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**Abstract**

Modern peacekeepers face many challenges in the areas in which they are deployed, including often dealing with a non-cooperative host population. However, if the peacekeepers shared an identity characteristic (this paper focuses on race, religion, language, gender, and geo-economics) with the host population, would this improve how peacekeepers and the host population interact, increasing the chances of the mission’s success? This study aims to answer this question and propose whether the UN should deploy peacekeeping troops based on this common identity criteria. Since the research was qualitative, data was primarily collected through interviews and focus group discussions with veteran and undertraining peacekeepers. After an extensive thematic analysis of the interviews, the thesis yielded the following results: a) A positive link exists between a shared identity (amongst peacekeepers and civilians) and success in peacekeeping missions b) Impartiality and timely provision of humanitarian assistance builds the good reputation of a UN contingent and can enhance ‘local acceptance’ for a peacekeeping mission c) While peacekeepers should not be deployed based on identity, language training before deployment can vastly improve how peacekeepers interact with the local populace. Hence, while the UN does not need to amend its deployment policies, language is a crucial identity characteristic that the UN can utilize to improve success in peacekeeping missions.

**Keywords**

Identity, Psychosocial, Peacekeeping, United Nations

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**Received** 07 August 2023; **Revised** 06 May 2024; **Accepted** 27 June 2024; **Published online** 30 June 2024

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Introduction

‘Establishing international peace and security’ is a statement synonymous with the agenda of the United Nations (UN). Particularly, it refers to the organization’s most challenging undertaking – Peacekeeping. It is a unique concept that involves deployment of multinational troops in a war-torn country to provide it ‘security and stability’. It is a joint international venture and is symbolic of the global community’s promise to uphold human rights and protect humanity at all costs. While this symbolism paints an idyllic picture of what peacekeeping stands for, in reality, this enterprise is far more technical.

Since many countries contribute troops for such missions, the UN, with the consent of all parties involved, is responsible to coordinate and manage deployment of contingents from volunteer countries, comprising soldiers from a variety of cultures, religions, and nations. This deployment process, however, does not consider the impact that psychosocial similarities between the deployed peacekeepers and the population of host country may have on success of the mission. For example, troops from China, Ethiopia, India, and Nepal were stationed in South Sudan when violence broke out in July 2016. They failed to protect civilians, abandoning their posts, and not responding to cries for help from aid workers under attack in a hotel close to a UN compound (Aljazeera, 2016). Would the situation have turned out differently had the UN contingent comprised of troops from African nations with close ethnic ties to the South Sudanese? This raises the question of whether the consideration of identity factors for UN troop deployment can prove to be the missing link in peacekeeping success. Or would the consideration of psychosocial factors such as identity in mandate composition subsequently harm the performance of peacekeeping missions?

Given the fact that UN failures receive a lot more media attention than successes, peacekeeping missions are largely under-appreciated for their efforts in bringing an end to a conflict or rebuilding a society that is emerging from one. In some instances, peacekeepers act in ways contrary to acceptable standards, tarnishing the reputation of the UN. The misconduct of UN peacekeepers in Haiti is a well-known case. Consequently, prejudice exists against UN peacekeepers in a lot of war-torn countries as the host population does not always trust the deployed troops and thus does not cooperate with them.

Therefore, in this research, main factors to observe appear to be how peacekeepers perceive their role; how much they can empathize with the host population; and how well that empathy can translate into cooperation and communication with the host population. Intuitively, this empathy and sense of solidarity should be amplified if the UN peacekeepers and the host country’s population share common identity factors such as race, religion, language, gender, or a similar geo-economic region. This research aims to answer the questions raised above and recommend the way forward.

Conceptual Framework

Identity is a much-debated concept. While some consider it to be a biological fact – an unchangeable reality, others argue that it is a fluid concept that changes according to the environment or situation in which the individuals find themselves. Identity has been defined as “…the social position that the self not only possesses but also internalizes. Put differently, for each of the social statuses that the self has, it also has an identity attached to it” (Cinoğlu & Arikan, 2012). Furthermore, identity can be understood as “(a) a social category, defined by membership rules and (alleged) characteristic
attributes or expected behaviors, or (b) socially distinguishing features that a person takes a special pride in or views as unchangeable but socially consequential (or (a) and (b) at once)” (Fearon, 1999). Hence, identity is very much psychological and very much social, in essence, psychosocial.

Groups and communities, based on identity, provide a sense of social security and belonging to individuals. These social dynamics inform how individuals interact with each other, particularly in multicultural settings. When the same argument is extended to UN Peacekeepers, there is a great probability that Peacekeepers will feel a natural kinship with the people they are sent to protect if those people share a common identity characteristic with the Peacekeepers. These characteristics are: religion (that influences social norms and practices); race (a sense of shared heritage or common ancestry); gender (understanding needs and issues faced by people of the same gender); language (a common source of communication - unites people across nations) and Geo-economic status (first-world country vs. third world country).

Furthermore, given the challenge that the identity factor poses to parties in a conflict zone, Social Identity Theory is considered extremely important in the evolving academic exploration of conflicts (Cuhadar & Dayton, 2011). According to this theory, humans tend to categorize other human beings into in-groups and out-groups, which permit individuals “to draw on mental constructs that set expectations and guide behavior as they navigate their social interactions” (Cuhadar & Dayton, 2011, p. 274). Applying psycho-sociological theories to literature related to peacekeeping isn’t a new venture. Woodhouse (1998) used psychological concepts as a basis to analyze peacekeeping and improve conflict resolution practices, admitting that “peacekeeping on the ground is an essentially psychological process requiring great sensitivity to local perceptions and culture”. (Franke, 1999) further encourages such research when he applies Social Identity Theory to identify tensions during peacekeeping. He argues that in any given situation, individuals tend to “derive their self-conceptions from a network of "central life interests" comprising their identities, beliefs, values, and attitudes”. Accordingly, current research hypothesizes that identity does impact behavior and perceptions of peacekeepers towards local people and vice versa.

Literature Review

For peacekeeping missions to be successful, interactions between peacekeepers and the host population (civilians) must be positive; where civilians trust uniformed peacekeepers while peacekeepers can communicate effectively with and respond sympathetically towards the civilians. Hence in peacekeeping missions, the identity of the peacekeepers as well as the civilians can either hamper or facilitate the mission’s success.

UN Peacekeepers tread a very difficult path as they must keep warring parties from engaging in violent clashes and protect civilians who may get caught in such clashes. Progressively, peacekeepers must also ‘build’ peace in their Area of Responsibility to ‘keep’ that peace. Hence, the UN can be envisaged to play an integral role in global governance. Aksu believes that the United Nation’s role in governance can be understood as the result of complex interplay between interests and norms in the global arena (Aksu, 2003). While it is undoubtedly the state’s interests that define UN’s role in peacekeeping, it cannot be ignored that the UN has its standing principles. As Tsagourias (2006) eloquently states, “Peacekeeping is based on the trinity of consent, neutrality/impartiality, use of force in self-defense” (Tsagourias, 2006, p. 1).
Impartiality is considered a cornerstone of peacekeeping by the UN. As soldiers are sent to keep the peace, they are not expected to side with any party in the conflict while carrying out their mandates. But as Peter (2015) argues, “…not only are UN peacekeeping operations mandated ‘to side with the government’ against interests of other parties; these missions are also staffed by personnel from parties that have vested interests” (Peter, 2015, p. 359). He maintains that modern peacekeeping missions are mandated to help the governments of host states reacquire control over their territory. In such scenarios, “It thus is not entirely clear whether troops participating in these missions are deployed to uphold the peacekeeping mandate or to protect immediate interests of the states contributing to them… Since it is doubtful whether the peacekeepers are protecting the UN mandate or their state’s interests, their impartiality can be labeled as “suspect” (Peter, 2015, p. 359). Regional states are becoming increasingly likelier to participate in regional peacekeeping operations, simply because the conflict impacts their security and political interests (Peter, 2015).

African peacekeeping ventures into other African countries are riddled with the same suspicion. Since the Cold War, peacekeeping contributions from African countries on their home continent have substantially risen. To understand the impetus behind this increase, an exhaustive quantitative analysis of 47 sub-Saharan African states between 1989-2001 revealed that while poorer regimes with lower state legitimacy are more likely to engage in regional peacekeeping, repressive regimes are likely to participate in more different peacekeeping missions, specifically to divert international attention away from the ongoing regime’s repressiveness (Victor, 2010).

Furthermore, studies suggest that there is a significant mismatch between doctrine and practice about peacekeeping principles. One analysis argues that trying to be an impartial actor in a peace process while seeking to disarm one of the parties is paradoxical to the role the mission plays (Peter, 2015). This disparity between practice and doctrine resonates with the findings of a report by HIPPO, which admitted that two contrasting schools of thought exist about the peacekeeping principles: one claims that they “should be upheld” while the other argues that they are “outmoded and require adjustment” (Sebastián & Gorur, 2018, p. 14). Modern peacekeeping practice requires upgrading these principles and focusing on enhancing communication, cooperation, and sympathy with the local population.

The case of UNPROFOR demonstrates that such considerations can prevent horrendous tragedies from occurring such as those that transpired in Bosnia. As Bakare (2020) points out, soldiers from the Netherlands still face the regret of such a tragedy:

Their mandate as a UN peacekeeping force was to keep and maintain peace amongst the warring parties in Bosnia, but the action of the Dutch soldiers underpinned their complicity in the Srebrenica genocide. Since 1995, the memory of wearing the Dutch military badge and allowing the Bosnian Serbs led by Ratko Mladic to slaughter Muslim men and boys will remain an undeletable stigma for the Dutch military (Bakare, 2020, p. 20).

Like impartiality, host-state consent is also critical for the success of peacekeeping missions. Host-state consent is political, granted by its government as official permission for the presence of a peacekeeping force. A study highlights the importance of obtaining host-state consent by arguing that the UN missions in Rwanda, Bosnia and Somalia were ‘strained politically and financially’ because “the UN was compelled to act and intervene on humanitarian grounds, without clear consent of the
parties involved in the conflict” which increased the threat level “faced by the peacekeepers and added new dimensions to their roles and responsibilities…” (Kiani, 2004, p. 48). Therefore, a host-state’s consent can mean the difference between mission success and mission failure.

Concurrently, the consent of local populace for peacekeeping missions is just as significant as host-state consent. While local consent itself is not a peacekeeping principle, recent studies have highlighted the need to consider it. For example, Whalan, (2013) analyzes peace operations’ effectiveness and legitimacy from the local lens. She discusses the need to look at the effectiveness of UN peace operations through a local level of analysis and emphasizes local cooperation and involvement in making peace operations successful. Le Roy & Malcorra (2009) agree when they point out that, “In the past, the effectiveness of UN peacekeeping has been hampered by ineffective communication, often exacerbated by a limited understanding of local culture, the diversity of views in the population, and divisions along ethnic, gender and other lines” (Le Roy & Malcorra, 2009, p. 15). For example, among the issues faced by peacekeepers in the UN Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL), one was the behavior of American troops lacked any awareness of local cultures and languages and displayed an absence of insight into how these societies functioned (Leone & Reno, 2001).

For this reason, many researchers argue that a diverse cadre of troops, spanning all nationalities, cultures, religions, and ethnicities, be deployed for peacekeeping. The importance of diversity in deployment has been underscored in the Brahimi Report. This review of existing UN peacekeeping policies proposed that for effective and rapid deployment of professional peacekeeping forces led by capable commanders, the Secretary-General in consultation with Member States make a comprehensive list of possible commanders and heads for missions based on a diverse geographic and equal gender distribution (United Nations, 2000, p. 17). In addition to this, Bove and Ruggeri explored how diversity in the composition of UN peacekeeping operations impacted the protection of civilians. The authors used fractionalization and polarization indices to determine how diversity impacted the protection of civilians in missions in Africa between 1991 and 2008, with the result showing a decrease in violence against civilians in missions with increased diversity. Similarly, they state that “Peacekeepers from different nationalities have their hidden cultural approaches and competencies in intercultural communication and the management of multicultural contexts” (Bove & Ruggeri, 2016, p. 686). Hence, the writers suggest that the deployment of a diverse mix of troops, who have the capability of working effectively within a multicultural environment, may have a significant impact on the success of the mission.

However, some researchers reason that diversity and identity may complicate the mission dynamics further. Particularly in the case of an ethnoreligious conflict, having the wrong mix of troops could end up aggravating it, making the peacekeeping mission an extremely difficult proposition. Many of the war-torn countries are culturally diverse where cultural fragmentation in the local population adds to the complications faced by peacekeepers in forming a trust-based professional relationship with the local people (Bove & Ruggeri, 2016). In conflicts where ethnicity is already a cause for violence and discontent, sending a diverse blend of peacekeepers might make the situation more volatile and the mission drastically ineffective. The Somalian
conflict is a good example. Additionally, there were several mistakes at the administrative level of the mission. For example, the US encouraged the UN to name a Turkish General as Commander of the mission but at the same time ensured a command structure in which the US armed forces reported to the deputy commander, who was an American. This effectively meant a dual chain of command for the mission (Myriam & Brule, 2017), which implied that a command-and-control disparity existed amongst the troops along identity lines. The relationship between peacekeepers and the host country is a complex one, something that contributing countries fully realize. It is in the best interest of Troop Contributing Countries (TCCs) that a peacekeeping operation ends successfully. To achieve this objective, effective pre-mission peacekeeping training is essential. Agha quotes General Assembly Resolution A/RES/49/37 (1995), which highlights that “Peacekeeping training is regarded as a strategic investment that enables UN military, police and civilian staff to effectively implement increasingly multifaceted mandates.” (Agha, 2023, p. 132-133) This investment can mean the difference between success and failure in a mission. This is the reason why many developing countries including Pakistan lay a strong emphasis on the training of their peacekeeping troops.

From defining the core concept of identity to understanding what factors lead to countries contributing troops to missions, one thing is glaringly clear: Modern, successful missions require a deeper level of understanding and cooperation between the locals (civilians and warring parties alike) and the peacekeepers. It is important to note that at the very core of all conflicts is society itself; one that is defined by the psychological association of its members to the values that define it. How the involvement of outside actors influences individuals and as a group, the society in conflict is based very much on the analysis of the psychological factors that impact it i.e., psychosocial factors. Identity, though a broad concept and generally limited to the causes of conflicts, might be the missing link to unlocking their solutions. Whatever, what the above literature essentially emphasizes is that the impact of identity on peacekeeping missions warrants academic exploration.

Methodology
This is a qualitative study based on phenomenological research. It aims to understand how identity influences the relationship between UN peacekeepers and the host-country population, thereby focusing on the human experience. The outcome of this research is not based on any preconceived notions; instead, it is based on the analysis of the personal (lived) experience of the main subjects of the research, which are the UN peacekeepers, as the research focuses on their perceptions vis a vis the host populations of the states where they are deployed.

The primary data in this research has been collected through interviews and group discussions with Officers being trained for Peacekeeping missions as well as with veteran peacekeepers having real-life experience with UN peacekeeping missions in various countries. Field data provided by the Peacekeeping Training Department of the Center for International Peace and Stability (National University of Sciences and Technology) has been used as a primary source to guide the thesis.

The secondary data has been collected from analysis of the current Troop Selection Policy and Peacekeeping Selection Standards of the United Nations as well as from UN reports and recommendations on how to improve peacekeeping missions. These have been analyzed to understand how the UN forms mission mandates and
determine where room and flexibility for change and improvement in this policy exists. This is supplemented with data from research articles and books relevant to the subject of the research.

**Identity Dynamics in Peacekeeping Missions**

The main question that this research aims to explore is whether the bond of a common identity, shared between peacekeepers and the host population, can impact the success of peacekeeping missions. The answer to this question will determine if the identity factor needs to be considered as an essential element while deploying troops for UN peacekeeping operations. The objective was to uncover any positive or negative link that existed between identity and successful peacekeeping and determine how the consideration of such a link could transform UN peace operations. A detailed thematic analysis of the gathered data (interviews and focus group discussions) has yielded the following results:

**Principles of Peacekeeping**

Peacekeeping, being a joint international effort at promoting peace and stability, is guided by three core principles: Impartiality, Consent of the belligerent parties and Non-use of force. The interviews and focus-group discussions with the veteran and in-training peacekeepers respectively highlighted two of these Principles as significant to the current research: Consent of belligerent parties (both local and host-state) and Impartiality.

**Local Consent and Response to UN Peacekeeping**

While peacekeeping operations are widely discussed in literature, academic analyses about their local angle are few in quantity. Both the veteran and the in-training peacekeepers mentioned local acceptance numerous times and admitted that local consent is important for peacekeeping missions. They also highlighted that the past behavior of peacekeepers in a mission influences the way locals perceive a peacekeeping operation and how they respond to the peacekeepers. One officer, who had not only served in a mission in West Africa but had also visited multiple missions, revealed that the locals were used to peacekeeping contingents changing every few months, therefore they had “adopted” themselves to the different cultures or identities to which the peacekeepers belonged. Vice versa, the peacekeepers had “…a very good gelling up with the local inhabitants.” (IP-1, personal communication, December 2023). Therefore, locals of countries who are already exposed to frequently changing peacekeeping contingents, do not get affected by the diversity in cultures and identities of the peacekeepers as the locals are already used to it. Another interesting aspect is the perception of the local population on the performance of peacekeeping operations. Many veteran peacekeepers pointed out that locals would only get upset when the mission did not fulfil its mandated tasks or was unable to provide the humanitarian assistance that it was supposed to deliver.

This goes in line with what Tsagourias (2006) says about obtaining support at the root level, “If the PKO is responsive to the needs of the local population, addresses their concerns, provides security and humanitarian assistance and protects them from threats efficiently and impartially, this may guarantee support…” and may end up affecting “…the attitude of the parties.” (Tsagourias, 2006). The in-training peacekeepers were of the view that perceptions of the local population regarding peacekeepers were affected by the geopolitical environment surrounding their conflict. This often made the affected (local) people believe that the UN wasn’t doing enough,
even though on-ground, the peacekeepers would be trying to help. A veteran peacekeeper admitted that a local pulse about peacekeepers was generated the moment they were deployed at the area of operation, and he believed that this first impression was important for the success of the peacekeeping mission. For another veteran peacekeeper, the ‘race’ of peacekeepers vis a vis the local population was also an important factor. While sharing his experience, he remarked that although their contingent, being Asian and brown, had generally cordial relations with the local officials and populace, “…there were some instances in which UN vehicles (carrying white passengers) were attacked…” (IP-5, personal communication, January 2023).

The veteran peacekeeper was of the view that the identity factor was not highlighted even though it existed; addressing this factor had a great potential to serve as a bridge to reduce biases of the locals and enhance mission success. The in-training peacekeepers argued that prior consent for deploying troops was always taken by the UN from all involved parties (including those representing locals) and therefore ‘local consent’ may not be a factor requiring special attention. From this research’s viewpoint, although local consent may be embedded in the Peacekeeping missions, the ‘local acceptance’ of the population towards the peacekeepers and the mission in general, remained critical to motivate both sides to cooperate to keep and build peace.

**Host-state Consent and Peacekeeping**

Belligerent party consent is an important peacekeeping principle. As discussed above, “before the deployment of …the peacekeepers, the consent of the belligerent party is obtained by the United Nations” (IP-2, personal communication, December 2023). Bakare also points out that a peacekeeping mission’s mandate is directly dependent on the consent of all involved parties, particularly the state actor (Bakare, 2020). Hence, host-state consent is equally significant, especially for troops of specific countries. As per the analysis of a veteran peacekeeper, the requirement of host government’s consent ensures political issues between states are resolved at the government level and they do not hinder peacekeeping operations. After having host-state consent for the deployment of troops, what makes a difference to the success of the mission on-ground is the professionalism of the soldiers. However, a veteran peacekeeper admits that vested interests on the part of certain deployed states, particularly the deployment of African troops into African nations, are increasingly becoming an issue for peacekeeping operations (IP-1, personal communication, December 2023). For this reason, many regional states are often barred from peacekeeping missions in their geographic proximity. This is because “excluding regional actors with interest in the conflict outcome not only has to do with obtaining consent but also with making sure that UN peacekeeping is not used as a political tool”. Therefore, this “policy is intended to protect the credibility of operations…” (Peter, 2015). While the national identities of deployed peacekeepers can affect the process of obtaining host-state consent for a peacekeeping mission, one of the veteran peacekeepers also pointed out that consent could be obtained gradually, and the UN is mindful of where it sends which troops. He argued that countries will not give consent where they mistrust the peacekeepers’ true objectives, and even if they do give consent, it is not permanent and can be revoked at any moment (IP-1, personal communication, December 2023). This is where the impartiality of the deployed troops becomes equally important to the mission.

**Impartiality**

Impartiality is extremely important to successful peacekeeping missions and is something which both the in-training and veteran peacekeepers highlighted. A veteran
peacekeeper proposed that host governments must conduct peace treaties with all the parties to the conflict before the peacekeeping mission as without the agreement “…the peacekeeping mission cannot be impartial, … because it [will appear to be] playing side of the host government against the rebels” (IP-1, personal communication, December 2023). Sebastian and Gorur (2018) conferred something similar when they argued that mandates, which are openly working to strengthen the authority of the state, contest the mission’s impartiality and damage its legitimacy in front of the other parties in the conflict (Sebastián & Gorur, 2018). Surprisingly, according to the peacekeepers that were interviewed, host-state consent depends on how impartial the peacekeepers were. The in-training peacekeepers suggested that the deployment of troops based on identity would affect impartiality, which would negatively impact the mission's success. However, a veteran peacekeeper who served in Bosnia was of the view that sharing a common identity does allow local people to become more comfortable with the deployed peacekeepers, yet it could be manipulated to show weak impartiality on the part of the peacekeepers, which would then pose a challenge to the mission (IP-3, personal communication, December 2023). The peacekeeper recounted an incident where a Muslim civilian asked a Muslim peacekeeper for assistance and the peacekeeper, following his duty, gave the required supplies. However, this was misconstrued by the mission administration as evidence of partiality in conduct. Even though the peacekeeper had only followed the mandate. Such an occurrence naturally caused other civilians to doubt the impartiality of the peacekeepers, which then posed a challenge to the mission. Therefore, the consideration of ‘identity aspect’ in troop deployment does pose challenges to impartiality.

**Humanity**

Interaction with peacekeepers brought another important aspect to notice, which was more related to the beliefs of peacekeepers themselves. When asked what common identity would be preferable for a peacekeeping mission deployment, two in-training peacekeepers belonging to different nationalities responded that their preferred mission deployment would be the one where protection of human rights was the main goal. A veteran peacekeeper agreed that the most important thing in a mission area was humanitarian assistance. Another peacekeeper who served in Cyprus as recently as 2020 said that even beyond being Muslim, seeing the Turkish Cypriot community suffering, seeing humanity suffering was extremely difficult (IP-4, personal communication, January 2023). A peacekeeper who had served in Bosnia also agreed; he believed that while it was natural to feel an inclination towards people of a shared identity, it was humanity that came first. In his view, if a local came to ask for help, the peacekeeper would solve the trouble first and ask for their identity later (IP-3, personal communication, December 2023). Yamin (2017) conducted a survey where “…none of the veteran Pakistani peacekeepers cited pay as the top motivation. The uppermost choices were a sense of duty, loyalty to the country and serving humanity.” (Yamin, 2017). As one of the peacekeepers remarked, “We are there to respect…humanity, we are there to protect …humanity. So long as we are doing the same, I think we are performing our job.” (IP-2, personal communication, December 2023). Therefore, as per the experience of interviewed peacekeepers and the perceptions of others, humanity comes before identity which ensures impartiality of a peacekeeping mission.

**Peacekeeping Identity, Training, and Professionalism**

Both veteran and in-training peacekeepers agreed that pre-deployment training was essential for peacekeepers. A veteran peacekeeper argued that, more than identity, the
success of the mission depended on how well the soldiers were trained and prepared for a mission. Professional and properly trained peacekeepers were more likely to find solutions to problems in the mission area, which were acceptable to all parties. One of the veteran peacekeepers suggested that to ensure peace in a mission area, peacekeepers must look for win-win solutions to the problems with the locals, which was why professional competence was key for mission success. An example of this professionalism exhibited by peacekeepers was quoted by a veteran peacekeeper, who had worked in Cyprus. She revealed that the Greek and Turkish Cypriots were very accepting of each other while working on the mission and displayed a very professional attitude towards one another and other peacekeepers as well (IP-4, personal communication, January 2023). Another veteran peacekeeper opined that appropriate training was mandatory before countries could deploy troops for peacekeeping; this included awareness training for two weeks conducted after the peacekeepers reached the mission area. Building on this, a veteran peacekeeper suggested that instead of sending peacekeepers belonging to the same identity, the troops must be given detailed cultural and religious training so that they are respectful towards locals of different religions and cultures. Some in-training peacekeepers were of the view that cultural awareness training was not necessary because peacekeepers were just going for their job and if the UN were to introduce detailed cultural training, then the cost would be extremely high. Veteran peacekeepers also felt that different countries practiced different training regimes, which posed a challenge to unified working in the mission area. Therefore, they proposed that uniform training segments of multiple contingents needed to be conducted together. The in-training peacekeepers suggested that training courses like those at the Center for International Peace and Stability should be conducted in other troop-contributing countries too.

**The Role of Language in Peacekeeping**

Language plays an important role in successful peacekeeping – this is a statement that received support from most of the interviewed peacekeepers. The peacekeepers, especially those who had already served, admitted that language courses before deployment were essential. Likewise, a group of in-training peacekeepers agreed that language was extremely important in overcoming communication barriers. Other groups of in-training peacekeepers were of the view that if they were deployed based on language then the warring parties or locals may view them with mistrust, which may damage their impartiality. Furthermore, in their view, entire contingents could not be deployed based on language alone “Congo is French speaking so you can't send the entire force full of French soldiers” (Focus Group 2). This is understandable as the UN requires contingents from different countries to support varying aspects of peacekeeping missions. While language was raised by the interviewed peacekeepers as definitely a factor that affects peacekeeping operations, the gender of peacekeepers was highlighted as being just as crucial.

**Gender and Peacekeeping**

Gender adds a unique perspective and attitude to peacekeeping. A group of in-training female peacekeepers were interviewed, who believed that they could understand things and connect with the victims of conflict better than their male colleagues. In their view, local women would feel more comfortable sharing their problems with a female peacekeeper, who would be able to comprehend their trauma in a better way and help them through it. The UN started sending Female Engagement Teams (FETs) because they realized that female victims would be more comfortable talking about their issues
with female peacekeepers and that female peacekeepers would be more empathetic towards the local female community. This was evident from the fact that the UN was open to amending its deployment policies and improving the probability of the peacekeeping operation’s success. The veteran and in-training peacekeepers highlighted that Pakistan was the first country to send a Female Engagement Team (FET) and the first to achieve the UN gender quota in peacekeeping deployments. These FETs could provide a treasure trove of information on how a gender-balanced (gender also being an identity) peacekeeping mission could positively influence a conflict-ridden society and increase the chances of an operation’s success.

**Obstacles in Peacekeeping Missions**

Most of the interviewed peacekeepers, both in-training and veteran, admitted that UN peacekeeping missions do not have many success stories, which negatively affects the UN’s image. One veteran peacekeeper was of the view that states with vested interests and other agendas do send their peacekeeping troops to war-torn countries, and this was an issue that could not be mitigated as there were huge financial benefits attached to the peacekeeping missions. Some veteran peacekeepers were also of the view that first-world countries deploy peacekeeping missions in selected countries to build access to their natural resources. Therefore, the very purpose of peacekeeping fails, and the presence of peacekeepers paradoxically decreases the chances of building peace. One of the veteran peacekeepers pointed out peacekeeping contingents were not adequately trained for public dealing and needed to learn how to negotiate with the locals and warring parties. Problematic compositions of peacekeeping contingents have emphasized the need to tackle another key obstacle to peacekeeping missions: local mistrust of deployed peacekeepers. It often happens that a deployed contingent from a country suspected of intervening in the internal affairs of the host country faces a lot of backlash and public mistrust due to their alleged political interference. A veteran peacekeeper stressed that this mistrust has such a damaging effect on the mission that it leads to a drawdown of troops. For example, the participation of Chadian soldiers in the African-led International Support Mission to the Central African Republic (MISCA) had been a highly contested issue due to Chad’s alleged backing of the Muslim rebel group Seleka. This was the group responsible for the overthrow of the CAR government at the time (Peter, 2015).

Veteran peacekeepers also pointed out the dichotomy between first world and third-world representation arguing that the former were usually the ones in the position of authority for a peacekeeping mission. While the first world controlled administrative roles in the mission headquarters, it was the third-world countries that contributed troops to the missions. In essence, the first-world countries had outsourced peacekeeping to the third world. Since these major powers controlled these organizations, there would not be any positive change in how the organizations were run; the interests of major powers mattered more than the change. The First World also uses influence of its financial contributions to the UN. This allows them to dictate terms of peacekeeping even though ironically, in most cases, it is the consequence of their colonial past that these peacekeeping mission countries are in chaos and conflict. The in-training peacekeepers were of a similar view as they believed that local acceptance would not be there for troops from countries with which the locals share a colonial past, and such missions would therefore be ineffective. One of the veterans highlighted another interesting aspect. According to him, the background of peacekeeping troops mattered. He was of the view that peacekeepers from underdeveloped/developing
countries would better understand the issues and problems faced by the locals in the underdeveloped countries where they were deployed.

**UN Peacekeeping Troop Deployment**
A veteran peacekeeper revealed that when the UN announces a peacekeeping mission, countries that are willing to contribute with troops or funds respond immediately. The in-training peacekeepers added that state interests determine the level of contribution to a mission. Another veteran peacekeeper expressed that the UN did take identity into account, particularly in ethno-religious cases; however, most troops were deployed based on the availability and willingness of countries to contribute. Both in-training and veteran peacekeepers highlighted that a peacekeeping mission should include multiple contingents with a good blend of different countries. They were of the view that diversity in deployments inculcates respect for diversity among peacekeepers themselves. One in-training peacekeeper was of the view that neutral parties or a blend of countries in peacekeeping contingents were also necessary to avoid identity being used as a tool to prolong conflicts to serve the interests of contributing states.

Therefore, it was evident that the UN should be mindful of political, normative, and cultural sensitivities when sending multiple contingents to avoid problems arising amongst its deployed peacekeepers. A veteran peacekeeper proposed that for more effective peacekeeping the UN should deploy peacekeepers belonging to the same region of the country in suffering. Significant academic work has been done on this topic and the conclusion has been accurately summarized by Peter, “UN peace operations have seen an increasing deployment of regional actors” (Peter, 2015). Even though there has been reluctance to deploy contingents belonging to regional states given that they might be used as political instruments in the conflict by their government; however, Peter believes that this prohibition is slowly changing as “UN operations increasingly rely on regional contributions”. This is because “regional states are interested in conflicts that affect their security and political interests; therefore, they are willing to contribute to high-risk situations.” (Peter, 2015).

**Identity and its Impact on Peacekeeping**
Some of the interviewed peacekeepers were of the view that the impact of identity varied on an area-to-area basis. The in-training peacekeepers argued that identity as a deployment criterion may serve to increase the chances of a conflict getting prolonged and may also lead to the development of a bias on the part of the peacekeepers. However, most of the veteran peacekeepers, those with real-life experience in the field, were of the view that a peacekeeper sharing a similar identity helped the mission because it made peacekeepers more approachable.

Respondent IP-1 (personal communication, December 2023) opined that “Nigeria…Rwanda, Central and South African countries… were better than other countries which were not from the same region” because they knew the cultures, traditions, and tribes (IP-1, personal communication, December 2023). As per his experience, a peacekeeping contingent from a similar region and culture was beneficial for a mission because these contingents were more cohesive and well-coordinated (IP-1, personal communication, December 2023). However, IP-2 (Personal communication, December 2023) believed that duty mattered more than identity as impartiality was enshrined in the principles of peacekeeping and the peacekeepers were “…there to respect humanity [and] protect humanity” (IP-1, personal communication, December 2023). IP-3 (personal communication, December 2023), who had served in
Bosnia, admitted that a similar identity did promote the feeling amongst the people that they could expect sympathy from the peacekeepers and share their problems more freely with them. He stated, “They (the civilian population) would come up to you expecting a sympathetic view. They would share their things with you…and yes, we would understand it in a much better fashion…the problems of the people of our faith” (IP-3, personal communication, December 2023).

Furthermore, in the mission administration, and especially in the command, discrimination on identity aspect was there. As IP-3 (personal communication, December 2023) put it, “Yes, it is there, but it is not pronounced” (IP-3). Whether a peacekeeper was white or brown, mattered a lot in the treatment of the UN in peacekeeping missions. Talking about an incident where Pakistani troops suffered losses because a European contingent refused to go due to non-provision of proper equipment, IP-3 (IP-1, personal communication, December 2023) recounted that “The Americans were in the thick of the operation, the Italians had refused to go. So, we had that precedence that when they can refuse then we should also refuse unless we are given those vehicles…”. However, the Pakistanis did not refuse, they still stepped in to help, which led to the loss of precious lives. This incident demonstrated that identity was a factor of manipulation in missions, particularly at the administrative level. However, the same veteran peacekeeper also posited that the aspect of identity would not serve as an obstacle to peacekeeping missions making it less effective. Other veteran peacekeepers were of the view that identity did not remain an issue because the mission objectives were more important, and they trumped any identity-based biasedness. In some cases, peacekeeping mission effectiveness was dependent on the type and atmosphere of conflicts, for example: Cyprus, where identity was not an issue for the mission despite clear identity lines in the conflict. IP-4, who served very recently in Cyprus related that she “…never had any bad experience in that case…” even though “….identity [was] a part of the peacekeeping mission between [those] two countries, opposite in religion to each other…” (IP-4, personal communication, January 2023). The professionalism of the peacekeepers and the fact that the conflict was inactive ensured that identity did not become an impediment. IP-5 (personal communication, January 2023) is a veteran peacekeeper, who was responsible for conducting surveys to get the local perception about the peacekeeping mission. He pointed out that racial difference was required to be addressed as the Africans generally had issues with the whites and no problems with the Asians. He observed that the locals “…had some hatred against the whites. When I observed critically, I thought they had a soft corner for Asians because mostly Asian[s] were Muslim[s]” (IP-4, personal communication, January 2023). Therefore, racial differences should at least be addressed to improve the chances of a peacekeeping mission’s success.

Conclusion
Conclusively, what this research revealed the most was that while identity did impact the perceptions of both the peacekeepers and locals, it had far more potential to be a source of good for the mission rather than harm. Language was highlighted as crucial for positive interactions with the locals. In addition to this, cultural awareness courses and a globally integrated training regime for peacekeepers were also deemed essential for the success of peacekeeping missions as both these things prepared peacekeepers for their mission and its specific requirements. Ultimately, it came down to the professionalism of the peacekeeping troops, their commitment to upholding the principles of peacekeeping and their sense of duty in fulfilling the mission objectives.
The locals will be more comfortable with troops despite their diverse identities if the troops provide the required humanitarian assistance, are reputed to be professional and do not compromise on their impartiality. Impartiality is the most important peacekeeping principle, particularly because it ensures that bias and prejudice do not affect the behavior of peacekeepers in a mission area which helps fuel local acceptance of the mission and its objectives.

Despite religion being a core cause of conflict in many parts of the world, religious differences do not create conflict between peacekeepers and locals. The UN was very much cognizant of ethnoreligious sensitivities while deploying peacekeepers. In terms of deployment, the current policy of multiple contingents from a diverse set of countries was the best way to ensure a balance of identities in the mission area. Diversity in deployed contingents has already been quantitively proven in the literature to be more beneficial to missions. The only problems that occur in diverse contingents are administrative. The fact that decision-making power often rests in the hands of people from the first world or to put it bluntly, white people, is symbolic of the racial and geo-economic segregation at the UN administrative level. The irony was that the problems that most conflict-ridden countries were now facing were caused by people from the First World and now they use the power accorded to them by their financial contributions to peacekeeping missions to control how missions are conducted. This fuels resentment in the locals and contingents from third-world countries towards Europeans and first-world contingents. Therefore, it would be more accurate to state that identity being a multi-faceted concept also has a multi-faceted impact on peacekeeping. The link between peacekeeping and identity is an overall positive one. It is this positivity that research needs to focus on so that peacekeepers in the field can increase their chances of successfully carrying out the mission mandate.

**Conflict of Interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

**Funding:** This research received no external funding.

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