

Call for Papers

International Conference

UN Peacekeeping: Divided perceptions and flawed success.

Troop contributors, host societies and international civil servants, 1948-2008.

A historical approach

Annual Conference of the German Association for Historical Peace and Conflict Studies / Arbeitskreis Historische Friedens- und Konfliktforschung e.V.; www.akhf.de

Venue	Katholische Akademie Schwerte, Germany
Conveners	Jan Erik Schulte, Hadamar Memorial Museum/University of Bochum; Manuel Fröhlich, Trier University Christian Jansen, Trier University
Date	November 1 st – 3 rd , 2018
Deadline for Proposals	June 1 st , 2018

Context

UN Peacekeepers, often known as “Blue Helmets”, represent one of the most frequently used but also controversial instruments of the United Nations in the pursuit of peace and security. Conceived during the Cold War, UN peacekeeping missions are still an important element of international conflict resolution and efforts to maintain and sustain peace.

Cold war antagonism had an ambivalent impact on peacekeeping: On the one hand, it prompted its implementation as a new tool of international politics. The principles and practices of peacekeeping were coined in the years after the Second World War. Some of the early ones, like those in the Middle East or at the border between India and Pakistan and on Cyprus, are still active. On the other hand, ideological rivalries also limited the cases in which the UN authorized peacekeeping missions.

After the end of the East-West conflict in 1989/90, a host of new missions mushroomed. But the heyday of international UN peacekeeping and expectations of a New World Order did not last long. High expectations transformed into disastrous and complete failures. Still, the ill-fated involvement in the civil war in Somalia between 1992 and 1995, the genocide in Rwanda in 1994, and the half-hearted thrust of UN peacekeepers into the civil war in Yugoslavia in 1992 to 1995 stand as manifestations of a crisis in UN peacekeeping.

To this day, it is highly contested if individual UN peacekeeping missions can count as success or failures and whether the long-term results of UN involvement were positive or negative. How UN missions were perceived differed with the flow of time and with the individual perspective. UN civil servants, troop providing governments and societies as well as host societies had and still have their own perception of the mandate, implementation, development and outcome of UN missions. While the international ramifications of Blue Helmet missions are widely discussed, the perceptions of individual and especially societal actors, in contrast, are lacking

scrutiny. This finding seems to be especially true for an historical approach of both short-term and long-term results. Nonetheless, recent studies point to the high relevance of mental settings, experiences and expectations of all actors for the outcome or perceived outcome of peacekeeping missions.

This international conference sets out to study and discuss various perspectives of individuals and group actors on a UN level, from troop providing countries and from host societies. It questions deep-rooted sentiments about peacekeeping endeavors in different societies. In bringing the various perspectives together, the conference will explore possibilities of (historical) comparison and of transfer history. At the same time, the conference tries to stay clear from a Eurocentric or Western view and aims at a truly global history of UN peacekeeping in the 20th century. This approach will not only provide new insights into historical developments and perceptions – and perhaps revise or problematize binary classifications of success or failure – but will help to understand how peacekeeping missions have to be designed and structured in order to be accepted in both troop providing countries and host societies.

At the centre of discussion will be the different perceptions and reactions vis-à-vis the deployment and presence of Blue Helmets in societies which provide soldiers as well as in societies which (have to) host UN troops. A third perspective can be discerned in the view of international civil servants that plan, lead and evaluate peacekeeping missions in the field and at UN headquarters. The comparison of these actors and their respective perceptions, motivations, interests and goals lies at the heart of the conference.

Perspectives, scope and guiding questions

In order to illustrate but not to limit the scope of potential contributions, the following questions may give some orientation:

Regarding the troop contributing societies, questions might be:

What were the interests of governments, administrations and the national military in the provision of troops? Why did some states provide troops on a regular basis? What was the significance of idealistic motives like the defense of human rights? What was the influence of civil society organizations and the media? What role did national identities, cultures and images play, and to what extent were they instrumental for providing troops? How were the host countries and societies perceived and did this perception change? How much information of the situation in the host countries was provided, and how were the activities, accomplishments and performances of UN soldiers perceived in the home countries?

Regarding the host societies, questions might be:

How much influence had governments and societies with regard to the deployment of UN missions on national territory and how did this develop over time (especially before and after 1989/90)? How did governmental, military, societal and non-governmental actors react to the presence of Blue Helmets? What were the perceived motives of the troop contributing countries? What were the hopes and expectations with regard to UN peacekeeping troops? How did the perception of UN peacekeeping missions and of individual soldiers develop over time? Which problems emerged (economic implications, human rights violations, sexual abuse

etc.), and how were these problems discussed in host countries or host territories? How were UN soldiers discussed in the host society's media and how did this differ from media perceptions in the troop providing countries?

Regarding the international civil servants, questions might be:

Which criteria were used by UN authorities to select troop contributing countries? How much influence did international civil servants, troop contributing countries and host countries have in shaping the mandate of peacekeeping missions? What are the UN's criteria to select and appoint leadership positions in UN missions? How important was and is the national affiliation for UN civil servants and how did and does this influence the design and operation of peacekeeping missions? How do UN officials interact with troop contributing countries and host societies? How do international civil servants try to reconcile and resolve tensions and ambiguities in mandate and implementation? How do they mediate between the interests and needs of contributing and host countries and their societies?

There will be several panels and a Roundtable.

The Roundtable will discuss current problems and the future of (UN) peacekeeping.

We welcome abstracts for papers dealing with these or similar questions no longer than 300 words (in English) in PDF format, along with a short biographical note. Please send your submission to jansen@uni-trier.de by June 1st, 2018.

Each presentation will be allotted 20 minutes. The conference language is English.

The organizers aim to secure funding to cover expenses for travel and accommodation. Panelists who have exceedingly high travel costs might be asked to cover a certain extent of their travel expenses.