



**Challenges  
Forum**

International Forum for the  
Challenges of Peace Operations

## **Improving peacekeeping effectiveness by increasing diversity of mission composition**

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Challenges Forum Background Paper<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** This background paper is about how diversity (in terms of geography, language, and religion) among peacekeepers deployed in peacekeeping missions helps to achieve missions' successes. We find that both high diversity among the peacekeepers' deployed and high diversity between the military and the civilian leaders of the mission enhance peacekeeping effectiveness. We study how diversity provides opportunities to enhance peacekeeping effectiveness by combining a quantitative analysis on a global dataset with in-depth case studies from the UN missions in Central African Republic, Lebanon and Mali.

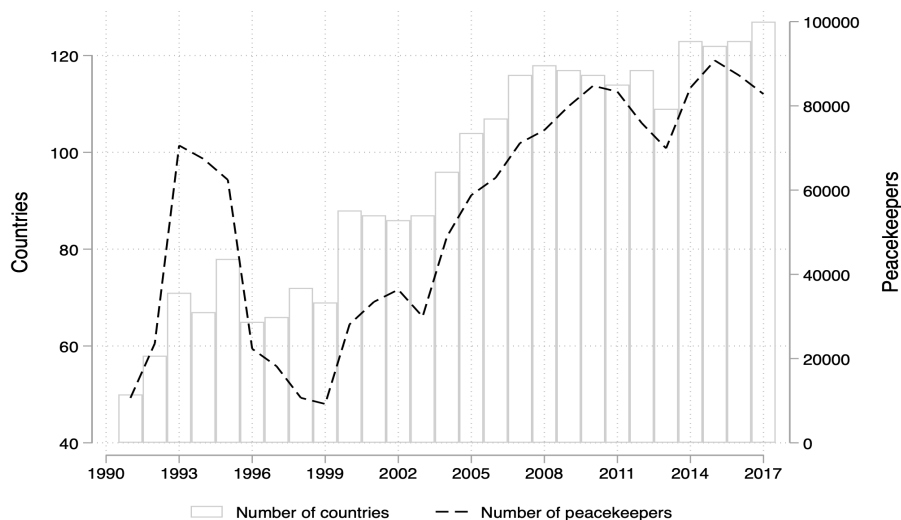
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<sup>1</sup> Disclaimer: This background paper represents the research and opinions of the authors. It does not represent the position or opinions of the Challenges Forum International Secretariat, the Challenges Forum nor any of its Members.

## 1. Introduction

To protect civilians and reduce violence, United Nations (UN) peacekeeping operations have become larger, more robust, and increasingly complex. As Figure 1 shows in 2018, 124 states (bars) deployed 90,000 peacekeepers (line) across 14 UN peacekeeping missions, just 30 years ago around 50 states contributed to UN peacekeeping operations and less than 20,000 troops were deployed. As missions’ demands have grown, so too has the level of diversity among participants deployed to recent peacekeeping operations, for instance, in Mali and South Sudan deploying peacekeepers from more than 40 countries.

**Figure 1: Countries contributing and number of blue helmets**



These trends lead to an important question of key policy importance: are diverse missions more capable of protecting civilians from atrocities and reducing battlefield violence?<sup>2</sup> In the past, diversity has been neglected as a factor potentially influencing the outcomes of UN peacekeeping operations.

<sup>2</sup>For violence against civilians we use as proxy the One-side violence data by UCDP. It is defined as “The deliberate use of armed force by the government of a state or by a formally organised group against civilians which results deaths”. We also use UCPD data to define battlefield violence, “use of armed force between warring parties, be it state-based or non-state, resulting in deaths”.

We find that high levels of diversity among peacekeepers on the ground - understood as the number of different nationalities of personnel within a single mission- and diversity between military and civilian leaders helps protecting civilians and reducing battlefield violence. In this Background Paper, we present key findings and draw key policy recommendations about diversity of mission composition (Bove, Ruffa, and Ruggeri 2020). In sum, we find that high levels of diversity along these two dimensions increase UN peacekeeping effectiveness.<sup>3</sup>

To answer our questions, we combine quantitative and qualitative methods. We employ statistical methods to investigate the correlation between mission composition and peacekeeping performances using a large-N dataset with monthly data on peacekeeping deployments and levels of violence for thirty-three UN peacekeeping host-countries between 1991 and 2017.<sup>4</sup> We combine this with case study research. With this purpose, we selected the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL II), the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), and the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA). These three cases were selected for three reasons. First, these missions comprise both traditional peacekeeping and the most innovative kinds of peacekeeping missions deployed, thereby allowing us to probe the plausibility of those mechanisms in a wide range of cases. While UNIFIL II is a traditional peacekeeping mission, MINUSMA and MINUSCA are ambitious, integrated, and multidimensional operations and their mandates foresee more tasks.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Diversity, however, may carry negative consequences when it comes to two dimensions of mission composition. First, low diversity between Force Commanders and its peacekeepers is associated with better performances. Second, linguistic and normative proximity between local populations and peacekeepers is related to low levels of hostility and casualties.

<sup>4</sup> Our quantitative analysis is based on a cross-missions time series where our unit of analysis is the mission-month. Within our data, we have created original indices that operationalize different forms of diversity that capture the variation of mission composition. We have also gathered original data on the political and military leadership of UN peacekeeping missions. We collected monthly data on the UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General, defined here as the civilian head or the political leader, and the mission Force Commander, defined as the military leader, for each UN peacekeeping mission since 1991

<sup>5</sup> For each case, we rely on three main bodies of qualitative data. The first is a dataset on all three cases that we created solely based on recently published, secondary sources. The second is a dataset of case narratives that Ruffa utilized for her work on UNIFIL II (Ruffa 2018a). The third is original material collected for this project,

In this background paper, we first discuss key trends and transformations in the composition of UN peacekeeping. Second and third, we present key findings from each of the two dimensions of mission composition, namely diversity between Blue Helmets<sup>6</sup> deployed and diversity between top civilian (the Special Representative of the Secretary General) and top military leaders of the mission (the Force Commander). In both dimensions, high levels of diversity increase peacekeeping effectiveness.

## **2. Recent trends about diversity of mission composition**

UN peacekeeping missions have become more diverse in terms of the diversity of the Blue Helmets deployed. Since the end of the Cold War, we witness two intertwined and unique increases: the number of peacekeepers in terms of size of deployment and the number of countries contributing to UN peacekeeping. In 2018, more than 90,000 Blue Helmets from 124 states deployed across fourteen UN peacekeeping missions (see Figure 1). Although the UN increasingly deployed police alongside military personnel, military troops contribute the most, both quantitatively in terms of personnel and qualitatively in terms of presence on the ground. As Figure 2 illustrates, in the last two decades, there has been a notable increase in the average number of troops per missions, with a maximum of twenty countries in 2017, and a minimum of three in 1999. In addition to the historical change in both numbers of peacekeepers and contributing countries, there has also been a major geographical shift of troop-contributing countries.

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comprising of fifteen interviews with peacekeepers deployed in the field or returned veterans, including one former SRSG, two former Force Commanders, one Deputy Force Commander, one Special Envoy, two Sector Commanders, and eight staff officers. Interviews were semi-structured and conducted in person or via videoconference, lasting between thirty minutes and ninety minutes.

<sup>6</sup> We use Blue Helmets and peacekeepers interchangeably. Blue Helmets or peacekeepers refer to the military units deployed on the ground.

**Figure 2: Average number of troop-contributing countries per mission**

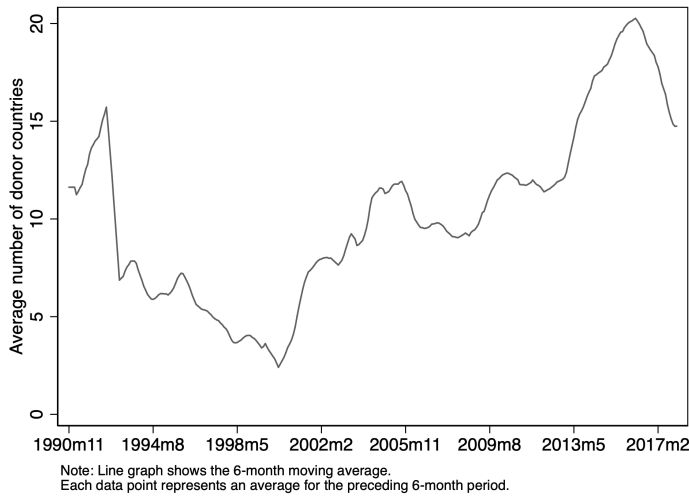
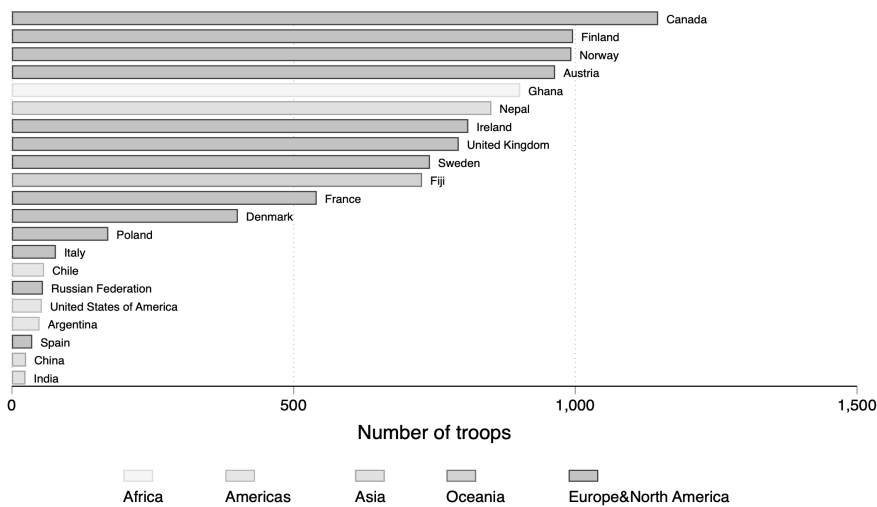


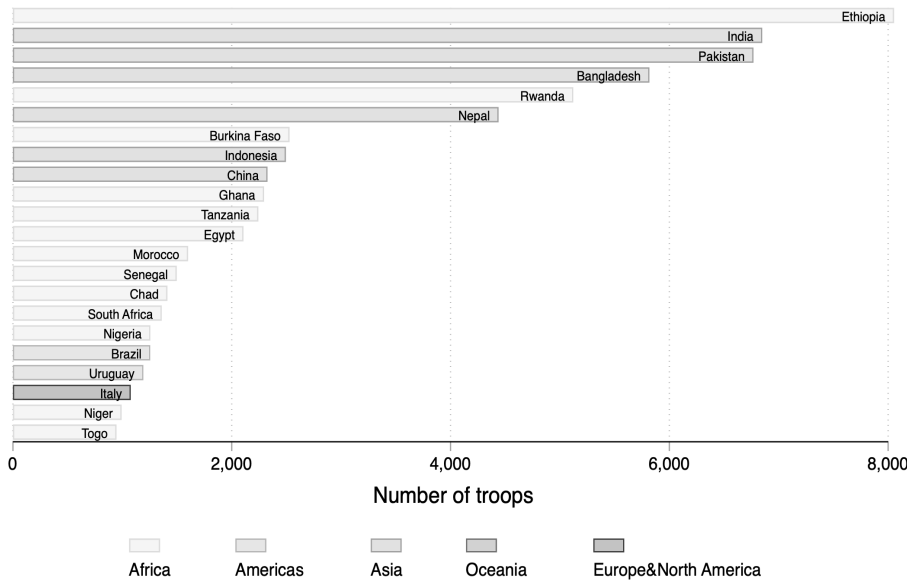
Figure 3 shows the top 20 countries contributing toward UN peacekeeping forces in 1991 and 2017 respectively: while the contributions of Western countries declined, countries from the ‘Global South’ began to recognize the benefits of participating in peacekeeping missions.

**Figure 3: Top 20 contributors of troops to UN peacekeeping in 1991 & 2017**

1991



2017



107 Different Nationalities

Since the end of the Cold War, peacekeeping missions have witnessed an increase in the number of peacekeeping troops deployed; an increase in the number of countries providing peacekeepers; an increase in the average number of troop-contributing countries per mission; and a change in the pool of countries from which the UN can draw troops. In practice, peacekeeping operations have become bigger, more complex, and more diverse. Of the seventy UN peacekeeping missions launched since 1948, the majority of missions were launched after the end of the Cold War. During the entire Cold War period, the UN launched just eighteen missions. Since 1990, the UN has launched more than fifty. Between 1989 and 1994 alone, the UN Security Council authorized twenty new peacekeeping operations, increasing the number of peacekeepers from 11,000 to 75,000. Crucially, UN peacekeeping missions and mandates have also expanded to include the implementation and enforcement of peace agreements in war-torn societies. Peacekeeping missions have transformed from mere observers into active enforcers of UN mandates, including approaches that extend beyond military presence. This shift from observer to active participant in conflicts has required launching missions that were larger, more robust, and more complex. In sum, UN peacekeeping missions have undergone substantive changes including the diversity of mission composition. What does diversity mean for keeping the peace?

### 3. Diversity among Blue Helmets

We find that diversity among Blue Helmets has a positive effect on keeping peace. Take the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL II) as an example, which deploys troops from forty-two contributing countries from all continents. A bulk of the national contingents are from relatively homogenous militaries, namely about 3,800 troops from Europe and a little over 5,000 troops from Asia out of about a total of 10,500 as of 2018 (Bove, Ruffa, and Ruggeri 2020: 57). Not only the sheer number of contributing countries is high but “for the first time, the bulk of the mission’s forces came from European militaries” (Ibidem). On the positive side, high diversity provides a broader spectrum of complementary skills employed to achieve the mission’s objectives.

To illustrate, “UNIFIL II also featured a Qatari contingent deployed under French operational control. (...) the Qatari contingent was located ten kilometers from the French base. While the French adopted a more assertive stance since the beginning in its AoR, the Qatari were crucial to engage in civil–military coordination activities. The Qatari contingent’s knowledge of Arabic allowed them to interact much more with the local community than their French counterpart” (Bove, Ruffa, and Ruggeri 2020: 59). The skills of the Qatari were highly valued also by the French that were working in the same area with them (Bove, Ruffa, and Ruggeri 2020). Several examples suggest how deploying a highly diverse pool of Blue Helmets enhances the complementarity of language skills. This helps at projecting a good image of the mission, at enhancing communication and, indirectly, at helping little by little at making progress in the resolution of the conflict. On the negative side, we found several instances in which high diversity among Blue Helmets increased misunderstandings among contingent- such as differences in cultural sensitivities or language skills- thereby partly hampering mandate implementation.

Another case study we delved into — the UN mission in Central African Republic (MINUSCA) – deployed Blue Helmets from fifty-five troops contributing countries, thereby displaying high diversity. African countries contributed over 9,000 Blue Helmets, while Asian countries have contributed over 3,000, but the Americas have only contributed 250. MINUSCA is a particularly challenging and volatile UN peacekeeping mission. Within MINUSCA, high field diversity also resulted in increased capability and monitoring that could have a positive impact on peacekeeping

effectiveness. For example, in long-range patrols, “Moroccan contingents had more autonomy than the Pakistani. In the Central African Republic (CAR), the local population and the mission itself refers to the military contingents by their nationality (e.g. ‘the Cameroonian did that, the Portuguese did this’).<sup>7</sup> However, the most important dimension of diversity was not nationality, but religion, specifically Muslim as opposed to non-Muslim Blue Helmets. In an interview, a MINUSCA officer reported: “It does not create significant tensions among the troops, but the contingents’ capacity to fulfil their mandate is conditioned to a great extent by their religion. Because of that, they are tasked in relation to their religion and the population perceives them the same way”.<sup>8</sup> This statement suggests that high diversity among Blue Helmets allows for better assignment of peacekeeping force to the most suitable area according to religion, thereby enhancing informative trust and communicability with the local population.

Differences in cultural norms and behavior were also a source of conflict between contingents beyond issues of religion. In one instance, both Gabonese and Moroccan Blue Helmets were conducting a joint convoy escort operation. Gabonese Blue Helmets led the first convoy and Moroccan forces led the second. During the convoy, the Gabonese came under attack and one non-UN civilian in the convoy was injured. The Gabonese contingent handed over the escort to the Moroccan in the middle of it and did not share information of the attack. This particular example suggests that how friction caused by diversity reduces peacekeepers’ ability to exchange key information. In so doing, peacekeepers may not be able to operate with one voice, thereby hampering their ability to protect civilian and reduce violence. Overall, qualitatively, we find that diversity among Blue Helmets can, on the one hand, increase complementarity, impartiality and monitoring, and on the other hand, foster coordination problems.

We also use statistical methods<sup>9</sup> to explore if our results based on our three case studies travel and are applicable among 33 UN peacekeeping host-countries between 1990 and 2017. We find indeed that our findings can be generalized to many UN missions: high diversity increases the

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<sup>7</sup> Authors’ interview.

<sup>8</sup> Authors’ interview.

<sup>9</sup> We use a large-N dataset with monthly data on peacekeeping deployments and levels of violence. We model the likelihood of increases of one-side violence and battle deaths using different proxies on UN operations diversity. We use several estimators, among these OLS and count models, using also fixed-effects.



probability of peacekeeping effectiveness. The level of field diversity among Blue Helmets has a substantial effect on the protection of civilian lives and reduces the number of civilian casualties. It also significantly reduces the level of battle-related deaths. The magnitude of effect of diversity on keeping peace is similar to that of troop size, that is widely dominating the debate.<sup>10</sup>

#### **4. Diversity within mission leadership<sup>11</sup>**

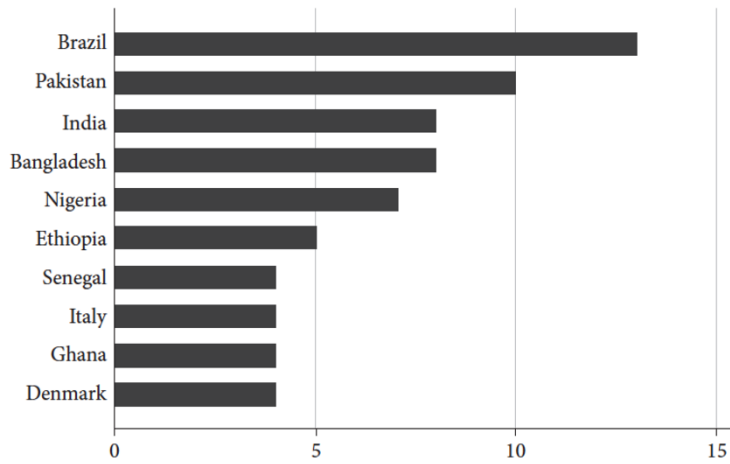
Diversity between the civilian leader of the mission (the Special Representative of the Secretary General) and the head of the military component (the Force Commander) matters. Diversity-based on geographical and religious distance between the country of origin of the SRSG and the Force Commander- tends to have beneficial conflict reduction effects. From the qualitative evidence from all three cases, it also appears that communication and coordination problems within mission leadership are mainly related to personalities, and not diversity, per se. Occasionally, the problem is not diversity but rather lack of experience of leadership. Another issue that emerges is how high levels of diversity may undermine coordination within the Mission Leadership Team (MLT). Oftentimes, SRSGs find it difficult to act as the Designated Official for Security, an area they usually know little about. Then, again to evaluate the possible generalization of our findings, we turned to a quantitative analysis, using an original dataset we created on SRSGs and Force Commanders. We found that diversity within a mission's leadership, especially in terms of cultural backgrounds, could help mitigate civilian victimization and battle deaths. Figures 4 and 5 show the top 10 nationalities for Force Commanders and, SRSGs respectively. Most of Force Commanders come from the Global South, whereas many SRSGs come from the Global North. In fact, our data show that, on average, we have a large geographical distance among the countries of origins of the mission leadership, around 5,000 kilometers. Using several statistical models and controlling for conflict and mission characteristics we find that diversity, based on geographical and religious distances between the country of origin of the SRSG and the Force Commander, tends to have beneficial effects for keeping peace.

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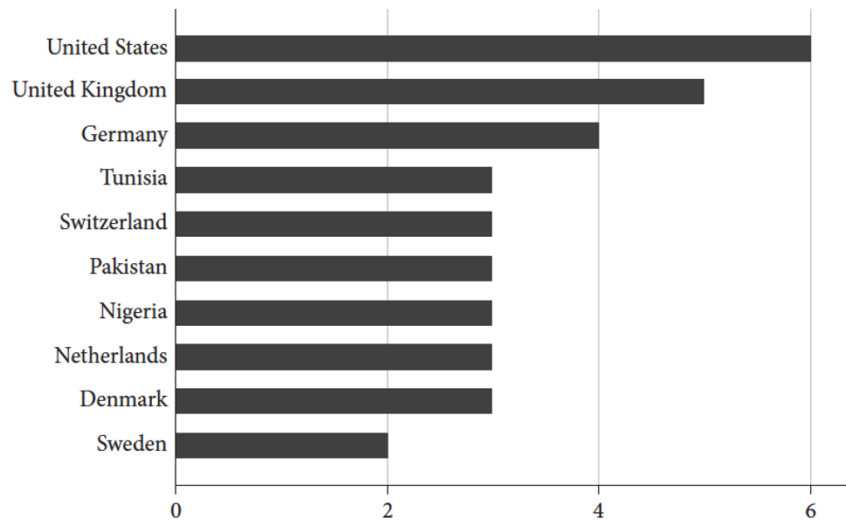
<sup>10</sup> When increasing fractionalization from its mean by one standard deviation, the number of monthly battle-deaths decreases by more than ten units, hence the marginal effect of Blue Helmets' diversity in absolute terms is similar to that of troop size.

<sup>11</sup> This section relies heavily on chapter 3, Bove, Ruffa, Ruggeri 2020.

*Figure 4: Top 10 nationalities of Force Commanders (1991–2017)*



*Figure 5: Top 10 nationalities of Special Representatives of the Secretary General (1991–2017)*



## 5. Key lessons for UN peacekeeping

The central finding of our book (Bove, Ruffa and Ruggeri, 2020) is that diversity matters and affects peacekeeping effectiveness. These results have important policy implications for Action for Peacekeeping (A4P) initiatives, particularly its performance thematic as diversity can be used as a tool to increase peacekeeping effectiveness.

The diversity of Blue Helmets and diversity of top leadership increases peacekeeping effectiveness. The policy and academic discourse about peacekeeping has pointed to trade-offs between representativeness and effectiveness in peacekeeping, whereby diversity is often framed as an enemy for effectiveness. Particularly the costs associated with diversity have been overemphasized in light of the opportunities that diversity provides, and our book reveals that there are many opportunities arising from diversity. Mission diversity and effectiveness are falsely assumed to be dichotomous, and we can actually increase effectiveness by increasing diversity. Increasing mission diversity can be done in different ways. The UN could provide additional incentives to underrepresented countries to contribute more troops.

This leads us to the next set of policy recommendations: diversity should be managed, and this management must strive to minimize conditions whereby diversity prompts instances of coordination problems and misunderstandings. This management likely requires a set of initiatives at the mission, national, and international levels.

### 1. Troop contributing countries should see diversity as an asset

At the national level, the key to improve the management of diversity is transforming state militaries. First, more efforts should be expended transforming military organizations into learning institutions, that can adapt more flexibly in cooperation with other military organizations. This should be done by including multinational coordination explicitly and systematically in training templates. In order to work with a diverse set of troops, peacekeepers need to become more adaptable generally. Relatedly, peacekeepers are drawn from state militaries, which, unsurprisingly, mostly train their members for war. Peacekeeping operations require special kinds of training, ones in which specific traits, such as diversity in multinational training, are emphasized. Also, we have learned that ‘training is not enough—we also need

socialization’ (Ruffa 2018). Peacekeepers will need to be socialized into roles where norms are internalized such that diversity may enhance effectiveness. Importantly, we should not forget that, as of 2019, ‘we still have no peacekeepers per se. Rather we have soldiers deployed as peacekeepers’ (Ruffa 2018b). Having dynamic and ambitious peacekeepers concerned by their advancement and aware of the positive effects of diversity in those operations, would be crucial to improve mission effectiveness in the future. In addition, material incentives—such as payment—are a key source for motivation. A more homogenous incentive structure for all troop-contributing countries could aid in addressing this issue.

## **2. Leveraging diversity in missions**

To start with, at the mission level, systematic knowledge regarding troop strength needs to be shared at both headquarters and sector levels to ensure that synergies and opportunities of coordination are identified. Perhaps more radically, at the mission level, we could envisage how a mission structures might be a site for innovation—to avoid problems relating to the current ‘single country, single Area of Responsibility’ approach at the more local level. High levels of field diversity could be ‘created’ in each Area of Responsibility, with company or even platoon size units from different countries working together. Some Member States are already proposing co-deployments, similar to the concept of composite units as was the case for Sweden and Ireland in the UN mission in Liberia (UNMIL). Enhancing within-mission learning could lead to additional positive results that subsequently enhance performance.

When Blue Helmets deploy in peacekeeping missions, they carry their training and cultures with them. These characteristics shape how they perceive and understand their operational environment. As such, some Blue Helmets score higher in terms of risk management than others. Some will be more proficient at patrolling than others. Some may be more effective in combat. If we know, for instance, that in a certain area, rebel groups are targeting civilians as a strategy, we should make sure to deploy troops that are less concerned with force protection, or more skilled at civilian protection. Rather, we contend that the combination of skills, language, habits, and culture provides unmissable opportunities for the United Nations to project its commitment and to bring and keep peace in war-torn countries. We have to make sure we are matching these characteristics with the requirements of the mission.

At the international level—particularly the United Nations—we suggest creating a task force on diversity whereby common drivers and effects of mission composition are openly discussed. The 2015 Report of the Independent High Level Panel on Peace Operations—best known as HIPPO—referred only tangentially to diversity at the leadership level (UN 2015:82) but made no mention of how diversity should be managed, where else in the mission it might be valuable, or how to optimize it. The UN should develop a plan on how to take diversity into account at all levels of the organization and how to mainstream it. This may also mean to include a ‘diversity advisor’ at the Department of Peace Operations level and at the mission level. The UN should not relegate the topic of mission composition as merely an artefact of logistics or politics among state members. Mission composition is a core factor for the conflict resolution process and the UN ought to think systematically and critically about composition as a crucial policy issue. The United Nations should also think explicitly about alternative ways of allocating peacekeeping forces and try to better match peacekeeping forces skills with their desired goals—importantly, this may include revisiting the possibility of a UN army.

While some of our findings suggest that diversity may jeopardize the effectiveness of the mission, more diversity among peacekeepers deployed is advantageous. In the current global division of peacekeeping labor, non-Western peacekeepers take bigger risks than their Western counterparts. A more equal division of labor may be needed in order to fully exploit the positive and transformative potential of diversity for peacekeeping,

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