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# United Nations Bias and Force Commitments in Civil Conflicts

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*A sizeable literature has been devoted to determining the effectiveness of United Nations (UN) peacekeeping in ending civil wars. Much less work has attempted to improve our understanding of the force-level commitments made by the UN to ongoing conflicts. We systematically address the issue of UN force commitments to civil conflicts and their relation to conflict hostility. Specifically, we posit that UN force deployments are a product of UN Security Council (UNSC) bias in favor of or against individual conflict factions and the battlefield performance of those combatants. To test our arguments, we employ newly collected data on UNSC resolution bias, monthly peacekeeping personnel commitments, and dynamic monthly-conflict conditions for African civil conflicts over the 1991–2008 period. We find that bias in UNSC resolutions is an important determinant of UN troop-deployment levels when its preferred side is sustaining higher casualties. These findings have important implications for peacekeeping effectiveness.*

By 1999, the civil war that had raged in Sierra Leone for nearly a decade was approaching its bloody zenith.<sup>1</sup> In a conflict marred by extreme hostilities, 1999 brought a major escalation of violence as the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) rebels began their advance on the capital, Freetown. In a military campaign aptly named “Operation No Living Thing,” the RUF engaged in weeks of carnage, overrunning government positions, engaging in wanton violence against civilians, and eventually taking control of the capital. Given the RUF’s reputation for atrocious behavior such as mutilation, rape, child soldiering, and scuttling peace talks (Gberie 2005), the United Nations (UN) had publicly identified the RUF as the primary threat to stability and made clear it favored the government.<sup>2</sup> Yet, the small UN Observer Mission in Sierra Leone (UNOMSIL) was ill equipped to confront the violence (Findlay 2002).

While the RUF would eventually be driven from Freetown by Nigerian troops operating under the auspices of the Economic Community of West African States, the RUF had demonstrated that its eventual victory over the government was a distinct possibility.

For the UN, this was the nightmare scenario. Recognizing that its existing limited military deployment could not influence the war in support of its preferred faction, the UN began its first significant troop escalation near the end of 1999. By early 2000, thousands of UN troops had arrived. While fighting subsided, the RUF again walked away from peace talks and began advancing on Freetown, overrunning government troops, directly engaging the UN, and nearing the capital by May (Findlay 2002). Again, the UN responded. In an effort to stem the tide of losses to the RUF and the threat that this posed, the UN made a massive commitment to the war by increasing its deployment to over 17,000 armed troops, making the mission in Sierra Leone the largest ongoing peacekeeping operation (PKO) in the world.

The escalation of the UN’s mission in Sierra Leone would prove consequential to the progress of peace, eventually helping to end the war and mend the wounds of many years of hostilities. This example is indicative of a more general finding that indicates that the size and structure of PKOs is a critical predictor of UN peacekeeping effectiveness (Hultman, Kathman,

<sup>1</sup>Author names appear alphabetically. Partial funding for this project was provided by the Baldy Center for Law and Social Policy. Data and supporting materials necessary to reproduce our results are available at [www.michellebenson.net](http://www.michellebenson.net) upon publication.

<sup>2</sup>For instance, see UNSC Resolution 1181 on the situation in Sierra Leone, UN Doc. S/RES/1181.

and Shannon 2013; Pushkina 2006; Ruggeri, Gizelis, and Dorussen 2012). At the policy level, the deployment of UN peacekeeping troops is often seen as the international community's highest form of commitment to a conflict. Yet, how does the UN determine the number of armed troops to deploy? Does it respond to conditions on the ground? Is it driven simply to achieve stability and security? These questions have yet to receive scholarly attention.

As the primary organization responsible for global peace and cooperation, it is critical that we gain an understanding of the UN's responses to conflict developments. Like any conflict actor, it must adapt to a dynamic strategic setting, deciding how best to distribute resources in such an environment. Without a deeper understanding of the UN's efforts, we sacrifice our ability to appreciate the overall effectiveness of PKOs. In a sense, then, the peacekeeping-effectiveness literature often puts the proverbial cart before the horse by examining the effect of PKOs on conflict without considering the effect that prior conflict dynamics have on UN efforts.

This article thus attempts to improve our understanding of the substantial variation in UN troop deployments across and within civil conflicts. Using original data, we show that the UN often has clear preferences for particular factions, as codified in UN Security Council (UNSC) resolutions. While stated preferences may seem to contradict the view of the UN as an impartial third party, its bias is not antithetical to its role as an arbiter of peace, as its preference for or against factions is the product of the behavior of those factions in support or subversion of peace, respectively. We posit that the UN acts to obtain its preferences, one of which, as the example above indicates, is to minimize damage to its preferred side in order to avoid outcomes that favor the nonpreferred faction. As such, when its preferred side endures higher casualties, the UN should be more likely to respond with elevated troop levels. In effect, we posit a conditional relationship whereby the effect of bias on troop levels intensifies with escalating battlefield deaths.

Using new data coding monthly UN PKO troop deployments, combat casualties, and bias in UNSC resolutions, we are able to examine such propositions systematically. Our results support our expectations. UNSC preferences are a robust predictor of troop-deployment levels. Additionally, when the preferred side sustains greater battle deaths, the effect of bias on the number of peacekeeping troops is even stronger. In other words, we find evidence that UN bias for

particular combatants is an important predictor of the UN's peacekeeping efforts. The biases encapsulated in resolutions are thus shown to be meaningful statements of the UN's commitment to particular conflicts. These findings have a number of implications. Principally, the conflict-management literature will benefit from an understanding of the influence that UN preferences have on its level of effort, as such commitments are critical to peacekeeping success. In the following pages, we more fully develop the above propositions by reviewing the literature, introducing our theoretical arguments, describing our research design and data, and testing our hypotheses. We conclude with a discussion of the broader relevance of this research.

## Resolution Bias and Peacekeeping Operation Force Levels

Much of the extant research on UN peacekeeping has focused on whether or not PKOs are effective in managing conflict (e.g., Diehl, Reifschneider, and Hensel 1996; Doyle and Sambanis 2000, 2006; Fortna 2004, 2008; Gilligan and Sergenti 2008; Gurses and Mason 2008). Initially, this work took a somewhat blunt approach, attempting to determine whether the mere presence of PKOs was associated with peaceful outcomes. More recent work has sought a deeper understanding of PKO effectiveness by examining how specific components of missions are associated with success or failure. Studies have noted the robustness of mission mandates (Doyle and Sambanis 2000; Hoffman 2004; Hultman 2010) and the presence of armed troops (Evans 2008; Kreps 2010) as central to our understanding of peacekeeping's ability to manage conflict. Importantly, PKO effectiveness has been closely linked to the effort put forth by the UN in managing those conflicts to which it has sent missions, as the size of PKO troop deployments have been shown to be a critical predictor of success.

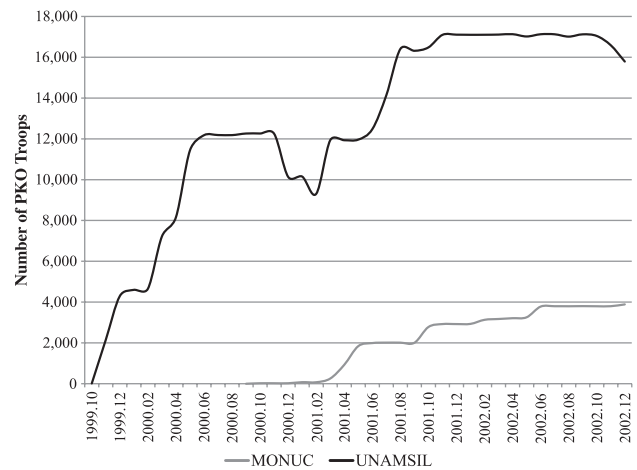
Escalating troop deployments have been found to reduce civilian suffering, decrease combat hostilities, increase combatant cooperation, and contain conflict contagion (Beardsley 2011; Hultman, Kathman, and Shannon, 2013; Kathman and Wood 2011; Pushkina 2006; Ruggeri, Gizelis, and Dorussen 2012). Similarly, mission failure has been linked to resource deficiencies, including limited troop capacity (Bratt 1997; Jett 1999; Jones 1999, 2001; Skogmo 1989). A number of causal mechanisms have been suggested for this connection between troop deployments and conflict

outcomes. First, larger troop commitments provide a signal of the UN's resolve for conflict resolution as sizeable deployments are more politically costly to withdraw, both for the UN and its member states (Thyne 2009; Posen 1996; Pushkina 2006; Kathman and Wood 2011; Ruggeri, Gizelis, and Dorussen 2012). A strong signal of commitment and an increasingly large number of troops also helps to resolve the security dilemma between the factions that encourages continued conflict (Walter 2002). Also, more troops can monitor and enforce larger buffer zones between the sides, improving efforts at conflict abatement. Larger deployments are likewise more capable of protecting civilians from violence that would destabilize peace processes. Robust deployments can also more quickly and effectively demobilize and disarm militia and paramilitary forces that may serve as spoilers in the peace process. Once disarmament has begun, a larger troop presence supports the progress of political reform and the societal reintegration of soldiers (Olonisakin 2008). Deployment levels are thus a crucial component of PKO effectiveness since troops facilitate important functions that cross peacekeeping, peacemaking, and enforcement missions.

Despite these findings, little research attempts to determine how missions are constituted. This is troubling given that the UN tends to intervene in the more difficult cases (Fortna 2004, 2008; Gilligan and Stedman 2003), yet we know little about what motivates the UN's efforts in these situations. If "boots on the ground" are important to conflict-management processes, then what explains the various troop levels deployed to these conflicts? We do not have a systematic appreciation of this. The dearth of research in this area may be due in part to a prior lack of fine-grained data on mission constitutions. Indeed, much research on mission effectiveness employs rather rudimentary empirical conceptions of PKOs, often dichotomizing the presence or absence of a mission in a host state in a given year. This is problematic. As Figure 1 indicates, missions are differentially outfitted to achieve their goals. Plotting the UN's PKO troop deployments from late 1999 through 2002 to the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUC) and Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL), Figure 1 makes clear that troop deployments vary over time, between and within missions. Consequently, missions may vary dramatically in their capacity to realize their goals.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup>For exposition, we display missions deployed over a similar period and are comparable in that both are deployed with "robust" mandates, as defined by the coding rules used for the *Robust Mandate* indicator described below.

**FIGURE 1 Monthly Number of UN Peacekeeping Troops**



Note: UN Peacekeeping Troop levels for Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUC) and Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL).

Since dichotomous conflict-year peacekeeping treatments only account for a mission's presence, scholars employing such approaches have implicitly assumed homogeneity across operations. Even if studies include some quantification of UN force commitments, by relying on the conflict-year unit of analysis, analyses are incapable of addressing intrayear changes in mission commitments. Indeed, for UNAMSIL, in 2000 alone the number of troops rose by over 7,600, an increase of over 165%. Yet, for MONUC, increases occurred only incrementally during this period. This variation both between missions and within mission-years has heretofore been unexamined in the literature.

Beyond the lack of data, there has been a paucity of theorizing on PKO troop levels. Still, explanations of PKO deployments can be built upon related research. The broader literature on actions taken by intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) can generally be divided into two camps. The first focuses on constructivist or functionalist theories that suggest the norms and stated purpose of an IGO should be what drive its actions (Abbott and Snidal 1998; Barnett and Finnemore 1999; Finnemore 2009; Keohane 1993; Lebovic and Voeten 2006). Thus, UN troop deployments should be tied to its charter goals to "maintain or restore international peace and security" (Article VII of the UN Charter) and respond to the most severe conflicts (Diehl 1993; Doyle and Sambanis 2006; Fortna 2004, 2008; Gilligan and Stedman 2003). A second camp, found largely within the rationalist, principle-agent, and realist

perspectives, suggests that the UN acts to further the goals of state actors in the organization. While rationalist or principal-agent approaches focus on the aggregate goals of the organization's members (Hawkins et al. 2005), a realist approach suggests UN actions should be a reflection of the preferences of the most powerful member state(s) (Mearsheimer 1994; Waltz 2000). Recent empirical work suggests that motivating factors from each of these camps play a role in determining UN actions (Beardsley and Schmidt 2011; Gilligan and Stedman 2003).

While it may be that the UN's founding principle is to be the impartial<sup>4</sup> arbiter of peace, directives from the UNSC are the result of interstate negotiations that have security interests in conflict outcomes (Howard 2008). In this sense, the constitution of PKOs is the product of the overlapping preferences of the UN's principal states. UNSC resolutions are thus more than mere diplomatic statements. They are instead the product of a negotiation that represents common agreement between important players on the UNSC. Still, while resolution language is commonly the product of negotiations in the UNSC, the preferences inherent in an adopted resolution are the consequence of the belligerent's condemnable behavior.<sup>5</sup>

Bias toward a particular side in resolutions thus represents the cohesion of preferences in the UNSC, indicating general agreement among the Council membership regarding a faction's conflict behavior. In fact, the ability to obtain such consensus, we argue, represents a basic level of agreement on an outcome that favors the preferred party in the conflict given the UN's interest in avoiding the triumph of factions that have engaged in flagrant violations of international norms of warfare. If this is the case, the UNSC should be motivated to send and maintain higher levels of troops when it has exhibited a preference for a particular combatant in an effort to buttress its preferred side and otherwise inhibit the progress of the faction in dispute. Thus, variation in PKO troop levels is not simply determined by the level of

violence generated by a conflict and the UN's normative preference for a cessation of hostilities. Rather, troop-deployment levels are likely to be the consequence of the UN's desire to avoid conflict outcomes that benefit a faction whose conflict abuses have led to a consensus UNSC prejudice against it.

Indeed, sizeable PKOs have been deployed in congruence with resolutions biased against factions that have engaged in particularly egregious violence, indicating a break with common UN impartiality assumptions. For example, peacekeepers have been tasked with disarming rebel factions (Angola, Congo, and Sierra Leone), providing buffer zones that effectively solidify the territorial gains made by one faction or prevent anticipated gains by another (Congo and Sudan), and protecting civilian populations that are perceived to be partisans of a particular faction (Ivory Coast, Congo, and Chad). Occasionally, UN troops have found themselves to be full-fledged participants in combat (Somalia, Sierra Leone, and Ivory Coast). Troop-deployment levels affect the ability of the PKOs to effectively implement their short- and long-term goals. The UN, the international community, and the conflict participants recognize this, and increasing levels of peacekeeping troops can thus have the consequence of benefiting a particular belligerent in civil conflict. Given that past work has shown that troop strength positively affects the ability of UN missions to achieve their goals, we expect UNSC preferences to affect troop commitments. In this sense, the bias revealed by the UNSC in its resolutions should play an important role in determining the level of UN troops deployed to civil wars. In short, we posit that a stated bias by the UNSC should be intrinsically related to the UNSC's interest in a conflict, leading to higher levels of military commitments regardless of whether troops are needed to ensure an outcome favoring the UN's preferred faction. This logic leads to the following hypothesis:

*H1:* The UN will make greater peacekeeping troop commitments to conflicts in which it has a preference for a particular side.

In addition, bias should be particularly important conditional on the conflict performance of the combatants. For instance, when the progression of a conflict is in line with the UN's stated preference, an escalation of troops may be viewed as unnecessary. However, if conflict developments indicate that an unfortunate outcome for the UN's preferred side is increasingly likely, the UN's vested interest in the war becomes more acute. If this is the case, one

<sup>4</sup>“Impartiality,” “bias,” and “neutrality” are often used loosely in the literature. We follow Kydd's definition of bias: “[i]f the mediator's preferences are aligned with one party or the other, she is said to be biased in favor of that party” (2003, 601). We refrain from using the term “neutrality” which is often defined as nonparticipation in conflict.

<sup>5</sup>Resolutions that indicate a bias follow from gross human rights abuses committed by a combatant. These often include abusing civilians, child soldiering, rejecting previously agreed upon accords, and other actions that fall outside the bounds of accepted international conventions in war making.

sensible response would be to escalate the number of deployed troops in an effort to stem the tide of loss for its preferred faction and thus improve the prospects for an outcome favored by the UN.

Consider the example of the recent war in the Ivory Coast. After losing the internationally monitored presidential election, sitting President Laurent Gbagbo invalidated the November 2010 elections results and began the violent persecution of protesters. The UN then began to play an important role in the regime change that followed. Indeed, the UN undertook military actions despite the fact that Gbagbo had asked for the UN mission to leave the country. After declining to withdraw its troops, the UNSC passed several resolutions clearly siding with the opposition in support of the internationally recognized winner of the elections, Alassane Ouattora. Convinced that Gbagbo would not relinquish his office and observing his force's continued attacks on the Ouattora side, the UNSC authorized greater military capabilities for its operation. The resolution called for 2,000 additional personnel, three infantry companies, and an aviation unit that included three armed helicopters. With the steady decline in conditions in the Ivory Coast through March of 2011, Resolution 1975, using clearly anti-Gbagbo language, authorized the PKO forces to "use all necessary means to carry out its mandate." Peacekeeping troops then shelled forces loyal to Gbagbo just as rival forces were launching their final assault on his stronghold. A BBC report noted that "a UN official admitted the effect of the air strikes was to seriously degrade the military capacity of pro-Gbagbo forces" (Plett 2011). The increase in troop levels and their armed activities were linked to the UN's preference for the opposition and its expectation that Gbagbo's forces would continue to consolidate power unless forced to step down.<sup>6</sup>

Thus, the effect of bias should be conditional on the conflict performance of the factions. While there are many markers to identify a conflict's progression and likely outcome, a belligerent's battle performance is a primary indicator. As a faction sustains battle losses, suffers rising casualties, and is forced to retreat, its ability to achieve its war aims diminishes. To avoid a disagreeable outcome, we expect that PKO troop levels committed by the UN increase as its

preferred faction suffers losses on the battlefield. This leads to our second and main hypothesis:

*H2:* The UN will make greater peacekeeping troop commitments to conflicts in which its preferred side is experiencing higher levels of loss.

## Research Design and Data

### Dependent Variable and Unit of Analysis

To test the hypotheses, we collected extensive data on UN PKO deployments (Kathman 2013).<sup>7</sup> While the UN often deploys several types of personnel to its missions, including police and unarmed observers, military troops are the most visible, capable, and potentially consequential (Hultman, Kathman, and Shannon 2013; Ruggeri, Gizelis, and Dorussen 2013). No other personnel type is tasked with such tasks as separating the factions, implementing and monitoring ceasefires, and at times confronting civil war factions. The size of troop commitments to conflict zones is central to the operational functions of PKOs. Our dependent variable is thus the monthly number of PKO troops committed to a country in conflict.

As noted earlier in Figure 1, troop levels can change rather dramatically within individual mission deployments over time and dynamically within individual deployment years. Therefore, the more conventional conflict-year unit of analysis is deficient, as the UNSC does not make its deployment decisions on an annual schedule. Measuring troop deployments at the conflict-month level allows for a more nuanced analysis of peacekeeping than has previously existed in the literature. With such a fine level of analysis, we are able to capture the dynamics of UN troop deployments much more precisely than prior work on UN peacekeeping. For our sample, the dependent variable ranges from 0 to 29,209 troops with a mean value of 1,432.

Such fine data on PKO deployments require similarly fine civil-conflict data. These data were provided by the Georeferenced Events Dataset (GED; beta v.2) (Sundberg, Lindgren, and Padsokimaite 2010), which codes conflict events in congruence with the UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset (v.4; Gleditsch et al. 2002). These data include all civil

<sup>6</sup>This example is admittedly fairly unique, as PKOs do not commonly target sitting governments with direct force. Still, this case is useful as it reveals underlying mechanisms that motivate our expectation in our second hypothesis.

<sup>7</sup>Beta versions of Kathman's (2013) peacekeeping troop levels data as well as the Georeferenced Events data set (beta v.2) were used in all analyses.

conflicts in Sub-Saharan Africa from 1991 to 2008.<sup>8</sup> We aggregated these events to conflict-month values. Given our interest in explaining variation in troop commitments, we examine all conflict months in our spatio-temporal domain, including observations for which PKOs were not deployed. Additionally, we provide a check of our results by analyzing only conflict observations for which the UNSC passed a resolution.

### United Nation Bias in Civil Conflicts

The presence of bias in UNSC resolutions on civil wars has gone largely unaddressed in the literature, requiring the collection of new data to represent UN preferences for or against each combatant. All existing resolutions were collected and coded regarding their relevance to African civil conflicts from 1991 to 2008 according to the Armed Conflict Dataset. Resolutions are associated with a civil conflict if they explicitly refer to one or more of the following in the period during the conflict: (a) the ongoing conflict, (b) the state government, or (c) the rebel group.

The UN has passed resolutions on approximately 39% of conflicts in Africa over this period (as compared to 24% of global civil conflicts). Of the 36 civil conflicts in Africa from 1991 to 2008, 14 received resolutions. There were a total of 181 resolutions on these 14 conflicts. In a given year, the number of resolutions ranges from zero to 10. Out of the 14 conflicts with UN resolutions, 11 received peacekeeping troops.<sup>9</sup> The tenor of these resolutions differs across resolutions and conflicts. Fortunately, the coding of bias in resolutions is straightforward, as the UNSC has used a standard format and language. A resolution is coded

<sup>8</sup>While we would prefer to test our arguments on a global dataset, the conflict data necessary for doing so do not yet exist. To our knowledge, there has been no analysis of the comparative level of PKO deployments to Africa versus other regions. Still, our data suggests that the rate of bias in resolutions is similar across samples, as 75% of non-African civil conflicts received biased resolutions as compared to 80% of African conflicts. Overall, we believe our sample is attractive. Given the variety of conflicts in Africa and the various PKO types committed to the continent in this period, we are confident we have not selected a sample of conflicts or missions that bias our results. Also, our temporal domain follows the end of the Cold War, thus removing the primary impediment to the use of various peacekeeping methods and deployments.

<sup>9</sup>Across these 11 conflicts, a total of 16 missions with troops were deployed, and 7 of these had "robust" mandates as defined by the coding rules used for the *Robust Mandate* indicator described below.

as biased if it urges or demands action from a named party, condemns or deplors a party's actions, or establishes sanctions against a specific party. Examples of resolutions below illustrate coding decisions:

*No Bias: Somalia-1994, (S Res 954):* Urges all Somali factions to negotiate as soon as possible an effective cease-fire and the formation of a transitional government of national unity.

*Bias against current government: Sierra Leone-1997 (S Res 1132):* Demands that the military junta take immediate steps to relinquish power in Sierra Leone and make way for the restoration of the democratically elected Government and a return to constitutional order.

*Bias against rebels: Angola-1993 (S Res 811):* (1) Strongly condemns the violations by UNITA of the Accords and its continued rejection of the elections; (2) Demands UNITA accept the democratic elections of 1992.

A resolution passed by the UNSC is considered biased if it names a party to the conflict in a negative or positive manner. To obtain such a resolution, at least nine out of the 15 UNSC members must support the resolution, and there must be no vetoes from the P5 (United States, United Kingdom, France, Russia, and China). Of the 14 conflicts with resolutions, the UNSC has exhibited bias toward a side in nine. As stated in Hypothesis 1, the existence of a clearly stated UNSC preference for either side may signal greater willingness to deploy peacekeepers. We thus create the variable *Any Bias* which is coded as 1 once the UNSC has issued any biased resolution and 0 otherwise.

We suggest in Hypothesis 2 that the determinants of troop levels are likely tied to more strategic and tactical considerations. Consequently, we examine UNSC preferences for particular factions. We consider that the UN has exhibited a preference for a side in conflict once the UNSC has passed one or more resolutions favoring that side. The variable *UN Government Bias* is thus coded as 1 if the UNSC has passed a current or prior resolution that favors the government (i.e., approve of the government or disapprove of the rebels), and *UN Rebel Bias* is coded 1 when the current or prior resolution favors the rebel group. Otherwise, these variables are coded 0. We lag these variables six months to account for the pace at which resolution passage yields changes in troop levels in the conflict state.<sup>10</sup> These variables are

<sup>10</sup>There is an essential time lag between the point of resolution passage, troop deployment, and their arrival in the conflict zone. Given the labor of this process, six months is a reasonable estimate (Diehl and Druckman 2010).

used in an effort to determine whether troop commitments are affected by biases expressed by the UNSC for or against each faction.

### Battlefield Deaths

Past studies have examined the aggregate number of deaths in a conflict (Doyle and Sambanis 2006; Fortna 2008). Yet, aggregated conflict-level data make it difficult to unravel causal relationships between violence and peacekeeping. At this level, it is impossible to ascertain whether peacekeeping is responding to changes in violence or if changes in violence are the result of peacekeeping. We therefore disaggregate the battlefield casualty data to the conflict month to generate several variables. First, to determine the overall effect of hostilities on troop deployments, *All Battlefield Deaths* counts the monthly number of government and rebel casualties produced by fighting on the battlefield. We then split this variable into its component parts. *Government Deaths* records the number of battle deaths sustained by the government, and *Rebel Deaths* accounts for battlefield fatalities suffered by the rebels. These data are derived from the UCDP's GED. As with the bias variables, we lag these variables six months.

### United Nations Bias and Battlefield Deaths Interaction Terms

To test Hypothesis 2, we interact government and rebel battle deaths with UNSC resolutions biased toward either side. The *Govt Bias\*Govt Deaths* variable is the product of *UN Government Bias* and *Government Deaths* while the *Rebel Bias\*Rebel Deaths* variable is the product of *UN Rebel Bias* and *Rebel Deaths*. We expect a positive relationship between these interaction terms and the number of monthly PKO troops deployed. When the UN's preferred side is suffering setbacks (when the number of battle deaths is high), the UN is expected to respond with larger PKO troop deployments in an effort to stabilize the conflict in favor of its preferred faction.

### Control Variables

To account for humanitarian concerns and the UN's responsibility to protect noncombatants, we control for *Civilian Deaths*, which measures the log-transformed monthly number of civilian casualties. These data are obtained from the UCDP's GED, which disaggregates

data from Eck and Hultman (2007). The protection of civilians has become a core principal espoused by Secretaries General. Thus, one might expect rising civilian deaths to yield an escalation of troops. Yet, prominent PKO failures, like that in Rwanda, point to a negative effect. To remain consistent with the timing of deployments described above, this variable was lagged six months.

Next, we account for temporal correlation in troop observations by including a one month lag of our dependent variable (in thousands), *Troop Commitment*. This variable helps account for inertia in PKOs, as the number of deployed troops at time  $t$  is likely to be related to the number of troops at  $t-1$ . Also, we include a variable to code the duration of conflict, *Episode Duration*. A variety of civil-conflict and peacekeeping phenomena are linked to conflict duration, and this variable should reveal the association between conflict duration and troop commitments. *Episode Duration* counts upward by month from a conflict's start to its termination. We also include a dichotomous indicator of each conflict's aggregate intensity. This is taken from the Armed Conflict Dataset. While our principal interest is in the dynamic effect of ongoing battlefield hostilities, captured by the battlefield deaths variables described above, including a measure of the overall intensity of the conflict offers an additional aggregated assessment. Thus, *Cumulative Intensity* takes a value of 1 when a civil conflict has crossed the 1,000 battle-deaths threshold.

We also include two variables that measure conflict-country characteristics. *Population* takes the natural log of the conflict state's yearly population size. Larger populations may require larger deployments if PKOs are to bring stability to war-torn states. This variable is derived from the disaggregated Composite Index of National Capabilities, taken from the National Material Capabilities dataset (Singer, Bremer, and Stuckey 1972). We also generate a dichotomous variable, *Permanent Five Colony*, to indicate whether the conflict state is a former colony of a P5 member of the UNSC. Former colonial powers may look to PKOs as a means to stabilize their former colonies, producing a positive relationship with troop levels. On the other hand, former colonial powers may prefer to limit the involvement of the UN in those countries over which they have traditionally held geopolitical sway, yielding a negative relationship.

Finally, we include variables that account for aspects of each PKO. It is rare that one type of personnel is deployed without also being teamed



simultaneously with observers or police to service the noncombative functions. Increasing observer or police deployments is likely to call for an increase in troops. Increasing the number of observers and police increases the UN's ability to monitor human rights and safeguard urban centers. Missions require more troops to provide the stability needed for observers and police to engage in these activities. We thus coded *UN Police Personnel* and *UN Observer Personnel* to count the number of police and observers deployed in each month. Also, in coding *Robust Mandate*, we control for the strength of mission mandates. This variable takes a value of 1 when a mandate invokes Chapter 7 of the UN Charter or includes language authorizing the use of "all necessary means" to achieve mission goals. Larger troop deployments are often needed to fulfill more forceful mandates. Furthermore, we code the log-transformed number of UN troop deaths per mission-year to determine how the UN responds to rising costs. These data were coded from UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations mission reports.<sup>11</sup> Finally, since regional organizations have engaged in peacekeeping, some of which deploy simultaneously with UN PKOs, we include a dummy variable, *Regional Organization PKO*, indicating the presence or absence of a regional peace operation. Data for this variable are culled from the Third Party Peacekeeping Missions Dataset v.2.1 (Mullenbach 2005) and were extended through 2008.

## Results and Analyses

As Figure 1 illustrates, UN troop levels are not static. Monthly variation in troops, we suggest, can, *ceteris paribus*, be predicted by examining whether the UN has made clear its preferences for a particular actor and whether its preferred side is suffering increasing casualties. Our analyses below examine the base and conditional impact of UNSC preferences and combatant battlefield deaths. Since our dependent variable counts the number of troops deployed to each conflict, we employ a negative binomial model. Table 1 reports the results of our analyses. Models 1 and 2 offer tests of Hypothesis 1. *Any Bias* is examined in model 1 to account for instances in which the UN stated a preference for either faction. This variable is positive and significant suggesting that a preference for a particular

combatant is associated with higher monthly PKO troop levels. This result is reflected in model 2, which disaggregated *Any Bias* by the side preferred by the UN as codified in the UNSC's resolution language. Thus, higher troop levels are also associated with the UN's preference for particular factions. These results support Hypothesis 1.

Hypothesis 2 expects a significant effect of bias on troop levels conditional on the combat performance of the favored belligerent. The models thus account for combat violence. We note that the battlefield violence variables have no singular significant effect on troop levels. However, our primary hypothesis expects an effect conditional on UN bias. Testing Hypothesis 2 thus necessitates the interaction of each belligerent's combat performance with the UN's partiality toward the sides. Models 3 and 4 thus include *UN Government Bias* and *UN Rebel Bias* and their interaction with battlefield fatality variables, *Government Deaths* and *Rebel Deaths*, to generate our interaction terms (*Govt Bias\*Govt Deaths* and *Rebel Bias\*Rebel Deaths*). Model 3 examines the effect of these interactions on troop levels for all civil conflicts, and model 4 limits the sample to those cases on which the UNSC has passed a resolution. Model 4 is thus a check of the results in model 3, as resolution passage is the initial step in any PKO process.

For the component variables, we note consistency in results with respect to the previous models. *UN Government Bias* and *UN Rebel Bias* report positive and significant coefficients,<sup>12</sup> but our interpretation of these variables changes slightly with the inclusion of the interactions, as each component variable can only be directly interpreted when the other is held at zero (Brambor, Clark, and Golder 2007). Thus, bias in the absence of battle deaths appears to increase the number of troops deployed to the conflict zone, lending additional support for Hypothesis 1. For *Government Deaths* and *Rebel Deaths*, when no bias is adopted by the UNSC in its resolution language, the level of battle deaths continues to produce no significant impact on troop levels.

It is the interaction terms in models 3 and 4 that offer direct tests of Hypothesis 2. We find that both *Govt Bias\*Govt Deaths* and *Rebel Bias\*Rebel Deaths* are statistically significant and positively signed in each model, indicating that battle deaths have an important modifying effect on the role of UN bias in

<sup>11</sup>These reports can be accessed at [www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/resources/statistics/fatalities.shtml](http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/resources/statistics/fatalities.shtml).

<sup>12</sup>While *UN Government Bias* is insignificant ( $p=.157$ ) in model 4, the positive sign lends credence to its effect across models.

TABLE 1 United Nations Troop-Commitment Levels

Variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
<i>Govt Bias*Govt Deaths</i>			0.011* (.004)	0.011* (.004)
<i>Rebel Bias*Rebel Deaths</i>			0.088* (.036)	0.079* (.037)
<i>Any Bias</i>	5.060* (1.436)			
<i>UN Government Bias</i>		4.557* (1.497)	4.447* (1.496)	1.507 (1.067)
<i>UN Rebel Bias</i>		7.127* (2.240)	6.860* (2.275)	2.132* (1.029)
<i>All Battlefield Deaths</i>	0.0003 (.001)			
<i>Government Deaths</i>		0.0007 (.001)	-0.001 (.001)	-0.006 (.004)
<i>Rebel Deaths</i>		-0.0003 (.003)	0.0004 (.004)	-0.004 (.004)
<i>Cumulative Intensity</i>	0.113 (1.112)	0.379 (1.034)	0.379 (1.039)	-2.227 (1.393)
<i>Civilian Casualties</i>	-1.349* (.566)	-1.583* (.567)	-1.508* (.568)	-0.395 (.404)
<i>Population</i>	-2.650* (.541)	-2.778* (.579)	-2.773* (.583)	-1.093* (.660)
<i>UN Police Personnel</i>	0.001 (.001)	0.002 (.001)	0.002 (.002)	0.002 (.002)
<i>UN Observer Personnel</i>	0.029* (.007)	0.028* (.007)	0.028* (.007)	0.015* (0.004)
<i>Troop Commitment</i>	0.149 (.137)	0.187 (.152)	0.187 (.153)	-0.035 (.109)
<i>Permanent Five Colony</i>	1.997 (1.238)	1.836 (1.239)	1.853 (1.233)	-0.647 (1.154)
<i>Peacekeeper Fatalities</i>	1.469* (.739)	1.748* (.725)	1.707* (.703)	1.067* (.488)
<i>Episode Duration</i>	-0.048* (.014)	-0.048* (.014)	-0.048* (.014)	-0.039* (.017)
<i>Regional Organization PKO</i>	0.213 (1.727)	-0.590 (1.264)	-0.610 (1.234)	-0.315 (.867)
<i>Robust Mandate</i>	4.665* (1.153)	4.182* (1.017)	4.174* (1.022)	5.963* (2.371)
Constant	24.266* (4.839)	25.456* (5.370)	25.390* (5.405)	15.952* (5.616)
Observations	3505	3505	3505	1278
Log pseudolikelihood	-5429.785	-5430.821	-5429.403	-5005.731
Wald $\chi^2$	260.64*	316.88*	398.35*	114522.54*

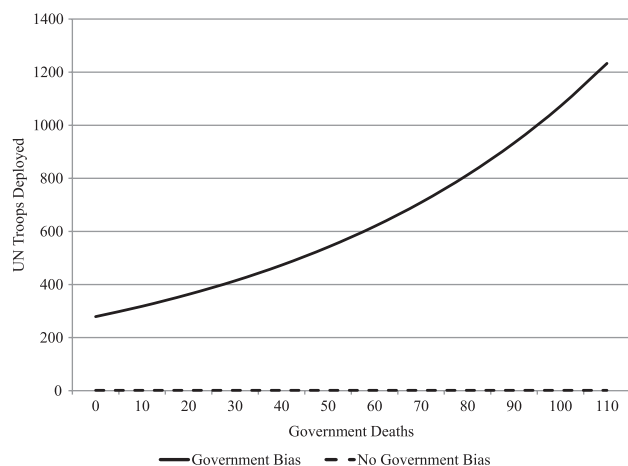
Note: Robust standard errors clustered on conflict in parentheses. \* $p < .05$ .

explaining the force commitments the UN makes to civil conflicts. In both models, the interaction terms are associated with higher monthly PKO troop levels. This indicates considerable support for Hypothesis 2, revealing that the UN tends to increase its troop commitments when its preferred conflict faction

endures increased battle casualties. This effect is best illustrated by comparing the predicted troop commitments graphically.

From the estimates in model 3, Figures 2 and 3 graph predicted troop commitments in relation to government and rebel battle losses when the UN has

**FIGURE 2 Predicted Monthly Rate of UN Peacekeeping Troops for United Nations Security Council Government Bias**

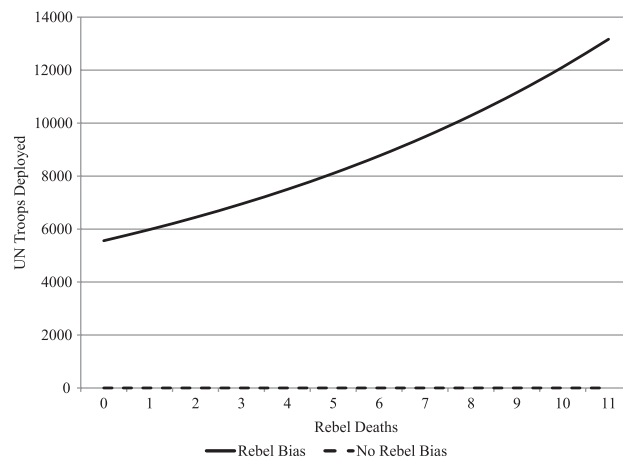


Note: Solid line = United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Bias towards the Government, Dotted line = No UNSC Bias towards the Government. Predicted Rates calculated for Model 3 with all continuous variables at their means and categorical variables at their modes.

indicated a preference for one side.<sup>13</sup> The positive slopes of the bias lines offer support for Hypothesis 2. Regardless of faction, increased combat deaths are associated with increased troop commitments by the UN when it favors the side suffering the losses. In contrast, when there is no preference for the government or rebels (i.e., the lower, dotted lines in Figures 2 and 3), predicted troop levels are much lower and have a relatively flat slope. Thus, the top lines of both graphs illustrate that, as the situation becomes increasingly dire for the preferred side, the UN escalates the number of troops it deploys. In Figure 3, when the UN prefers the rebels, an increase in rebel deaths from zero to 11 yields an increase of deployed PKO

<sup>13</sup>Predicted troop levels were based on simulations using Clarify (King, Tomz, and Wittenberg 2000). To improve the readability of the graphs, the confidence intervals (CIs) were removed. Graphs with CIs included can be found at [www.michellebenenson.net](http://www.michellebenenson.net). We note that the upper and lower 95% CIs for each predicted line for bias in Figures 2 and 3 are upward sloping and never cross the x-axis. The same can be said for the nonbias lines in each figure. Additionally, across the x-axis range in Figures 2 and 3, each CI's lower bound for the bias line remained above the upper bound for the nonbias line. In other words, the effect of battle deaths when bias was present was distinct from the effect of battle deaths when bias was absent. For reference, the simulations in Figures 2 and 3 reflect a situation in which the PKO did not have a "robust" mandate, the cumulative intensity exceeded 1,000 deaths, and the conflict country was a former colony of a P5 member. All continuous controls were held at their means.

**FIGURE 3 Predicted Monthly Rate of UN Peacekeeping Troops for United Nations Security Council Rebel Bias**



Note: Solid line = United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Bias towards the Rebels, Dotted line = No UNSC Bias towards the Rebels. Predicted Rates calculated for Model 3 with all continuous variables at their means and categorical variables at their modes.

troops from approximately 5,300 to over 13,000. This is an approximately 145% expansion in troops. Similarly, when the UN favors the government (Figure 2), as monthly government deaths increase from zero to 110, the UN escalates its commitment by over 900 troops, an increase of approximately 325%.<sup>14</sup> Thus, the UN makes substantially greater force commitments to its PKOs when it has a distinct bias for factions that are suffering increasingly large combat losses. In particular, the willingness of the UN to commit substantial troops to suffering rebel groups it favors is striking. Given that bias toward the rebels is the product of abuses by government forces, it appears that once the UN has turned its back on a member of the international community due to the government's malevolent actions, the UN intensifies its commitment to the conflict in an effort to avert the collapse of the rebel's forces.

With respect to the controls, several report consistent effects across the models. Features of each conflict have various effects on troop deployments. *Cumulative Intensity* adds an aggregated conflict element. The result for this variable is similar to the battle-deaths variables discussed above in that there is no significant effect on troop levels. The coefficient for *Civilian Casualties* is negative and significant in

<sup>14</sup>In Figures 2 and 3, respectively, the range of the x-axis represents an increase of a one-half standard deviation for *Government Deaths* and a one standard deviation increase for *Rebel Deaths*.

the first three models, indicating that lower numbers of peacekeeping troops are deployed as civilian deaths increase. Yet, this result is insignificant in model 4. Still, this is a curious result given the UN's oft-stated interest in protecting civilians. However, the effect of civilian deaths on deployment levels may be conditional on other conflict dynamics or on the presence or absence of a civilian protection mandate. Further research on this issue is warranted. Conflict duration appears to be associated with smaller deployments, as *Episode Duration* reports a negative and significant coefficient across models. This result speaks to the criticism of the UN that PKOs only escalate as conflicts wind down. This appears not to be the case. This result may also be reflective of the UN intervening and escalating commitments early in conflict. However, conflicts that drag on for extended periods may yield smaller deployments, or none at all, given limited capacities for ceasing otherwise intractable hostilities.

Several variables representing characteristics of the conflict country produce consistent results. The negative effect of *Population* indicates that smaller troop contingents are sent to populous countries. *Permanent Five Colony* is insignificant. It therefore appears that the relationships between conflict states and their former colonial metropolises on the UNSC do not meaningfully affect troop-deployment levels. Similarly, the presence of a regional peace operation appears unrelated to UN decision making in terms of the number of troops deployed to each conflict. While UN interventions are at times undertaken alongside regional institutions, the mere presence of a regional PKO in the conflict country does not affect UN PKO troop levels.

Lastly, we assess the effect of several mission-specific variables. Of the three personnel variables, only *UN Observer Personnel* is significant. As expected, each of these variables generally reports a positive coefficient. Troops and observer personnel are often deployed in tandem given their complementary responsibilities. Yet, this relationship is not statistically significant for police forces. Interestingly, the one-month lag of the dependent variable is insignificant. This variable accounts for inertia in troop commitments. However, it may be that the size of a troop deployment at a given time is more circumstantially associated with the size of its commitment at previous time points. Mission mandates are clearly influential, as the UN pairs larger soldier deployments with more robust mandates that require the use of "all necessary means" to achieve mission goals. Finally, *Peacekeeper Fatalities* is positive and significant. The narrative of cases like Rwanda indicates that the UN may cut its losses when posed with direct costs in

the form of peacekeeper casualties. The result produced here counters this perspective and instead fits more consistently with cases like the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Sierra Leone in which troop escalations followed peacekeeper fatalities.

In addition to the results reported in the models and simulations, a number of analyses replicating model 3 were conducted as robustness checks. First, we changed our model specifications in several ways. For instance, a variety of longer and shorter lag structures were used to verify the primary findings, and the results were substantively the same as those presented in Table 1.<sup>15</sup> However, we believe six months to be an accurate estimate of the time necessary for UN forces to respond to UNSC directives (Diehl and Druckman 2010). Additionally, since we use such a fine-grained level of analysis in the models, we calculated standard errors clustered on various identifiers, including the conflict and conflict country. These specifications report results that are substantively identical.

Additionally, we controlled for several potentially confounding factors in our models and modified the means by which we measured several of our existing controls in order to test the robustness of our primary findings. First, we included a variable that indicated the presence or absence of a ceasefire between the combatants using data from Fortna (2008). While ceasefires do not ensure an end to fighting, if such an agreement is obtained, then the UN may increase its troop commitments in order to take advantage of the political progress achieved. This variable reports a positive relationship with troop levels. However, its inclusion in the models limits the temporal domain to 2004. Still, this variable did not affect our primary findings. In addition, if there are instances in which the factions directly negotiate the number of troops to be dedicated to a PKO, then the size of troop deployments may depend on such demand-side considerations. Unfortunately, no data exist on the number of troops that may have been requested by the sides. Furthermore, troop deployments fluctuate in response to changes in the conflict and political contexts. We suggest it is likely that the initially mandated size of the troop deployment is most closely reflective of the number of troops on which all parties agree. We therefore coded the number of troops mandated to deploy, as reflected

<sup>15</sup>Checks included lag periods of four, five, seven, and eight months. To test the claim that the UN could deploy as a rapid reaction to crises, more likely under limited circumstances, we used a single month lag. In all, the results remained the same.

in the initial resolution that created each PKO. This value was then held constant for each mission's duration. When included in the model, this variable was positive but only marginally significant. Again, our primary results did not change.

## Discussion and Conclusions

This study makes several important contributions to the literature on peacekeeping and conflict management. First, this work is unique in that it attempts to explain the force deployment levels committed by the UN to its PKOs. While previous research has made great progress in understanding why the UN chooses the conflicts in which it intervenes, little work has attempted to provide explanations for the effort the UN puts forth in its interventions.

Second, we recognize that the literature has begun to coalesce around the finding that the UN often intervenes in the more difficult cases, making previous critiques of UN failures undeserved. However, this does not mean that the organization suitably outfits its PKOs for the challenges posed by these difficult cases. Therefore, studies of this type should improve the literature's ability to understand the UN's operational performance in various contexts.

Our finding that UNSC preferences are an important determinant of UN actions is a novel one in the peacekeeping literature. The impartiality assumption has been challenged in recent research, and this article is able to lend empirical support to the notion that the UN does at times make clear its preferences for particular factions over others. Of course, there are many conflicts where the UN fails to address the presence of civil conflict and/or any related atrocities. Our findings suggest, however, that in the cases where the UN chooses to express its preferences, they are important determinants of peacekeeping deployments. Specifically, the UN provides higher force levels to those conflicts in which its preferred combatant is suffering, as the organization attempts to avert outcomes in which unseemly belligerents prove victorious.

This is an important finding for the purposes of peacekeeping effectiveness. Returning to the Sierra Leone example that opened this article, it had become clear that an RUF victory in the civil war would be an outcome antithetical to the UN's interest in a stable and peaceful postconflict Sierra Leone. Critically, it was the UN's *responses* to the RUF's advances on the battlefield that helped pave the way for peace. By

escalating its troop deployment to the country, the mission more capably began stifling RUF momentum. It more competently implemented its mandated goals to bring stability to the country, and these developments were reflected in subsequent assessments of the security situation (United Nations 2000a, 2000b). By the latter part of 2000, in response to the RUF's final offensive, the expanded troop deployment allowed the UN to move into rebel-held areas, hold larger tracts of territory, and begin the process of monitoring, confronting, and disarming rebel factions. Additionally, the expanded PKO was able to pave the way for elections, political reform, and national reconciliation through programs meant to reintroduce the combatants to society (Olonisakin 2008).

The successes of the mission in Sierra Leone were in large measure the product of the UN's willingness to deploy the number of troops necessary for the task when they were most needed (Kreps 2010). In this sense, we find strong evidence that the UN functions effectively as a collective security organization that seeks to confront aggressive challenges to peace and stability. This research thus offers evidence that the growing literature on the UN's effectiveness in conflict management is not simply a product of spurious correlation. The UN does not merely choose the "easy" cases in which to intervene, and it is not by accident that the UN has been found to be effective even under difficult conditions. Our results indicate that the UN productively allocates resources to these difficult interventions in ways that are consistent with confronting aggression. These findings thus bode well for the UN's role as an arbiter of peace in one of the most conflict-torn areas of the post-Cold War world.

If we are to continue to gain a better understanding of peacekeeping effectiveness, and if success or failure is predicated, at least in part, upon the commitment made by the UN to a given conflict, then we need to begin the process of uncovering explanations for why the UN makes force commitments of various sizes to civil conflicts. Doing so should substantially increase our understanding of peacekeeping processes and outcomes.

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