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Why Have United Nations Peacekeeping Operations Expanded Their Use of Force? A Study From 1948 Until the Present Time

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Abstract: United Nations Peacekeeping Operations (UNPKOs), established on the tripartite principles of party consent, impartiality, and force restriction to self-defense consent, have undergone a marked doctrinal evolution in force application since 1948. Through textual analysis of 71 UNPKO mandates and process-tracing of historical policy shifts, this study identifies three phases of expansion: from strict self-defense (1948–1980s), to civilian protection mandates (1990s), and ultimately to the contemporary "necessary force" doctrine permitting offensive actions to achieve mission objectives. Despite documented risks—including threats to peacekeeper safety, erosion of neutrality, civilian casualties, and North-South divisions within the UN—the trajectory toward force liberalization persists. To explain this paradox, the essay innovatively adapts Kingdon's Multiple Streams Framework (MSF) through two critical modifications. First, the conventional "political stream" is reconceptualized as an "environmental stream", incorporating legal-institutional dynamics and operational realities, which captures the UN's unique multilateral decision-making ecosystem. Second, departing from MSF's assumption of stream independence, the revised framework posits continuous interaction among problem, policy, and environmental streams. The study concludes that three interdependent factors drive the continuous expansion of force application in UN peacekeeping operations: the evolving multiplicity of missions (problem stream), the group preserving psychology of the UN Security Council (policy stream), and the shifting operational-legal environment (environmental stream).

Keywords: United Nations; Use of Force; Peacekeeping

1. Introduction

Black Hawk Down, a war movie based on a US-led peacekeeping operation in Somalia in 1993, opens with a short but haunting adage: 'Only the dead have seen the end of the war'. It vividly depicts the disaster brought by the large-scale use of force in the United Nations Operation in Somalia (UNOSOM). In this robust peacekeeping operation, 312 Somali people were killed, 814 were injured,

20 peacekeepers were killed and 92 were injured. The grief is so deep that it is not surprising that many studies highlight the negative effects of the use of force in United Nations peacekeeping operations (UNPKOs) such as the increasing number of casualties in conflicts, the ineffectiveness of the protection of civilians, the extent to which conflicts are exacerbated, and the diminishing legitimacy of the existence of peacekeeping operations. This essay takes this argument further and ponders more deeply: why, despite all these negative effects, UNPKOs still expand their use of force?

This question gains urgency given three contradictions: (1) Legal-political tension: UN-mandated force continues challenging sovereignty norms while lacking coherent doctrinal safeguards. (2) Operational paradox: seven decades of mission creep reveal reactive, under-theorized normalization of coercion. (3) Ethical disjuncture: escalating force deployment conflicts with UNPKOs' founding preventive ethos. Through tripartite analysis - historical evolution mapping, modified multiple streams framework application, and policy-pathway evaluation - this study interrogates the expansion of the use of force as institutionalized practice rather than episodic anomaly. By bridging security studies and policy process theories, it transcends extant case-specific or unidimensional explanations, offering systemic insights into UNPKOs' coercive transformation since 1948.

2. Literature Review

The evolution of force application in United Nations Peacekeeping Operations (UNPKOs) has generated substantial scholarly attention, yet critical analytical gaps persist. While existing studies provide valuable empirical documentation of mission-level dynamics, their predominantly descriptive orientation limits theoretical engagement with the systemic drivers of force expansion. Illustrative cases include Findlay's (2002) and Duursma et al.'s (2024) chronological analyses of large-scale force deployment patterns, Krishnan's (2020) granular examination of civilian protection mandates, and Jorgensen's (2025) critical historiography tracing contemporary intervention challenges to colonial policy legacies through the United Nations Emergency Force case (1957-1967).

Notwithstanding their operational granularity, these works exhibit three recurrent limitations: First, they prioritize vertical case narratives over comparative frameworks capable of identifying cross-mission structural commonalities. Second, theoretical interrogation of why force thresholds have progressively escalated remains underdeveloped. Third, the absence of systematic cross-temporal analysis obscures the interplay between evolving security paradigms and mission authorization parameters. Such descriptive predominance, while instrumental for contextual reconstruction, leaves critical questions unanswered about the causal mechanisms driving force normalization in ostensibly consensual peacekeeping architectures.

While existing theoretical engagements with force escalation in UNPKOs remain limited, pioneering studies have initiated crucial conceptual pathways for deeper analysis. Notably, some attempt to offer an explanation from the strategic aspect. For example, Koops et al. (2015) mentions that the use of force could be viewed as a deterrence. The theory of deterrence holds that, for party A to successfully deter party B, it must convince B that it faces unacceptable consequences if it fails to

comply with A's wishes. Hence, peacekeeping troops are deployed to deter spoilers who undermine the implementation of the mandate. However, as consent and impartiality are the prerequisites for UNPKOs, if the two elements are obtained, there should be no need for the actual use of force. If opposition to the presence of peacekeepers develops, according to the theory of peacekeeping, negotiation and withdrawal are the only options. The use of force in self-defence can only be a short-term palliative to a loss of consent and the offensive use of force should not be seen. Thus, the deterrence theory cannot fully explain the expansion of the use of force in UNPKOs.

Additionally, some attempts to find the reasons for the expansion of force in political theory such as rationalists and constructivists. On the one hand, a common thread in these studies is the focus on the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), addressing why it has repeatedly authorized the use of force in UNPKOs. These analyses are very targeted, however, other macro factors besides the Security Council are less explored. A broader vision has not been presented. On the other hand, although both are concentred on UNSC, different logics are applied. For the rational choice theory, the behaviour of permanent members to authorise the use of force is mainly driven by their national interests. Pushkina & Kalina (2024) find that UNPKO is a powerful tool to defend US unilateral interests. UN Operation in Somalia (UNOSOM) is the evidence here. Having reaped the enormous benefits of the internationalist policies pursued by the old Bush administration, successor Clinton increased political and financial support for UNPKOs. The force deployed in Somalia was considerably larger than any UNPKOs before. Notably, at its peak, it numbered 37 000 troops, including approximately 8000 on ships offshore. However, when the peacekeeping force suffered a major setback and domestic media began accusing Clinton's aggressive use of force in UNPKOs, he withdrew the US support for the UNOSOM, which directly caused the later failure of mission. In the case of Somalia, rational theory does offer insights to explain the expansion of the use of force. If following the logic of rationalists, each individual council member has its own divergent national security goals, which will lead them to satisfice or make suboptimal decisions in UNSC, the decisions on the use of force should be very difficult to reach an agreement. However, according to the study of Howard & Dayal (2018), this struggle rarely appears, and force mandates tend to be repeatedly approved by UNSC.

Besides, the norm-life cycle model, designed by Finnemore and Sikkink (1988), is also applied in this case. It consists by three stages: norm emergence, norm cascade, and norm internalization. According to this model, Santos Cruz, the Force Commander of UN Stabilisation Mission in Haiti and Congo, played the role of norm entrepreneur in the first stage of norm emergence. He actively advocated a new norm, 'robust peacekeeping', which accelerated the expansion of the use of force in UNPKOs. Second, according to the frame of the norm-life cycle, mandates may vary, but then they will follow the pattern of a 'norm cascade'. Use-of-force mandates will be difficult to obtain before the cascade, but easy after. In UNPOKs, some missions accord with this model. The norm of 'robust peacekeeping' was applied in operations in Sierra Leone, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Haiti, and Lebanon. Meanwhile, since 2000, this term has appeared repeatedly in official UN documents such as *UN*

Peacekeeping Operations: Principles and Guidelines, *the New Horizon*, and *a Concept Note on Robust Peacekeeping*'. So far, norm-life cycle model seems to be suitable for the explanation of the expansion of the use of force. However, its explanatory power reduces in the third stage: internalization. The model assumes that after the stage of norm cascade, internalization stage will come, that is, the norm will become broadly internalized and acquires a taken for granted quality. If it is true, the P-5 ought to openly express support for the appropriateness of the robust peacekeeping. In other words, a shared belief about the expansion of the use of force should be formed. However, this has never come. The international community has long debated about the use of force by UNPKOs outside the limits of the self-defence. Different regions, countries, and even different apartments in the UN have different views on it. Therefore, despite the early stages of the expanding use of force fitting the characteristics of the norm-life cycle, the internalization stage is not suitable here.

Overall, this section reviews the main literature that explains the expansion of the use of force in UNPKOs. Is the continuous expansion of the use of force in UNPKOs an extraordinary coincidence, a deliberate design, or a practical necessity? The answers to these questions do not manifest themselves in the existing literature. On the one hand, a majority of studies explore the reasons for the expansion of the use of force in a specific UNPKO, lacking theoretical overall analysis. On the other hand, while those who apply theoretical frameworks of deterrence, rational choice, and norm-life cycle have their own advantages in explaining the expanding force use in partial operations, none of them offer a complete logic to illustrate the whole story of the expansion of the use of force in UNPKOs. Therefore, this essay attempts to fill these gaps by applying the modified multiple streams framework to explain the expansion of the use of force from 1948 to the present.

3. Theoretical Framework

This study adapts Kingdon's (1984) Multiple Streams Framework (MSF) - extended by Zahariadis (2014) - to analyze the expansion of the use of force in UNPKOs through three interdependent streams: (1) Problem Stream: Emerging security imperatives requiring coercive responses. (2) Policy Stream: Doctrine formulation processes (e.g., "robust peacekeeping" norms). (3) Political Stream: Geopolitical bargaining among UNSC veto powers.

Classical MSF posits these streams operate independently until policy entrepreneurs catalyze convergence during "policy windows" (Figure 1). While effective for analyzing domestic agenda-setting, two critical modifications enhance its applicability to UNPKOs: Temporal Extension: Incorporating 1948-present institutional path dependencies. Actor Complexity: Accounting for multilateral decision-making inertia. The revised framework (Figure 2) redefines "policy windows" as phased tipping points where historical precedents (problem), doctrinal evolution (policy), and power dynamics (politics) interact recursively. This adaptation addresses MSF's teleological assumptions, better capturing the nonlinear expansion of the use of force in contested security environments.

Figure 1: Multiple-streams framework
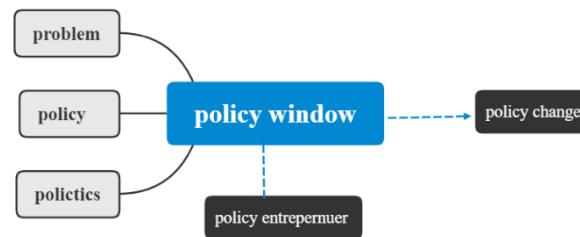
Source: Kingdon, 1984

The application of Kingdon's MSF necessitates reconceptualizing UNPKOs' force expansion as a policy continuum - institutionalized practices emerging from cumulative UN resolutions rather than discrete mandate. This paradigm shift reframes force application along a defensive – preemptive - offensive scalar spectrum. Two structural modifications enhance analytical precision. The first aspect is the stream expansion. The political stream is augmented into an environmental stream (Figure 2), integrating legal architectures (e.g., Chapter VII reinterpretations) with traditional geopolitical determinants. The other one is concerning the interactive dynamics. Rejecting Kingdon's stream independence premise, the framework adopts Béland & Howlett's (2016) interaction model. This interaction is crucial for analyzing UN force policy, as an increasingly hostile environment (environment stream) exacerbates civilian protection challenges (problem stream), influencing decisions toward more offensive UNPKO actions (policy stream). Instead of independent streams, this essay adopts an interactive framework of problem, policy, and environment streams (see figure 3).

Figure 2: Reasons for the expansion of the use of force in UNPKOs
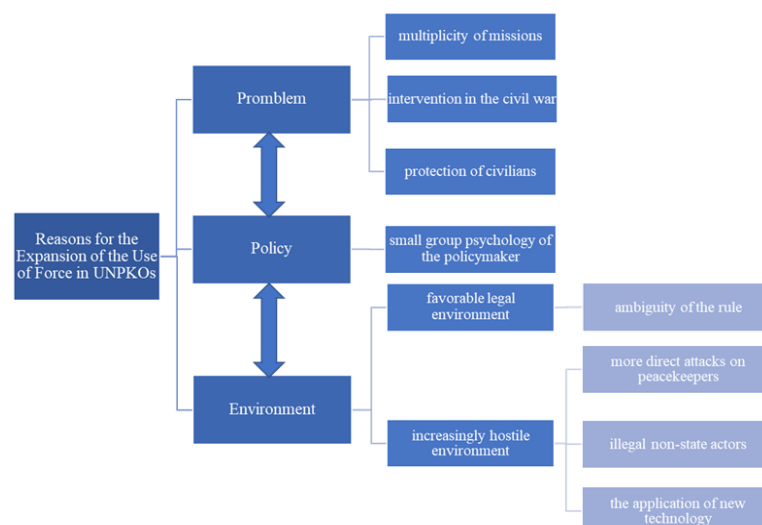
Source: Made by the author

Figure 3: Multiple-streams framework
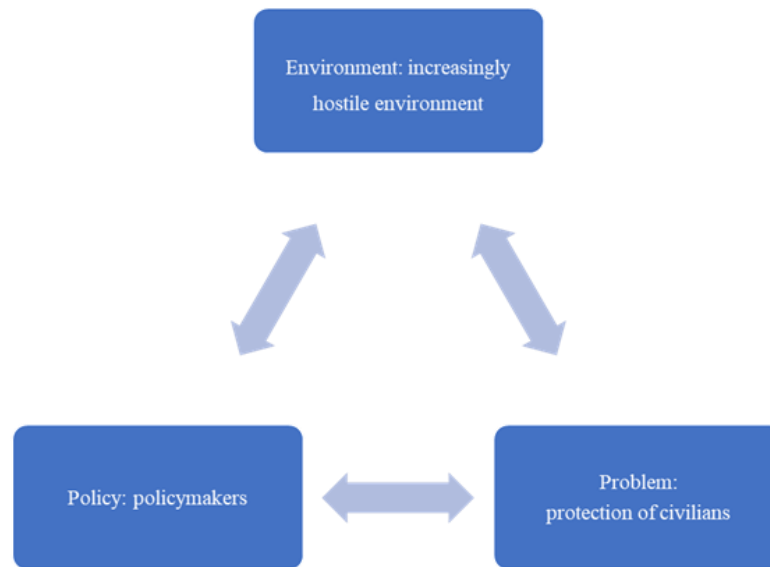
Source: Made by the author

4. The Historical Evolution of the Expansion of the Use of Force in United Nations Peacekeeping Operations

4.1 Use of Force Limited to Self-Defense: 1948-1991

This section traces the theoretical and practical evolution of force in UNPKOs, beginning with its initial phase from 1948 to 1991 (see figure 4 and Table 1). At its inception, UNPKOs adhered strictly to a policy of non-initiative in the use of force, as emphasized by Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld (1958). Early operations, including the United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF I), embodied this principle, solidifying the image of UN peacekeepers as 'blue helmets'. Hammarskjöld maintained that UNPKOs would 'never include combat activity', restricting force to narrowly defined self-defense.

During the Cold War, great power rivalries often paralyzed the UNSC, limiting UNPKO effectiveness. From 1978 to 1988, no new peacekeeping missions were initiated due to geopolitical deadlock. Consequently, with few operations and minimal doctrinal shifts, the use of force in UNPKOs remained strictly restrained throughout this period.

Figure 4: Historical Evolution of the Use of Force in United Nations Peacekeeping Operations
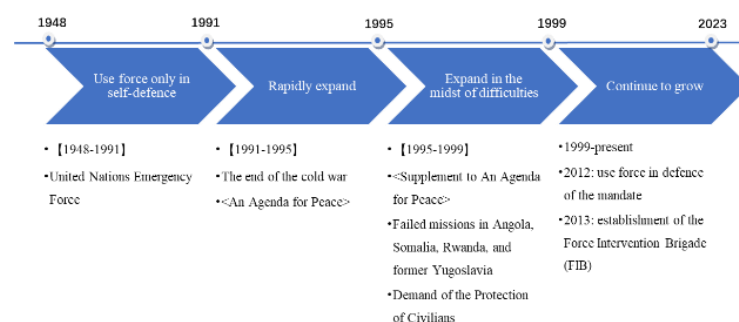
Source: Made by the author

Table 1: United Nations Peacekeeping Operations from 1948-1991

Start	End	Name	Acronym
1949	Ongoing	UN Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan	UNMOGIP
1956	1967	UN Emergency Force I	UNEF I
1958	1958	UN Observation Group in Lebanon	UNOGIL
1960	1964	UN Operation in the Congo	ONUC
1962	1963	UN Security Force and UN Temporary Executive Authority	UNSF
1963	1964	UN Yemen Observation Mission	UNYOM
1964	Ongoing	UN Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus	UNFICYP
1965	1966	Mission of the Representative of the Secretary-General in the Dominican Republic	DOMREP
1965	1966	UN India-Pakistan Observation Mission	UNIPOM
1973	1979	UN Emergency Force II	UNEF II
1974	Ongoing	UN Disengagement Observer Force	UNDOF
1978	Ongoing	UN Interim Force in Lebanon	UNIFIL
1988	1990	UN Good Offices Mission in Afghanistan and Pakistan	UNGOMAP
1988	1991	UN Iran-Iraq Military Observer Group	UNIIMOG
1989	1991	UN Angola Verification Mission I	UNAVEM I
1989	1990	UN Transition Assistance Group	UNTAG
1989	1992	UN Observer Group in Central America	ONUCA

Source: United Nations Peacekeeping

4.2 The Rapid Expansion of the Use of Force: 1991-1995

At Only with the end of the Cold War and the subsequently changing political climate, did the use of force in UNPKOs enter a new phase. Table 2 lists UNPKOs in this phase. According to de Coning et al. (2019), since 1991, more radical ideas about the seemingly sacred principles on which UNPKOs have traditionally been based begin to proliferate. Thus, with the ambitious expectation that the UN will play a greater role in maintaining global peace, in An Agenda for Peace (1992), the newly appointed Secretary-General Boutros Boutros Ghali urged the UNSC to consider the expansion of the use of force in clearly defined circumstances. It indicated that the time was ripe to re-examine the rules and norms of the use of force. In fact, during this period, a series of UNPKOs from the Middle East to Central America could reflect this change.

Table 2: United Nations Peacekeeping Operations From 1991-1995

Start	End	Name	Acronym
1991	2003	UN Iraq-Kuwait Observation Mission	UNIKOM
1991	1995	UN Angola Verification Mission II	UNAVEM II
1991	1995	UN Observer Mission in El Salvador	ONUSAL

Start	End	Name	Acronym
1991	Ongoing	UN Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara	MINURSO
1991	1992	UN Advance Mission in Cambodia	UNAMIC
1992	1995	UN Protection Force	UNPROFOR and UNPREDEP
1992	1993	UN Transitional Authority in Cambodia	UNTAC
1992	1993	UN Operation in Somalia I	UNOSOM I
1992	1993	UN Observer Mission to Verify the Referendum in Eritrea	UNOVER
1992	1994	UN Operation in Mozambique	ONUMOZ
1993	1995	UN Operation in Somalia II	UNOSOM II
1993	1994	UN Observer Mission Uganda-Rwanda	UNOMUR
1993	2009	UN Observer Mission in Georgia	UNOMIG
1993	1996	UN Observer Mission in Liberia	UNOMIL
1993	1996	UN Mission in Haiti	UNAMIR
1993	1996	UN Assistance Mission for Rwanda	UNAMIR
1994	1994	UN Aouzou Strip Observer Group	UNASOG
1994	2002	UN Mission of Observers in Tajikistan	UNMOT

Source: United Nations Peacekeeping.

4.3 Expanding Amid Difficulties: 1995-1999

The expansion of force in UNPKOs faced a major setback during this period (see Table 3). While robust peacekeeping operations were widely deployed from 1992 to1995, their large-scale use of force revealed significant drawbacks. Failures in Somalia, Rwanda, and Srebrenica raised deep concerns within the international community. As former Secretary-General Kofi Annan acknowledged, these failures would "haunt our history forever". In early 1995, the Supplement to An Agenda for Peace conveyed a pessimistic outlook on force in peacekeeping, advocating a return to fundamental principles and stricter limitations on its use. By 1999, the UNSC acknowledged the negative impact of armed conflict on civilians, signaling growing recognition of the risks associated with force expansion.

Despite this, debates over force in UNPKOs persisted. A worsening peacekeeping environment reignited calls for stronger force application to enhance operational effectiveness. Bellamy & Williams (2009) note that just six months after the Supplement to An Agenda for Peace, the UN reconsidered expanding force when Bosnian Serb forces overran the UN-designated safe area of Srebrenica. Subsequent operations after 1999 underscored a firm commitment to preventing atrocities like those in Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia, further intensifying tensions between peacekeeping and the use of force.

Table 3: United Nations Peacekeeping Operations From 1995-1999

Start	End	Name	Acronym
1995	1997	UN Angola Verification Mission III	UNAVEM III
1995	1996	UN Confidence Restoration Operation in Croatia	UNCRO
1995	1999	UN Preventive Deployment Force	UNPREDEP
1995	2002	UN Mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina	UNMIBH
1996	1998	UN Transitional Administration for Eastern Slavonia, Baranja, and Western Sirmium	UNTAES
1996	2002	UN Mission of Observers in Prevlaka	UNMOP
1996	1997	UN Support Mission in Haiti	UNSMIH
1997	1997	UN Verification Mission in Guatemala	MINUGUA
1997	1999	UN Observer Mission in Angola	MONUA
1997	1997	UN Transition Mission in Haiti	UNTMIH
1997	2000	UN Civilian Police Mission in Haiti	MIPONUH
1998	1998	UN Civilian Police Support Group	UNPSG
1998	2000	UN Mission in the Central African Republic	MINURCA
1998	1999	UN Observer Mission in Sierra Leone	UNOMSIL

Source: United Nations Peacekeeping.

4.4 Sustainable Growth Period: 1999-Present

Since 1999, the number of UNPKOs has steadily increased, accompanied by a continued expansion in the use of force (see Table 4). Operations in Sierra Leone, Haiti, and the Congo reinforced this trend, executed under Chapter VII mandates allowing the use of "all necessary means" to fulfill mission objectives. While Chapter VI focuses on peaceful dispute resolution, Chapter VII authorizes force to address conflicts. Invoking Chapter VII in peacekeeping represented a major shift. Before 1999, only six UNPKOs had done so, but since then, 14 missions have directly referenced Chapter VII, signaling a shift toward more offensive force application.

In 2012, the UN further expanded peacekeeping's force mandate from self-defense and civilian protection to the broader concept of "defense of the mandate". This vague definition created more flexibility for force deployment. The trend peaked in March 2013 when the UNSC reinforced its Congo mission (MONUC) with a Force Intervention Brigade (FIB). Even before FIB's creation, MONUC had employed offensive force, with its force commander, Lt. General Babacar Gaye, stating: "It may look like war, but it is peacekeeping". Despite this, the UN deemed further reinforcement necessary, highlighting the increasing normalization of force in peacekeeping.

Today, the debate over force expansion in UNPKOs remains unresolved. In 2014, five of the UN's largest missions—in Darfur, the DRC, the CAR, Mali, and South Sudan—operated under Chapter VII mandates for civilian protection. However, the absence of lasting political progress in these conflicts

has fuelled ongoing discussions on the role and limits of force in peacekeeping. This debate continues today.

**Table 4:** United Nations Peacekeeping Operations From 1999-Present

Start	End	Name	Acronym
1999	Ongoing	UN Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo	UNMIK
1999	2005	UN Mission in Sierra Leone	UNAMSIL
1999	1999	UN Mission in East Timor	UNAMET
1999	2002	UN Transitional Administration in East Timor	UNTAET
1999	2010	UN Organization Mission in Democratic Republic of the Congo	MONUC
2000	2008	UN Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea	UNMEE
2002	2005	United Nations Mission of Support in East Timor	UNMISET
2003	2018	United Nations Mission in Liberia	UNMIL
2004	2017	United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire	UNOCI
2004	2017	United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti	MINUSTAH
2004	2006	United Nations Operation in Burundi	ONUB
2005	2011	United Nations Mission in the Sudan	UNMIS
2006	2012	United Nations Integrated Mission in Timor-Leste	UNMIT
2007	Ongoing	United Nations African Union Mission in Darfur	UNAMID
2007	2010	United Nations Mission in the Central African Republic and Chad	MINURCAT
2010	Ongoing	UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo	MONUSCO
2011	Ongoing	UN Interim Security Force for Abyei	UNISFA
2011	Ongoing	UN Mission in the Republic of South Sudan	UNMISS
2012	2012	UN Support Mission in Syria	UNSMIS
2017	2019	UN Mission for Justice Support in Haiti	MINUJUSTH

Source: United Nations Peacekeeping.

5. Driving Factors Behind the Expansion of the Use of Force in UNPKOs

5.1 Analysing Framework

The historical development of UNPKOs reveals common factors driving the increasing use of force. This section applies the modified MSF to analyze these factors (see figure 2).

Figure 2: Reasons for the expansion of the Use of Force in UNPKOs
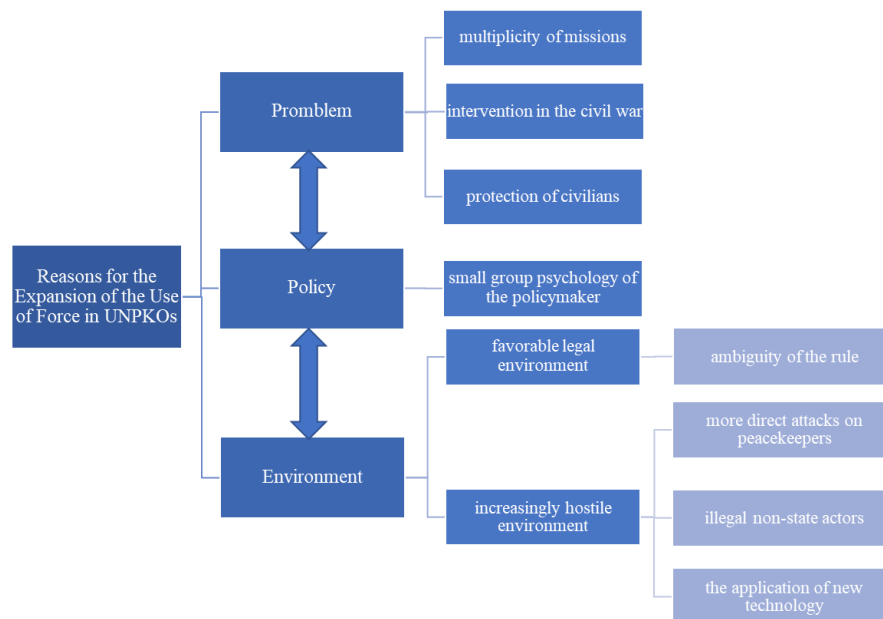
Source: Made by the author.

5.2 The Problem Stream

This section follows the model and examines the problem stream, identifying three key issues driving the increased use of force in UNPKOs. First, the growing complexity of UNPKOs has heightened force requirements. With the end of the Cold War, the UNSC facilitated comprehensive conflict resolutions, significantly expanding UNPKOs' scope. Peacekeeping evolved into a multidimensional effort, including transitional governance and state-building. The *Brahimi Report* (2000) acknowledged that these expanded tasks necessitate a stronger force posture.

Second, increasing involvement in civil wars has made UNPKOs more robust and aggressive. Initially designed for intra-state conflicts, peacekeeping now engages extensively in inter-state wars. Since 2005, civil war incidents and casualties have risen, driven by weak institutions, economic exclusion, and political instability. Civil wars create cycles of violence, intensifying resistance to peacekeeping interventions. Studies show that since the 2000s, peacekeeping has increasingly been deployed in civil war settings, with missions like UNOSOM II, MONUC, UNMIS, and UNAMID exemplifying this shift.

Third, the *Protection of Civilians (POC)* mandate has further justified force expansion. Over 98% of military personnel in UNPKOs now operate under POC directive. The UN recognizes POC as a key driver of more forceful peacekeeping. Failures to prevent mass atrocities in Rwanda and Srebrenica

heightened demands for stronger interventio. The *UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS)* explicitly authorizes "all necessary means, up to and including the use of deadly force" to protect civilian.

In summary, the expansion of force in UNPKOs is driven by mission complexity, civil war involvement, and the growing emphasis on civilian protection.

5.3 The Policy Stream

This section examines the role of policymakers, particularly the UNSC, in expanding the use of force in UNPKOs. As the decision-making body, the UNSC's repeated authorization of force reflects a psychological tendency toward group preservation. Former U.S. Ambassador Robert Loftis notes that policymakers tend to reuse past language in resolutions, even when it lacks relevance. According to Howard & Dayal (2018), this phenomenon stems from group-preserving psychology, wherein the five permanent members (P-5) prioritize maintaining their collective status and legitimacy over policy content.

The P-3 (France, the UK, and the US) have consistently advocated for force expansion, but China and Russia's support for repeated force mandates is more complex. Initially resistant, both states gradually aligned with this trend due to strategic concerns. China's shift began after NATO's 1999 Kosovo intervention, which bypassed the UNSC. Recognizing that continued opposition to force use could weaken the UNSC's authority and elevate NATO's role in crisis resolution, China chose to preserve UNSC unity.

Russia's stance also evolved post-Cold War as it sought to restore international prestige. Strengthening the UN became central to its foreign policy, with scholars arguing that internal P-5 divisions over force use risked eroding the UNSC's influence. Since 2012, all Chapter VII force authorizations have been unanimously agreed upon by the P-5, demonstrating how group-preserving psychology drives consensus in peacekeeping mandates.

5.4 The Environment Stream

First, the ambiguous nature of UN rules provides a favorable legal environment to the force expansion. According to Stone (2012), the ambiguity of the rule tends to result in grey areas of policy implementation. This ambiguity runs through the whole text in UN resolutions. For instance, when authorized to use offensive force in MONUSCO, UN Resolution 2098 states that: 'Authorizes MONUSCO, through its military component … to take all necessary measures to perform the following tasks, through its regular forces and its Intervention Brigade as appropriate.' In fact, most of the resolutions are written in this way, that is, when describing the extent to which force should be used, ambiguous words such as 'appropriate' are frequently applied.

Moreover, ambiguity is also a powerful means to gain political support, which enables wider coalition and compromise. Norms such as improving equality, security, and peace frequently appear in the context of peacekeeping, however, what kind of equality? Equality in process or equality in outcome? The security of which group? Whether security 'them' is only important so far as it contributes to 'our'

security? What kind of peace, sustainable peace or unsustainable peace? These questions are cleverly circumvented when the UN recounts the story of expanding the use of force. This ambiguity enables policymakers to gather support from different groups, unite people around broad goals and promote collective actions.

However, it does not mean that this ambiguity can make the expansion of force unimpeded. Although UN's appeals of the robust peacekeeping are powerful, it cannot counteract the sharp North-South divisions on the use of force. Studies reveal that North–South divisions over peacekeeping issues create great resistance to the expansion of the use of force in UNPKOs. At the operational level, UNPKO is critically lopsided, which means that the use of force is mainly proposed by the North but in fact implemented by the South. Bellamy & Williams (2009) argue that while Western states are the main financial contributors to the UNPKOs, they have been largely absent in terms of troop contributions. Conversely, the developing countries have shouldered the largest troop contributions, thus shaping the political dynamics of peacekeeping in the field. As presented in figure 9, as of 2023, the top three troop contributors of UNPKOs were Bangladesh, Nepal, and India. At the same time, the peacekeeping decision-making process remains dominated by the P-5 in UNSC. It indicates that states that have decision-making power are often not the ones that implement those decisions. As a result, the distribution of force using responsibility and risk are uneven. This division of North and South feeds the divide and the politicization of UNPKOs. In short, while ambiguous UN rules and norms could create flexible space for commanders to adjust military movements and help them gain more supports to expand the use of force in UNPKOs, it cannot set off the serious division of North and South in the force-using issues.

Moreover, hostile environment s another factor that promotes the expansion of the use of force in UNPKOs. In fact, in September 2021, the UN publish an official document called Force Protection for Military Components of United Nations Peacekeeping Missions, which directly points out that the increasingly hostile environment faced by blue helmets needs to be solved by the expansion of the use of force. According to the Department of the UN Peacekeeping Operations, the death toll of UN peacekeeping troops in 1988, 1998, and 2018 was 78,138 and 156 respectively. Moreover, up to 2023, the number of fatalities in current UN peace operations since 1948 has reached 1579. These alarming numbers urge UN to use force more actively to protect the safety of peacekeepers.

The hostile environment including more direct attacks on peacekeepers, illegal non-state actors, and the application of new technology. First, Julian & Gasser (2019) find that since the mid-1990s, more attacks are directly targeting peacekeepers, which leads to higher facilities and injuries. Second, the objective that peacekeepers coped with has changed from sovereign states to failed states and violent extremist groups, which constructs a great challenge to UNPKOs. Specifically, Day (2017) argues that the growth in the importance of non-state actors, such as violent extremist groups, poses tremendous challenges to the UNPKOs. Thirdly, new technologies are increasingly impacting the conflict landscape, as it enables more actors to become influential players in the violent conflict. For example, social media

could be used for recruitment of armed groups. Dark web could be applied for transfers of resources to violent actors. In general, more attacks directed against peacekeepers, the involvement of illegal non-state actors, and the advancement of new technology constitute an increasingly hostile environment of UNPKOs, thus promoting the expansion of the use of force in peacekeeping.

In all, a favorable legal environment created by the ambiguous UN rules and norms, and the increasingly hostile environment, have promoted the more robust use of force to protect the security of peacekeepers.

6. Conclusion

The evolution of UNPKOs from 1948 to the present reveals a consequential trajectory: the expansion of the use of force has become institutionalized through interdependent problem-policy-environment dynamics. Emerging security imperatives - mission diversification into state-building, deepening civil war entanglements, and heightened civilian protection demands - progressively redefined the boundaries of permissible coercion. Within this context, the UN Security Council's institutional preservation psychology fostered repetitive authorization patterns, evidenced by unanimous P5 consensus on all Chapter VII mandates since 2012. Concurrently, legal ambiguities in resolutions and escalating operational threats created enabling conditions for doctrinal hardening. Crucially, these elements interact recursively rather than sequentially: hostile environments exacerbate civilian risks, prompting policy responses that inadvertently deepen operational complexities.

This analysis advances peacekeeping scholarship by transcending fragmented approaches prevalent in existing literature. Where prior studies isolated Security Council politics or single-mission dynamics, the present framework synthesizes macro-theoretical perspectives, integrating institutional decision-making with legal architectures and battlefield realities. Such integration exposes how ostensibly technical mandate expansions mask structural tensions between Global North and South governance priorities.

Limitations persist, however, in mapping the precise mechanisms of triadic stream interactions. Future inquiry should prioritize three interrelated dimensions: the quantifiable impact of North-South asymmetries on force authorization thresholds, the paradoxical correlation between coercive escalation and mission efficacy erosion, and the identification of doctrinal tipping points where forceful measures undermine conflict resolution objectives. These investigations promise to refine our understanding of institutional path dependencies in multilateral security governance.

Author Contributions

The author confirms sole responsibility for the following: study conception and design, data collection, analysis and interpretation of results, and manuscript preparation.

Availability of Data and Materials

The data on which the study is based were accessed from a repository and are available for downloading through the following link.

https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/data

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest to report regarding the present study.

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