

# The Impact of Identity on the Success of Peacekeeping Missions: The Pakistani Perspective

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\***Jawaiza Sulehri<sup>1</sup> and Humaira Shafi<sup>2</sup>**

## Abstract

UN peacekeepers face numerous challenges in the regions where they are deployed, often encountering a non-cooperative host population. This study investigates whether sharing an identity characteristic—specifically race, religion, language, gender, or geo-economic background—with the host population could enhance the interactions between peacekeepers and the local populace, thereby increasing the likelihood of mission success. The research seeks to determine whether the UN should consider deploying peacekeeping troops based on these common identity criteria. The data was gathered through interviews and focus group discussions with veteran and trainee peacekeepers. Through extensive thematic analysis, the study produced the following key findings: (i) There is a positive correlation between shared identity characteristics (between peacekeepers and civilians) and the success of peacekeeping missions; (ii) impartiality and the timely provision of humanitarian assistance significantly contribute to building a positive reputation for UN contingents, which can enhance the ‘local acceptance’ of peacekeeping missions; (c) language training prior to deployment can substantially improve interactions between peacekeepers and the local population.

## Keywords

Identity, Psychosocial, Peacekeeping, United Nations

## Introduction

UN peacekeeping involves the deployment of multinational troops to war-torn countries to provide security and stability. As a joint international venture, it symbolizes the global community's commitment to upholding human rights and

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<sup>1</sup> \*Corresponding Author: *Jawaiza Sulehri* is an MS Graduate from the Department of Peace and Conflict Studies at the Centre for International Peace and Stability, NUST, Islamabad, Pakistan  
E-mail: [jawaiza.jabeen@gmail.com](mailto:jawaiza.jabeen@gmail.com)

<sup>2</sup> *Humaira Shafi* is an Assistant Professor at the Department of Peace and Conflict Studies, Centre for International Peace and Stability (CIPS), National University of Science and Technology (NUST), Islamabad, Pakistan

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protecting humanity at all costs. However, while this symbolism conveys an idealistic image of peacekeeping, the reality of this enterprise is far more complex and technical.

Since many countries contribute troops for such missions, the UN, with the consent of all parties involved, is responsible for coordinating and managing the deployment of contingents from volunteer countries, comprising soldiers from various cultures, religions, and nations. However, this deployment process does not consider the impact that psychosocial similarities between the deployed peacekeepers and the host country population may have on the mission's success. 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?

Since UN failures receive much more media attention than successes, peacekeeping missions are largely under-appreciated for their efforts to end a conflict or rebuild a society emerging from one. In some instances, peacekeepers act 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, the 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. 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 above questions and recommend the way forward.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Identity is a much-debated concept. While some consider it 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 social status that the self has, it also has an identity attached to it” (Cinoğlu & Arikan, 2012, p. 1116). Furthermore, identity can be understood as “[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, p.1). Hence, identity is very much psychological and 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 significant 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—that unites people across nations) and Geo-economic status (first-world country vs. third world country).

Furthermore, given the identity factor's challenge to parties in a conflict zone, Social Identity Theory is considered extremely important in the evolving academic exploration of conflicts. 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 is not a new venture. Woodhouse (1998) used psychological concepts 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, p.1) further encourages such research when he applies Social Identity Theory to identify tensions during peacekeeping. He argues that in any 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. In contrast, peacekeepers can communicate effectively with and respond sympathetically toward civilians. Hence, in peacekeeping missions, the identity of the peacekeepers and the civilians can either hamper or facilitate the mission's success.

UN Peacekeepers tread a challenging 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 as integral to global governance. Aksu believes that the United Nation's role in governance can be understood as the result of the complex interplay between interests and norms in the global arena (Aksu, 2003). While it is undoubtedly the state's interests that define the UN's role in peacekeeping, it cannot be ignored that the UN has its standing principles. As Tsagourias (2006, p. 1) states, “Peacekeeping is based on the trinity of consent, neutrality/impartiality, use of force in self-defense.”

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. However, 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”. He maintains that modern peacekeeping missions are mandated to help the governments of host states reacquire control over their territory. In such scenarios, it often remains unclear whether the troops are deployed primarily to uphold the UN peacekeeping mandate or to safeguard the interests of the states contributing to them (Peter, 2015, p. 359). Regional states are increasingly likely to participate in

regional peacekeeping operations because the conflict impacts their security and political interests.

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 and 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 a significant mismatch between the doctrine and practice of 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.' At the same time, the other argues for necessary adjustment (Sebastián & Gorur, 2018). Contemporary peacekeeping practice requires upgrading these principles and 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 Najimdeen (2020, p. 20) points out, soldiers from the Netherlands still face the regret of such a tragedy:

Their mandate as a UN peacekeeping force was to maintain peace amongst the warring parties in Bosnia. Still, 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.

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 underscores the importance of obtaining host-state consent, arguing that UN missions in Rwanda, Bosnia, and Somalia were 'strained politically and financially' due to the UN intervention on humanitarian grounds without explicit consent. This lack of consent heightened the threat level faced by peacekeepers and added new complexities to their roles and responsibilities (Kiani, 2004, p. 48). Therefore, a host-state's consent can mean the difference between mission success and failure.

Concurrently, the consent of the local populace for peacekeeping missions is just as significant as host-state consent. While local consent 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 and 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). In addition, 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, showing decreased violence against civilians in missions with increased diversity. Similarly, they state, “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 deploying a diverse mix of troops who can work effectively within a multicultural environment may significantly impact the mission's success.

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 a challenging proposition. Many war-torn countries are culturally diverse, and cultural fragmentation in the local population adds to the complications peacekeepers face 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, several things could have been improved 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 also 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 complex, 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, practical 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 implement increasingly multifaceted mandates effectively.” (Agha, 2023, pp. 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 clear: Modern, successful missions require more profound 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. Though a broad concept and generally limited to the causes of conflicts, identity might be the missing link to unlocking their solutions. However, the above literature emphasizes that identity’s impact 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, 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. The study focuses on their perceptions of 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 trained for peacekeeping missions and veteran peacekeepers with 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 was collected by analyzing the current Troop Selection Policy and Peacekeeping Selection Standards of the United Nations, as well as UN reports and recommendations for improving peacekeeping missions. These have been interpreted to understand how the UN forms mission mandates and determine where room and flexibility exist for change and improvement in this policy. This is supplemented with data from research articles and books relevant to the research subject.

### **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 must be considered an essential element while deploying troops for UN peacekeeping operations. The objective was to uncover any positive or negative link between identity and successful peacekeeping and determine how considering 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, a joint international effort to promote peace and stability, is guided by three core principles: Impartiality, Consent of the belligerent parties, and Non-use of force and defence of the mandate. The interviews and focus-group discussions with the veteran and in-training peacekeepers highlighted two of these significant principles 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, there are few academic analyses of their local angle. The veteran and the in-training peacekeepers mentioned local acceptance numerous times and admitted that local consent is essential 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 'adapted' to the different cultures or identities of the peacekeepers. Conversely, the peacekeepers developed a good rapport with the local inhabitants. (IP-1, personal communication, December 2023). Therefore, locals of countries who are already exposed to frequently changing peacekeeping contingents are not affected by the peacekeepers' diversity in cultures and identities as the locals are already used to it. Another exciting 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 fulfill its mandated tasks or could not provide the humanitarian assistance it was supposed to deliver.

This goes in line with what Tsagourias (2006, p. 477) 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. 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 was not 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 necessary for the success of the peacekeeping mission. For another veteran peacekeeper, the 'race' of peacekeepers vis-à-vis the local population was also essential. 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 believed 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 the UN always took prior consent for deploying troops 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 a vital 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). Najimdeen (2020) also points out that a peacekeeping mission’s mandate directly depends on the consent of all involved parties, particularly the state actor. Hence, host-state consent is equally significant, especially for troops of specific countries. As per the analysis of a veteran peacekeeper, the host government’s consent requirement ensures that political issues between states are resolved at the government level and do not hinder peacekeeping operations. After having host-state consent for the deployment of troops, what makes a difference to the mission’s success on-ground is the soldiers’ professionalism. 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, ensuring UN peacekeeping is not used as a ‘political tool.’ Therefore, the policy aims 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. It can be revoked anytime (IP-1, personal communication, December 2023). This is where the impartiality of the deployed troops becomes equally essential to the mission.

### ***Impartiality***

Impartiality is essential to successful peacekeeping missions and is highlighted by the in-training and veteran peacekeepers. A veteran peacekeeper proposed that host governments negotiate peace treaties with all parties to the conflict before deploying peacekeepers. Without such agreements, the peacekeeping mission cannot be impartial, as it [will appear to be] siding with the host government against the rebels. (IP-1, personal communication, December 2023). Sebastian and Gorur (2018) conferred something similar when they argued that mandates openly strengthen the state’s authority, contest the mission’s impartiality, and damage its legitimacy in front of the other parties in the conflict. Surprisingly, according to the interviewed peacekeepers, host-state consent depends on how impartial the peacekeepers were. The in-training peacekeepers suggested that deploying troops based on identity would affect impartiality, negatively impacting the mission's success. However, a veteran peacekeeper who served in Bosnia believed that sharing a common identity allows local people to become more comfortable with the deployed peacekeepers. Nevertheless, 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, considering the 'identity aspect' in troop deployment poses challenges to impartiality.

### ***Humanity***

Interaction with peacekeepers brought another critical 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 from different nationalities responded that their preferred mission deployment would be the one where protection of human rights was the primary goal. A veteran peacekeeper agreed that humanitarian assistance was essential in a mission area. 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 humanity came first while it was natural to feel inclined towards people of a shared identity. 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. As one of the peacekeepers remarked, "We are there to serve and protect humanity. As long as we are fulfilling this mission, I believe 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 the 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 mission's success 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 that 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 vital 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 (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 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 to respect locals of different religions and cultures. Some in-training peacekeepers believed that cultural awareness training was unnecessary because peacekeepers were going for their

jobs. If the UN were to introduce detailed cultural training, then the cost would be extremely high.

### ***The Role of Language in Peacekeeping***

Language plays a crucial role in effective peacekeeping. Veteran peacekeepers emphasized that language courses before deployment are essential while in-training peacekeepers agreed that language is fundamental to overcoming communication barriers. However, some in-training peacekeepers expressed concerns that deploying peacekeepers based solely on language might lead to mistrust from warring parties or locals, potentially undermining their impartiality. This reflects the necessity for the UN to deploy contingents from diverse countries to address various aspects of peacekeeping missions effectively. Additionally, while language is an important factor, the interviewed peacekeepers also highlighted that the gender of peacekeepers is equally significant in influencing peacekeeping operations.

### ***Gender and Peacekeeping***

Gender adds a unique perspective and attitude to peacekeeping. A group of in-training female peacekeepers who believed they could understand things and connect with the victims of conflict better than their male colleagues were interviewed. 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 because 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 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 interviewed peacekeepers, both in-training and veteran, admitted that UN peacekeeping missions do not have many success stories, negatively affecting 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 substantial financial benefits attached to the peacekeeping missions. Some veteran peacekeepers also believed that first-world countries deploy peacekeeping missions in selected countries to serve specific national interests. 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 that peacekeeping troops in modern multidimensional missions 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 critical obstacle to peacekeeping missions: local mistrust of deployed peacekeepers. A deployed contingent from a country suspected of intervening in the host country's internal affairs often faces 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 group was responsible for overthrowing 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, the third-world countries contributed troops to the missions. In essence, the first-world countries had outsourced peacekeeping to the third world. Since these significant powers controlled these organizations, there would not be any positive change in how the organizations were run; the interests of substantial powers mattered more than the change. The First World also uses the influence of its financial contributions to the UN. 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 less effective. One of the veterans highlighted another exciting aspect. According to him, the background of peacekeeping troops mattered. He believed 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 countries willing to contribute with troops or funds respond immediately when the UN announces a peacekeeping mission. The in-training peacekeepers added that state interests determine the contribution level 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. In-training and veteran peacekeepers highlighted that a peacekeeping mission should include multiple contingents with a good blend of different countries. They believed that diversity in deployments inculcates respect for diversity among peacekeepers themselves. One in-training peacekeeper believed that neutral parties or a blend of countries in peacekeeping contingents were also necessary to avoid identity being used 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.

Peter (2015) highlights the growing trend of deploying regional actors in peacekeeping operations due to the intertwined nature of regional conflicts. Given their direct stake in the region's stability, these actors are often more willing to engage in high-risk situations.

### ***Identity and its Impact on Peacekeeping***

Some of the interviewed peacekeepers believed that the impact of identity varied on an area-to-area basis. The in-training peacekeepers argued that identity as a deployment criterion may 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 veteran

peacekeepers with real-life experience in the field believed 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, and other Central and South African countries were more effective than non-regional countries in peacekeeping operations because they possessed a deeper understanding of the local cultures, traditions, and tribal dynamics” (IP-1, personal communication, December 2023). As per the respondent’s experience, a peacekeeping contingent from a similar region and culture benefitted the mission because these contingents were more cohesive and well-coordinated (IP-1, personal communication, December 2023). However, IP-2 (Personal communication, December 2023) argued that duty outweighed identity, emphasizing that impartiality is a fundamental principle of peacekeeping. According to this perspective, peacekeepers are there to uphold and protect humanity, regardless of shared identity characteristics. Similarly, another respondent who had served in Bosnia acknowledged that sharing a similar identity with the local population fostered a sense of trust. This shared identity made the people feel they could expect sympathy from the peacekeepers and share their problems more openly.

Furthermore, the data revealed that discrimination based on identity was evident in the administration of peacekeeping missions, particularly within the command structure. The treatment of peacekeepers often varied significantly depending on their background. This issue was highlighted by an incident where Pakistani troops suffered losses because a European contingent refused to proceed due to the lack of proper equipment. This incident, highlighted by a veteran peacekeeper, underscores that identity played a significant role in the mission, particularly at the administrative level. However, the same veteran peacekeeper also argued that while identity issues existed, they would not necessarily undermine the effectiveness of peacekeeping missions.

Other veteran peacekeepers asserted that identity did not pose a significant issue, as mission objectives were paramount and outweighed any identity-based biases. In some cases, the effectiveness of a peacekeeping mission depends on the nature and context of the conflict. For instance, despite the clear identity lines within the conflict, identity was not a concern for the mission's success in Cyprus. The professionalism of the peacekeepers and the fact that the conflict was inactive ensured that identity did not become an impediment. Therefore, addressing racial differences and biases is essential to enhance the likelihood of a peacekeeping mission’s success.

## **Conclusion**

Conclusively, this research revealed that while identity impacted the perceptions of 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, cultural awareness courses and a globally integrated training regime for peacekeepers were also deemed essential for the success of peacekeeping missions. Both 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 maintain impartiality. Impartiality is the most critical peacekeeping principle, mainly because it ensures that bias and prejudice

do not affect peacekeepers' behavior 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 ethno-religious sensitivities while deploying peacekeepers. Regarding deployment, the current policy of multiple contingents from diverse countries was the best way to ensure a balance of identities in the mission area. Diversity in deployed contingents has already been quantitatively 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, is symbolic of the racial and geo-economic segregation at the UN administrative level. This fuels alienation 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, a multi-faceted concept, also impacts 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.

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