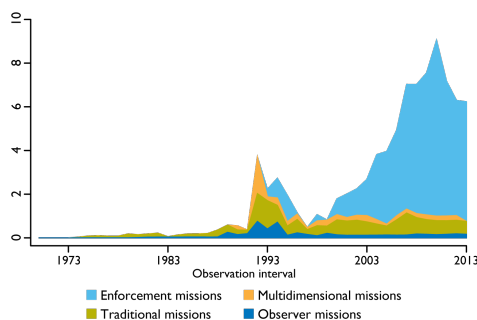


Figure 3: UN PKO budget, by mandate. PKO classification from Doyle & Sambanis 2000. Figures in billion US dollars.

above USD 6 billion to peacekeeping, roughly the same as the defense budget of Norway. Not surprisingly, missions with restrictive mandates are also the cheapest to field. Consequently, the international community contributed only negligible amounts to PKOs up until the early 1990s. The dramatic increase in PKO expenditure from the late 1990s to the present is a direct result of the increase in the number of robust enforcement mandates deployed by the UN, partly in response to the failures in Rwanda and Bosnia-Herzegovina to protect civilians from mass violence. Two of the most expensive PKOs to date are MONUC in DR Congo and UNMIS in Sudan, both enforcement missions.

In recent years the UN Security Council has increasingly issued PKOs with a mandate to protect civilians. Such protection mandates routinely require the PKOs to be deployed with robust contingencies and enforcement mandates. We expect this to continue in the future and will likely lead to a further increase in UN peacekeeping budgets.

### Protection of civilians

Our simulation of conflict reduction focuses on conflict between governments and armed opposition groups. However, the human impact of armed conflict goes far beyond the battlefield. Both governments and armed groups regularly kill civilians in their quest for political power. Following previous failures to prevent human tragedies, like the ones in Rwanda or Bosnia, UN peacekeeping has therefore undergone fundamental changes. Most notably, one of the main objectives of many current peacekeeping operations is the protection of civilians.

This is not an empty political ambition. Research by Hultman shows that the UN Security Council has become more responsive to civilian atrocities. After the introduction of mandates authorizing the physical protection of civilians, the UN is much more likely to deploy a peacekeeping operation when there is widespread violence against the civilian population. This is also reflected by the sharp increase in the PKO budget after 2000. The growing number of PKO missions with an enforcement mandate is a direct consequence of this shift in policy.

But how well do peacekeepers fare in protecting civilians from physical harm? First of all, the fact that peacekeeping operations are effective in reducing the occurrence of armed conflict is good news for the purpose of protecting civilians. Armed conflicts provide both opportunities and incentives for armed actors to target civilians. By reducing the occurrence of armed conflict as shown in Figure 1, PKOs also remove one of the main drivers of violence against civilians. Moreover, our simulations show that peacekeeping operations de-escalate armed conflicts. When the intensity of regular fighting is reduced the civilian population also suffer less. By reducing the scope of armed conflicts, civilians are indirectly protected from violence.

Peacekeeping operations can also contribute to civilian protection more directly within the context of an armed conflict. In this regard, robust mandates are important. Most enforcement missions allow peacekeepers to interfere with armed actors for the purpose of protecting civilians. They regulate the situations in which peacekeepers can act more forcefully, without violating the core principles of UN peacekeeping. Peacekeepers, then, do not have to be passive bystanders to attacks on civilians. In addition, the increased focus on the protection of civilians has also led UN peacekeeping missions to develop military doctrine specifically tailored to dealing with this priority.

Protection of civilians is yet another pathway by which UN PKOs contribute to a more peaceful world. A systematic assessment of the impact of peacekeeping operations on the intensity of violence against civilians shows that protection mandates reduce human suffering. That goes hand in hand with our findings that more robust missions are more

effective in limiting the intensity of conflict. The decline in conflict that we predict in the future is consequently also accompanied by a decline in violence against civilians.

### Evaluating peacekeeping

Previous research has identified four pathways through which PKOs contribute to peacebuilding.

1. PKO deployment reduces the amount of violence during conflict
2. PKO deployment reduces the duration of conflict
3. PKO deployment reduces the risk of conflict recurrence – i.e. PKOs increase the duration of peace
4. PKOs limit the risk that conflict in one country spreads to neighboring countries

Existing studies have evaluated PKO effectiveness by looking at individual pathways separately. These existing studies are therefore likely to severely underestimate the overall effectiveness of PKOs. We have developed a methodology that makes it possible to rigorously evaluate the effectiveness of PKOs along all of these pathways simultaneously. Our study is therefore the first to offer a comprehensive assessment of PKO effectiveness.

We approach the issue of evaluating PKOs by simulating the effect of various possible UN peacekeeping policies. We base the simulation on a statistical model that estimates the efficacy of UN PKOs in preventing the onset, escalation, cross-border diffusion, continuation, and recurrence of internal armed conflict in the world for the period 1950-2013.

Earlier studies on peacekeeping have shown that the size of PKO budgets and the robustness of their mandates are important for making and building peace. The simulation methodology allows us to forecast the impact of these factors on the risk of conflict for the next 25 years. We specify eight scenarios reflecting different potential policies for how much to spend on peacekeeping and what mandates to provide, which countries to target, and how soon a mission is deployed after a major conflict breaks out. These scenarios are informed by previous research on where peacekeepers are deployed, our own statistical estimations of relevant factors, and reports by UN sources about the likely future of peace-

keeping.

The eight different PKO scenarios allow us to evaluate PKO effectiveness. The baseline scenario is one in which the UN abruptly halts deployment of PKOs and no new missions are deployed. We compare this baseline with two sets of scenarios where we assume that the UN reacts to every major conflict if they happen in small or middle-sized countries. In the first set we evaluate the effectiveness of PKOs relative to the baseline by varying the budget allocated to the missions. We increase the budget from 100 million USD per year to 800 million USD per year. In the second set we vary the mandates the PKOs are equipped with. The first scenario in this set sees the UN only approving traditional mandates, and we then increase the robustness of the deployed mandates.

#### Peacekeeping and the continued decline in war

Peacekeeping works. The more the UN is willing to spend on peacekeeping, and the stronger the mandates provided, the greater the conflict-reducing effect. Figure 1 shows the proportion of the world's countries involved in internal armed conflict (top blue line). The lower blue line shows the proportion in major armed conflicts, or wars, with more than 1,000 battle-related deaths per year. Up until 2013, Figure 1 reports observed data, and the lines emanating from that point in time show the likely proportion of countries in conflict in the next 25 years under different PKO scenarios. The blue line represents the baseline, no-PKO scenario, the orange line represents a budget of 100 million, and the green line represents a budget of 800 million.

We estimate that an ambitious UN peacekeeping policy (the lines marked USD 100 Mill. and USD 800 Mill in Figures 1) will reduce

the global incidence of armed conflict by two thirds relative to a non-PKO scenario. This reduction is maintained throughout our 25-year time frame. This is a substantial effect for an intervention that is often feasible to implement if the political will is there.

A strong commitment scenario means an initial sharp increase in the total UN PKO budget, as shown in Figure 4. The ambitious scenario implies deployment of PKOs in several conflicts that have been running for a long time the moment they cross the 1,000 battle-related deaths per year threshold. Our simulations indicate that the increase flattens after 2040 and then start to decrease as a consequence of the global reduction in the incidence of conflict. PKOs can thus be viewed as a long-term high-yield investment for peace.

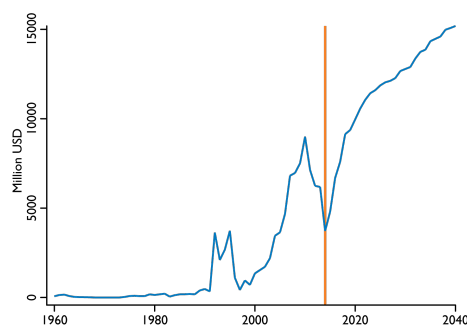


Figure 4: Future PKO budget, ambitious scenario.

These findings have clear policy implications, since they illustrate the effect of different PKO policies. Take the most extensive scenario: if a PKO with an annual budget of USD 800 million is implemented in all major armed conflicts, the total UN peacekeeping budget would be estimated to increase by 50-70 percent. However, in this scenario the risk of major armed conflict is reduced by half relative to a scenario without any PKOs. This

indicates that a large UN peacekeeping budget is money well spent. Moreover, the total PKO budget would increase for about ten years, and then start decreasing again as a result of a reduced number of conflicts in the world. In another scenario, which specifies that PKOs with a multidimensional or enforcement mandate are implemented in all conflicts in their first year, the risk of conflict worldwide is reduced by two-thirds in 2035 compared to a scenario without any PKOs. In its efforts to maintain international peace and security, the UN is well advised to consider the impact of different policies regarding mandates and budgets, as well as the reaction time from a conflict outbreak to the deployment of a mission. ■

#### Notes

The research reported on in this policy brief is based on:

- **Evaluating the conflict-reducing effect of UN peacekeeping operations** by Håvard Hegre, Lisa Hultman, and Håvard Møkleiv Nygård
- **Beyond Keeping Peace: United Nations Effectiveness in the Midst of Fighting** by Lisa Hultman, Jacob Kathman, and Megan Shannon

For additional information see: [havardhegre.net/forecasting](http://havardhegre.net/forecasting)

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#### THE PROJECT

The Conflict Trends project aims to answer questions related to the causes of, consequences of and trends in conflict. The project will contribute to new conflict analyses within areas of public interest, and works to produce thorough and quality-based analysis for the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

#### PRIO

The Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO) is a non-profit peace research institute (established in 1959) whose overarching purpose is to conduct research on the conditions for peaceful relations between states, groups and people. The institute is independent, international and interdisciplinary, and explores issues related to all facets of peace and conflict.