

Women and children queue to enter a free medical clinic run by Ugandan and Burundian personnel of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) in Baidoa, capital of Somalia's Bay region.

Local Perceptions of Robust Protection of Civilians in UNMISS and AMISOM

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IN THIS BRIEF, we investigate what forms of protection of civilians (PoC) provided by peacekeepers that enjoy more support than others. We compare peacekeepers' perceived level of proactive engagement, with the expectations and demands from local populations. We find that civilians who are at risk prefer peacekeepers who show resolve in protecting civilians, and their support is based on assessments of robustness.

We illustrate this with two different peacekeeping missions. Our findings show that too much, and too little, use of force negatively impacts the communities' levels of support. Civilians' support drops when they think peacekeepers have used disproportionate levels of force, such as in the case of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM). But their support also drops when they think peacekeepers have been overly reticent in their PoC approach, such as in the case of the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS).

A better preparation of peacekeepers' use of force approach is part of the solution, but this goes hand-in-hand with people-centred measures by peacekeepers using robust force.

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Policy recommendations

- 1. At the strategic level**
 UN headquarters needs to ensure standardisation around "proactiveness" in implementation of PoC mandates in field missions. Conducting local perception studies could ensure better understanding of how the population perceives the peacekeepers' use of force, when implementing their PoC mandates. These need to inform mission mandate reviews as well as suggest suitable measures to managing expectations.
- 2. At the practical (tactical) level**
 Deployed contingents need to receive training and knowledge on PoC, especially around people-centred community engagements. Mission level commanders must pass on training to prepare contingents to make proactive and combined use of social and material capital. Deployed contingents need to be able to combine "soft" skills, with their material resources to protect civilians, all while managing local expectations.
- 3. Troop- and police-contributing countries (TCCs/PCCs) pledges**
 Personnel quality is key, and it's critical that TCCs/PCCs prepare troops and meet expected mission standards to protect civilians. Procedures should be put in place so that reports from mission leaders can inform more precise and tailored member state commitments.
- 4. Partnership peacekeeping**
 Regional-UN peacekeeping partnerships, such as the case of AMISOM, are necessary for the future of peacekeeping in complex and high-risk security environments. However, although AMISOM has produced security successes, we see that such models need to strengthen political and civilian components from the start. Both the AU's and the UN's credibility is at stake when incidents of excessive force used by regional partners face backlash and negative sentiment among host populations. The strong collaboration between the AU and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), as expressed in the AU Compliance and Accountability Framework, is a promising development in partnership peacekeeping.

Introduction

HIGH-RISK CONFLICT SETTINGS and the difficulties of supporting a peace process amid multiple armed and conflicting parties prompted a rethinking of what kinds of use of force are most effective to use when protecting civilians.¹ In numerous cases, host populations' protests against UN presence have turned violent. Seen from the perspectives of host populations, what local factors are most salient in explaining why, when, and how robust PoC provision generates support at the local level? We investigate public perceptions of peacekeepers' responses to violence perpetuated by state or non-state actors in the context of robust peacekeeping to find out what forms of physical protection civilians prefer.

We have selected two — admittedly very different — missions that nonetheless exemplify contemporary peacekeeping in high-risk and complex contexts: UNMISS in South Sudan, which was mandated by the UN Security Council under Chapter VII to carry out PoC, and AMISOM in Somalia, which was an African Union (AU)-led peace enforcement mission in Somalia given an objective to conduct targeted offensive military operations together with Somali security forces against a designated conflict actor. We selected a UN-led and an AU-led peace operation to ask a particular question: are there particular interactions and styles of robustness that stand out and help explain what type of physical PoC populations consider preferable?

We focus on public perceptions of uniformed peacekeepers' proactive engagement to protect civilians from threats of physical violence.² We find it useful to view the peacekeeping use of force posture as a graduated performance, where some physical protection modes are perceived by host societies as 'good' performance, in contrast to too little or too much physical PoC.³ It follows from this view that reticent and reactive postures alike can have adverse protection

effects, albeit for different reasons. In this brief, we will refer to the idea of 'excessive' PoC performance as that perceived by local populations to have been non-people-centred, selective, and overly governed by TCC/PCC capitals. It is a form of material compellent power that conflicts with local beliefs about the mission's appropriate and legitimate role.

International peacekeeping research has demonstrated the links between fulfilment of the PoC component of peacekeeping mandates to overall mission effectiveness.⁴ We analyse Howard's insights about non-compellent use of power in peacekeeping from the viewpoint of local populations; that peacekeepers perform better when they combine social capital, such as verbal persuasion, and material forms of power, such as the use of 'carrots and sticks' and coercion in interactions with conflicting parties⁵. It is wellknown among peacekeepers that trustbuilding and relationships at operational and tactical levels affect field-level politics including societal responses and localised conflict dynamics. Practical examples of peacekeepers who provide immaterial and material forms of protection beyond the scope or intent of their rules of engagement abound — but the effects of such actions often remain at the level of anecdotal evidence.⁶

Research Findings:

PoC Provision, Coercion and Resolve in Non-permissive Contexts

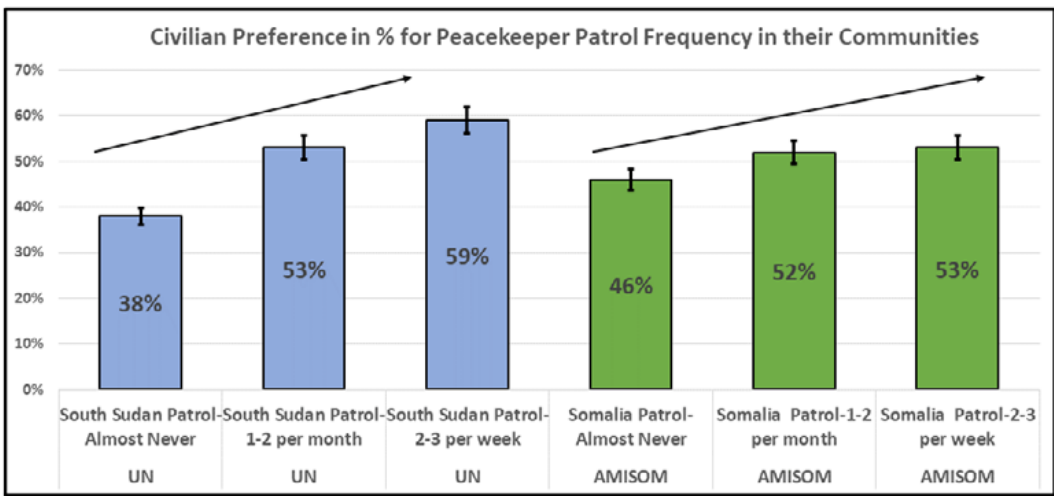
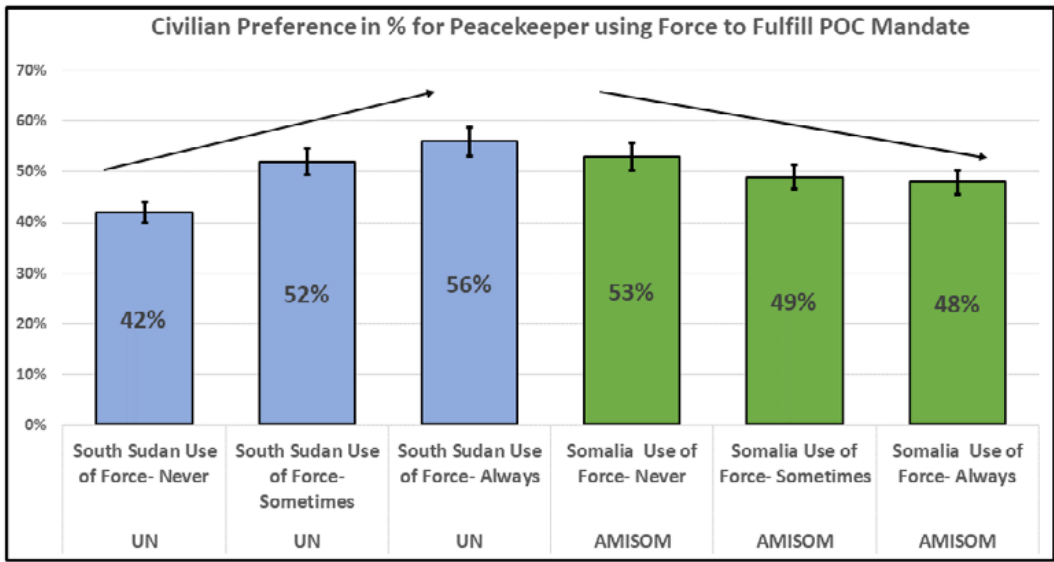
WE CONDUCTED TWO SEPARATE comprehensive surveys in 2021 with almost 3,000 civilians populating 160 host communities in South Sudan and Somalia. These were designed to gauge differences in public views about amount and style of peacekeepers' use of force to provide PoC.⁷ We find that some dimensions of military coercion will garner more support among the populations surveyed and others will reduce it. Peacekeepers were expected to be proactive when protecting civilians, through increased patrolling and interactions, in both missions. Findings from the survey about UNMISS show that more use of force would have been preferred in addition to an authoritative presence. In contrast, our survey about AMISOM shows that 'excessive protection' and offensive uses of force during military operations has negatively impacted levels of host population support. Local populations are supportive of proactive uses of force to fulfil a PoC mandate, but we suggest that in part the difference between the findings from the two cases is that communities expect to be adequately engaged by the mission. In South Sudan, this involved community engagement to match troop presence with zones in most need and at most risk.⁸ In Somalia, there was a perceived lack of communication to communities how the mission leadership, TCC's and international partners work to mitigate any resulting civilian harm. Overall, we find that which differences regarding the amount and style of use of force are deemed acceptable to local communities need to be teased out by examining how the force impacts on local conflict dynamics. The micro-political reaction to what peacekeepers say and do depends on a culturally appropriate force posture. A few contextual factors stand out in this regard.

Since 2013 and 2014 respectively, both AMISOM⁹ and UNMISS¹⁰ have proactive approaches to PoC. Both missions have been characterised by significant PoC innovation in practice, as well as the resulting

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policy adjustments following significant criticisms that their military components, to varying degrees and in varying ways, have implemented their PoC tasks reticently or reactively when deterring or stopping armed actors from threatening to harm and kill civilians. These missions have dissimilar approaches, tools, and frameworks governing the use of force, and importantly, UNMISS was an integrated mission from the start and included a PoC component staffed and resourced through regular UN budgetary channels. AMISOM was a few years into its existence before it began mainstreaming PoC considerations. Funding for AMISOM was secured through a partnership model, and the mission operated without many of the capabilities it required to address the complexity of the tasks at hand.



Figures: See footnote.¹⁵

The conflict type in the two countries — both are communal, but in Somalia the main non-state conflict party has been designated a terrorist organisation by the US — shapes operational realities in important ways. Somalia has experienced multiple stabilisation and counterterrorism operations with probable risks of ‘guilt by association’ for UN and AU missions.¹¹ Geopolitics at regional or global levels, such as a history of neighbourhood interference, also plays a role in peacekeepers’ ability to claim impartiality. The impartiality of UNMISS and AMISOM peacekeepers have both been challenged on slightly different grounds.¹²

Results from our conjoint surveys show that civilians prefer UN Blue Helmets in South Sudan and Green Helmets in Somalia to carry out more proactive patrols in their communities.

However, while we see that in South Sudan civilians prefer the peacekeepers to use more military force to reduce violence and fulfil their PoC mandate, civilians in Somalia want AMISOM peacekeepers to use less military force to reduce violence and provide PoC. In fact, the less AMISOM uses force while still addressing protection needs, the more they are preferred.

In order to dig deeper into how support for proactive and performance coercive varies, we followed our survey vignettes with the following direct survey questions with all our respondents. Civilians prefer peacekeepers who show resolve to lessen threats of physical violence against civilians. At the same time, they are apprehensive about forms of physical PoC that would destabilise local conflict dynamics.

If it is perceived, for instance, that a peacekeeper contingent supports repressive state security forces and coercively weakens a non-state armed actor, thereby changing the local balance of forces, this may leave certain communities more at-risk and insecure. In the case of Somalia, the Islamist militant group al-Shabaab has for its part used insurgency tactics and misinformation to draw peacekeeper contingents into outright warfare. One implication is that peacekeepers that operate with a people-centred mindset and credibility, as well as capability to command and employ versatile uses of force, are better positioned to adjust for and match local protection needs. Attempts to protect civilians are factored into civilian assessments of the mission performance.

In South Sudan, the most persistent mode of UNMISS PoC has been to offer physical protection inside PoC sites. We therefore surveyed people from both PoC sites and communities in general, since the minority of the South Sudanese population who sought shelter inside these PoC sites are predisposed to finding a better match between UNMISS PoC and their protection needs than the majority of people remaining outside them. The takeaway point from the South Sudan survey is that civilians perceive that UNMISS under performed in terms of PoC.¹⁴ While some contingents were reputed to have kept up patrolling and as having responded to high-risk situations, there were commanders and units that faced reproach for their risk-averse posture.¹⁵

In Somalia, respondents instead preferred AMISOM to be less reactive. We suggest that the survey finding that civilians are supportive of patrols, but un-supportive of peacekeepers' use of physical force, means that support levels there were undermined. We interpret this finding as an imbalance between peacekeepers' use of social, symbolic and material capital. Our findings also imply that civilians are not anti-peacekeepers (or overall anti-AU) but their support is localised and builds on their experiences of how AMISOM conducts itself during offensive military operations. Based on cross-validation with our qualitative research in the country, we also suggest that support levels in Somalia have been negatively impacted by populations' experiences of incidents

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where AMISOM, and neighbouring states security forces, used reactive offensive force.¹⁶

AMISOM offers an example of a “tipping point” in local acceptance of proactive use of force. Too much, or excessive, PoC during some of their offensive stabilisation operations has led to collateral damage and the infliction of human rights abuses and civilian harm. This sometimes also made certain clans more vulnerable and at risk than before, because armed clan militias who cooperate with AMISOM military contingents on offensive operations often led to clan-based reprisals when peacekeepers and Somali security forces could not consolidate the stabilisation gains in the area. It is interesting to consider what difference it would have made if the mission had from day one, in the public view, prioritised civil-military coordination and implemented techniques and policies to mitigate civilian casualties.¹⁷ At the strategic level, a number of mission-specific accountability mechanisms such as boards of inquiry have been put in place in recent years and the AU has formalised a compliance and accountability framework. Partners such as the UN, the EU, and others, have refined their support models over time to resource the mission in ways that are more appropriate.

Conclusions and Policy Recommendations

OVERALL, WE FIND THAT the differences in the amount and style of use of force deemed acceptable to local communities depends on how force impacts localised violence and conflict dynamics. Peacekeepers vary in operational styles, and thus in how efficient they are at certain tasks widely held to be crucial for a proactive and people-centred approach to PoC, including situational awareness, close cooperation with police components, foot patrols, and multiple modes of community engagement.

This study is relevant for TCCs/PCCs, since peacekeeper performance and professionalism are important to UN and non-UN peacekeeping effectiveness, and tactical success is more likely when operational conduct matches local peacekeeping ‘demand’. TCCs/PCCs can also draw on this study to complement their own analyses of their mission performance. This will be important, since discussions about accountability for weak PoC have seen recent policy advances.¹⁸ We recommend the following:

At the strategic level

UN headquarters needs to ensure standardisation around “proactiveness” in implementation of protection of civilians mandates in field missions. Local perception studies could be conducted to ensure better understanding of how the population perceives the peacekeepers’ use of force to implement their protection of civilians mandates in contemporary mission settings. These need to inform mission mandate reviews as well as suitable measures to managing expectations.

At the practical (tactical) level

To be able to protect civilians deployed contingents need to receive training and knowledge especially around people-centred community engagements. Mission-level commanders must pass on training to prepare contingents to make proactive and combined

use of social and material capital. Deployed contingents need to be able to combine “soft” skills, while managing local expectations, with their material resources to protect civilians.

Troop- and police-contributing countries (TCCs/PCCs) pledges

Personnel quality is key, and resolve from troop- and police-contributing countries (TCCs/PCCs) to prepare troops and meet expected mission standards to protect civilians is a critical factor in improving mission performance. Procedures should be put in place so that reports from mission leaders can inform more precise and tailored member state commitments.

Partnership Peacekeeping

Regional UN peacekeeping partnerships, such as the case of AMISOM, are necessary for the future of peacekeeping in complex and high-risk security environments. However, although AMISOM has produced security successes, we see that such models need to strengthen political and civilian components from the start. Both the AU’s and the UN’s credibility is at stake when incidents of excessive force used by regional partners face backlash and negative sentiment among host populations. The strong collaboration between the AU and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) as expressed in the AU Compliance and Accountability Framework is a promising development in partnership peacekeeping.

Endnotes

- ¹ Cruz, dos Santos, A.C., Phillips, W. and Cusimano, S., 2017. Improving security of United Nations peacekeepers. New York: UN, 19 December; United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations/Department of Field Support, 'DPKO/DFS Guidelines: Use of Force by Military Components in United Nations Peacekeeping Operations', Ref. 2016.24, January 2017. <https://info.publicintellgence.net/UN-PeacekeepingForces-2017.pdf>
- ² We emphasise how the uniformed peacekeepers perform, even if we are well aware of the challenges of assessing their actions in isolation when PoC is always an integrated, whole-of-mission duty.
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- ⁴ Hultman, Lisa, Jacob D Kathman and Megan Shannon. 2019. *Peacekeeping in the Midst of War*. Oxford University Press.
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- ⁷ We are thankful for the excellent field survey implementation by our regional research teams. These survey results form part of the larger research project 'Peacekeeper performance and mission-host society interactions' that has been funded by the Folke Bernadotte Academy during 2022–2024.
- ⁸ Mampilly, Zachariah. 2018. "Shifts in global power and UN peacekeeping performance: India's rise and its impact on civilian protection in Africa." *African Affairs*. 117(467): 171–94, <https://doi.org/10.1093/afraf/ady009>
- ⁹ African Union, 2013. Report of the Chairperson of the Commission on the Situation in Somalia. AU Document PSC/PR/2. (CCCLX-XIX), June 13, Addis Ababa: African Union. https://au.int/sites/default/files/speeches/25332-sp-psc-report-somalia-13-06-2013_0.pdf Since April 2022, AMISOM was transformed into the African Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS).
- ¹⁰ United Nations, 2014. S/RES/2155 (2014), 27 May, New York. This UN Security Council resolution decided to make PoC a core priority, regard-less of the source of the threat.
- ¹¹ Williams, P 2013 *The African Union Mission in Somalia and Civilian Protection Challenges*. *Stability: International Journal of Security & Development*, 2(2): 39, pp. 1–17, DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5334/sta.bz>
- ¹² Fisher, Jonathan. 2019. "AMISOM and the Regional Construction of a Failed State in Somalia." *African Affairs* 118(471):285–306; Craig Murphy, 'The United Nations Mission in South Sudan and the Protection of Civilians', *Journal of Conflict and Security Law*, vol. 22, no. 3, 2017, pp. 367–94.
- ¹³ The figures provide descriptive representations of conjoint data as marginal means (MMs), which represent the mean outcome across all appearances of the conjoint feature level presented: Peacekeeper Patrol Frequency (left figure) and Using Force to fulfil PoC (right figure), averaging across all other features. Left figure represents results in Marginal means for Civilian Preference for Peacekeeper Patrol Frequency in their Communities from: almost never to 1–2 times per month to 2–3 times per week. Right figure represents results in Marginal means for Civilian Preference for Peacekeeper Using Force to fulfil the Protection of Civilians (PoC) mandate from: never, sometimes to always. C.I. whiskers at 95%. Blue bars for Green Helmets in South Sudan (UNMISS) and green bars for Green Helmets in Somalia (AMISOM). Since this was a forced choice conjoint design with two profiles per choice task, values above 50% indicate features that increase profile favourability and values below 50% indicate features that decrease profile favourability.
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Author biography

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