

United Nations Peace Operations and International Relations Theory

Edited by *Kseniya Oksamytna and John Karlsrud*

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A comprehensive review of the book *United Nations (UN) Peace Operations and International Relations Theory*, edited by Kseniya Oksamytna and John Karlsrud, helps analyze the challenging notion that International Relations (IR) theories are impersonal and abstract. The book offers insights into international conflict resolution through the practical application of various IR theories. The book explores three main themes of peacekeeping, which are mentioned as follows: (i) the reasons behind state participation in missions, (ii) the results of peacekeeping efforts, and (iii) the relationship between international and local peacekeeping players. By examining several theoretical frameworks, such as constructivism, critical theory, feminist institutionalism, liberal institutionalism, rational choice institutionalism, sociological institutionalism, and complexity theory, each chapter provides insights into the actors, motivations, and mechanisms influencing UN peacekeeping.

In chapter one, Philip Cunliffe explains the conceptual differences between the realist theory of international relations and peacekeeping operations and highlights the similarities between their views on world order, war, and peace. He argues that peacekeeping seeks to sustain peace through international cooperation and institutional structures in contrast to realism, which usually focuses on the geopolitical conflict between powerful nations. He critically examines the potential applicability of three forms of realism, structural, neoclassical, and classical, to peacekeeping research.

Carla Monteleone and Kseniya Oksamytna's arguments in chapter two around liberal institutionalism stem from the significance of international institutions that pave the way toward international partnership and collaboration while alleviating uncertainty in an anarchic system. They thoroughly explored the applicability of liberal institutionalism on UN peacekeeping while arguing that regardless of the close association of theory with UN peacekeeping, it has only been applied to negotiations by the Security Council and troop contributions.

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In chapter three, Reykers emphasizes ‘Rational Choice Theory’ and explains the politics of control and command as one pertinent issue UN peacekeepers face. His principal argument, therefore, pertinently revolves around the challenges of UN peacekeeping control procedures and mandates, and he strongly affirms the usage of the principal-agent model of rational choice theory in understanding these difficulties.

Sarah Von Billerbeck explains the central idea of sociological institutionalism and its application to UN peacekeeping in chapter four. She interprets the impact of sociological institutionalism on standards, norms, and culture in influencing the behavior of an organization, which signifies UN peacekeeping. The author’s argument about local ownership in UN peacekeeping stresses institutional norms, the reputation of UN staff, and the importance of considering local ownership as an innovative policy option.

Marion Laurence and Emily Paddon Rhoad, in chapter five, thoroughly examined the discussion around constructivism and explained how constructivism gives a useful understanding of peacekeepers’ interpretative processes and the effect of norms on their daily actions and activities.

In chapter six, Ingvild Bod argues that practice theories provide a profound perspective that paves the way for examining the dynamics of peacekeeping, along with implementation and relevant challenges. He focused on the relatability of social hierarchies and power dynamics in affecting the workings of peacekeeping standards.

In chapter seven, Lucile Maertens makes an argument by explaining the perspectives of Critical Security Studies (CSS) around UN peacekeeping and the inclusion of environmental concerns into peacekeeping operations. For instance, the exemplification of the cholera outbreak in Haiti and the environmental/ecological rules adopted by the Departments of Peacekeeping Operations shows the concurrent link between security and environmental challenges.

In chapter eight, Georgina Holmes highlights Feminist Institutionalism as an essential theoretical framework for the comprehensive study of gendered dynamics and functioning within peacekeeping organizations and international security at large. She aptly argues that feminist institutionalism emphasizes the need for institutional change to enable women to engage in peace operations meaningfully, rationally, and successfully. The explanation given by the author around the execution of *UNSCR 1325* and the inclusion of female military peacekeepers into Ghana’s Armed Forces seconds the related empowerment.

Moreover, in chapter nine, Charles T. Hunt’s explanation of complexity theory and its applicability to the study of UN peacekeeping enhances our understanding of its interconnected features. Focusing on feedback processes, unexpected systemic outcomes, and emergent order, he effectively highlights the challenges faced during peacekeeping missions. Hunt’s emphasis on these issues provides valuable insights into the complexities of peacekeeping operations. In the concluding chapter, Mats Berda very accurately explained IR as a crossroads by pertinently stressing its multifarious character to analyze complicated peacekeeping scenarios.

While the chapters centered around different theories, there is still space to integrate practical challenges and ethical concerns that are a part and parcel of peacekeeping missions. The book should also inculcate discourse about the unpredictable impact of peacekeeping missions on local communities and the environment, as well as cultural rules, norms, sociopolitical issues, and economic challenges. Incorporating these elements would have provided a more complete picture of peacekeeping missions and their effects on various populations in the current context.

In summary, the book offers valuable insights into applying international relations theory to UN peacekeeping missions. It effectively illustrates the evolution of peacekeeping missions and the relevance of various theoretical frameworks. However, it falls short of addressing the practical issues and ethical dilemmas inherent in peacekeeping. Despite this, it remains a significant resource for anyone seeking to understand the dynamics of modern peacekeeping operations from multiple theoretical perspectives, aiding in navigating the complexities of peacekeeping practices at any time.

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