Secure Missions:
Why Multidimensional Mandates Endanger UN Peacekeepers, and How to Fix That

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Abstract: Protecting peacekeepers from hostile attacks is a central priority for the United Nations. Multidimensional peacekeeping is designed to enhance the security and effectiveness of peacekeeping operations. Despite some academic evidence that multidimensional peacekeeping succeeds, this model of peacekeeping is criticized in UN policy circles for producing missions that are plagued by field-level disorganization that endangers peacekeepers. Here, I argue that UN mission mandates that contain many objectives endanger peacekeepers by introducing decision-making inefficiencies into the chain of command that prompt individual units to undertake risky unilateral actions. The UN can mitigate this issue by assigning specific tasks that facilitate decision-making by mid-level officials. Using original data on mission mandates, I analyze the language of mandates to measure their multidimensionality and test the consequences of mission design for peacekeeper security. I confirm concerns that mandates containing many objectives undermine peacekeeper security, but find that adding detailed instructions attenuates these effects. (149 words)

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Key terms: multidimensional peacekeeping, mission mandates, malicious violence, peacekeeper security
Protecting peacekeepers from hostile attacks is a central priority for the United Nations. Multidimensional peacekeeping, which involves the deployment of missions with multiple objectives, is designed to enhance the security and effectiveness of peacekeeping operations. Indeed, classic research in political science ties multidimensional peacekeeping to many positive outcomes for host countries (e.g., Doyle and Sambanis, 2000, 2006; Fortna, 2008; Heldt, 2011; Howard, 2007). Despite some academic evidence that multidimensional peacekeeping succeeds, this model of peacekeeping is criticized in UN policy circles for producing missions that are plagued by field-level disorganization that endangers peacekeepers.

Here, I argue that UN mission mandates that contain many objectives endanger peacekeepers by introducing decision-making inefficiencies into the chain of command that prompt individual units to undertake risky unilateral actions. As the number of objectives in a mission’s mandate increases, so does uncertainty within the chain of command about the priorities of the Security Council and the central benchmarks against which mission progress will be assessed. This uncertainty impedes decision-making by mid-level officials, hindering their ability to develop and transmit realistic guidelines to unit commanders that keep pace with evolving conditions. Peacekeeping units operating under these conditions are more likely to act unilaterally, increasing the risk peacekeepers will die in hostile attacks.

The UN can mitigate this issue by assigning specific tasks that facilitate decision-making by mid-level officials. These tasks provide officials in the chain of command more information about the preferred nature and scope of peacekeeper engagement. This helps them develop realistic and agile frameworks for action that empower unit commanders to act cohesively and safely in pursuit of mission objectives. The result is fewer peacekeepers’ lives lost in hostile attacks.
Using new data on mission mandates, I analyze the language of mandates to measure their multidimensionality, which allows me to test the consequences of mission design for peacekeeper security. My findings confirm concerns that mandates containing many objectives undermine peacekeeper security. However, the addition of detailed instructions diminishes these effects considerably, making missions with the most objectives as safe for peacekeepers as their much more specialized counterparts.

This work makes several contributions to the study of interventions by international organizations. First, it provides a new direction for the study of the effectiveness of UN peace operations. While a growing body of research ties attributes of these operations, including their mandates, to variation in their effectiveness, this study is the first to highlight the complementary roles of mandate size and specificity. Second, this study contributes to a nascent body of research on peacekeeper security. Peacekeeper security is an essential dimension of peacekeeping success with proven impacts on burden-sharing in the UN system (Levin, 2019). Yet, research on this topic has been limited to a small number of academic studies and policy briefs that have, thus far, yielded little evidence that mandates matter. This study advances this research, identifying a previously overlooked pathway by which mission mandates influence peacekeeper security. That pathway is through their impact on decision-making by key officials in the chain of command. Third, this article unpacks, fine-tunes, and empirically assesses extant critiques of mission mandates that are widespread in global governance policy circles. My argument reconciles these critiques with the prevailing intuition developed in foundational political science research that multidimensional missions can—and often do—succeed.
Literature review

Despite deploying to the hardest cases, interventions by international organizations like the United Nations reduce battlefield hostilities, protect civilians, and lengthen the duration of peace (Doyle and Sambanis, 2006; Fortna 2008; Gilligan and Sergenti, 2008; Howard, 2019; Hultman, Kathman, and Shannon, 2013; 2014; 2015; Ruggeri, Dorussen, and Gizelis, 2017). UN missions are nevertheless continually subject to hostile attacks that cost peacekeepers their lives. A rapidly growing body of research seeks to explain this deadly phenomenon. It proposes two main explanations. First, some missions are deployed to more dangerous operational environments in which peacekeepers are at greater risk of attack. Existing research connects deployment to civil conflicts, “intractable political disputes,” hotly contested, difficult-to-win wars, and conflicts involving violence against civilians with heightened risks to peacekeepers (Seet and Burnham, 2000; Willmot, Sheeran, and Sharland, 2015: 3; Fjelde, Hultman, and Bromley, 2016; Duursma, 2019; respectively).

Second, mission size and composition influence the likelihood of hostile attacks. Building on early research that identifies a connection between mission size and peacekeeper fatalities (Seet and Burnham, 2000), several recent studies argue that missions with larger troop components are more likely to lose personnel to hostile attacks. They present a couple of possible reasons for this connection, including that missions with larger troop components threaten rebels’ bargaining positions in the conflict and that UN troops undertake the most dangerous peacekeeping activities, including executing military operations and patrolling and traversing dangerous territory (dos Santos Cruz, Phillips, and Cusimano, 2017; Salverda, 2013).

These findings are backed by the results of a number of policy briefs that attempt to disentangle the effects of robust mandates and the size of troop components. The interest in robust mandates is
founded in concerns that the use of force impacts peacekeepers’ readiness and level of engagement. These studies, nevertheless, produce little evidence that robust mandates influence peacekeeper security after controlling for the number of troops deployed (Bellamy, 2014; Henke, 2018; van der Lijn and Smit, 2015).

Mission mandates have nevertheless been shown to impact many other outcomes related to peacekeeping effectiveness, including the durability of peace, the protection of civilians, and democratization (Doyle and Sambanis, 2000; 2006; Fortna, 2008; Howard, 2019; Hultman, 2010). As conduits for conveying objectives to peacekeepers, mandates are an important source of variation in UN missions. A mandate refers to the set of directives assigned to a UN mission by the Security Council. Within the UN system, the Security Council is responsible for identifying and constructing responses to threats to international peace and security. When it decides that a mission is the appropriate response to some threat, the Council bears responsibility for deciding the mission’s mandate. While it considers input from consultations with Permanent Missions, delegations, and other branches of the UN system, the Security Council is the sole UN body with the authority to define mission mandates. It consists of 15 member states, five of whom are permanent and have veto power (Russia, the UK, France, China, and the US). Mandates that receive nine “yes” votes from the Council and no “no” votes from the P5 comprise the formal legal foundations of UN missions (“Mandates and the Legal Basis for Peacekeeping,” 2019; Wood, 1998).

Within the global governance policy community, mandates “in which template language is used for too many routinely assigned mission tasks” (van der Lijn et al. 2017: 17) are commonly thought to impede mission performance. These mandates, disparagingly called Christmas tree mandates, are usually interpreted as symptoms of an unfocused Security Council and causes of “overloaded” missions that lack clear priorities during deployment (ibid). As a 2015 report from the High-level
Independent Panel on Peace Operations put it, Christmas tree mandates “frustrate efforts at prioritization and sequencing during implementation, and progress is increasingly hard to realize in more difficult settings” (HIPPO, 2015: §III, para. 182). A recent Security Council Research Report similarly notes that large mandates produce missions that “lack strategic focus” and “respond inadequately to realities on the ground” (“Is Christmas Over?,” 2019: 1).

These concerns provide the foundations of numerous arguments advocating a return to the narrow, specialized mandates of the Cold War era (A/55/305-S/2000/809, 2000; A/70/95-S/2015/446, 2015). Early concerns about the growing number of tasks in mission mandates appear in the Brahimi Report, in which the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations emphasizes the importance of “clear, credible, and achievable mandates” and argues that consensus-building at the expense of specificity in mission mandates has “serious consequences in the field…especially for operations that will deploy into dangerous circumstances” (Brahimi Report, 2000). In 2018, the Secretariat issued the Declaration of Shared Commitments, in which it called for renewed commitments “to pursue clear, focused, sequenced, prioritized and achievable mandates by the Security Council matched by appropriate resources” (2018: para. 5). The Declaration was subsequently accepted by more than 150 member states in the General Assembly (“Is Christmas Over?,” 2019). In the words of a representative of Indonesia in a recent meeting of the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations, “since the mandate of the mission is the logical basis for setting key performance indicators, the mandate can no longer be a Christmas tree” (GA/PK/235, 2019). Despite these efforts, large mission mandates show no signs of disappearing in the near future. In fact, the number of directives appearing in mandates has grown considerably in the past three decades, soaring from an average of two during the Cold War to an average of eight in the decade after (1992-99) and an average of 18 in the decade and a half after that (2000-15).
While the policy community widely derides large mandates, academic research has been much kinder to what it terms multidimensional mandates. Foundational research defines multidimensional peacekeeping missions as those that play a number of roles in their host countries, “such as the organizing of elections, human rights training and monitoring, police reform, institution building, economic development, and so on” (Fortna, 2008: 7). This literature regards multidimensional peacekeeping as largely effective at keeping and building peace and facilitating post-conflict democratization (Doyle and Sambanis 2000, 2006; Fortna 2008; Heldt, 2011; Howard, 2007).¹ Scholars have recently begun to acknowledge the challenges large mandates pose for efficacy, however. Williams (2019) identifies what he calls the peacekeeping trilemma in which no mission can be fairly expected to implement multidimensional mandates, insulate peacekeepers from risks, and maximize cost-effectiveness simultaneously. In a recent working paper, Blair, Di Salvatore, and Smidt (Nd: 19) argue that fragmented mandates in which tasks are dispersed across several “substantively different domains” make it harder for the Security Council to monitor the actions of peacekeepers and for peacekeepers to do everything asked of them. To my knowledge, however, the impacts of large mandates on peacekeeper security have not yet undergone systematic scrutiny in peer-reviewed academic research.

Theory

Large mission mandates appear to confer some benefits to host countries in the form of multidimensional peacekeeping, but—assuming policy makers are not completely mistaken—also

¹Note that exceptions to this consensus do exist. Metternich (2011), for instance, finds that missions with democratization mandates only promote democratization under certain conditions.
come with some disadvantages in terms of field-level organization and prioritization. What explains the disconnect between these two informed audiences?

I argue that mandates that contain many objectives and not enough tasks endanger peacekeepers because they produce decision-making inefficiencies within the military chain of command. Absent effective guidance from their superiors, unit commanders resort to making ad hoc unilateral decisions about how to conduct their troops in the field, increasing the likelihood that peacekeepers will die at the hands of hostile attackers. When the Security Council adds tasks to these mandates, it diminishes their pernicious effects by providing key officials in charge of field-level organization and prioritization more information about the preferred nature and scope of peacekeeper engagement. This makes decision-making by these officials easier, improving the quality of guidance they provide to unit commanders and curtailing dangerous unilateral activities by peacekeeping units. In short, the effects of large (or multidimensional) mandates on peacekeeper security are conditional on specificity.

To my knowledge, this is the first article to theoretically and empirically distinguish between the objectives and tasks in mission mandates. Consistent with the standard English-language usage, I define a ‘task’ as a specific piece of work that needs to be done in order to meet some objective. An ‘objective’ is a goal, which can be achieved through the completion of some task (or tasks). Objectives tell missions what their aims should be, but not how to achieve them—e.g., protect human rights, monitor the ceasefire, assist with security sector reform, etc. Tasks tell peacekeepers what needs to be done to achieve these objectives—e.g., protect civilians from hostile attacks, monitor the buffer zone, or train police, respectively. While the conventional approach in academic and policy circles has been to label all of these directives ‘tasks,’ tasks and objectives in practice make very different contributions to the decision-making processes of key figures in the military chain of command.
The military chain of command in UN missions (illustrated in Figure 1) is divided into three distinct but overlapping levels: the strategic level, the operational level, and the tactical level. At the strategic level, the Security Council provides the “legal authority, high-level strategic direction and political guidance for all UN peacekeeping operations” (“Authority, Command and Control in United Nations Peacekeeping Operations,” 2008: 7). It produces the mission’s mandate, and then confers operational authority to the Secretary General, whose staff “formulate policies and develop operational guidelines based on Security Council resolutions” (ibid). The Secretariat conveys these policies and guidelines to the Head of Mission, who then provides “political guidance for mandate implementation” and sets “mission-wide operational direction,” while working with “the heads of all mission components” to ensure “unity of effort and coherence among all UN entities in the mission area” (ibid). This includes issuing and regularly updating a mission plan that prioritizes tasks and identifies benchmarks for mission success. The Head of Military Component (usually designated the Force Commander) communicates the mission plan to her subordinates and assigns specific tasks to units as necessary to fulfill the plan developed by the Head of Mission. The Head of Military Component is also responsible for establishing a clear tactical chain of command. This includes placing peacekeeping units under the control of a series of tactical commanders, typically at the division, brigade, battalion, and company levels. Peacekeeping units are battalion- or company-sized groups of (usually) co-national troops who work together to carry out specific assignments, occasionally splitting off into sub-units to work on different tasks as necessary (Mays, 2004). Depending on their size, peacekeeping units are headed by co-national company or battalion leaders who are called unit leaders.

2 Note that some units represent operational partnerships between multiple member states. In these cases, unit command goes to the senior partner (Daniel, Williams, and Smith, 2015).

[Insert Figure 1 about here.]

My argument focuses on the effects of large mission mandates on decision-making by mid-level UN officials within the military chain of command—i.e., officials below the Security Council but above unit commanders. When the Council provides mid-level officials too many objectives, it makes it harder for them to do their jobs well. This includes translating Council mandates into realistic and agile peacekeeping strategies. Specifically, as the number of objectives in a mission’s mandate increases, so does uncertainty within the chain of command about the priorities of the Security Council and the benchmarks against which mission progress will be assessed. This generates questions about the scope and nature of mission engagement, including how the objectives in the mandate relate to each other; whether they can, or even should be, pursued simultaneously; and if they should be staggered, in what order. These questions handicap decision-making by mid-level officials, making it harder for them to determine operational priorities and benchmarks and convey these details to unit commanders.

Unit commanders operating under these conditions are more likely to take matters into their own hands. Absent effective guidance from their superiors, unit commanders will resort to making unilateral decisions about their units’ priorities and what constitutes success. This includes devising their own approaches and responses to new opportunities or threats rather than asking their superiors and waiting on the paralyzed chain of command to generate a decision. Unilateral activity by peacekeeping units increases the likelihood missions will incur fatalities from hostile attacks in two ways. First, military units that act unilaterally are liable to become isolated from the rest of the force.
Isolated units are more attractive targets for opportunistic attackers than coordinated units operating as a cohesive whole. This should make them more likely to experience attacks. Second, peacekeeping forces that are uncertain about what they can or should be doing are less prepared to act decisively to defend themselves and their comrades. This should make them more likely to incur fatalities during attacks.

In sum, through their effects on decision-making by mid-level officials in the chain of command, mandates containing many objectives increase unilateral activity by peacekeeping units. This places peacekeepers at greater risk of dying in hostile attacks. Initial indications of this process can be found in some of the UN’s highest profile failures, including Bosnia, Somalia, and Rwanda.

In Bosnia, the troubles with UNPROFOR’s mandate began in 1993, when the Security Council capitulated to international pressure to adopt a more active role by assigning the previously-traditional peacekeeping mission a wide range of new and unfamiliar objectives (Akashi, 1995: 315). This manifested in what was arguably the most confusing mandate of all time, S/RES/836 (1993), which asked peacekeepers: “acting in self-defense, to take the necessary measures, including the use of force, in reply to bombardments against the safe areas by any of the parties or to armed incursion into them or in the event of any deliberate obstruction in or around those areas to the freedom of movement of UNPROFOR or of protected humanitarian convoys.” Beyond flaunting basic rules for clear writing, S/RES/836 assigned UNPROFOR a variety of new objectives “without clearly distinguishing between a rhetorical and operational application of its provisions” (Akashi, 1995: 317). Unable to build effective peacekeeping strategy around such an ambiguous mandate, UNPROFOR collapsed into a “crisis-reactive mission lurching from one predicament to another” (ibid). The disjointed and incoherent peacekeeping strategy in Bosnia had devastating consequences for public and peacekeeper security. The poorly-implemented safe areas were rapidly converted into havens in
which armed actors could “refit, re-arm, train, and prepare for future military operations” (*ibid* 314). Peacekeepers, meanwhile, were killed, taken hostage, and used as human shields in unprecedented numbers (Findlay, 2002).

In Somalia, widespread confusion surrounded how best to meet the numerous ambiguous objectives in UNOSOM II’s mandate. Questions about the exact nature and scope of peacekeeper engagement—such as whether reprisals were acceptable, under what conditions punitive measures should be taken, and what constituted a hostile threat—paralyzed the chain of command, which in turn “fail[ed] to develop rules of engagement in pace with the changing threat” (Thakur, 1994: 397). Those that were developed did “not correspond to the realities of the environment in which they [were] to be implemented.” As a result, different units came to hold and act upon different beliefs about the nature and scope of their involvement in Somalia. From there, the mission rapidly devolved into a loose association of uncoordinated national units subject to regular deadly attacks by armed groups (*ibid*).

UNAMIR’s experience in Rwanda further illustrates the dangers of assigning missions too many objectives. When the killing began in April 1994, UNAMIR was a traditional UN peacekeeping mission with a mandate to monitor the implementation of the 1993 peace agreement. The Security Council’s response to the onset of genocide came in the form of a series of rapid expansions to the mission’s role in Rwanda. With each new resolution, the Security Council added new objectives to peacekeepers’ list of goals, but left important details governing the actual pursuit of these objectives “disjointed and unclear” (Larose-Edwards, 1994: 20). As the number of mission objectives rose, how exactly peacekeepers should implement their objectives remained uncertain. For instance, S/RES/918 asked the mission to protect human rights, while simultaneously asking it to continue carrying out its previously assigned responsibilities, including monitoring and implementing the disintegrating peace
agreement and facilitating the delivery of humanitarian assistance. It stopped short, however, of providing additional information about how peacekeepers should actually do all of this in the midst of genocide. These new objectives wreaked havoc on decision-making by mid-level officials, manifesting in “inadequate strategy formulation and communication within the Secretariat” and “disjointed relationships between the Secretariat and the field level” (Eriksson, 1996: 47).

The resulting confusion paralyzed the chain of command, prompting unit commanders to invent ad hoc, uncoordinated, and unpredictable strategies for coping with genocide that put peacekeepers at risk. During the rapid withdrawal of Belgian peacekeepers following the executions of ten of their colleagues, they made a last-minute decision to renege “on their promise to leave behind equipment, particularly armoured [sic] vehicles for the Ghanaian Battalion,” forcing remaining peacekeepers to continue on alone with even fewer resources (Larose-Edwards, 1994: 21). In his 2003 book, Canadian Lt.-Gen. Dallaire recounts making an impromptu decision to have a few unarmed peacekeepers guard a hotel, gambling that the militia would abort plans to massacre the civilians inside rather than kill the peacekeepers standing in their way. Even though no peacekeepers died in this situation, this was clearly a risky move that put peacekeepers in the line of fire.3

The Security Council can, and often does, facilitate decision-making within the chain of command by providing more detailed information about how exactly it envisions missions will pursue objectives that are otherwise unclear in nature or intention. These tasks—which I defined at the beginning of this section—have appeared in mission mandates since the deployment of the first UN missions, albeit to varying extents. The UN specifically mandated ONUC to improve government capacity by implementing Congolese government policies; UNEF I to monitor the Suez Crisis ceasefire

3 He admits this, saying: “My order put him and his team at extreme risk” (p. 269).
monitoring the buffer zones between Egyptian and Israeli forces; and UNOGIL and UNSF to monitor the security sectors in Lebanon and West New Guinea (respectively) by monitoring the actions of the Lebanese armed forces and Guinean police. Mission mandates continued to deepen throughout the 1990s and 2000s, as their contents increasingly specified how broader objectives ought to be implemented—e.g., missions were increasingly mandated to protect human rights by preventing sexual assault, promote national reconciliation by pursuing justice for war criminals, facilitate the delivery of humanitarian assistance by protecting humanitarian personnel, and so on.

Tasks make it easier for officials to make informed decisions about how to pursue and stagger their missions’ objectives. First, when the Council specifies how peacekeepers should act to achieve broad goals, it narrows down the enormous range of potential actions peacekeepers might take in pursuit of each goal. This allows officials to rapidly develop clear plans of action in which they prioritize certain efforts over others from the outset. For example, when the Security Council tells peacekeepers to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian assistance by protecting humanitarian personnel or protect human rights by preventing rape, it produces missions that can start out on day one developing strategies to address these specific facets of objectives that otherwise imply a nearly endless list of possible activities. Relatedly, by communicating the Council’s expectations governing the nature and scope of mission engagement, tasks generate insights among mission officials about the likely benchmarks against which mission progress will be assessed. When the Security Council asks a mission to monitor a ceasefire by monitoring a buffer zone, it makes clear to mission officials that how well their mission monitors the ceasefire will be determined by its ability to monitor the integrity of the buffer zone in particular.

Second, tasks help key officials in the chain of command understand the precise nature and scope of each objective. In so doing, they inform decision-makers about how the objectives relate to
each other, both in character and urgency. This helps them make sensible decisions about the order
in which the mission should pursue them, pursuing similar objectives simultaneously and more time-
sensitive objectives first. It can also help produce insights about how efforts to achieve their objectives
will compare in terms of resource intensiveness, facilitating sophisticated upfront assessments about
how best to allocate mission resources to maximize efficacy.

In sum, tasks are, fundamentally, sources of useful information—they unpack the black box
of objectives, minimizing guessing and uncertainty within the chain of command. By helping decision-
makers in UN missions make informed decisions about how to pursue and stagger objectives, tasks
reduce obstacles to decision-making imposed by large mandates with numerous objectives. Tasks help
decision-makers generate sensible and agile peacekeeping strategies during missions whose mandates
otherwise make this kind of effective and rapid planning very difficult. While they should never harm
mission operation, tasks should be most useful in missions where the challenges facing decision-
makers are highest. For decision-makers on the receiving end of a mandate with a mountain of
objectives, there should be no such thing as too much information about the precise nature of these
objectives.⁴

⁴ One could claim that this argument conflicts with the theory developed by Howard (2007) in
which she argues that retaining room for local innovation is essential to mission success. I disagree
with this claim wholeheartedly. First, even when they receive guidance from the Security Council,
missions still retain autonomy in how to carry out specific tasks. Second and relatedly, tasks should
empower mission officials to make quick and decisive adjustments to the mission’s approach with
less concern that their decisions will contradict the objectives established by their superiors.
If this argument is correct, then the effect of mandate size is conditional on specificity. While mandates containing many objectives can endanger peacekeepers, whether they do so depends on if the Security Council goes the extra mile to provide clear tasks that describe how exactly to achieve these objectives. In other words:

\[ H_1: \] When the number of tasks is at its lowest level, the likelihood of peacekeeper fatalities from hostile attacks should increase with the number of objectives assigned in a mission’s mandate. The magnitude of this increase should diminish as the number of tasks increases, until the number of objectives no longer has any effect.

**Data and Methods**

To test these expectations, I start with replication data from Henke (2019), to which I add data on UN peacekeeping mandates from a new dataset, Tasks Assigned to Missions in their Mandates (TAMM). The replication data combine monthly data on peacekeeper fatalities from malicious attacks and existing data on UN personnel deployments between 1990 and 2011.\(^5\) The unit of observation, mission-month, reflects the dynamic nature of mission mandates and deployment figures, both of which often change mid-year.

Since I am interested in the likelihood of peacekeeper fatalities from hostile attacks, the dependent variable is a binary variable indicating whether any peacekeepers died as a result of a malicious act in a given mission-month. Fatalities from malicious acts are those that occur as results of “hostilities, revolution, rebellion, insurrection, riots or civil commotion, sabotage, explosion of war

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\(^5\) Henke’s time frame is limited by the deployments data, originally from Kathman (2013), which are available from 1990 to 2011.
weapons, terrorism, murder or assault or an attempt thereat” (“Information Regarding Malicious Acts Insurance Policy (MAIP),” 2011: 1). Fatalities from malicious violence stand apart from deaths due to accident or illness in that they are purposefully inflicted by hostile actors (Rogers and Kennedy, 2014; Henke, 2019). While about half of all UN missions experience peacekeeper fatalities from malicious violence at some point in their deployments, these fatalities are fairly rare, appearing in just about 4.3% (n=158) of mission-months.

Data on mission mandates come from a new dataset called TAMM, which identifies all the directives in the mandates of UN peace operations deployed between 1948 and 2015. Many data collection efforts classify mission mandates according to specific types or attributes (e.g., Doyle and Sambanis, 2006; Fortna, 2008; Henke, 2018; Howard, 2015, 2019; Hultman, 2010; Karim and Beardsley, 2013; Mullenbach 2017). To my knowledge, TAMM is the first to provide comprehensive data on the full range of content in the mandates of UN peace operations. Each variable in TAMM captures an action that relates to some actor, institution, or process; each contains a noun and verb—e.g., monitor the ceasefire, protect human rights. The variables are represented with binary variables equaling 1 if they are assigned to missions and 0 if not. TAMM identifies all of the directives assigned to each mission by the UN Security Council; it also identifies any directive recommended in advisory reports from the General Assembly or Secretary General, provided the Council formally accepts these recommendations.

TAMM places these directives into an organizational hierarchy that distinguishes between the broadest directives in mandates and more specific ones that explain how to achieve them. TAMM does not distinguish between objectives and tasks; instead, it labels the broadest directives in mission mandates ‘first-order tasks’ and more specific ones ‘subtasks.’ Despite having different labels, the characteristics of mandates measured in TAMM and the concepts described in my theory are very
similar. In Tamm, first-order tasks are the broadest directives assigned to peacekeepers; subtasks are second- or third-order tasks that provide instructions on how to pursue first-order tasks. A mission that receives a 1 on a subtask in Tamm always receives a 1 on the broader corresponding task, but not necessarily vice versa. Using these data, I measure the number of objectives in a mission’s mandate by counting the number of first-order tasks; I measure the number of tasks by counting the number of subtasks. In the remainder of this text, I discard the language of ‘first-order tasks’ and ‘subtasks’ in favor of the simpler terminology of ‘objectives’ and ‘tasks,’ respectively. Since all missions are deployed with some objectives in mind, the number of objectives in Tamm ranges between 1 and 19 with mean 5. Not all mandates contain tasks, however, meaning that this measure ranges between 0 and 11 with mean 2.

Tamm, which is available in mission-resolution and mission-month formats, makes it easy to see how mandate size and specificity change over time. Figure 2 illustrates the steady increase in the numbers of objectives and tasks in mission mandates since the end of the Cold War. Mandates also often change during missions; more than half (29) of the 55 missions active between 1990 and 2011 experienced changes in the size or specificity of their mandates. Mandates can change during any month of the year, but mandate changes are most common in June, September, October, and

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6 One possible issue with this coding procedure is that some resolutions assign subtasks in the mandate, but leave their corresponding first-order tasks implicit. These resolutions usually explicitly state the first-order tasks elsewhere in the text, such as the preamble. This could be a source of error during analysis, but I do not expect it to bias the findings in any particular direction.

7 These descriptive statistics come from the mission-month version of Tamm.
November.

I test $H_1$ using these data and Probit regression. The analysis centers on an interaction between counts of the numbers of objectives and tasks assigned to missions in their mandates. I also include several control variables based on the findings of existing research on the determinants of peacekeeper security. First, since the number of peacekeepers, especially troops, is thought to impact the likelihood of peacekeeper fatalities, I control for the number of UN troops present in a given mission-month. Second, since peacekeepers serving in the midst of active fighting may also be more likely to end up in the line of fire, I control for active fighting between warring parties by including an indicator of mission-months with any battle-related deaths (Melander and Sundberg, 2013).\(^8\)

**Selection**

It is difficult to say for sure whether and how the process (or processes) of determining the size and specificity of mandates is influenced by the likelihood that missions will incur losses from hostile attacks. On one hand, these features of mandates are likely a response to evolving international norms governing the desirable scope of UN involvement. As Figure 2 makes clear, the number of objectives and tasks has risen steadily over time. To the extent to which this trend drives the number of objectives and tasks appearing in mandates, these features are not products of the UN’s perceptions of the likelihood of attacks.

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\(^8\) I compare the fit of this model with that of two others containing more control variables in the appendix.
On the other hand, the UN could assign more objectives and tasks to missions deploying to more dangerous operational environments, whose dire circumstances warrant more extensive responses. If missions with more objectives and tasks are systematically deployed to difficult contexts, then the findings should be biased in favor of a positive relationship between the number of objectives and the likelihood of peacekeeper fatalities but against the finding that attaching tasks diminishes these effects.

It is also possible that different selection processes could govern the assignment of objectives and tasks. In reality, there are many observed and unobserved ways cases that receive missions with mandates containing more objectives and tasks could vary. To address this possibility, I replicate the findings using fixed effects and covariate-balancing propensity score estimation in the section labeled *Robustness*.

**Findings**

I present the findings as a coefficient plot in Figure 3.\(^9\) The estimated effect of the number of objectives is positive and significant when the number of tasks is zero. The interaction term, however, is negative, suggesting that this effect diminishes as the number of tasks increases. What do these findings mean for the probability of peacekeeper fatalities from malicious violence? The contour plot in Figure 4 shows the predicted probabilities of peacekeeper fatalities from malicious violence as the

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\(^9\) I present these results in table form in the appendix.
numbers of objectives and tasks increase. The probabilities are color-coded and get darker as they increase by 1%.  

Figure 5 supplements these findings with a scatter plot showing the distribution of observations in the sample. The scatter plot contains weighted circles indicating the number of observations for each number of tasks and objectives. Given that tasks explicate objectives, it is no surprise that the two counts are correlated. However, there is considerable variation in the number of tasks, especially for missions with mandates containing low-to-moderate numbers of objectives.

Looking at the contour plot, it is clear that the predicted probability of peacekeeper fatalities starts low for narrow mandates but rises quickly above three objectives. Fortunately for peacekeepers, about 44% of missions active between 1990 and 2011 had mandates with three tasks or fewer at some point during their deployments (1,582 mission-months). For missions with mandates containing more than three objectives, however, the probability of incurring peacekeeper deaths from malicious violence rises precipitously. This again describes a considerable proportion of UN missions; in the time period under study, 38 missions received mandates containing more than three objectives (accounting for 2,090 mission-months).

For missions in the top end of this spectrum (juggling nine or more objectives), having four or more tasks in their mandates helps diminish the likelihood that peacekeepers will die in malicious attacks. Of the 22 missions with mandates with this many objectives (n=1,162), 15 reach this threshold.

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10 While the contour plot succinctly summarizes the substantive findings, it does not contain confidence intervals. Readers can find a version of this figure with 95% confidence intervals in the appendix.
of tasks at some point in their deployments (n=769; 66%). These findings constitute good news for peacekeeper security: with enough tasks, even the most ambitious mandates can be as safe for peacekeepers as their much more specialized counterparts. A mission like MINUSTAH with 16 objectives and nine tasks in its mandate can have the same probability of incurring fatalities from hostile attacks (2.2%) as the narrowest UN missions.\textsuperscript{11} However, for missions whose mandates contain many objectives but not enough tasks—i.e., the other 34% of mission-months (n=393) whose mandates contain nine or more objectives and fewer than four tasks—the predictions entail alarmingly high probabilities of peacekeeper deaths in hostile attacks.

While tasks help keep peacekeepers safe during missions with large mandates, they appear to have the opposite effect in missions with few objectives. This is surprising. I have no clear reason to believe that tasks, which I have described as sources of useful information, would be detrimental to any mission. To address the possibility that this puzzling finding is driven by some unobserved variation across missions—and to ensure that the other findings generated in this study are not—I re-estimate this model using mission fixed effects and covariate balancing propensity score estimation. These findings, which I review in the following section, indicate that tasks have no effect on peacekeeper security when the number of objectives is low.

Taken together, these findings suggest that adding tasks to UN mission mandates diminishes the pernicious effects of having a large number of objectives. Before discussing the results of the robustness checks, I now summarize the findings for the control variables. Consistent with the expectations outlined in existing research, the number of UN troops is positively correlated with the

\textsuperscript{11} The narrowest UN missions receive mandates contain just one objective and no tasks. These missions include ONUCA, UNDOF, UNIIMOG, or UNMOGIP, among others.
likelihood of peacekeeper fatalities from malicious violence. Fatalities from malicious violence are also more likely in mission-months with active fighting, suggesting that peacekeepers deployed to conflict zones that are not yet post-violence are at greater risk.

[Insert Figure 3 about here.]

[Insert Figure 4 about here.]

[Insert Figure 5 about here.]

Robustness

I check the robustness of these findings in a number of ways. The tables and figures containing the results of these robustness checks are in the appendix. First, there are several areas of debate and departure within existing research on peacekeeper security that suggest a number of other potential controls. Whereas Seet and Burnham (2000) emphasize the importance of overall mission size, subsequent studies have focused on the effects of large troop components in particular. I can nevertheless imagine situations in which UN police, much like troops, encounter hostile attacks while patrolling dangerous territories and neighborhoods. In addition, military observers are generally unarmed and unprepared to defend themselves in the event of such attacks. For these reasons, I re-estimate the original model with added controls for the number of UN police and military observers.

The contents of mission mandates could also impact peacekeepers’ readiness and level of engagement. The size and specificity of mandates does, in fact, correlate with their content. 50% of tasks (8/16) clarify objectives related to mitigating and alleviating the intensity of violence (i.e., violence limitation), while 31% (5/16) dictate how missions should support key structures necessary for preventing conflict relapse (i.e., peacebuilding). Just three tasks (monitoring buffer zones,
establishing good offices, and liaising between parties) relate to traditional peacekeeping. It is, therefore, possible that the apparent effects of tasks will be owed to the pursuit of substantively different objectives. To address this possibility, I re-estimate the original model with added controls for the proportion of objectives in mission mandates related to violence limitation and peacebuilding.\(^{12}\) The substantive findings for the effects of mandate size and specificity are unchanged. The results, nevertheless, suggest that the proportion of a mission’s mandate dedicated to peacebuilding is positively associated with the likelihood of fatalities, while the proportion of a mandate dedicated to violence limitation has no relationship with this likelihood. This echoes the findings of prior research by Bellamy (2014) and van der Lijn and Smit (2015) that robust mandates have little effect on the likelihood of hostile attacks beyond the tendency for such missions to have large troop components.

My attention to the possible role of robust mandates does not stop there, however. It is conceivable that my findings are being driven by an interaction between mandates to use force and the presence of tasks that help peacekeepers execute force effectively. This argument would be consistent with numerous extant critiques that emphasize the manifold obstacles to the successful use of force in peacekeeping. These obstacles include peacekeepers’ reluctance to use force, a lack of political will by member states to support the implementation of mandates to use force, and numerous “operational and managerial inadequacies” that undermine the effective use of force (dos Santos Cruz, Phillips, and Cusimano, 2017; Mansson, 2006; Findlay, 2002: 390; respectively). Dos Santos Cruz, Phillips, and Cusimano (2017: 11), in particular, assert that many threats to peacekeepers’ lives stem

\(^{12}\) The comparison group is the proportion of peacekeeping-related tasks in a mission’s mandate. When added together, the three ratios equal 1. To see all of the tasks and objectives in Tamm, see Figure A1.
directly from peacekeepers’ failure to use force effectively, arguing that it “invites attack.” If tasks help peacekeepers use force effectively, then their presence in a mandate could make the difference between a failed and successful robust peacekeeping endeavor. To explore this possibility, I replicate my original analysis with an additional interaction between Chapter VII authorizations and the number of tasks. My findings indicate no effects associated with the use of force; the substantive findings for mandate size and specificity are unchanged.

Second, while my focus has, thus far, been on the likelihood peacekeepers will die in hostile attacks, the size and specificity of mission mandates could also impact how many peacekeepers die when attacked. I explore this possibility by replicating the original analysis using Negative Binomial regression and a count version of the DV. The results suggest that more peacekeepers perish in hostile attacks during missions whose mandates contain many objectives but few tasks. As before, this effect diminishes as the number of tasks increases. Third, the findings in the original analysis could be driven by missions with especially high numbers of objectives or tasks. I replicate these findings with log-transformed versions of these variables. The findings are unchanged. Fourth, mission mandates have become larger and more specific over time. If time trends are also affecting peacekeeper security, then the apparent connection between this and mandate size and specificity could be spurious. I conduct two robustness checks in which I add a linear control for year and year fixed effects. Neither adjustment alters the findings.

Fifth, a possible alternative explanation is that tasks improve peacekeeper security whenever they represent a sufficiently high proportion of total directives in a mandate. If true, then adding one task to a mandate containing one objective should be just as helpful to peacekeepers as adding five

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13 The formula for log transformation is $\ln (1 + \text{var})$. 
tasks to a mandate with five objectives, since both produce mandates with 1:1 ratios of objectives to tasks. In contrast, I expect tasks to be most helpful when objectives are so numerous that they handicap decision-making in the chain of command. I directly adjudicate between these two arguments by adding a control for the proportion of total directives accounted for by tasks. The substantive findings are again unchanged and the coefficient for the new control variable is not statistically significant.

Sixth, funding could play an important, but thus far overlooked, role in peacekeeper security. While assessing the full effects of funding is beyond the scope of this article, I address its role as a potential confounder. Absent funding data for individual missions, I rely on monthly data on total financial contributions by UN member states (1994-2011) from the International Peace Institute Peacekeeping Database. I re-estimate the model with added controls for the total logged monthly financial contributions in actual and 2010 dollars. Since the same amount of funding could be generous or meager depending on the number of peacekeepers deployed, I also control for the average logged financial contribution per peacekeeper per month. The findings are unchanged.

Seventh, I use mission fixed effects to address the potential confounding role of unobserved heterogeneity across missions. The findings are largely consistent with expectations. While the number of objectives still increases the risk of fatalities when the number of tasks is low, the fixed effects render the interaction between the two no longer statistically significant. However, the predicted probabilities (shown in the appendix) are strongly suggestive of the expected conditional relationship between these two variables. These predicted probabilities further suggest that tasks do not, in fact, endanger peacekeepers when included in mandates with too few objectives, suggesting that this puzzling finding was due to unobserved differences across missions. I also use mission fixed effects to replicate the findings of the Negative Binomial regression model described at the start of this
section. The results are consistent with expectations: more peacekeepers die in malicious attacks when mandates have many objectives and too few tasks; however, these effects diminish as the number of tasks increases. Tasks, again, have no apparent effect on peacekeeper security when the number of objectives is low.

Eighth, I use covariate-balancing propensity score (CBPS) estimation to reduce imbalances in the data attributable to the non-random deployment of missions with larger mandates to harder cases. CBPS is a robust method of covariate balancing that improves on the empirical performance of other commonly-used propensity score matching and weighting approaches (Imai and Ratkovic, 2014). Two considerations guide my choice of covariates during balancing. First, the included covariates must not be affected by the treatment. The list of covariates that could be affected by the size of a mission’s mandate is vast, and includes mission characteristics, such as the number of peacekeepers deployed, and conflict characteristics, such as battle-related deaths and one-sided violence. Balancing on lagged covariates, while common practice, is still a source of post-treatment bias insofar as their values are mediated by previous rounds (Montgomery, Nyhan, and Torres, 2018). Second, numerous unobserved context— and time-dependent factors are likely to render the treated and control groups systematically different.

With these considerations in mind, I balance on sub-region, GDP, population, and year-month. The result is a balanced sample with treated and control missions active in similar countries in the same sub-regions and during the same time periods. Given the immense diversity across countries within regions, I use sub-regional categories imported from the UN Statistics Division to create 12
sub-regional dummy variables indicating the location of each mission.\textsuperscript{14} The measures of GDP and population are yearly, logged, and come from the World Bank’s World Development Indicators. The treatment is a binary variable that indicates whether a mission’s mandate is large—i.e., whether it contains four or more objectives. I consider these mandates large because they are in the top 50\textsuperscript{th} percentile of mission mandates during this time period. Before balancing, the mean absolute standardized difference between the treated and control groups on these variables is 0.45. This is indicative of considerable imbalance between observations that do and do not receive large mandates. The CBPS estimation corrects for this imbalance, improving overlap and resulting in a mean absolute standard difference of 0.00.\textsuperscript{15} The balanced sample retains 59\% of the 3403 observations in the original estimation sample. This includes 72 observations with peacekeeper fatalities, 880 observations with small mandates, and 1137 observations with large mandates.

After balancing, I estimate six models based on the original model specification and several of the robustness checks already discussed in this section. The first interacts the number of tasks with the binary treatment indicating whether a mandate has four or more objectives; the following four add controls for UN police and military observers, violence limitation and peacebuilding, Chapter VII authorizations, and monthly financial contributions per peacekeeper. The final model interacts the number of tasks with the original count of objectives. All models produce substantively identical

\textsuperscript{14} The sub-regions are: Caribbean, Central America, Central Asia, Eastern Africa, Middle Africa, Northern Africa, South-Eastern Asia, Southern Africa, Southern Asia, Southern Europe, Western Africa, and Western Asia.

\textsuperscript{15} I include more summary information about pre- and post-matching covariate balance and propensity score overlap in the appendix.
findings: peacekeepers are more likely to die from malicious violence when their mandates have a lot of objectives but few tasks. Tasks have no apparent effects on peacekeeper security when the number of objectives is low. They do, however, reduce the likelihood that missions whose mandates contain many objectives will sustain fatalities.

Finally, this study has focused on the explanatory power of variation in mission mandates, largely neglecting variation across conflict actors. Existing data on peacekeeper fatalities from malicious violence do not attribute attacks to specific perpetrators (Henke, 2019). Nevertheless, the preponderance of attacks are believed to be carried out by rebel groups, which are thought to resort to violence when it is in their strategic interests to do so (Fjelde, Hultman, and Bromley, 2016; Hultman, 2007; Kalyvas, 2006; Wood, 2010; etc.). To address the possibility that rebels’ strategic positions impact their use of violence against peacekeepers, I re-estimate the original analysis with a number of additional controls for rebel and government conflict involvement. The substantive findings are unchanged.

Conclusion

Protecting peacekeepers from hostile attacks is a central priority for the UN. Despite empirical evidence that multidimensional peacekeeping succeeds, this model of peacekeeping is criticized in UN policy circles for producing missions that are plagued by field-level disorganization that endangers peacekeepers. I argue that UN mission mandates that contain many objectives endanger peacekeepers by introducing decision-making inefficiencies into the chain of command that prompt individual units to undertake risky unilateral actions. As the number of objectives in a mission’s mandate increases, questions arise in the chain of command about the priorities of the Security Council and the central benchmarks against which mission progress will be assessed. This
hinders officials’ ability to develop realistic peacekeeping strategies that keep pace with the evolving threats facing peacekeepers. Unit commanders operating in these conditions are more likely to make ad hoc unilateral decisions about their units’ priorities and what constitutes success, placing peacekeepers at greater risk of dying in hostile attacks.

I further argue that the UN can mitigate the dangers associated with large mandates by attaching tasks that facilitate the creation of realistic and agile peacekeeping strategies. When the Security Council adds tasks to large mandates, it provides key officials in charge of field-level organization and prioritization more information about the preferred nature and scope of peacekeeper engagement. This makes decision-making by these officials easier, improving the quality of guidance they provide to unit commanders and curtailing dangerous unilateral activities by peacekeeping units. With enough tasks, even the most ambitious mandates can be as safe for peacekeepers as their much more specialized counterparts.

I test this argument using new data on UN mission mandates from Tasks Assigned to Missions in their Mandates (TAMM) and existing data on peacekeeper fatalities from Henke (2019). I find that missions become more dangerous for peacekeepers when their mandates contain more objectives. However, the pernicious effects of large mandates dissipate as the number of tasks appearing in them increases.

These findings imply several new directions in the study of the effectiveness of interventions by prominent IOs like the United Nations. First, they raise new questions about how the number and specificity of tasks in mission mandates influence the creation of peacekeeping strategy, with potentially dire consequences for efficacy. To my knowledge, this is the first study to empirically assess the effects of these features of mission mandates on peacekeeper security. The results suggest that
including detailed instructions for achieving objectives in mission mandates improves force cohesion by facilitating effective decision-making in the military chain of command. While this appears to translate into safer conditions for peacekeepers, it may also generate better outcomes on other dimensions of peacekeeping effectiveness, such as the durability of peace or intensity of violence. It also opens new avenues for qualitative researchers who should further explore how officials in the military chain of command receive and translate mandates into strategy. Second, this article raises new questions about why the UN assigns certain types of mandates to certain missions. While this article is not the appropriate venue for a deep dive into the organizational processes leading to the assignment of specific kinds of mandates, the comprehensive data in TAMM make such an exploration of mandates eminently feasible. Third, this study contributes to an ongoing debate in the global governance policy community surrounding the efficacy of large mandates. It shows that the UN can produce successful missions without returning to the narrow mandates of the Cold War era by simply adding more detailed instructions. In so doing, it resolves a tension between the concerns of policy makers that large mandates fail, and the prevailing finding in political science research that multidimensional peacekeeping missions can, and often do, succeed.
References


Montgomery, Jacob, Brendan Nyhan, and Michelle Torres. 2018. “How Conditioning on Posttreatment Variables Can Ruin Your Experiment and What to Do about It.” *American


Figures

**FIGURE 1. Military chain of command in UN missions**
FIGURE 2. The size and specificity of mandates over time
Notes: Horizontal bars are 95% confidence intervals. Coefficient estimates based on Probit regression with robust standard errors clustered on mission. Missions=50; N=3,403.

**FIGURE 3.** Effects of mandate size and specificity on peacekeeper security
FIGURE 4. Predicted probability of peacekeeper fatalities from malicious violence across mandate size and specificity.
Notes: Weighted circles indicate the number of observations for each number of tasks and objectives.

**FIGURE 5. Scatter plot**