

Meaning Making and Decision Making in UN Peacekeeping

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From Lebanon to Mali, UN peacekeepers continue to serve in volatile and conflict-affected areas. UN peacekeeping troops are the second-largest military deployment in the world (after the US), while UN civilian peacekeeping bureaucracy is the third-largest international civil service (after the European Commission and the World Bank Group). Despite that, we know relatively little about how peacekeepers make sense of their mandate, social and operational environment, and dilemmas inherent in their work. The papers investigate these questions with regard to military peacekeepers, leaders of peacekeeping operations, peacekeeping officials at New York headquarters, and civilian mission staff working on human rights, elections, and broader peacebuilding matters. Drawing on extensive fieldwork, the papers highlight the processes of dynamic meaning-making, risk analysis, and resolution of ethical and political trade-offs. Since such decisions ultimately shape how peacekeepers engage with the parties to the conflict and the local population, a systematic understanding of their drivers is a significant contribution to peace and conflict studies. Furthermore, theoretically, the papers build on and contribute to such academic subfields as military sociology, new institutionalism, and organisational psychology.

Track Classification: Peacekeeping and Peacebuilding Working Group