Saving Strangers or Keeping Ourselves Safe?

An Analysis of Peacekeeping & Unarmed Civilian Protection

Zander Willoughby

Affiliation
Master's Student at the Department of Peace
and Conflict Research,
Uppsala University, Sweden

Contact
zander.e.willoughby@gmail.com
ORCiD https://orcid.org/0009-0005-7079-0620

Abstract

This paper examines the roles, strengths, and limitations of peacekeeping and unarmed civilian protection (UCP) as tools in the conflict resolution process. Peacekeeping, primarily executed by United Nations military operations, follows a 'saving strangers' paradigm, which focuses on reducing violence through external intervention. In contrast, UCP emphasises a relational approach to the Responsibility to Protect (R2P), leveraging local knowledge, community agency, and strategic nonviolence to fill protection gaps often left by peacekeepers. Through an in-depth exploration of theoretical frameworks and a case study in Bentiu, South Sudan, the paper reveals how UCP strategies—such as Women's Protection Teams—effectively address challenges like sexual violence by mobilising local resources and fostering community-led solutions. While peacekeeping has demonstrated significant impacts in reducing conflict recurrence and civilian casualties, its shortcomings, including a lack of cultural integration and recurring issues like sexual exploitation and abuse, highlight the need for alternative or complementary approaches. The paper concludes by advocating for a more nuanced integration of UCP and peacekeeping, emphasising the potential to create sustainable, community-centred protection strategies. It underscores the importance of further research into UCP to enhance its role as a critical component of global peacebuilding efforts.

Key words: *peacekeeping, Unarmed Civilian Protection (UCP), Responsibility to Protect (R2P), conflict resolution, civilian protection, community-led peacebuilding, relational R2P, strategic nonviolence*

Introduction

The peacebuilder's toolbox includes myriad tools for the cessation of violence, peace negotiation, conflict transformation, resolution, and prevention. While each tool may have its ideal application scenario, no single tool is universally effective in resolving conflicts. This article delves into the roles, prerequisites, and outcomes of peacekeeping in conflict resolution processes. Additionally, it examines unarmed civilian protection—a grassroots peacebuilding approach—and contrasts it with military peacekeeping. Through comparing peacekeeping's 'saving strangers' paradigm with unarmed civilian protection's relational responsibility to protect (R2P) framework and a case study of their combined use in Bentiu, South Sudan, the paper highlights their complementary and oppositional aspects, particularly in addressing gaps in protection to prevent sexual violence.

Peacekeeping & its Contribution to the Conflict Resolution Process

Although the word 'peacekeeping' is not found in the UN Charter, the creation of UN Peacekeeping in 1948 led to its limited use in interstate wars during the Cold War period. Since then, its utilisation and complexity have increased and 'blue helmets' have become a tangible symbol of the UN and its ability—or failure—to keep civilians safe during times of conflict. UN Peacekeeping Operations (UN PKOs) have become larger and more effective since the end of the Cold War (UN Department of Public Information, 1996, p. 4; United Nations, 1945; Fortna, 2008, p. 1; Fortna, 2004, p. 283; Gaibulloev, Sandler & Shimizu, 2009, p. 827). Perceptions and opinions on peacekeeping vary widely. Nearly every large-N study has found strong, statistically significant relationships between the utilisation of peacekeeping and a reduction in conflict-related death while also leaving serious protection gaps and having pervasive sexual abuse issues (Walter, Howard & Fortna, 2021, p. 1718; Jose & Medie, 2015, p. 521; Ndulo, 2009, pp. 141-146).

What is (& is not to some) Peacekeeping

The definitions of peacekeeping vary by people, sectors, and levels of analysis. For Fortna (2008), peacekeeping is the:

> ...deployment of international personnel to help maintain peace and security in the aftermath of war. All peacekeeping missions involve military personnel, though they may or may not be armed, and many missions include substantial civilian components as well (Fortna, 2008, p. 5).

Furnari (2015) takes a broader approach, defining peacekeeping as:

> ...action by third parties to prevent violence, protect civilians, and support local efforts to change conflict dynamics, by controlling or influencing belligerents and/or their proxies, as well as local people (Furnari, 2015, p. 25).

The latter definition of peacekeeping is inherently relational between third-party interveners and those living in a conflict situation—in this definition, peacekeeping is inherently about influencing others (Furnari, 2015, p. 25). Some define peacekeeping as a specifically military endeavour, while others define it by the functions performed, such as interpositioning, accompaniment, protective accompaniment, and monitoring. Even further, some would consider the incidental performance of said functions to be peacekeeping, even when performed by non-peacekeeping organisations (military or civilian) (Schirch, 2006, pp. 10 & 24; Gray, 2022a, p. 198). For this paper, 'peacekeeping' refers to military peacekeeping—mainly UN PKO. Civilian peacekeeping, unarmed peacekeeping, third-party nonviolent intervention, and other related concepts will hereafter be collectively referred to as Unarmed Civilian Protection (UCP), as discussed below.

Peacekeeping is performed by the UN and various regional organisations, such as the African Union, the European Union, NATO, or ad hoc groups of states, such as the Multi-

National Force–Iraq.[1] The most well-known form of peacekeeping is UN traditional peacekeeping—the deployment of military units to facilitate the negotiated settlement of a conflict by the consent of member-state parties, authorised by Chapters VI-VII on the UN Charter (UN, 1945, Art. 33-51). Traditional peacekeeping operations create buffer zones, assist with demobilisation, and more (Doyle & Sambanis, 2000, p. 781). The 'Second Wave' of PKOs, beginning in the 1990s, moved to *multidimensional* peacekeeping, which includes traditional military deployment and civilian peacekeeping roles focusing on community relations, intelligence, and institutional reform (Doyle & Sambanis, 2000, p. 782).

The Logic of Peacekeeping

Peacekeeping operates by providing external security guarantees for warring parties and is employed at various stages of the conflict resolution process, typically at the conclusion of armed hostilities. It is largely used during ceasefires and when transitioning from peace agreement negotiation to signature to implementation (UN DPO, 2008, p. 19). Krain (2005), in their exploration of third-party intervention models, illustrates the Challenging Intervention Model in relation to state-sponsored mass atrocities. They argue that "[i]nternational intervention against the perpetrator should reduce the severity of any ongoing genocide or politicide" (Krain, 2005, p. 367) by forcing perpetrators to reassess their cost-benefit analysis of continuing the killing. The witness model holds that the mere presence of international boots on the ground, regardless of the use or threat of violence, should reduce the severity of mass violence. The bystander model, adopted by most states in most cases of mass atrocity, operates under a Luttwakian logic, positing that no intervention will have an ameliorating effect. Therefore, it is better to not intervene and allow local power dynamics to play out. The impartial intervention model, alternatively, is the model under which most international organisations operate. This model necessitates impartiality and clarifies that the cessation of violence is the goal, not victory, for any involved party. These interventions appear more legitimate, non-biased, and less threatening (Krain, 2005, pp. 367-369; Melander, 2009, p. 394; Luttwak, 1999, p. 37 & 44). Contemporary UN PKOs tend to operate under the Impartial Intervention and Witness models of international intervention.

Peacekeeping is often employed in the most challenging situations, when it is unlikely that any other tool will be effective, few other organisations or states can provide assistance, and prospects for peace are low. It is rarely used when there has been a decisive military victory, hence credible commitment and security dilemmas are omnipresent, meaning conflicting parties often have spoiler power in any existing peace negotiations or implementation (Fortna, 2008, 2004, p. 288; Melander, 2009, p. 393; Luttwak, 1999, p. 37 Gilligan & Stedman 2003; Kathman & Wood, 2016; Howard, 2019, p. 185). This is partly because intrastate armed conflicts often occur in contexts of legitimate state authority failures, and sustainable peace frequently relies on rebuilding that state authority (Doyle & Sambanis, 2000, p. 779). However, Howard (2019, p. 185) notes that even in the most complex concluded PKO missions, over 60% have successfully implemented their mandates.

Pathways for Peacekeeping Effectiveness

Post-conflict environments are inherently fragile. Limiting post-conflict violence is important to maintaining public and political confidence in the peace process and to allow the peace to take shape (Ruggeri et al., 2017, p. 182). Peacekeeping is used to end current hostilities and create space for building durable future peace. Hegre, Hultman, and Nygård (2019) identify three main pathways through which peacekeeping works, which are supported and complemented by a robust literature on peacekeeping:

- Preventing conflict recidivism;
- Reducing the intensity of ongoing violence or enabling the cessation of violence;

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[1] Military group during the 2003 invasion of Iraq comprised the United States, United Kingdom, Australia, Italy, Spain, and Poland.

- Limiting the spatial and temporal contagion of conflict.

In cases where peacekeepers are present, the risk of conflict recidivism is reduced by 75-85% (Fortna, 2008, p. 125; Hegre, Hultman & Nygård, 2019, p. 217). Peacekeeping can address lingering and soon-to-be-assuaged security dilemma concerns in fragile post-conflict areas, especially in containing civilian deaths (Kathman & Wood, 2014, pp. 151 & 166). It also helps mitigate credible problems—increasing trust in negotiated settlements (Hultman et al., 2014, p. 741; Powell, 2004, p. 347). Parties thus feel more comfortable participating in peace processes. PKOs allow space for economic growth and recovery in conflict-affected settings, reducing the likelihood of conflict reoccurrence (Collier et al., 2008, p. 474). This does not always have a positive outcome, as peacekeeping has also been found to disrupt local economies in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia, and South Sudan (Autesserre, 2017, p. 119; Jennings & Bøås, 2015, p. 284).

Peacekeepers reduce the intensity of ongoing violence and can enable favourable conditions for the cessation of violence by making violence more costly relative to the alternative—thereby changing parties' cost-benefit analysis. They achieve this by limiting battlefield engagement opportunities, turning belligerents away, separating combatants, and facilitating pre-agreement disarmament, among other measures (Hultman, Kathman, & Shannon, 2014, p. 742; Walter, Howard, & Fortna, 2021, p. 1707). A higher number of troop deployments has been associated with reduced battlefield hostilities (Hultman, Kathman & Shannon, 2014, p. 748). In localised areas, i.e. PRIO-GRID cells,[2] a deployment of just 300 armed peacekeepers reduces the probability of conflict continuing from 90% to 75%; an increase to 500 troops drops the probability to 48% (Ruggeri, Dorussen & Gizelis, 2017, pp. 5 & 26-27).[3]

Lastly, peacekeeping limits the spatial diffusion of conflict. States are more likely to experience intrastate or interstate conflict when their neighbours are in conflict (Buhaug & Gleditsch, 2008, p. 230; Beardsley, 2011, p. 1051). Peacekeeping mitigates this effect by containing the spatial diffusion of conflict within and across borders (Beardsley & Gleditsch, 2015; p. 68). Peacekeeping further secures borders, preventing rival states from supporting or sponsoring insurgencies, "...dampen[ing] the propensity for intrastate conflict to spark additional intrastate conflict nearby" (Beardsley, 2011, p. 1062). Peacekeeping will be most efficacious in intrastate conflicts in states with regional rivalries. While Beardsley (2011, p. 1062) finds that both light and heavy peacekeeping forces can stop the diffusion of conflict, undercommitted or misaligned PKO deployments can fail to contain violence and protect civilians (Beardsley & Gleditsch 2015, p. 85; Hultman, 2010, p. 38; Hultman, Kathman & Shannon, 2013, p. 888; Fjelde, Hultman & Nilsson, 2019, p. 35).

The Problem with Peacekeeping

Misunderstanding and disrespect towards the societies in which peacekeepers operate, as well as a lack of attention to local knowledge, are common issues. They often establish ineffective routines and structures, rush political and economic liberalisation, attempt to implement inappropriate mandates, engage in sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA), and misuse their authority (Autesserre 2010, 2014; Barnett & Finnemore, 2004; von Billerbeck, 2017; Campbell, 2017; de Coning, 2011; Donais, 2009; Howard, 2008; de Vries, 2015; Howard, 2019, p. 185).

UN Peacekeeping has a sexual abuse problem. In 2023, 60 peacekeepers in the Central African Republic were sent home for sexual abuse (Dodds, 2023), seven years after a compatriot peacekeeping contingent in DRC allegedly abused 11 women—including six minors (Nichols, 2016). Concerns about SEA by peacekeepers came in the early 1990s in Mozambique. There have been allegations of SEA in nearly every UN PKO, especially in DRC, Bosnia,

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[2]The PRIO-GRID is composed of 0.5 decimal degrees latitude/longitude cells which correspond to roughly 50 x 50 km at the equator (Tollefsen, Strand & Buhaug, 2012, p. 67)

[3]Effects beyond this are marginal

Kosovo, Haiti, Eritrea, East Timor, Liberia, and Sierra Leone (Lee & Bartels, 2020, p. 178). The power dynamic—economic, rank, and propensity to use armed force—between peacekeepers and local populations is usually stark.

Furthermore, peacekeepers also stay in particular locations for short periods of time. Thousands of women around the world have had children with UN peacekeepers before being left behind—in Haiti alone, 2,541 women were interviewed about their experience, an indication of how many times this has happened both in Haiti and across the globe. Both unequal power dynamics and the short-term nature of mission postings are key factors that influence the likelihood of SEA. Accountability for sexual exploitation and violence perpetrated by UN Peacekeepers is rare (Lee & Bartels, 2020, pp. 198-199; Nordås & Rustad, 2013). Though this has been an issue for well over 30 years, it continues to be pervasive.

Undercommitted or misaligned peacekeeping operations can fail to contain violence and endanger local populations (Beardsley & Gleditsch, 2015, p. 85; Hultman, 2010, p. 38; Hultman, Kathman & Shannon, 2013, p. 888; Fjelde, Hultman & Nilsson, 2019, p. 35). Though research does show the apparent effects of peacekeepers' presence and the ability to contain conflict diffusion with relatively small groups, it is important to properly equip and deploy PKOs to match the needs in the area. It can be overdone, however; larger peacekeeping missions with large numbers of military personnel increase homicide rates,[4] particularly from organised and individual crime. Under their current mandates, UN troops are not equipped to handle criminal violence. Therefore, multidimensional peacekeeping missions must be appropriately situated in broader peacebuilding strategies (Di Salvatore, 2019, p. 854). This is made more difficult by findings that point to sufficient troop deployment being important to reducing conflict violence (Hultman, Kathman & Shannon, 2014, p. 745). In addition, for violence perpetrated by rebel groups, regression analysis indicates a

235% expected increase in civilian deaths when peacekeeping is present compared to when it is not (Hultman, 2010, p. 38).

The 'holy trinity' of peacekeeping principles is the consent of the parties, impartiality, and non-use of force except in self-defence and defence of the mandate (Gregory & Sharland, 2023). *UN Peacekeeping Operations Principles and Guidelines* define consent as "a commitment by the parties to a political process and their acceptance of a peacekeeping operation mandated to support that process" (UN DPO, 2008, p. 31). In practice, consent is always needed from the host state "...in recognition of their sovereign rights to control their territories," which includes:

1. Acquiescence to the presence of a peacekeeping mission

2. Acceptance of the mission's mandate

3. Commitment to the political process that the mission is intended to support (Sebastián & Gorur, 2018, p. 11)

This means that—outside of exceptional circumstances—PKOs do not happen if the host state does not want them to, even in cases with violence against civilians and state repression. This gives a de facto leverage to a UN-member conflict party, as they could withdraw their consent. The consent of non-UN member states is not required by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), but they can be consulted (Gregory & Sharland, 2023). UN PKOs will, therefore, always struggle to be impartial.[5]

In short, peacekeepers are given a difficult task as PKOs are launched in the most challenging situations. Individual peacekeepers are sent to countries they have likely never lived in, rarely speak the local languages, and are not effectively initiated into the context. Because of this, PKO design is especially essential to mission success.

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[4]Though, presence of UN police does lower the homicide rate, even counteracting the negative effect of military personnel when deployed in tandem.

[5]Except potentially in cases of conflict between two or more UN member states, none of whom being permanent UNSC members. See Gregory & Sharland, 2023

Unarmed Civilian Protection & its Contribution to the Conflict Resolution Process

The large-scale failures to protect civilian lives in Rwanda and Bosnia in the 1990s and cases of UN Peacekeepers 'withdrawing behind closed gates' led many to question the efficacy of the primacy of the use of force to protect civilians from violence (Gray, 2022a, p. 198; Gray, 2022c, p. 315). This leads to interrelated schools of thought and practice that examine ways in which civilians can protect themselves in the face of violence and question prevailing assumptions that the use of military force is the only way to do peacekeeping. This leads to non-inherently militarised relational definitions of peacekeeping, such as the Furnari definition[6] and a growing literature on relational R2P. This underpins the unarmed civilian protection theory and practice.

Unarmed civilian protection encompasses a diverse array of methods and applications, ranging from safeguarding civilians amidst conflict in Kherson, Ukraine, to providing protective accompaniment in camps for civilians in Bentiu, South Sudan. Additionally, it includes strategic nonviolent interpositioning in Hebron, Palestine, as well as offering unarmed security for members of Congress in the United States. UCP, when Lisa Schirch first introduced it to the academic literature in 1995, was—and is still often—referred to as 'civilian peacekeeping' (Schirch, 1995; Julian & Schweitzer, 2015, p. 1). UCP, though professionalised in the last 40 years as a practice, operates within the logic of strategic nonviolence, which has historically seen successes from India to the US to the Philippines to the Soviet Union (Francis, 2013, p. 46). In the current militarised global paradigm, the use of armed force is seen as 'normal' and legitimate when used to the ends of state interests, while peace-related protection missions in conflict zones without military forces are seen as doomed to failure (Julian, 2020, p. 1; Gray, 2022b, p. 198; Michael & Ben-Ari, 2011, p. 658). Major nonviolent campaigns are successful 53%

of the time (Stephan & Chenoweth, 2008, p. 9).[7] Conventional wisdom continues to hold the use of armed force as the default tool for shaping conflict outcomes—often forgetting the strategic value of nonviolence broadly and nonviolent direct action for keeping peace. UCP can be defined as:

> The practice of deploying unarmed civilians before, during and after violent conflict to prevent or reduce violence, to provide direct physical protection to other civilians and to strengthen or build resilient local peace infrastructures. The purpose of UCP is to create a safer environment, or a 'safer space,' for civilians to address their own needs, solve their own conflicts and protect vulnerable individuals and populations in their midst (Furnari, Oldenhuis & Julian, 2015, p. 299).

UCP can be employed at different stages of a conflict: as a violence prevention tool before a conflict, during conflict to stop or de-escalate violence where feasible, or in post-conflict scenarios to support peace agreements and establish safer environments for broader peacebuilding endeavours (Oldenhuis, 2016, p. 16; Paffenholz, 2014, p. 88). Though UCP can, and often does for strategic reasons, involve international actors, it is almost always led by people who come from and live in the conflict environment. This paradigm recognises the agency of people living in conflict-affected settings, which is often stripped from traditional conversations on R2P and other third-party military interventions, which frequently reinforces racist assumptions about conflict-affected communities (Baines & Paddon, 2012, pp. 235-236; Gray, 2022b, p. 317; Mayersen, 2020, p. 5; Jose & Medie, 2015, pp. 522-523; Mégret, 2009, pp. 579-581; Tynan, 2021, p. 604). By shifting from state-centric armed third-party interveners, such as UN peacekeeping, to locally-owned commu-

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[6]"...action by third parties to prevent violence, protect civilians, and support local efforts to change conflict dynamics, by controlling or influencing belligerents and/or their proxies, as well as local people" (Furnari, 2015, p. 25)

[7]Stephan and Chenoweth (2008), of course, look at nonviolent civil resistance, not UCP or other nonviolent interventions—the idea here is to underscore the efficacy of strategic nonviolence in a broader sense.

nity self-protection, such as UCP, we recognise, value, and benefit from existing webs of relationships, pre- and extra-colonial conflict resolution mechanisms, and local knowledge which supports prospects for long-term sustainable peace through the means, not just as an end (De Juan, 2017, p. 1839-1841; Elfversson, 2019; p. 2065-2068; Baines & Paddon, 2012, p. 232; Bräuchler & Naucke, 2017, p. 429; Autesserre, 2018).

UCP is a growing but underutilised instrument in conflict resolution processes, especially compared to peacekeeping. As it builds its academic and advocacy evidence base, UCP, as a practice, has gained recognition as a standalone tool and a tool to be combined with traditional peacekeeping (Mayersen, 2020, p. 7). The following section looks deeper at the 'saving strangers' vs relational R2P dichotomy and problematises a case study on peacekeeping-UCP integration.

Comparing Peacekeeping & Unarmed Civilian Protection

'Saving Strangers' vs Relational R2P

The 'saving strangers' narrative stems from the 2001 International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS) report, which concretely conceptualised R2P and Nicholas Wheeler's following 2002 book, *Saving Strangers: Humanitarian Intervention in International Society,* which sees R2P military interventions as necessary in the face of the post-WWII "...dilemma of what to do about strangers who are subjected to appalling cruelty by their governments" (Wheeler, 2002, p. 1; Gray, 2022c, pp. 316-319). The 2001 ICISS report outlines a framework for action towards human protection claims in other states, as opposed to self-defence claims already permissible under Article 51 of the UN Charter[8] (Evans & Sahnoun, 2001, p. VIII). Wheeler (2002) posits a solidarist theory of legitimate humanitarian intervention. This holds that military intervention can be legitimate in the pursuit of the protection of human rights and promotion of global justice—that

states have a moral obligation to intervene militarily in cases of egregious violations of civilian rights, e.g. genocide, ethnic cleansing, or crimes against humanity. Viewing people as strangers most often strips them of their history, relations within their communities, agency, and potential as agents to build peace in their own communities (Ahmed, 2021, p. 8; Gray, 2022c, p. 316). Scholars such as Mégret (2009) and Gray (2022c) argue that the dominant measures recommended to help victims of atrocities are classically humanitarian and state-centric. Relational R2P, intentionally in line with many Indigenous philosophical frameworks, puts its focus on the interconnections between all beings—human or otherwise—as opposed to the individual (Gray, 2022c, p. 322; Tynan, 2021). Dominant R2P literature and debate reject local agency, resistance to oppression, and locally owned community self-protection. R2P and its advocates carry a noble cause and seek to stand in solidarity with those facing the worst crimes humans have done. This 'saving strangers' paradigm manifests inequitable global power structures which place people in the Global North as the benevolent protectors and people from the Global South as poor victims without agency to ameliorate their situation.

This lack of local ownership, community inclusion, and meaningful relationship between 'protectors' and the 'protected' seeds mistrust between peacekeepers and the civilians they are often mandated to protect. "They do not have social embeddedness or intimacy with the community required to provide that care," as Gray (2022c, p. 319) says. Furnari (2015) focuses on the centrality of relationships to any peacekeeping activity—armed or unarmed. They argue that, even in the case of armed coercion by UN Peacekeepers, they still have some sort of relationship with whomever they interact with. All actors—especially people—want to be seen as legitimate and work within a web of relationships with others (Furnari, 2015, p. 26). UCP, not armed with kinetic coercive force, utilises these webs of relationships to challenge the perception of legitimacy by influencing key relationships to

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[8]Acknowledging "...the inherent right of individual or collective self-defence if an armed attack occurs against a Member of the United Nations" (UN, 1945, Art. 51).

protect civilians and prevent any violence targeting civilians (Furnari, 2015, p. 26). A reasonable reader may take this information and surmise that we should focus on improving the relationships between peacekeepers and the civilians they are mandated to protect; however, as Gray (2022c, p. 319-320) notes, this does "...little to disrupt the militarised, racialised, and gendered hierarchies inherent in conventional protection architecture."[9]

Some, such as Smidt (2020), argue that UN PKOs can reduce communal conflict by supporting traditional peacebuilding activities such as intergroup dialogues. They point out that states rarely have the capacity—or interest—to participate in post-war reconciliation, and the UN PKOs are the largest, best-funded international actors working on the local level (Smidt, 2020, p. 346). It seems highly unlikely that local peacebuilding activities done by UN PKOs—even civilian PKO staff—could be more effective than local and locally-rooted peacebuilding endeavours, given real and perceived state bias, lack of trust (not helped by omnipresent weaponry), and the lack of meaningful relational webs between international PKO staff and local communities. As Smidt notes, peacekeepers can provide buffers and safe space for peacebuilding activities to take place, but the primacy of using armed peacekeepers for such activities needs to be examined concerning cost, long-term impact, and potential unintended outcomes. At its base, this argument appears to be a phenomenon of logistic and operational convenience rather than strategic choices for the *best possible outcome* in a post-conflict situation. Jose and Medie (2015, pp. 529-530) argue that peacekeeping and UCP could be used in tandem, especially for facilitating the spread of information and resources, as well as supporting and coordinating communication between parties. There are examples of the complementary utilisation of UCP and PKOs, as discussed in the following section, which can be studied to design the best implementation for the future.

Complementary Utilisation of UCP & PKOs to Prevent Sexual Violence

As described above, Peacekeeping often leaves serious protection gaps. Peacekeepers are not trusted—by the nature of being agents of the UN, their ongoing history of sexual exploitation and abuse—are seen to be biased towards the host state and are not equipped to deal with many types of security needs. Civilian self-protection[10], often in the form of UCP, seeks to fill these protection gaps by leveraging relations as a form of protection (Gray, 2022c, pp. 325-326). This is done both by International NGOs (INGOs), such as Nonviolent Peaceforce or EAPPI,[11] in close partnership with local communities and at the grassroots level within the community itself. Protection of Civilian (PoC) sites in Bentiu, South Sudan, in 2014 is an example of effective complementary utilisation of UCP and PKOs—owned and initiated by civilians in response to critical protection gaps left by UNMISS, the peacekeeping mission in South Sudan.

In the absence of state protection, UNMISS was mandated to protect civilians within a conflict that saw widespread violence against civilians, especially sexual violence (see Pinaud, 2020). Within the PoC sites, mutual fear and mistrust were reported between peacekeepers, United Nations Police, and communities (Gray, 2022a, p. 158). Women in the Bentiu PoC sites were spending up to eight hours walking outside of the camp to collect firewood—further and further from the camp as the 200,000 people in the camp needed to use up the surrounding resources as the situation became more protracted. While outside of the UNMISS protection of the camp, women were "...harassed, forced to pay a 'tax' to pass, assaulted, raped, abducted, and killed" (Gray, 2022c, p. 327). In response to this protection gap, women in the Bentiu PoC sites mobilised their own communal self-protection groups called Women's Protection Teams (WPT) using UCP strategies. Using a feminist relational responsibility to pro-

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[9]See Gray, 2022a

[10]Which also includes armed self-defence and resistance such as gangs, vigilante groups, and other mutual-defence arrangements

[11]Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel

tect approach, the WPTs organised groups to travel, counting as women left and reentered the camp, used relational networks to map out the safest and riskiest routes, and more (Gray, 2022b, p. 159; 2022c, p. 327). Because of their webs of relationships and embedded local knowledge, WPT was able to create much more accurate risk assessments much faster than UNMISS or any other foreign PKO would have been able to do. Using the lessons, they learned and partnering with an international UCP organisation, the women of WPT built relationships with UNMISS commanders and other key stakeholders in the area to further improve their work. They were also able to use this experience and knowledge to lobby UNMISS to deploy armed patrols in high-risk areas and other protection resources. Interviews with UCP practitioners and community members reported significant decreases in violence against women after the WPTs mobilised (Gray, 2022c, p. 327). This is an example of successful integration of peacekeeping and UCP. In a best-case scenario, this particular outcome may have been achieved through a more effective PKO programme design. However, peacekeeping missions will always leave protection gaps. UCP strategies can quickly identify these gaps and mobilise communities to address them with minimal planning. These community responses are much more dynamic and agile than top-down approaches designed in Geneva or New York.

Because UCP tools, methods, and strategies are diverse and responsive to community needs, it is challenging to draw lines between UCP activities emerging from the grassroots level in close partnership with UCP INGOs and UCP and UCP-adjacent activities done by unarmed UN PKO civilian staff and police. Advocates within the professional UCP community are also torn between spreading UCP methodologies to make PKOs more effective and address some of their protection gaps, and those who advocate against using the state-based monopolisation of violence paradigm entirely. There are theoretical and practical differences between strategic nonviolence and activities that merely do not include violence. Regardless, there are natural opportunities for the complementary utilisation of peacekeeping and unarmed civilian protection. At times, these opportunities will emerge to address the design, form, and function weaknesses of peacekeeping. Many existing peacekeeping functions could be complemented, or even replaced, by UCP strategies and practitioners.

Conclusion

Comparing peacekeeping and unarmed civilian protection (UCP) reveals distinct methodologies, strategies, and worldviews, despite both conflict resolution instruments often seeking similar outcomes and being deployed in the same situations. Both instruments are used in the ongoing hostility, negotiation, and post-agreement stages of conflict. Both instruments have a strong focus on the protection of civilians. The two instruments come from different perspectives within the responsibility to protect (R2P) paradigm. Peacekeeping sits within the 'saving strangers' humanitarian approach to R2P, whereas UCP leverages relational R2P for community self-protection. The case of grassroots UCP emerging in the protection of civilians camps in Bentiu, South Sudan, in 2014 illustrates an effective use of UCP to fill protection gaps left by peacekeeping. Although the literature on peacekeeping is ever-growing and continually improving, the academic literature on UCP, although strong, is still emerging, and more quantitative and qualitative research is needed on its efficacy and mechanisms.

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