Supplying UN Peacekeepers

Caroline Buts (VUB) & Cind Du Bois (KMS)[1]

Literature on the determinants of participation and troop contribution to peacekeeping missions is rapidly growing. Most studies focus on initial participation decisions and use a public goods approach.[2] Such research typically finds that a combination of country-specific determinants and conflict-related variables can explain a decision on participation to a peacekeeping mission as well as the size of the contribution. Larger nations, having more military personnel, typically contribute more as capacity plays an important role.[3] While it was previously confirmed that wealthier countries also contribute more[4], recent literature suggests that financial compensation can motivate poorer nations to increase the supply of peacekeepers.[5] Within the category of conflict characteristics, we observe that security concerns, measured as proximity to the conflict, conflict intensity and refugee flows, partly explain participation decisions.[6]

Once the mission is ongoing and decisions to participate have been made, it is often assumed that countries remain active throughout the entire operation. Anecdotal evidence, however, shows us that this is not always the case. Tragic events during which peacekeepers lost their lives have triggered withdrawal decisions during, for example, the missions in Rwanda and Somalia. The decision to continue participation and contribution during the operation has, to the best of our knowledge, not yet been studied. Hence, we try to fill this gap in the literature by investigating the determinants of follow-up decisions. We ask whether the supply of personnel to peacekeeping operations is indeed invariable after the initial decision was made or whether certain factors can explain change during an ongoing mission. Could it for example be that fatalities lead to a reduction of troop contribution or even to a full withdrawal?

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[1] Author note: Caroline Buts, Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Department of Applied Economics, carobuts@vub.be. Cind Du Bois, Royal Military Academy, Department of Economics, Management & Leadership, cindy.dubois@rma.ac.be.

[2] See for example: Bove, V., & Elia, L. (2011). Supplying Peace: Participation in and Troop contribution to Peacekeeping Missions. Journal of Peace Research, 48(6), 699-714 and Gaibulloev, K., George, J., Sandler, T., & Shimizu, H. (2015). Personnel Contributions to UN and non-UN Peacekeeping Missions: A Public Goods Approach. Journal of Peace Research, 52(6), 727-742.

[3] See for example: Bove, V., & Elia, L. (2011). Supplying Peace: Participation in and Troop contribution to Peacekeeping Missions. Journal of Peace Research, 48(6), 699-714.

[4] Andersson, A. (2002). United Nations Intervention by United Democracies? State Commitment to UN Interventions 1991-99. Cooperation and Conflict, 37(4), 363-386.

[5] Gaibulloev, K., George, J., Sandler, T., & Shimizu, H. (2015). Personnel Contributions to UN and non-UN Peacekeeping Missions: A Public Goods Approach. Journal of Peace Research, 52(6), 727-742. 6 See for example: Bove, V., & Elia, L. (2011). Supplying Peace: Participation in and Troop contribution to Peacekeeping Missions. Journal of Peace Research, 48(6), 699-714 and Uzonyi, G. (2015). Refugee Flows and State Contributions to Post-Cold War UN Peacekeeping Missions. Journal of Peace Research, 52(6), 743-757.

[6] See for example: Bove, V., & Elia, L. (2011). Supplying Peace: Participation in and Troop contribution to Peacekeeping Missions. Journal of Peace Research, 48(6), 699-714 and Uzonyi, G. (2015). Refugee Flows and State Contributions to Post-Cold War UN Peacekeeping Missions. Journal of Peace Research, 52(6), 743-757.

To empirically study the determinants of follow-up decisions, we construct a dataset that contains all UN peacekeeping missions from 1996 until 2014 in which OECD countries participate. A dyad structure is created by pairing the supplying countries to the peacekeeping operations. This results in a panel dataset with 2979 observations and allows us to investigate in greater detail the relationship between potential determinants of deployment and the actual supply of troops during ongoing peacekeeping missions.

For this dataset, we test six different econometric models.[7] We find that the number of troops deployed in a previous period largely explains the supply of peacekeepers in the current period. This is a logical finding as troop deployment to peacekeeping missions is indeed relatively constant. Nevertheless, our data indicates that there is considerable variation during the missions as well. For 80% of the peacekeeping operations, we see a change in participating countries. For the other 20%, we see variation in the number of troops, while the same group of countries remains active. The question thus arises which determinants explain the variation in a country's supply of peacekeepers during a mission.

Conflict characteristics are certainly among the most influential factors. We observe that higher levels of conflict intensity are positively related to the number of troops supplied. Similarly, higher numbers of mission casualties result in higher levels of deployment. The number of peacekeepers that a country deploys is also positively related to the supply of other nations. In short, we notice that fierce conflict provokes higher levels of engagement.

Intriguingly, we do not find substantial influence among the country characteristics of the supplying nation. Where these variables are very influential for initial participation decisions, they do not seem to play a role for follow-up decisions. However, the number of casualties that a country suffers constitutes the exception. We find some evidence indicating that countries that incur more fatalities are likely to reduce commitment by the next year. Studying this variable more closely explains that not all types of casualties have an impact. We can split the variable into four categories, i.e. fatalities due to accidents, malicious acts, illnesses and other types. Making this distinction results in strong evidence that countries reduce their supply of peacekeepers when losing troops due to illness. Such a withdrawal of troops is visible during, for example, the United Nations Mission to Liberia (UNMIL), Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) and Sudan (UNMIS), as well as during the African Union-United Nations Mission in Darfur (UNAMID). This does seem to be a rather remarkable finding, but casualties due to illness have indeed increased substantially.[8] Whereas training programmes for peacekeepers have been reformed and improved, Rogers and Kennedy (2014) also report that illness and illness prevention have not received sufficient attention.

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[7] We use the Arellano and Bond estimator, a model that accounts for an autoregressive disturbance term, and an OLS with clustered standard errors. These three tests are run for two different specifications of our set of independent variables.

[8] Rogers, J.I., & Kennedy C. (2014). Dying for Peace? Fatality Trends for United Nations Peacekeeping Personnel. International Peacekeeping, 21(5), 658-672.