

# UN Peace Operations Withdrawals and State Capacity

## Descriptive Trends and Research Challenges

Jessica Di Salvatore  
Andrea Ruggeri  
*University of Oxford*

### Introduction

While United Nations Peacekeeping Operations (PKO) have moved away from traditional, security-focused mandates in the last generation, most research on the effectiveness of peace missions continues to evaluate success based on security outcomes -- such as levels of violence on the battlefield, civilian victimization, duration of ceasefires and violence containment (Di Salvatore and Ruggeri 2017). Few studies adopt broader and more long-term criteria for evaluation. Pioneers of this change, Doyle and Sambanis (Doyle and Sambanis 2000) reframed the terms of peacekeeping from a focus on military strategies to that of peacebuilding. Multidimensional missions can foster democratization and participatory peace in post-conflict societies; but there is still debate among scholars and policy-makers about the use of peace missions as effective tools for state-building (Lake 2016). Most of the discussion, especially among scholars, pays little attention to whether peacekeeping creates stable polities and institutions that endure when the international presence eventually leaves. In other words, if peace missions are beneficial for state capacity, is their legacy strong enough to avoid the after-exit pitfalls?

The primary challenge in answering these questions remains our definition of state capacity. Maintaining order within recognized borders and monopoly on the legitimate use of violence is the core pillar of state capacity. This definition of state capacity based on security and military aspects is, as noted by Hendrix (2010), consistent with Weber's definition of what a modern state is. Governmental capacity is the second dimension that describes the quality of institutions. Such quality is assessed based on the combination of democratic and authoritarian features of a government (Hendrix 2010), thus is often operationalized using the Polity index (Marshall, Jaggers, and Gurr 2009). This dimension, however, remains conceptually separate from the productive and extractive capacity of the state. Productive capacity relates to economic performances of the state, such as its gross national product and export volumes. Extractive capacity captures the ability of the state to extract resources from the population, for example, the share of GDP from tax revenues. The last pillar of state capacity captures external relations or the 'diplomatic capacity' of the central authority. The

capacity to establish relations with other states is an attribute of statehood, and – as a consequence – it remains an important, if underexplored, pillar of state-building programs.

Multidimensional missions intended to increase the host state's capacity need to operate across these four different dimensions to create conditions for durable, strong institutions. However, only a few studies analyse the impact of peace missions across all the above-mentioned state-building dimensions. Joshi (2013) and Steinert and Grimm (2015) focus on democratization processes and find that peacekeeping results in positive changes in the quality of governmental institutions, as measured in the Polity Score and the Freedom House index respectively. In terms of security, these same missions perform very well in creating less violent environments and preventing conflict relapse (Hultman et al 2013, 2014; Ruggeri et al 2017), although we know less about the success of security sector reforms (Karim 2017). Also, the productive and extractive pillars of state capacity are also understudied, with some limited evidence of a beneficial effect of peace missions on agricultural economic productivity in South Sudan (Caruso et al 2016).<sup>1</sup> To our knowledge, meanwhile, there has been no systematic research on how peace missions affect a state's diplomatic capacity. Most importantly, a systematic and comparative study of the effects on UN missions -- after those missions have closed and peacekeepers have withdrawn -- is missing across all of these dimensions of state capacity.

This brief article first presents descriptive statistics on how host states perform on different dimensions of state capacity *after* UN blue helmets leave. Based on proxies suggested by the existing literature (Hendrix 2010), we focus on GDP growth, Infant Mortality Rates (IMR), Polity score and territorial control. Trends of these dimensions have been studied during peace missions, but never after withdrawal. Second, this article moves from these descriptive trends to highlight significant methodological challenges encountered when studying peacekeeping legacies. While these measures do not map neatly onto the four dimensions of state capacity, they are all the same relevant for peacebuilding and proxy at least three of the dimensions. Polity score, for example, can measure quality of institutions while GDP growth and IMR proxy potential productive capacity. Finally, territorial control captures state's capacity in the security dimension.

## **Descriptive Trends: Before, During and After UN Mission Presence**

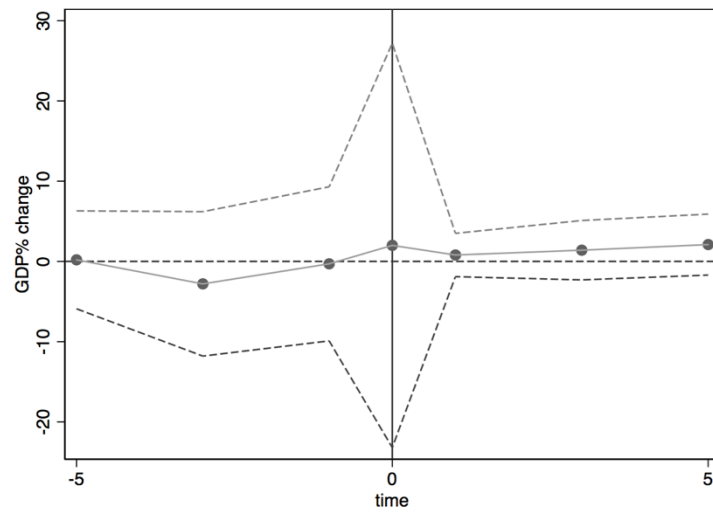
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<sup>1</sup> Beber et al's working paper suggests that the arrival of peacekeepers fuels the local economy and generates high demand for low-skilled workers that will likely require "painful adjustment" after withdrawal (Beber et al. 2016).

In this section, we provide graphs that reflect trends before and after UN peace missions. We have only selected countries that have experienced a civil war (as defined by UCDP/PRIO), received UN deployment, and then UN withdrawal, which is defined as a reduction to less than 100 uniformed UN personnel. We provide data points on five, three and one years before the UN deployment, the period of troop deployment (labelled as  $t=0$ ), and then one, three, and five years after UN withdrawal. In the graphs, we chart one standard deviation above and below the mean with dotted lines, to show the level of variation within a certain period among different cases. We avoid using regression tables for two reasons. First, this piece seeks to offer an introductory empirical context for studying the effects of UN missions and, second, regressions track the correlational nature between observables and we do not want to suggest any causal effects given the paucity of data, the research design challenges, and the limited space of this piece. All the variables used below are from the data project V-dem (Coppedge et al. 2017).

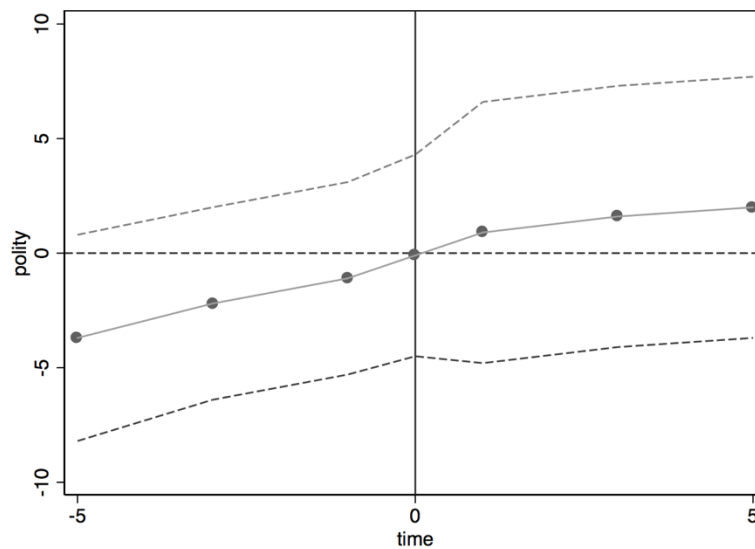
*GDP Growth:* The literature on civil wars has highlighted that civil wars have a significantly negative effect on a state's GDP and economic development (Bove, Elia, and Smith 2016; Costalli, Moretti, and Pischedda 2017). Figure 1 shows a feature common in all following trend graphs. The dashed line plots the standard deviation from the mean (solid line), which describes variation in the sample. We can see that at some point in times, especially during the first year of UN deployment ( $t=0$ ) the deviation from the mean is too large to be assertive. It seems, however, that after the UN withdrawal countries have a more similar response (smaller standard deviation), and most (but not all) countries experience growth in GDP. Notice the scale, the GDP growth ( decline) has a very broad range.

**Figure 1. GDP change during and after UN missions**



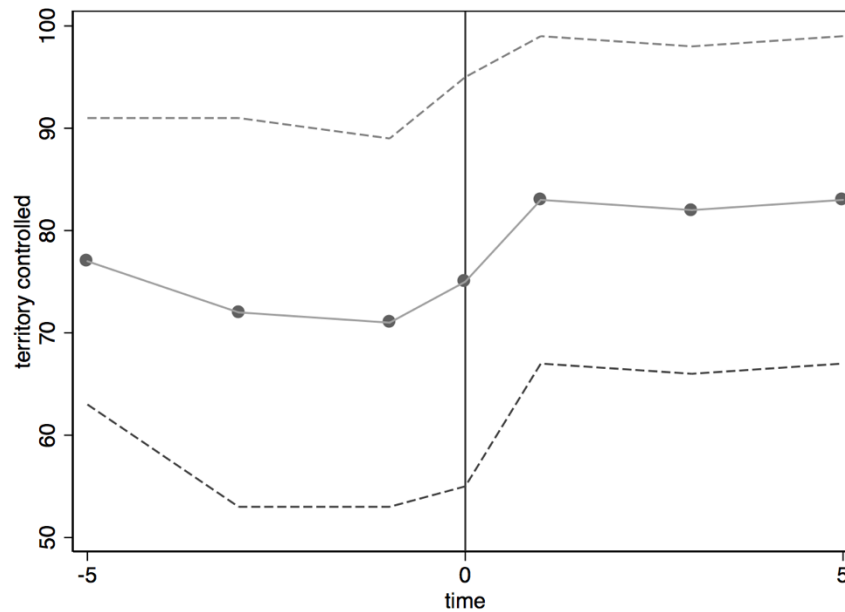
*Polity*: For countries that suffer civil war and then host a UN peacekeeping operation, which subsequently withdraws, we chart an apparent positive change in the Polity score, after exit. However, the dashed boundaries in Figure 2 suggest that there is significant level of uncertainty surrounding that finding. However, if we follow the literature and label countries above -5 “anocracies”, the two standard deviations cover only democracies and anocracies, not autocracies.

**Figure 2. Polity change during and after UN missions**



*Territorial Control*: The data in Figure 3 show that both UN deployment, and subsequent withdrawal, are associated with an improvement in state territorial control in recipient countries. Again, uncertainty around such trend begs caution.

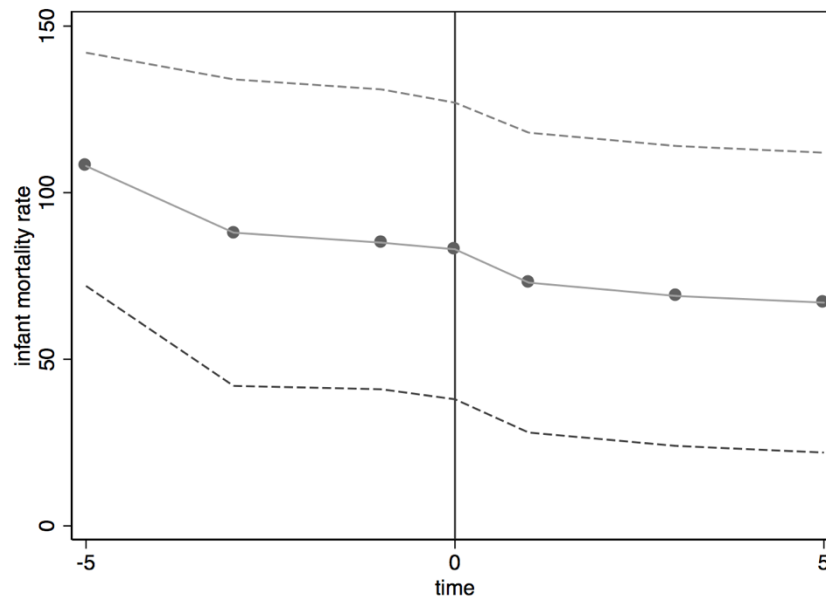
Figure 3. Territorial control during and after UN missions



*Infant Mortality:* Figure 4 also suggest the level of infant mortality decreases across this same period. However, two possible issues emerge. First, variation of these declines is substantial. Second, this data may also capture the system-level effect of declining infant mortality rates across the developing world since World War II.

Taken together and with a grain of salt, all trends describe a positive trajectory for countries after exit. Some positive trends, such as decline in IMR and institutional improvements seem to persist, though trends in GDP growth and territorial control are less clear-cut.

Figure 4. IMR change during and after UN missions



### Empirical Challenges

In light of the presented trend lines, above, it is vital to highlight three important challenges for future research on the effects of UN peace operations withdrawal on state capacity: missing data, small samples, and non-random assignment of the treatment.

A key challenge researchers will encounter is the small population of cases, as our sample includes a maximum 16 (depending on missing data) UN peacekeeping missions. Given the aim of investigating after-exit trends, the sample is necessarily limited to missions that are concluded. Also, the data is not always available for all cases, which further limits the sample available and potentially signals an issue of non-random missing data. This challenge is significant as, even if we were able to include the entire universe of completed UN missions, the sample would only number 56: excluding pre-1990s missions—first generation of peacekeeping operations—the number of cases drops to 48 missions globally. Among these 48 missions, we may decide to focus only on those whose mandates included capacity building, and whose presence extended beyond phases of intense violence. More schematically, samples (N) shrink when accounting for additional treatments across time. The largest sample is N1, where all units could experience a civil war (first treatment). Then, within the smaller N2 with civil war countries only, some of these could receive a UN deployment (second treatment). This leads to an even smaller N3 of countries with UN peace operations. Finally, some countries have experience withdrawal of UN missions (third

treatment), making up a sample of N4; if we were to study countries 5 years after withdrawal, this would leave as with the smallest sample (N5).

Furthermore, available cases of completed missions exhibit one crucial problem. We have mentioned that countries receive multiple treatments over time, but these treatments are also systematically related and unlikely to be random. Effective research design to evaluate the effects of UN withdrawal would need to account for the multiple treatments and their likely non-random assignment based on observable data-generating processes or, even harder, on unobservable ones. These research designs must also assess the different intensities and timings of each treatment.

## Final Remarks

Should empirical and methodological limitations prevent the academic community from investigating the effects of UN peace missions on state capacity after exit? We believe not. Even in the absence of clear cut identification strategies for the effect of UN withdrawals, the lasting consequences of these missions on state stability – after the UN has left -- are vital to understand. However, this means that scholars should invest heavily in methodological triangulation (qualitative/quantitative and different level of analysis), further resources, and transparency on inferential scope conditions. As we highlighted in the above, aggregate-level data (country-year) analysis, these preliminary trends have significantly high heterogeneity between cases. Thus, besides the useful and necessary qualitative analysis based on fieldwork, quantitative analyses based on observational data with subnational variation (Ruggeri et al 2017) and surveys after UN exit (Dorussen 2015) will serve as fruitful models to gauge the effects of UN withdrawal on state capacity.

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