

Local Peace, International Builders: How UN Peacekeeping Builds Peace from the Bottom Up

by William G. Nomikos

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Local Peace, International Builders: How UN Peacekeeping Builds Peace from the Bottom Up is a scholarly publication authored by William G. Nomikos, intended for academics and researchers specializing in International Relations, Peace, and Security Studies, as well as United Nations policymakers. It examines the role of UN peacekeeping in mitigating communal violence to prevent it from escalating into violent conflicts and the significance of local perspectives for the success of peacekeeping operations (PKOs). The author's main argument is that UN peacekeepers succeed in their mission when locals in the deployment region view them as impartial, with no vested interest in the conflict and no connection to the host country. Peacekeepers' impartiality increases communities' willingness to cooperate and resolve their disputes, as they trust peacekeepers to ensure justice and hold accountable those involved in misconduct, regardless of their identity.

landscape.
To analyze the success and effectiveness of PKOs, the author shifts the lens of analysis from peacekeepers' ability to restrain armed groups to their capacity to resolve local communal conflicts. The author stresses that even after peace agreements are signed, communal clashes persist and may prove to be the biggest source of instability. By developing "localized peace enforcement theory," Nomikos presents the circumstances under which UN peacekeepers will succeed in solving local issues and prevent them from escalating, when they are considered impartial by the local population. This perception of impartiality depends on the UN's multilateral identity, rotating national contingents, and civilian-protection rules.

He divides this book into three parts with nine chapters. In the first part, Nomikos introduces his Localized Peace Enforcement Theory, sets the framework for the upcoming chapters, defines the limits, scope, and contributions, and presents counterarguments to defend his theory. He then describes the evolution of

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multidimensional UN PKOs, their shift from Chapter Six to Chapter Seven, and how they have grown to respond to communal violence. He explains that bias reduces the likelihood of cooperation between the conflicting parties. In the second part, he takes Mali as the case study due to its history of communal tensions, colonial legacy, ethnic composition, intrastate tensions, and the presence of MINUSMA and other international actors. Affirming that UN PKOs in Mali have increased the willingness of the local population to cooperate with members of other ethnic groups, thereby reducing the chances of conflict escalation. The grid-level results from Mopti and Kidal show that the composition of the UN mission matters, as peacekeepers' identities and diversification influence their effectiveness in preventing communal violence. In the last part, Nomikos compares the deployment of peacekeeping patrols with civilian conflict resolution programs to prevent communal violence. He concludes that PKOs shouldn't become counterinsurgencies, as this threatens the perceived neutrality of peacekeepers. Communal violence can convert disputes into large-scale conflicts; thus, peacekeeping missions must be assessed by whether local community clashes were stopped, rather than by ceasefires and signed agreements.

To measure how the perceived unbias of UN peacekeepers shapes narratives, cooperation, and ultimately communal-violence outcomes, Nomikos has combined different methods and techniques. He builds and tests his theory at the individual, subnational, and cross-national levels. On the individual level, he conducted a lab-in-the-field experiment with over 500 participants and surveyed 1,400 respondents from 20 rural and pre-urban areas of Mali to compare UN peacekeepers with French forces, finding that UN peacekeepers increase cooperation and lower the likelihood of escalation between communities. On the subnational level, he divided the cities of Mopti and Kidal into grid cells, using them as the unit of analysis to examine the distribution of communal violence (2012-2020). He used maps of MINUSMA deployment to measure UN presence and used ACLED and RADPKO as data sources for conflict events and UN deployments at the subnational and cross-national levels. For the cross-national level, like the subnational analysis, he divided 10 sub-Saharan African countries into grids. He then ran a statistical model (OLS) on the collected data to show fewer new communal-violence events and that non-regional troop contributors lowered the share of violence in those areas.

Further, the book offers a bottom-up account of why UN peacekeeping succeeds, challenging the conventional top-down approach that links outcomes to the number of troops deployed, the use of force, or ties to the host country. It develops a distinct theory that moves beyond earlier frameworks and shows how they fail to explain local cooperation and de-escalation. Moreover, the theory gains credibility and value because the impartiality mechanism is triangulated across layers. Experimental evidence shows a shift in beliefs, Mali grids in the subnational model indicate reduced communal violence near the deployed region, and cross-national comparisons demonstrate that both strong as well as impartial peacekeepers prevent escalations. This book documents how UN PKOs were successful in limiting the impact of communal disputes, which are the cause of major violence in post-conflict societies.

Nevertheless, UN missions are funded by states with agendas, so neutrality is hard to sustain and measure. The author builds his argument on the principle of impartiality and the importance of trust in peacekeepers among the local population, but how that trust develops is subjective. According to the author, it can come through frequent contact (seeing and speaking to locals), but is that sufficient to change their perspective? Further, the theory relies heavily on fragile perceptions; an unpredictable

event or negative contact, such as civilian harm or sexual exploitation, can overturn Nomikos' argument, calling into question the stability and durability of locals' beliefs and presenting his theory in an ideal setting. The author also suggests that trust in peacekeepers increases when trust between the conflicting groups is low. However, that trust tends to be low because of their involvement in the conflict, which weakens the author's argument. Overall, his argument is coherent and set within the operational limits of UN PKOs, but it is context-dependent and framed within an ideal setting, which the book fails to acknowledge.

In many cases, local conflicts significantly contribute to and influence intrastate wars, sometimes even after peace agreements have been signed; as such, communal skirmishes often become a persistent obstacle to lasting peace. Therefore, Nomikos' argument that UN peacekeepers must be responsible for preventing these communal disputes and building peace through individuals, and that this is only possible when the local community considers peacekeepers impartial, is very effective for evaluating and analyzing UN PKOs in the future. His research provides a fresh perspective on peacekeeping missions, and the theory enriches the existing literature, encouraging future researchers to shift their focus to bottom-up peace. Policymakers can use this to design future peace operations. Future studies can be developed on post-operation trajectories after peacekeeping operations exit countries. Researchers should also apply this theory to non-African contexts to test its validity across different regions with different conflict histories. Overall, "Local Peace, International Builders" reorients peacekeeping and emphasizes that durable peace begins not with peace agreements but with local populations.

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