

## **Master in Advanced European and International Studies**

Applied European Policy and Governance Studies

Assessing the Effectiveness of the  
United Nations Peacekeeping  
Operations in Civil Wars: The  
Case of Bosnia-Herzegovina  
(UNPROFOR) and Namibia  
(UNTAG)

## **Abstract**

This thesis investigates the effectiveness of United Nations peacekeeping operations in civil war contexts through a comparative case study of two missions: the United Nations Transition Assistance Group (UNTAG) in Namibia and the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) in Bosnia-Herzegovina. It asks how various factors contribute to mission success or failure, using a structured comparison to assess each mission's outcomes in terms of mandate fulfilment, host-state cooperation, conflict environment, and operational performance. Selected for their contrasting outcomes, Namibia's successful transition versus Bosnia's protracted conflict, these cases reveal recurring patterns. The study finds that two conditions (local consent and a clear mandate) are consistently necessary for peacekeeping success, while other factors influence outcomes only in interaction with these primary conditions.

**Keywords:** United Nations, Peacekeeping Operations, Civil Wars, Blue Helmets, Effectiveness.

To my parents and dearest friends,  
for your love, trust, and presence through  
every storm and stillness.

To Susann,  
for your invaluable guidance and belief  
in me when things felt uncertain.

To CIFE,  
for the whirlwind of memories, growth,  
and unforgettable connections.

*A chapter etched in time, one I will carry  
with me always.*

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## **List of Abbreviations**

ARBiH	Army of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina
CIVPOL	Civilian Police (UNTAG component)
COHA	Ceasefire of Hostilities Agreement
DFS	Department of Field Support
DPKO	Department of Peacekeeping Operations
DPO	Department of Peace Operations
DPPA	Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs
HVO	Croatian Defence Council (Hrvatsko vijeće obrane)
ICTY	International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia
IFOR	Implementation Force (NATO)
JNA	Yugoslav People's Army (Jugoslovenska narodna armija)
MSSD	Most Similar Systems Design
PBSO	Peacebuilding Support Office
PKO	Peacekeeping Operation
PLAN	People's Liberation Army of Namibia
SADF	South African Defence Force
SRSG	Special Representative of the Secretary-General
SWAPO	South West Africa Territorial Force
UN	United Nations
UNAVEM I	United Nations Angola Verification Mission I

UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNPROFOR	United Nations Protection Force
UNTAG	United Nations Transition Assistance Group
UNTSO	United Nations Truce Supervision Organisation

## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

The end of the Cold War ushered in an era of unprecedented expansion in United Nations peacekeeping. From Namibia's successful transition to the tragedies in Bosnia, UN peacekeepers in the 1990s symbolised both the international community's highest aspirations and its most sobering failures. In just a few years, the UN Security Council launched a dramatic surge of missions, transforming peacekeeping from a handful of modest observer deployments into a sprawling global enterprise.<sup>2</sup> Between 1989 and 1994 alone, the number of active UN operations multiplied, and the ranks of deployed “blue helmets” swelled from roughly 11,000 to over 75,000 personnel.<sup>3</sup> These missions also grew more ambitious in scope: no longer confined to monitoring ceasefires, peacekeepers were now tasked with rebuilding war-torn states and protecting civilians under multidimensional mandates. Yet as peacekeeping expanded, so did scrutiny. Some operations were praised as model interventions, while others were condemned as painful failures. This stark contrast raises an urgent question that lies at the heart of this study: why do some UN peacekeeping missions succeed while others fail?

Defining UN peacekeeping is essential to understanding its significance in global conflict management. Put simply, UN peacekeeping operations (PKOs) are missions authorised by the UN Security Council to help stabilise conflict zones, typically with the consent of warring parties and under UN command.<sup>4</sup> During the Cold War, such missions were relatively rare and usually limited to monitoring inter-state ceasefires. In the post-Cold War era, however, peacekeeping evolved into a core instrument of international security governance. Missions began intervening in intra-state conflicts and civil wars, undertaking tasks such as supervising elections, disarming and demobilising combatants, and protecting civilians and human rights.<sup>5</sup> This evolution reflected a newfound global resolve to end civil wars and address humanitarian crises, but it also plunged UN forces into more volatile environments with ambitious mandates. The effectiveness of the United Nations' peacekeeping efforts carries

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<sup>1</sup> This paper has been linguistically and grammatically edited with the assistance of the AI tool ChatGPT 4.0.

<sup>2</sup> United Nations (2008): *Peacekeeping Operations: Principles and Guidelines*. New York: UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations, pp. 14–16

<sup>3</sup> Bellamy, A.J. and Williams, P.D. (2010) *Understanding Peacekeeping*. 2nd edn. Cambridge: Polity Press, pp. 86–88.

<sup>4</sup> United Nations (2023) *What Is Peacekeeping?* <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/what-is-peacekeeping>

<sup>5</sup> Fortna, V.P. (2008) *Does Peacekeeping Work?* Princeton: Princeton University Press, pp. 6–10.

enormous weight because the organisation is responsible for international peace and security. With so many lives and resources at stake, understanding what drives mission success or failure is a pressing imperative for both policymakers and scholars. Peacekeeping has become One of the UN's flagship tools for managing conflict is often the only viable alternative to either inaction or full-scale intervention, making its ability to deliver on promises a matter of global consequence. Accordingly, this study is guided by one overarching research question: *How do various factors contribute to the effectiveness and ultimate success or failure of UN peacekeeping operations?*

This question guides our research into the various factors that could contribute to one mission's success and another's failure. Rather than treating peacekeeping success as a binary outcome or an abstract concept, the question invites a nuanced analysis of which conditions and variables shape the performance of peacekeeping missions on the ground. It reflects the core puzzle arising from the post-Cold War peacekeeping record, a puzzle that is both theoretically intriguing and of urgent practical relevance.

In answering this question, the thesis advances a central argument: two factors emerge as necessary conditions for a UN peacekeeping mission's success, while other commonly cited factors prove important but context-dependent. In particular, this study argues that (1) *the genuine consent and cooperation of local actors* and (2) *a clear, achievable mandate* are indispensable prerequisites for an effective peacekeeping operation. Without the host country's consent and buy-in, a mission's legitimacy and freedom of action are undermined; without a well-defined and feasible mandate, peacekeepers risk being stretched beyond limits or facing unrealistic expectations. These two conditions, the thesis contends, must be in place for any operation to have a chance at success. In contrast, other factors that are often believed to determine outcomes, such as the degree of international support, the balance of power between warring parties, or the presence of ethnic tensions, affect results in ways that are highly specific to each context. While these factors hold significance and have the potential to influence outcomes, they cannot ensure success in the absence of local consent or a fundamentally flawed mission's mandate. In other words, effective peacekeeping requires a foundation of legitimacy and clarity of purpose; given that foundation, additional factors will shape the mission's trajectory, but their impact will vary from case to case.

To investigate these propositions, the thesis employs a comparative case study approach. The analysis focuses on two UN peacekeeping missions selected for their sharply divergent



outcomes: the United Nations Transition Assistance Group in Namibia (UNTAG) and the United Nations Protection Force in Bosnia-Herzegovina (UNPROFOR). Both missions were launched in the late 20th-century wave of peacekeeping and dealt with civil war contexts, yet one is widely regarded as a success and the other as a failure. Drawing on peacekeeping theory and prior empirical studies, five key factors are hypothesised to affect mission effectiveness, each corresponding to a specific hypothesis about how that factor contributes to success or failure. By comparing a successful mission with a failed one, the study sheds light on why UNTAG succeeded in securing Namibia's peace while UNPROFOR fell short in Bosnia, thereby generating insights into what makes UN peacekeeping effective (or ineffective) in civil war settings.

The rest of the thesis is organised as follows: Following this introduction, the first section lays out the study's design, the scholarly debate on peacekeeping effectiveness and the theoretical foundation of the research. After establishing this base, the empirical analysis is presented in two parts. Part I provides historical and contextual background on the United Nations and the evolution of peacekeeping. This context sets the stage for understanding the case studies. Part II delivers the comparative assessment of UN peacekeeping effectiveness through the two case studies. It first examines UNTAG in Namibia and then UNPROFOR in Bosnia-Herzegovina, applying the structured framework to each case, and finally compares the findings across the cases to test the five hypotheses. Finally, the conclusion reflects the overall results and considers the broader implications for UN peacekeeping operations.

## **Research Design and Framework**

The central question guiding this research is, “How do various factors contribute to the effectiveness and ultimate success or failure of UN peacekeeping operations?” This thesis addresses the question through an explanatory, theory-guided inquiry, using a comparative case study design. The goal is to explain outcomes (success or failure) of peacekeeping by examining key causal factors in each case. A theory-guided approach means that existing peacekeeping theories inform the hypotheses and analysis, rather than purely inductive description.

The study is organised as a structured, focused comparison of two cases, applying the same theoretical framework to each. This method ensures systematic analysis by asking the same questions of each case and focusing only on factors relevant to the research question. The comparative design strengthens the explanatory power by examining how the presence or absence of certain factors correlates with mission success or failure.

### **1. Case Selection: UNTAG and UNPROFOR in Most Similar Systems Design**

The thesis analyses two UN PKOs with contrasting outcomes. UNTAG in Namibia is widely regarded as a complete success, having overseen a peaceful transition to independence, while UNPROFOR in Bosnia is often considered a failure, marked by its inability to stop a brutal civil war and prevent atrocities such as the Srebrenica massacre. These cases have been deliberately selected following the logic of the Most Similar Systems Design. In MSSD, researchers compare cases that share key structural and contextual similarities but differ in their outcomes in order to identify the factors that account for such variation. Both missions were launched in the post-Cold War era and authorised by the UN Security Council. They were tasked with multidimensional mandates in civil conflict settings. Yet despite these similarities, their levels of effectiveness diverged sharply. This design allows for a focused investigation into which explanatory factors account for the differing outcomes, thereby shedding light on what makes UN peacekeeping effective.

### **2. Factors and Hypotheses**

Guided by peacekeeping literature, the study identifies five key factors assumed to influence the effectiveness of UN peacekeeping missions. Each factor corresponds to a hypothesis

about how it affects the chances of mission success or failure. The factors (F) and their corresponding hypotheses (H) are:

**Table 1: Factors and Corresponding Hypotheses**

<b>Factor</b>	<b>Hypothesis</b>
<b>F<sub>1</sub>.</b> Consent, Cooperation, and Sense of Ownership	<b>H<sub>1</sub>.</b> Missions are more effective when local parties consent, cooperate, and take ownership of the peace process.
<b>F<sub>2</sub>.</b> Military Balance of Power	<b>H<sub>2</sub>.</b> Balanced military strength between belligerents increases mission success.
<b>F<sub>3</sub>.</b> External Interference	<b>H<sub>3</sub>.</b> Foreign support to warring parties reduces mission effectiveness.
<b>F<sub>4</sub>.</b> Ethnic Dimensions of the Conflict	<b>H<sub>4</sub>.</b> Ethnic divisions in the conflict make peacekeeping more difficult.
<b>F<sub>5</sub>.</b> Mandate Clarity and Feasibility	<b>H<sub>5</sub>.</b> Clear, realistic mandates improve mission performance.

In each case, the analysis will assess whether these factors were highly, partially or marginally relevant to the effectiveness of the PKO and whether their presence/absence corresponds to the mission's outcome.

### **3. Data Sources and Evidence**

The research relies on qualitative analysis of secondary data and primary documents. Given the explanatory case study approach, the emphasis is on collecting rich descriptive and evaluative material on each UN mission. Key sources of data include United Nations official

documents, particularly Security Council resolutions, Secretary-General reports, mandate documents, and final mission evaluation reports. Additionally, a wealth of scholarly books and articles on both UNTAG and UNPROFOR has been used. These include after-action analyses, historical accounts, and evaluations by peacekeeping experts such as Howard, Doyle, and Paris. Such sources provide valuable insights into the missions' context, challenges, and outcomes and often identify factors contributing to their success or failure; insights that will support the testing of our hypotheses. Policy reports and evaluations by think tanks, NGOs, and governmental agencies offer broader assessments of UN peacekeeping operations; key examples include the Brahimi Report (2000) and other UN self-evaluations, which provide general insights applicable to this study. In addition, memoirs and interviews with mission officials, including special representatives and force commanders, contribute valuable perspectives on internal challenges encountered during implementation. There are some datasets in peacekeeping research (for example, Fortna's data on civil war outcomes with/without peacekeepers or Hultman et al.'s data on peacekeeping troop deployments and violence). This thesis is not a statistical study, but such data can contextualise the cases. Prior comparative studies like Pushkina (2006) and Doyle & Sambanis (2006) also classify these missions. These classifications and findings will be used as reference points. The data collection is document-based; no fieldwork or interviews were conducted, given the historical nature of the cases (1989 and the 1990s). The analysis will thus be a form of structured process tracing, using the collected documents to trace each factor's presence and effects in the two cases. Triangulation will be done by cross-verifying facts across multiple sources. While relying on secondary and document sources has limitations, it is appropriate here because these missions have been well-documented by others, and rich narratives and evaluations already exist to draw upon.

#### **4. Limitations and Scope of the Study**

It is important to acknowledge the limitations of this research design. First, the study examines only two cases, which is a small sample. This limits our ability to generalise findings to all UN PKOs. The cases were chosen for their theoretical and illustrative value rather than representativeness. As a result, any conclusions about which factors matter may not universally apply to different missions or contexts. Second, the research relies on qualitative and secondary data. Using after-the-fact analyses and documents carries an inherent limitation; they may contain biases or fail to capture all relevant information. The

lack of fieldwork or primary interviews means the study cannot provide new firsthand insights or unpublished information; it must synthesise what is available. Another limitation is potential retrospective determinism, since we know Namibia turned out well and Bosnia badly; there is a risk of post hoc reasoning (i.e., simply attributing anything “good” as a cause in Namibia and anything “bad” as a cause in Bosnia). The theory-guided design is meant to avoid such limitations by specifying factors *before* deeply analysing cases and then objectively checking those factors. Even so, the analysis must be cautious to distinguish correlation from causation and to consider alternative explanations. Each case will be examined for not just whether a factor was present but *how* it plausibly contributed to the outcome. Despite these limitations, the chosen approach has significant merit and relevance. Focusing in depth on two pivotal cases allows for a rich, contextual understanding that broad statistical studies can overlook. Namibia and Bosnia are emblematic of different eras and extremes of peacekeeping success; thus, studying them can yield valuable lessons for theory and practice.

## **Theoretical and Methodological Approach**

### **1. Peacekeeping Effectiveness in the Literature**

Understanding what makes UN peacekeeping succeed or fail requires engaging with the rich theoretical literature on peace operations. Over the past few decades, scholars have proposed various ways to conceptualise peacekeeping effectiveness. Early studies often took a narrow view, asking whether missions simply kept peace (often defined as absence of open conflict) or fulfilled their mandates. For instance, Duane Bratt (1997) offered one of the first systematic frameworks, evaluating missions by four operational criteria (mandate completion, conflict containment, conflict resolution, and casualty minimisation) and classifying outcomes as success, partial success, or failure.<sup>6</sup> Bratt’s approach was pragmatic, bridging the gap between ideal goals and on-the-ground outcomes. Around the same time, scholars like William Diehl outlined basic conditions for “traditional” peacekeeping success (e.g., presence of consent, impartiality, limited use of force)<sup>7</sup>, reflecting the principles derived from Cold War interstate missions.

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<sup>6</sup> Durch, W.J. (1993) *The Evolution of UN Peacekeeping: Case Studies and Comparative Analysis*. New York: St. Martin’s Press, p. 48. Available at:

<https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/d60a/8fdf4553f2597456017794e9ea69e25023d3.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

As UN missions expanded in scope and entered civil wars in the 1990s, a second wave of literature emerged that often focused on high-profile failures and challenges. Authors such as Lise Morjé Howard and others examined cases like Somalia, Bosnia, and Rwanda to understand what went wrong. The tone in this period was often critical, emphasising peacekeeping's dysfunctions and the mismatch between ambitious mandates and realities on the ground. For example, many argued that missions failed when mandates were overambitious, when there was no peace to keep, or when UN forces were ill-equipped for the task. Roland Paris in *At War's End* (2004) provided a critique of the "liberal peacebuilding" model that guided many 90s missions. He observed that despite different local contexts, most missions shared a common template of promoting rapid democratisation and market reform, which often proved destabilising in fragile post-conflict societies.<sup>8</sup> Paris argued that missions should place greater emphasis on building effective local institutions ("institutionalisation before liberalisation") to achieve lasting peace.<sup>9</sup> His work suggests that judging peacekeeping solely by short-term calm or elections held is insufficient; one must consider deeper institutional and social impacts.

By the 2000s and 2010s, a third wave of peacekeeping research brought more systematic and often more optimistic insights. Scholars like Virginia Page Fortna used rigorous quantitative analyses to assess peacekeeping outcomes across many cases. Fortna's seminal finding, published in 2008, was that peacekeeping works. When peacekeepers are present after a civil war, the risk of war restarting is significantly reduced compared to when they are absent.<sup>10</sup> This was a crucial rejoinder to the earlier pessimism; it suggested that despite well-known failures, on average UN interventions have a substantial conflict-suppressing effect. Alongside Fortna, researchers including Lisa Hultman, Jacob Kathman, and Megan Shannon have focused on specific mechanisms, particularly the reduction of violence. Their studies demonstrate that larger and well-equipped peacekeeping forces dampen violence on the ground, reducing both battlefield casualties and civilian killings.<sup>11</sup> These findings shifted the

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<sup>8</sup> Paris, R. (2005) 'Towards more effective peace-building: A conversation with Roland Paris', *rolandparis.com*, 1 November. Available at:

<https://www.rolandparis.com/single-post/2005/11/01/towards-more-effective-peace-building-a-conversation-with-roland-paris>

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Fortna, V.P. (2008) *Does Peacekeeping Work? Shaping Belligerents' Choices After Civil War*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

<sup>11</sup> University of Colorado Boulder (2020) 'Good news: UN peacekeepers do, in fact, reduce conflict', *Arts and Sciences Magazine*, 16 September. Available at: <https://www.colorado.edu/asmagazine/2020/09/16/good-news-un-peacekeepers-do-fact-reduce-conflict>

debate toward *how* and *under what conditions* peacekeeping is effective, rather than *if* it can be effective.

Contemporary literature recognises that peacekeeping effectiveness is multidimensional. Scholars increasingly talk about both negative peace (ending fighting) and positive peace (building conditions for lasting stability). For example, recent analyses in the Oxford Research Encyclopaedia note that *effective missions should aim not only to stop armed conflict (negative peace) but also to create conditions for sustainable peace, justice, and security (positive peace)*.<sup>12</sup> What emerges from the literature is that there is no single grand theory of peacekeeping effectiveness universally accepted. Instead, there is a spectrum of perspectives, suggesting that the effectiveness concept is multilayered.

## **2. Theory-Guided Empirical Analysis**

The approach in this thesis is fundamentally theory-guided or deductive. It starts from theoretical propositions (the five hypotheses derived from literature) and then uses the empirical cases to test and refine these propositions. The logic behind this procedure is to ensure the analysis is not purely descriptive but rather focused on evaluating what theory says should matter. Each hypothesis stems from existing scholarship, which lends it credibility and a basis in prior knowledge. For instance, the expectation about consent comes from decades of peacekeeping doctrine and research; the expectation about resources comes from recent quantitative findings, etc. By presenting these hypotheses at the beginning, the thesis articulates clear and falsifiable statements that can be confirmed or contradicted by the case evidence.

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<sup>12</sup> Fortna, V.P. and Howard, L.M. (2017) 'Peacekeeping, Civil War, and Peace Agreements', *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*.

## Literature Review

In recent years, a surge of empirical research has asked simply whether and how UN peacekeeping “works”.<sup>13</sup> The literature on UN peacekeeping effectiveness in civil wars is characterised by a wide scholarly debate over how to define and measure success. Many authors note that there is no single agreed-upon metric.<sup>14</sup> For example, Paul F. Diehl distinguishes “operational” success (fulfilling the mission’s mandate) from “contextual” success (achieving a lasting peace).<sup>15</sup> In contrast, Fortna (2008) and Hultman et al. (2014) emphasise concrete outcomes, such as reductions in violence, improved civilian security, and the prevention of conflict relapses.<sup>16</sup> The distinction reflects recognition that strict mandate compliance does not capture a mission’s broader impact. Varying evaluation criteria can lead to contrasting conclusions, with the same mission being interpreted as either a success or a failure depending on the lens through which it is assessed. Some scholars even adopt categorical ratings, following Duane Bratt’s approach of classifying each operation as a complete success, moderate success, or failure<sup>17</sup> to capture this nuance.

Effectiveness is also considered heavily conditioned by political and operational factors. Host-state consent emerges as a near-universal determinant. Quantitative studies show that whether local parties support or resist a UN deployment consistently distinguishes success from failure. Pushkina, Siewert, and Wolff (2022) conclude that “the presence or absence of domestic consent” is the factor that matters most in civil-war peacekeeping.<sup>18</sup> Even a clear mandate is ineffectual without sufficient backing. Adequate troops, funding, and political unity are therefore needed to carry out a mission. Hultman et al. find that each additional UN soldier sharply reduces battlefield casualties, whereas deploying more unarmed observers has no comparable effect.<sup>19</sup> Matching mandate ambition with sufficient resources is crucial.

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<sup>13</sup> Virginia Page Fortna, *Does Peacekeeping Work? Shaping Belligerents’ Choices After Civil War*, Princeton University Press, 2008

<sup>14</sup> Hultman, L., Kathman, J. and Shannon, M. (2013) *United Nations Peacekeeping and Civilian Protection in Civil War*. New York: Permanent Mission of Sweden to the United Nations, p. 2. Available at: <https://www.almendron.com/tribuna/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/united-nations-peacekeeping-and-civilian-protection-in-civil-war.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> Robert C. Johansen, “U.N. Peacekeeping: How Should We Measure Success?”, 1994

<sup>16</sup> Pushkina, Darya, “A Recipe for Success? Ingredients of a Successful Peacekeeping Mission,” *International Peacekeeping*, Vol. 13, No.2, June 2006.

<sup>17</sup> Bratt, D. (1996) ‘Assessing the success of UN peacekeeping operations’, *International Peacekeeping*, 3(4), pp. 64–81.

<sup>18</sup> Pushkina, D., Siewert, M.B. and Wolff, S. (2021) *Deploying without consent: UN peacekeeping in civil wars*. University of Birmingham Research Archive. Available at: <https://pure-oai.bham.ac.uk/ws/files/154165850/PushkinaD2021Mission.pdf>

<sup>19</sup> Hultman, L., Kathman, J.D. and Shannon, M. (2014) *Beyond keeping peace: United Nations effectiveness in the midst of fighting*. *American Political Science Review*, 108(4), pp. 737–753. Abstract only. Available at:



Howard also highlights that strong leadership and effective civilian-military coordination are important enablers.<sup>20</sup>

Scholars distinguish older “traditional” missions from multidimensional peace operations. Traditional Chapter VI deployments generally monitored ceasefires, whereas modern mandates often include broad peacebuilding tasks (elections, institution-building, civilian protection). Some data indicate that these “transformational” missions have distinct and often stronger effects on conflict outcomes than classic deployments.<sup>21</sup> Yet broad mandates can backfire without proper conditions. Lise Morjé Howard (2008) emphasises that complex missions succeed only when backed by “credible political agreements, well-resourced implementation strategies, and sustained commitment”.<sup>22</sup> Many civil-war operations lacked these prerequisites; some were launched without firm ceasefires or broad consensus. The UN has often struggled to reconcile headquarters planning with adaptive field management. Fortna notes that mission credibility depends more on engaging local actors and managing crises than on rigid structures.<sup>23</sup>

Debate continues over the normative assumptions underlying missions. Roland Paris (1997) famously warns that the UN’s “liberal peace” paradigm, which imposes rapid democratisation and market reforms, can backfire if societies are not ready, undermining legitimacy.<sup>24</sup>

In short, many scholars emphasise that outcomes must be interpreted in context. A mission may fulfil its technical tasks yet fail if violence resurges, whereas even a “failed” mission might deserve credit for protecting civilians or preserving state institutions. For instance, one study cautions that “a return to chaos after a long period of time does not make the earlier

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[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/278693568\\_Beyond\\_Keeping\\_Peace\\_United\\_Nations\\_Effectiveness\\_in\\_the\\_Midst\\_of\\_Fighting](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/278693568_Beyond_Keeping_Peace_United_Nations_Effectiveness_in_the_Midst_of_Fighting)

<sup>20</sup> Howard, L.M. (2015) ‘Namibia (UNTAG)’, in Koops, J.A., MacQueen, N., Tardy, T. and Williams, P.D. (eds.) *The Oxford Handbook of United Nations Peacekeeping Operations*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 340.

<sup>21</sup> Hegre, H., Hultman, L., Nygård, H.M. and Binningsbø, H.M. (2016) *Peacekeeping works – but not always: Evaluating the conflict-reducing effect of UN missions*. Oslo: Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO), p. 7. Available at: [https://havardhegre.net/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/pko\\_prediction\\_march2016.pdf](https://havardhegre.net/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/pko_prediction_march2016.pdf)

<sup>22</sup> Howard, L.M. (2015) ‘Namibia (UNTAG)’, in Koops, J.A., MacQueen, N., Tardy, T. and Williams, P.D. (eds.) *The Oxford Handbook of United Nations Peacekeeping Operations*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 294.

<sup>23</sup> Goldstone, J. (2010) ‘Review of *Does Peacekeeping Work? Shaping Belligerents’ Choices after Civil War* by Virginia Page Fortna’, *Perspectives on Politics*

<sup>24</sup> Paris, R. (1997) ‘Peacebuilding and the limits of liberal internationalism’, *International Security*, 22(2), pp. 54–89, p. 56.

mission a failure” if its interim objectives were met.<sup>25</sup> Applying different success criteria to the same mission often yields opposite verdicts.

Ultimately, the literature converges on the view that effectiveness lies on a spectrum; it depends on the interplay of mandate, means, and context and must be judged against what was realistically achievable. For policymakers, this implies calibrating expectations; even partial achievements (like civilian protection or ceasefires) should count as meaningful success in arduous environments. Many scholars caution that evaluations must avoid absolute labels. Instead, studies suggest spelling out which objectives were achieved under what constraints. In policy terms, this perspective means valuing incremental gains, such as how much violence was averted or trust built, rather than expecting instant solutions. In practice, this means acknowledging that peacekeeping often aims to mitigate conflict and protect civilians; small gains in these areas can be significant progress under the circumstances.

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<sup>25</sup> Druckman, D. (1999) ‘Evaluating peacekeeping missions’, *International Journal of Peace Studies*, 4(1), para. 13. Available at: [https://www3.gmu.edu/programs/icar/ijps/vol4\\_1/druckman.htm](https://www3.gmu.edu/programs/icar/ijps/vol4_1/druckman.htm)

## **Part I: The United Nations and the Evolution of Peacekeeping**

As intrastate wars became the dominant form of conflict in the post-Cold War era, United Nations peacekeeping shifted from ceasefire monitoring to managing fractured societies and rebuilding institutions. This transformation, while normatively ambitious, has introduced a set of unresolved contradictions that continue to shape mission outcomes. Although the UN Charter does not explicitly mention peacekeeping, it has developed as a central feature of the UN's practical response to crises since the late 1940s. Over seventy peacekeeping operations have been launched since the first armed mission in 1956, illustrating not only the flexibility of the UN system but also the evolution of the international community's approach to conflict resolution.<sup>26</sup> This transformation has been shaped by considerable changes in the nature of armed conflict. With the decline of interstate warfare and the proliferation of intrastate violence after the Cold War, the role of peacekeeping underwent a significant expansion. UN missions began operating in civil war settings marked by contested authority, fragmented armed groups, and weak governance structures.<sup>27</sup> The ambition of these operations often stood in contrast to the institutional and political constraints they encountered on the ground.

This chapter provides a focused overview of the evolution of UN peacekeeping in the context of civil wars. Rather than tracing every historical mission, it examines the major turning points that have shaped contemporary peacekeeping practice. Particular attention is given to how the literature has debated the meaning of success or failure in peacekeeping, especially when applied to intrastate conflict. In doing so, this chapter establishes the broader context for understanding the challenges explored in the empirical analysis that follows.

### **1.1 Peacekeeping as a UN Instrument for Global Security**

The origins of United Nations peacekeeping are rooted in the organisation's broader efforts to maintain international peace and security, as outlined in Chapter VII of the UN Charter. Yet peacekeeping itself is not mentioned in the Charter, nor was it initially envisioned as a core activity when the UN was founded in 1945. Instead, it developed pragmatically during the early decades of the Cold War as a means to prevent the escalation of armed conflict,

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<sup>26</sup> Koops, Joachim A., MacQueen, Norrie, Tardy, Thierry, and Williams, Paul D., *The Oxford Handbook of United Nations Peacekeeping Operations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 1–2.

<sup>27</sup> Sarjoon, A. and Yusoff, M. A., "United Nations Peacekeeping Operations and the Challenges," *Asian Journal of International Peace and Security*, 3(1) (2019), p. 204.

particularly in contexts where the Security Council was divided and traditional enforcement measures were politically unfeasible.<sup>28</sup>

The first peacekeeping missions were improvised solutions to crises that required a visible international presence without direct military confrontation. For example, the United Nations Truce Supervision Organisation (UNTSO) in 1948 and the United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF I) in 1956 were designed to monitor ceasefires and establish zones of separation between belligerents in the scope of inter-state conflicts. These early operations followed what came to be known as the “first generation” of peacekeeping: lightly armed, limited in scope, and dependent on the consent of the parties involved.<sup>29</sup> Despite the limited nature of these missions, they contributed to the symbolic power of the UN. Peacekeepers came to symbolise not only international neutrality, but also the idea that the global community could step in and stabilise volatile situations. Their blue helmets and impartial posture were often considered a mark of legitimacy. As such, peacekeeping became closely tied to the UN’s identity of the actor transcends geopolitical rivalries and provides a multilateral response to insecurity.<sup>30</sup>

The end of the Cold War introduced new possibilities. With the decline of superpower rivalries, the Security Council began authorising more missions. The UN deployed operations to internal conflicts in which state structures were weak or contested, and the nature of violence had switched from formal armies to fragmented armed groups.<sup>31</sup> In this new environment, peacekeeping became not only a tool of containment but also a mechanism for political transition. These new conflict environments challenged the traditional peacekeeping framework. The growing gap between the realities on the ground and the principles guiding operations forced both scholars and practitioners to reconsider what peacekeeping could realistically achieve, particularly in intrastate wars. These tensions set the stage for changes in how missions were planned and carried out, which will be examined in the following section.

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<sup>28</sup> Koops, Joachim A., MacQueen, Norrie, Tardy, Thierry, and Williams, Paul D., *The Oxford Handbook of United Nations Peacekeeping Operations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 1–2.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., pp. 3–4.

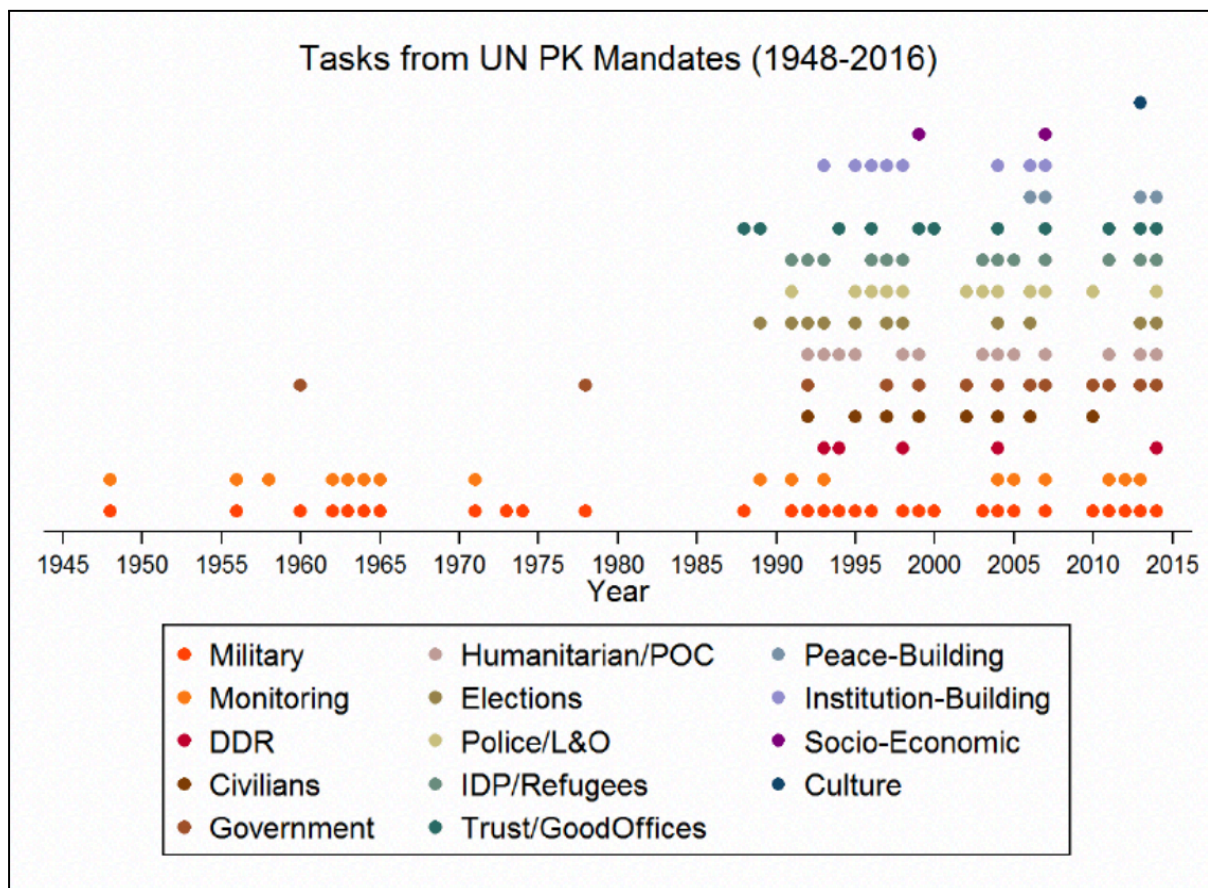
<sup>30</sup> Sarjoon, A. and Yusoff, M. A., “United Nations Peacekeeping Operations and the Challenges,” *Asian Journal of International Peace and Security*, 3(1) (2019), pp. 203–204.

<sup>31</sup> Fortna, V. P., *Does Peacekeeping Work? Shaping Belligerents’ Choices After Civil War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), p. 6.

## 1.2 Evolution from Monitoring to Multidimensional Missions

The United Nations' growing involvement in internal conflicts during the 1990s brought important changes to the way peacekeeping missions were implemented. This period marked the beginning of what came to be known as multidimensional peacekeeping. While earlier peacekeeping missions were largely focused on military observation and ceasefire supervision, the nature of UN mandates evolved considerably after the Cold War. As Fortna and Howard observe, most recent missions now include components related to longer-term post-conflict recovery, such as political reform, economic development, and institution-building.<sup>32</sup> Figure 1 below captures this transformation, highlighting the growing number of substantive tasks assigned to UN missions from 1948 to 2015. It clearly illustrates how post-1990 operations began incorporating multidimensional responsibilities well beyond the traditional military scope.

**Figure 1. Changing mandates of UN peace operations**



<sup>32</sup> Fortna, V. P. & Howard, L. M., 2008. Pitfalls and Prospects in the Peacekeeping Literature. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 11(1), pp. 283–301.

Source: Jessica Di Salvatore, J. & Ruggeri, A. (2018). "Effectiveness of Peacekeeping Operations". Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics, p. 12.

This required changes in institutional design. Peacekeeping operations now included specialised civilian components, like legal advisors, electoral experts, and human rights monitors, who worked alongside military contingents under unified command structures. The establishment of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) in 1992 further formalised this approach by providing a centralised administrative hub for planning, logistics, and strategic coordination.<sup>33</sup> The UN's operational vocabulary also evolved during this period, with terms such as '*mission integration*', '*transitional authority*', and '*sequenced mandate implementation*'.<sup>34</sup>

However, the expansion of mission functions was not matched by proportional increases in capacity and political consensus. Many mandates lacked operational clarity and suffered from internal fragmentation.<sup>35</sup> Coordination between military and civilian components remained inconsistent, and the gap between strategic objectives and field-level implementation grew more pronounced. This institutional overstretch was often exacerbated by delays in deployment, vague engagement, and minimal enforcement power.<sup>36</sup>

Some missions nonetheless managed to navigate these constraints effectively. In settings where local cooperation was relatively high, the integrated model yielded tangible results, as seen in Namibia and Mozambique. Others, deployed in the absence of ceasefires or basic security guarantees, quickly became overwhelmed by the scale of violence, as the experiences in Somalia, Rwanda, and Bosnia clearly demonstrated.<sup>37</sup>

By this point, operations were no longer short-term deployments with narrowly defined technical goals but long-term engagements requiring sustained diplomatic support, adaptable command structures, and local legitimacy.<sup>38</sup> Yet the UN system continued to authorise missions through a politically driven process that rarely accounted for operational demands or institutional learning from previous deployments. This lack of doctrinal consistency, paired

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 8–10.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 14–16.

<sup>35</sup> Ameer Ali Sarjoon and M. A. Yusoff, "United Nations Peacekeeping Operations and the Challenges," *Asian Journal of International Peace and Security* 3, no. 1 (2019): 206–208.

<sup>36</sup> Koops et al., *Oxford Handbook*, 10–11.

<sup>37</sup> Virginia Page Fortna, *Does Peacekeeping Work? Shaping Belligerents' Choices After Civil War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 15–17.

<sup>38</sup> Roland Paris, "Peacebuilding and the Limits of Liberal Internationalism," *International Security* 22, no. 2 (1997): 55–57.

with heightened expectations, would shape the performance, credibility, and limitations of peacekeeping in civil war contexts for decades to come.

These institutional developments laid the groundwork for new questions about what peacekeeping can realistically achieve in civil war settings, especially when judged against the rising expectations attached to these missions. However, the ability of the UN to meet these expectations has often been constrained in practice. The following section examines the main challenges that continue to undermine the effectiveness of UN peacekeeping operations.

### **1.3 Structural and Operational Challenges**

Despite their noteworthy achievements, UN peacekeeping operations continue to grapple with several related challenges that persistently hinder their effectiveness. These difficulties can be broadly categorised into three dimensions: political backing, institutional capacity, and the expanding scope of operational mandates.

Firstly, peacekeeping efforts have often suffered from the uneven political will of member states. The Security Council has frequently failed to present a unified front, especially in high-stakes missions such as those in Bosnia, Somalia, and Rwanda, where political disagreement translated into hesitant or contradictory mandates.<sup>39</sup> Even when missions are approved, many states provide insufficient material or logistical support, leaving peacekeepers ill-equipped to meet the demands placed upon them.<sup>40</sup> The inconsistent commitment of key stakeholders continues to be cited as a fundamental reason for operational failure.

Secondly, the UN's institutional structure has frequently proven inadequate for managing the urgency of large-scale, multidimensional missions. Prior to the establishment of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations in 1992, there had been no specialised body to oversee planning, force generation, logistics, or field deployments.<sup>41</sup> Although several bureaucratic reforms have been implemented, the organisation still faces difficulties mobilising troops quickly, coordinating across the military and civilian sectors, and maintaining an integrated command system. More than twelve diplomatic attempts to create a

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<sup>39</sup> Roland Paris, "Peacebuilding and the Limits of Liberal Internationalism," *International Security* 22, no. 2 (1997): 56–59.

<sup>40</sup> Alex J. Bellamy and Paul D. Williams, *Understanding Peacekeeping*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Polity, 2021), 128–130.

<sup>41</sup> United Nations, *Report of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations* (Brahimi Report), A/55/305-S/2000/809, 2000.

standing peacekeeping force, giving practical effect to Articles 43 to 45 of the UN Charter, have failed, leaving missions dependent on slow and inconsistent national troop contributions.<sup>42</sup>

Thirdly, the very nature of peacekeeping has become increasingly knotty and sort of confusing. As previously discussed in section 1.2, the growing expansion of peacekeeping mandates has increasingly stretched the UN's capacity to implement its missions effectively. What began as a tool for monitoring ceasefires and separating armed groups has evolved into a system expected to support elections, protect civilians, reform state institutions, and uphold human rights.<sup>43</sup> These wide-ranging tasks are often launched in unstable environments where violence persists and political settlements are weak or even absent.<sup>44</sup> In these conditions, the UN has repeatedly struggled to translate ambitious Security Council mandates into clear and realistic mission strategies. Although planning instruments have been developed as reforms like the Integrated Mission Planning Process and the Mission Concepts<sup>45</sup>, they are often applied unevenly, lacking flexibility, and are frequently outdated by the time they reach the field.<sup>46</sup> Missions with broad agendas often end up with unclear priorities and insufficient means to carry them out, a problem referred to in policy circles as "mission overload" or "Christmas tree mandates".<sup>47</sup> Institutional coordination further complicates implementation. The Department of Peace Operations (DPO), the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA), and the Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO) often pursue overlapping initiatives without unified direction, making it difficult for missions to maintain a focused approach.<sup>48</sup> Additionally, a 2020 joint study by the United Nations University and the Stimson Centre found that expanding mission size or budgets does not automatically lead to greater influence in peace processes.<sup>49</sup> In some cases, operations become absorbed by the logistics at the expense of political engagement and negotiation. Taken together, these challenges do not simply delay or weaken peacekeeping mandates; they shape how missions

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<sup>42</sup> "Twelve Times the UN Has Failed the World," *TRT World*, September 8, 2018, <https://www.trtworld.com/americas/twelve-times-the-un-has-failed-the-world-12710932>.

<sup>43</sup> Bellamy, Alex J., and Paul D. Williams. *Understanding Peacekeeping*. 3rd ed. Cambridge: Polity, 2021, 129–130.

<sup>44</sup> Holt, Victoria K., Aditi Gorur, Adam Day, and Charles T. Hunt. *The Political Practice of Peacekeeping: How Strategies for Peace Operations Are Developed and Implemented*. New York: United Nations University, 2020, 9–10.

<sup>45</sup> United Nations Department of Peace Operations, "In-Mission Training," *Peacekeeping Resource Hub*, accessed June 17, 2025, <https://peacekeepingresourcehub.un.org/en/training/in-mission>.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 6–8.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>48</sup> Sarjoon, Ameer Ali, and M. A. Yusoff. "United Nations Peacekeeping Operations and the Challenges." *Asian Journal of International Peace and Security* 3, no. 1 (2019): 206.

<sup>49</sup> Day et al., *The Political Practice of Peacekeeping*, 12–14.



are implemented on the ground. Understanding their combined effect is essential to assessing why peacekeeping outcomes vary so significantly across different missions.

This chapter has laid the groundwork for understanding UN peacekeeping as both an evolving instrument of international security and a practice marked by significant challenges. While the UN has developed increasingly ambitious mandates in response to the changing nature of conflict, its capacity to deliver on those mandates remains uneven. The historical and structural analysis presented here highlights a central tension between the expectations placed on peacekeeping and the limitations of the system that supports it. These structural and operational frictions do not suggest that peacekeeping lacks utility; rather, they underline the importance of assessing when, how, and under what conditions peacekeeping can contribute meaningfully to conflict resolution and post-conflict stability.

Against this background, the study turns to an empirical examination of how peacekeeping performs in such settings. Rather than assessing peacekeeping in the abstract, the next chapters focus on how these missions unfold in practice. The goal is not to generalise these cases but to use them to better understand the determinants of peacekeeping effectiveness in such settings.

## **Part II: Comparative Assessment of UN Peacekeeping Effectiveness in Civil Wars**

This chapter conducts a comparative analysis of two emblematic UN peacekeeping operations, UNTAG in Namibia and UNPROFOR in Bosnia-Herzegovina, both deployed in the context of civil war but with markedly different outcomes. While UNTAG is widely considered a successful multidimensional mission that facilitated Namibia's peaceful transition to independence, UNPROFOR has become a cautionary example of operational failure, unable to prevent mass atrocities in Bosnia despite a significant UN presence.

The analysis draws on a structured framework of peacekeeping effectiveness developed in Part I, assessing each mission through five key factors: consent and willingness to cooperate; clarity and achievability of the mandate; coherence of international support; leadership and adaptability; operational resources and enforcement capacity; conflict conditions; and mission integration with local trust-building. These factors are operationalised by ten hypotheses, which form the basis for evaluating outcomes in each case. Each case study begins with a contextual overview of the conflict and mission mandate, followed by a factor-by-factor assessment of effectiveness. The final section compares findings across both cases to identify the structural and political conditions most conducive to successful UN peacekeeping in civil war settings.

### **1. Case Study: UNTAG in Namibia**

#### **1.1 Background and Deployment of UNTAG**

Few UN peace operations have been launched with such a long political gestation as the United Nations Transition Assistance Group (UNTAG). Namibia's journey to independence was shaped by more than seventy years of foreign rule and international debate. First colonised by Germany, the territory passed into South African hands as a League of Nations mandate after the First World War. When the League dissolved, the United Nations inherited responsibility for mandates. South Africa refused to submit to UN oversight. Instead, it implemented apartheid policies in Namibia and administered the territory as if it were a fifth province of South Africa.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Colin Leys & John S. Saul, *Namibia's Liberation Struggle: The Two-Edged Sword* (London: James Currey, 1995), 5–6.

In 1966, the UN General Assembly responded by revoking South Africa's mandate through Resolution 2145, declaring its continued presence illegal under international law and placing Namibia directly under UN responsibility.<sup>51</sup> The decision was symbolically powerful but, in practice, unenforceable. On the ground, the South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO) launched an armed campaign for independence, while South Africa escalated repression and fortified its occupation. For the UN, Namibia became both a legal case and a political test.

A plan for resolving the conflict emerged in Resolution 435 (1978), which proposed a ceasefire, the repatriation of Namibian exiles, and free elections supervised by the United Nations.<sup>52</sup> Yet the resolution remained dormant for over a decade. South Africa insisted on linking Namibian independence to Cuban withdrawal from Angola, where Cold War rivalries were playing out through proxy wars and foreign deployments. This "linkage" was firmly rejected by both the UN General Assembly and the Security Council as a delaying tactic.<sup>53</sup> Efforts to activate Resolution 435 stalled amid diplomatic deadlock and regional warfare.

A breakthrough came with the Tripartite Agreement, signed in New York on 22 December 1988 by Angola, Cuba, and South Africa. The accord formalised Cuba's commitment to withdraw troops from Angola and paved the way for implementing the Namibian peace plan. The agreement was the result of sustained negotiation, supported by the Western Contact Group, a coalition of five Western states (the United States, the United Kingdom, France, West Germany, and Canada) that had pushed for a comprehensive settlement since the late 1970s.<sup>54</sup>

After clearing the political path, the Security Council authorised the deployment of UNTAG in early 1989. The mission was designed not only to monitor the ceasefire and troop withdrawals but also to manage an entire political transition. Its mandate included monitoring and implementing a ceasefire; overseeing the withdrawal and demobilisation of South African and SWAPO forces; monitoring the national police; facilitating the return of exiles; managing a political normalisation process; and supervising and controlling the electoral process.<sup>55</sup> These responsibilities were distributed across five integrated components: military

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<sup>51</sup> Faye Carroll, *South West Africa and the United Nations* (Lexington: Univ. of Kentucky, 1967), 22–28.

<sup>52</sup> UNSC, *Resolution 435*, S/RES/435 (1978), 29 Sept. 1978.

<sup>53</sup> UNGA, *Resolution A/RES/42/22* (1987), para. 6.

<sup>54</sup> Weiland & Braham (eds.), *The Namibian Peace Process*, Arnold-Bergstraesser Inst. (1994), 67.

<sup>55</sup> UN Peacekeeping Resource Hub, "UNTAG – Namibia," <https://peacekeeping.un.org/mission/past/untagFT.htm>

observers, a civilian police contingent, electoral and political affairs officers, logistics and public information specialists, and a senior leadership team under the Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG).<sup>56</sup>

UNTAG was among the first peacekeeping missions explicitly structured as multidimensional. Its role extended beyond monitoring compliance to shaping the very conditions under which a new state would be born. It had to coordinate disarmament and electoral registration, advise on law enforcement, and serve as a guarantor of political fairness. The mission's credibility rested not on enforcement capacity but on perceived neutrality, legal legitimacy, and the backing of the Security Council.

However, the mission faced a crisis even before reaching full deployment. On 1 April 1989, the day the ceasefire was to take effect, fighting broke out between South African forces and combatants from the People's Liberation Army of Namibia (PLAN), the armed wing of SWAPO, in northern Namibia. PLAN combatants said they were moving into pre-established assembly areas south of the border; locations that the UN had designated to gather and separate forces for demilitarisation at the start of the transition.<sup>57</sup> South Africa accused the group of launching an incursion from Angola in violation of the ceasefire. At that point, only 291 UNTAG personnel had been deployed, well under the Security Council's authorised ceiling of 4,650, leaving the mission critically under-resourced on the eve of the ceasefire.<sup>58</sup>

The Secretary-General, under pressure to stabilise the situation, authorised the temporary redeployment of South West Africa Territorial Force (SWATF) units. Although justified on security grounds, this decision drew criticism for involving a partial actor in a peacekeeping role. Over 140 PLAN fighters were killed in the following days.<sup>59</sup> Internal UN summaries and Situation Reports later confirmed that PLAN movements into assembly areas followed previously agreed procedures, including UNTAG-approved routes and coordination through liaison officers.<sup>60</sup> Leaked internal assessments noted that the swift deployment of additional observers and logistical support "significantly restored the mission's credibility, both domestically and within the Security Council".<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> United Nations, *Yearbook of the United Nations 1989*, ch. IV, based on SG Report A/43/997/Add.1, p. 791.

<sup>57</sup> UN SG Report on Res. 435, A/43/997/Add.1 (23 Jan 1989), paras. 10–12; *Yearbook 1989*, p. 791.

<sup>58</sup> United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations, *Namibia – UNTAG: Background*, <https://peacekeeping.un.org/mission/past/untagFT.htm>

<sup>59</sup> Weiland & Braham (1994), 93–94.

<sup>60</sup> UN SG Report on Res. 435, A/43/997/Add.1, para. 11.

<sup>61</sup> Walter Dorn, *Namibia 1989: A Case of Successful UN Peacekeeping*, National Security Archive Briefing Book 184 (2005), 2–3.

By May 1989, the mission was operational across all 42 electoral districts. Refugees began returning under UNHCR supervision, while the civilian police component monitored local law enforcement and reported abuses. A public information campaign was launched to explain the elections and encourage broad participation. Registration and voting were conducted under tight UN control. The elections held in November 1989 were assessed by international observers as free and fair. On 21 March 1990, Namibia formally declared independence, and SWAPO leader Sam Nujoma was sworn in as the country's first president. The mission officially concluded on 31 March 1990. The effectiveness of UNTAG is examined in detail in the following section through a factor-based analysis.

## **1.2 Assessing UNTAG's Effectiveness: Factor-by-Factor Analysis**

### **a. Local Consent, Cooperation, and Ownership**

The success of the United Nations Transition Assistance Group (UNTAG) in Namibia is widely attributed to the genuine consent, cooperation, and sense of ownership demonstrated by the principal local parties: the South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO) and the South African administration, as well as the Namibian population. Formal consent to the UN plan was achieved through painstaking diplomacy: in December 1988 South Africa finally agreed to implement UN Security Council Resolution 435 (1978) in exchange for parallel regional concessions, while SWAPO committed to cease all hostile acts<sup>62</sup>. Notably, the UN General Assembly had long affirmed that any settlement must include SWAPO's direct participation as the "*sole and authentic representative*" of the Namibian people, recognising that Namibia's genuine independence required SWAPO's full involvement<sup>63</sup>. This high-level consent created an initial framework of legitimacy and buy-in for UNTAG's deployment in April 1989. It meant that, on paper, both belligerents accepted UNTAG's mandate of overseeing a ceasefire and democratic transition to independence through elections.<sup>64</sup>

In practice, operational cooperation was soon tested. On the very day the ceasefire was to take effect (1 April 1989), armed clashes erupted in northern Namibia between SWAPO's military wing, PLAN, and South African forces. South Africa accused SWAPO of a "*wilful incursion*" from Angola by 600-1000 guerrillas, while SWAPO argued its fighters were

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<sup>62</sup> United Nations, *Yearbook of the United Nations 1989*, Chapter III: Namibia, p. 790.

<sup>63</sup> United Nations General Assembly, *Report of the United Nations Council for Namibia*, A/40/24 (1985), p. 144, para. 652.

<sup>64</sup> United Nations Council for Namibia, *Report for 1986*, A/40/24, p. 9; United Nations Security Council Resolution 629 (1989), para. 5.

inside Namibia preparing to assemble for UN monitoring and had been ambushed<sup>65</sup>. Over 140 PLAN combatants were killed in the ensuing South African “counter-insurgency”<sup>66</sup>. This serious breakdown in compliance threatened to derail the peace process at its outset. UNTAG’s Secretary-General’s Special Representative, Martti Ahtisaari, faced an acute dilemma: with UNTAG’s military component still under-strength on 1 April, he reluctantly authorised the temporary redeployment of South African counter-insurgency police (SWATF/Koevoet) to help restore order; an expedient step that nevertheless underscored UNTAG’s dependency on the parties’ cooperation to enforce the ceasefire.<sup>67</sup> The “*April Fool’s Day*” crisis vividly demonstrated that without good-faith operational cooperation, even a formally consented mission could falter. Indeed, Secretary-General Javier Pérez de Cuéllar later observed that UNTAG had “*no powers of enforcement*” and could only succeed if “*all parties...adhere strictly to the agreements and understandings to which they had committed themselves*”.<sup>68</sup>

UN mediation and renewed cooperation proved crucial in resolving the April 1989 impasse. The UN facilitated urgent high-level talks in early April, resulting in the Mount Etjo Declaration of 9 April 1989, in which all sides reaffirmed their ceasefire obligations and agreed on concrete steps to restore the status quo ante<sup>69</sup>. Under UNTAG supervision, SWAPO fighters who had come south of the Angolan border were given safe passage to withdraw back north of the 16°S latitude, while South African forces were pulled back to their bases and confined under UN monitoring. By mid-April the ceasefire was effectively reinstated. A subsequent tripartite meeting produced the Cahama Minute (15–19 May 1989), which confirmed that SWAPO’s armed elements were indeed back in Angola under UNTAG watch and that South African troops were again restricted to base, “*re-establishing a de facto cessation of hostilities*” in northern Namibia<sup>70</sup>. The UN’s Special Representative and South Africa’s Administrator-General in Namibia jointly verified this return to compliance<sup>71</sup>. From this point forward, both parties largely abided by the settlement plan’s provisions. The Security Council buttressed the UN’s efforts by demanding full compliance by all parties

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<sup>65</sup> United Nations, *Yearbook of the United Nations 1989*, Chapter III: Namibia, p. 796; Gwinyayi A. Dzinesa, “A Comparative Perspective of UN Peacekeeping in Angola and Namibia,” *International Peacekeeping* 11, no. 4 (2004): 648

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 648

<sup>67</sup> United Nations, *Yearbook of the United Nations 1989*, p. 796

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 794

<sup>69</sup> United Nations General Assembly, *Report of the United Nations Council for Namibia, 1989*, A/44/24, paras. 93–95

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, para. 96

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, para. 97

(especially South Africa) with Resolution 435 and related agreements<sup>72</sup>. In particular, the Council in August and October 1989 insisted on the *complete disbandment* of remaining paramilitary units, mainly the notorious Koevoet counter-insurgency police, which South Africa had been slow to disarm. Under international pressure, about 1,600 ex-Koevoet personnel were finally demobilised by October 30, 1989, and the last 1,500 (the so-called "Merlyn" police unit) were withdrawn right after the November elections<sup>73</sup>. This measured but firm UN intervention secured the parties' renewed cooperation and allowed UNTAG to proceed with its core mandate. As one analysis by Dzinesa notes, once the initial setbacks were overcome, "*the parties' commitment to the settlement plan and their confidence in the mission*" enabled UNTAG to fully deploy and function effectively.<sup>74</sup>

Equally important was local ownership of the political process, exemplified by Namibians' enthusiastic and peaceful participation in the UN-supervised elections. UNTAG worked in close coordination with South Africa's local Administrator-General to create conditions for free campaigning and balloting<sup>75</sup>. The Secretary-General himself convened regular meetings with all Namibian political parties, fostering dialogue and confidence across factional lines. In September 1989, the major parties (including SWAPO and its former opponents) signed an agreed Code of Conduct committing to non-violence, fair electioneering, and most significantly to "*accept and respect the outcome of the elections if certified as free and fair*" by the UN Special Representative.<sup>76</sup> This explicit pledge ahead of time ensured that all sides would treat the result as legitimate. Voter registration proceeded smoothly under UNTAG's civil police supervision, enrolling over 701,000 voters (out of an estimated 1.3 million eligible population) with negligible irregularities.<sup>77</sup> The November 1989 elections recorded a massive turnout and took place "without incident."<sup>78</sup> When UNTAG's chief declared the vote free and fair, both winners and losers *accepted the verdict*; a critical moment of local commitment that cemented the peace.<sup>79</sup> SWAPO, which won a plurality, respected the agreed constitutional process (forming a coalition constituent assembly to draft the new constitution), and opposition groups accepted SWAPO's victory and participated in the new

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<sup>72</sup> United Nations Security Council, Resolution 643 (1989), paras. 5–7

<sup>73</sup> United Nations, *Yearbook of the United Nations 1989*, p. 796

<sup>74</sup> Gwinyayi A. Dzinesa, "A Comparative Perspective of UN Peacekeeping in Angola and Namibia," *International Peacekeeping* 11, no. 4 (2004): 655

<sup>75</sup> United Nations General Assembly, *Report of the United Nations Council for Namibia, 1989*, A/44/24, para. 140

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, para. 140

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, para. 141.

<sup>78</sup> United Nations Security Council, *Further Report of the Secretary-General on Namibia*, S/20967, para. 5

<sup>79</sup> *Yearbook of the United Nations 1989*, Chapter III: Namibia, pp. 803, 805.

political order. The Namibian people's ownership of their transition was thereby evident in the broad compliance with electoral rules, the absence of post-election violence, and the general unity in moving toward independence. As the Security Council noted, the electoral process allowed the "unfettered and effective exercise by the people of Namibia of their inalienable right to self-determination", finally achieving the intent of Resolution 435.<sup>80</sup>

In sum, UNTAG's effectiveness was predicated on the trust and cooperation of the local actors at every stage. Formal consent by SWAPO and South Africa gave the mission a legitimate mandate, but it was the *operational* compliance so the willingness of both sides to refrain from aggression, abide by ceasefire and demobilisation agreements, and heed UN mediation, that kept the transition on track. When that cooperation wavered, UNTAG's influence was severely limited, as seen in the April 1989 scare. Conversely, once the parties renewed their commitments and Namibians embraced the electoral process, UNTAG could fulfil its mandate with resounding success. The mission became a *facilitator* rather than an enforcer, a role that succeeded because Namibian stakeholders themselves took ownership of the peace plan. In Namibia, local consent and cooperation were not mere formalities but genuine commitments, and local ownership of the transition guaranteed that the birth of an independent Namibia in March 1990 would be peaceful and widely accepted as legitimate. UNTAG thus stands as clear evidence that peacekeeping success hinges on genuine local consent, sustained cooperation, and sense of ownership.

## **b. Military Balance of Power**

The military balance of power in 1989 was heavily skewed in favour of the South African forces, posing a fundamental challenge to UNTAG's peacekeeping effectiveness. At the start of the transition, South Africa maintained over 30,000 security personnel in Namibia, including approximately 9,000 regular South African Defence Force (SADF) troops and more than 20,000 counter-insurgency auxiliaries (local "ethnic" units, commandos and police)<sup>81</sup>. By contrast, SWAPO's military wing, PLAN, could only field a few thousand guerrillas based in exile, and UNTAG's own military component was initially limited to about 4,650 peacekeepers (three infantry battalions, 300 military observers, and support elements) despite an authorised ceiling of 7,500 troops.<sup>82</sup> This stark asymmetry meant that at the moment

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., p. 804.

<sup>81</sup> United Nations. *Yearbook of the United Nations 1989*. New York: United Nations Department of Public Information, 1990, pp. 796–797.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., p. 792.



UNTAG deployed, South Africa retained overwhelming force superiority on the ground. Indeed, when a contingent of an estimated 600-1,000 PLAN fighters crossed into northern Namibia on 1 April 1989, allegedly to establish assembly points (cf. 1.2.b), they were swiftly engaged by South African counter-insurgency units, resulting in over 140 SWAPO combatants killed in the ensuing clashes.<sup>83</sup> This early crisis vividly demonstrated how the lopsided military balance could undermine the ceasefire: with UNTAG's peacekeepers only beginning to arrive and "*no powers of enforcement*", the stronger party (South Africa) was able to unilaterally dictate security outcomes on the ground, nearly derailing the peace process in its first days.

Facing this reality, UNTAG's effectiveness hinged on systematically rebalancing the military equation through verified troop withdrawals and demobilisation. Under the UN plan, the bulk of South Africa's forces had to be withdrawn or disbanded in parallel with the ceasefire. In practice, once the April fighting was contained, UNTAG oversaw a rapid drawdown of the South African military presence. By 24 June 1989, the SADF contingent in Namibia was reduced from nearly 10,000 to the agreed residual of 1,500 troops (the so-called "Merlyn Force"), confined to two bases (Grootfontein and Oshivello) under continuous UNTAG observation.<sup>84</sup> All other SWATF units (comprising over 9,000 local auxiliary troops) were demobilised by late May 1989, with their weapons, heavy equipment, and ammunition collected and secured in UN-guarded depots<sup>85</sup> (An exception was made for two isolated "Bushman" battalions, totaling 1,351 men, which were kept in their camps under UNTAG guard due to humanitarian concerns and barred from any military activity.) Critically, the Koevoet paramilitary police unit, a highly mobile counter-insurgency force that had been responsible for much of the pre-independence warfare, was ordered *disbanded*<sup>86</sup> under the UN plan. South African authorities initially reconstituted Koevoet in April during the crisis, redeploying its fighters with armoured vehicles under the pretext of combating the SWAPO incursion. Even after a second nominal disbandment, roughly 3,000 ex-Koevoet members (about two-thirds of the unit) were simply absorbed into the police ranks and continued operating with military-style equipment, such as Casspir armoured carriers mounted with heavy machine guns, in clear violation of the settlement accords.<sup>87</sup> UNTAG's leadership and

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., p. 796; Dzinesa, Gwinyayi A. "A Comparative Perspective of UN Peacekeeping in Angola and Namibia." *International Peacekeeping* 11, no. 4 (2004): 648.

<sup>84</sup> United Nations. *Yearbook of the United Nations* 1989, pp. 797–798.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., p. 798.

<sup>86</sup> United Nations, *Yearbook of the United Nations* 1989, pp. 797–799; UN Security Council Resolution 643 (1989), paras. 6–7; UN General Assembly, A/44/24, para. 113.

<sup>87</sup> United Nations. *Yearbook of the United Nations* 1989, pp. 798.

the Security Council had to intervene repeatedly on this issue; in August and October 1989 the Council demanded the complete disbandment of all remaining paramilitary and territorial units “in particular Koevoet and the SWATF” and the dismantling of their command structures.<sup>88</sup> This pressure eventually yielded results. On 28-30 October 1989, just days before the national election, UNTAG supervised the demobilisation of the last Koevoet elements (approximately 1,625 ex-members) and removed them from the security apparatus.<sup>89</sup> Thanks to these measures, by November 1989 South Africa’s once-dominant military footprint in Namibia had been effectively neutralised: only a token SADF force remained confined to base, and the myriad auxiliary forces that had propped up the occupation were disarmed and cantoned.

On the other side of the equation, SWAPO’s armed units were also kept in check, largely by virtue of their forced absence. Following the April truce violation, virtually all remaining PLAN combatants withdrew to designated bases in Angola, where they were kept under Angolan and UNTAG supervision. The great majority of SWAPO fighters never re-entered Namibia with weapons; instead, they returned home gradually as unarmed returnees under UN High Commissioner for Refugees auspices once an amnesty was in place, or they waited to be integrated into a future national army after independence. By October 1989, fewer than 300 PLAN combatants were still left across the border in Angola (confined near Lubango under UN monitoring), indicating that SWAPO had effectively given up the military contest in favour of the political process.<sup>90</sup> In effect, UNTAG succeeded in demilitarising the arena. It shepherded South Africa’s powerful forces out of the field and kept SWAPO’s fighters on the sidelines, thereby creating the conditions for a peaceful political transition. The UNTAG military contingent played an instrumental role in this balancing act despite its limited size. Once fully deployed, UN infantry battalions and observers fanned out across Namibia to monitor compliance. They guarded arms storage depots, manned checkpoints at border crossings, patrolled potential infiltration routes, and accompanied local police in sensitive areas to deter any intimidation. UNTAG patrols became a constant visible presence (notably by the Finnish and Malaysian battalions in the north), which helped reassure the population and prevent renewed fighting or covert rearmament in the lead-up to the vote. No significant security incidents occurred after April; the elections in November 1989 were conducted peacefully, free from the overt violence that many had feared when the peace process began.

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<sup>88</sup> United Nations Security Council. *Resolution 643 (1989)*, S/RES/643, adopted 31 October 1989, paras. 6–7.

<sup>89</sup> United Nations. *Yearbook of the United Nations 1989*, p. 799.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

In sum, the stark military asymmetry in Namibia's conflict (a modern army and its surrogates confronting an irregular insurgency) had the potential to either spoil the UN transition or, if deftly managed, to facilitate it. UNTAG's effectiveness flowed from its ability to contain and reduce the dominance of the stronger party's forces while enforcing the confinement of the weaker party's troops. Removing or restraining South Africa's overwhelming military advantage proved essential in levelling the playing field and building mutual confidence: it denied the South African side any means to violently influence the outcome, and it gave SWAPO the security assurances necessary to lay down arms and engage in politics. At the same time, the imbalance meant UNTAG had to rely on the stronger side's good faith in the initial phase, a dependency that became painfully clear during the "April Fool's Day" crisis when UN peacekeepers alone could not halt the SADF's response. Ultimately, however, the controlled reduction of South Africa's military presence and the neutralisation of its coercive power, coupled with UNTAG's on-ground vigilance, allowed the Namibian transition to unfold in a largely tranquil atmosphere. The military asymmetry, once a threat to the peace plan, was turned into a factor that facilitated success. By Independence Day, the armies that had long dominated Namibia were off the stage, ensuring that the transfer of power would be decided by ballots rather than bullets. This careful balancing of force was a decisive ingredient in UNTAG's acclaimed accomplishment, demonstrating how a peacekeeping mission can mitigate an imbalance of power to shepherd a conflict toward a stable and legitimate conclusion.

### **c. External Interference**

In the final year of Namibia's transition (April 1989-March 1990), prior agreements and vigilant international oversight largely neutralised potential external interference. Crucially, the Tripartite Accord of December 1988 between Angola, Cuba, and South Africa, mediated by the US with the USSR as an observer, settled regional conflicts and removed a major external obstacle to Namibian independence.<sup>91</sup> This agreement set a firm timeline for the *withdrawal of Cuba's troops from Angola* (monitored by a separate UN mission, UNAVEM I) and obliged South Africa to accept UN-supervised elections in Namibia.<sup>92</sup> With the contentious 'linkage' issue resolved, both Cold War superpowers endorsed the UN plan, ensuring that Namibia's transition would proceed without rivalry or proxy disruptions. The Western Contact Group also fully supported the implementation, demonstrating an

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<sup>91</sup> United Nations, *Yearbook of the United Nations 1989*, p. 790.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., "Trusteeship and Decolonisation," p. 790

unprecedented level of consensus. As a result, *no neighbouring state or great power overtly hindered UNTAG*<sup>93</sup>; instead, each external actor was either cooperative or kept at bay by the new diplomatic equilibrium.

Angola and Cuba, once hosts to foreign forces and Namibian fighters, became partners in safeguarding the transition. When a ceasefire violation crisis erupted on 1 April 1989, a *Joint Commission* comprising Angola, Cuba and South Africa (with American and Soviet observers) convened under UNTAG's auspices to restore calm.<sup>94</sup> By mid-May, the three governments reaffirmed that both SWAPO insurgents and South African forces were confined and the cease-fire was re-established, as recorded in the Cahama Minute. Cuban forces, for their part, stuck to the withdrawal timetable: tens of thousands of Cuban troops redeployed or left Angola on schedule in 1989, removing the principal foreign military presence from the theatre. The international community's monitoring (through UNAVEM I and the Joint Commission) ensured that neither the Cuban drawdown nor Angola's civil war spilt over to destabilise Namibia's path to independence.

The US' leverage over South Africa and the Soviet Union's influence with Angola and SWAPO leadership were crucial in preventing any backtracking on the settlement. Both superpowers participated as observers in the Joint Commission meetings, indicating their commitment to a peaceful outcome. Western Contact Group members also supported firm Security Council action to guard the process. For example, in August and October 1989 the Council unanimously demanded that South Africa dismantle its remaining paramilitary units and cease obstructive practices (resolutions 640 and 643); a stance fully backed by the Western permanent members, who in earlier years had been reluctant to pressure South Africa<sup>95</sup>. This unity denied South Africa any external patron to shield it from complying with UNTAG's terms. Moreover, generous material support from Western states meant UNTAG was robustly funded and deployed at full strength, denying spoilers any security vacuum to exploit. In sum, the superpower détente and Western commitment transformed external actors from potential spoilers into guarantors of the process, greatly enhancing UNTAG's freedom of action.

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid., pp. 790–791

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., pp. 797–798

<sup>95</sup> United Nations Security Council, *Resolution 643 (1989)*, 31 October 1989, paras. 5–7; *Resolution 640 (1989)*, 29 August 1989, paras. 1–2.

By the time of Namibia's November 1989 elections, the regional climate was overwhelmingly supportive. Neighbours like Angola and Zambia continued to honour their commitments to keep insurgents in check, and no hostile outside forces threatened the polling. A brief scare arose when South African officials sounded an alarm about alleged SWAPO fighters massing north of the border, but *joint UNTAG–Angolan verification swiftly disproved this false claim*.<sup>96</sup> The Security Council “deplored the false alarm” and warned South Africa against such provocations.<sup>97</sup> This episode underscored how effectively external interference was being policed: Angola's cooperation with UNTAG in fact-finding and the UN's readiness to call out disinformation prevented any pretext for renewed cross-border fighting.

Thus, external actors did not derail UNTAG's mission. On the contrary, their involvement was either constructively channelled or diplomatically constrained. The removal of foreign troops, the alignment of the superpowers, and the active support of regional and Western governments eliminated external meddling as a threat. This favourable external environment was a pivotal factor in UNTAG's effectiveness, allowing the UN to concentrate on Namibia's internal transition with minimal outside disruption. The Namibian independence process stands out as a case where international consensus and engagement successfully neutralised would-be external spoilers, paving the way for a peaceful and credible transition to sovereignty.

#### **d. Ethnic Dimensions of the Conflict**

Decades of South African rule in Namibia entrenched ethnic divisions as a deliberate tool of colonial control. From 1964 onwards, the apartheid policies sought to fragment Namibian society into separate tribal “homelands” under puppet administrations.<sup>98</sup> The Odendaal Plan and subsequent measures (e.g., *Proclamation AG 8* of 1980) divided the population into 11 mutually exclusive ethnic groups, mirroring South Africa's Bantustan system.<sup>99</sup> This divide-and-rule strategy was intended to prevent national unity and perpetuate white minority domination while exploiting African communities as pools of cheap labour. In practice, it

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<sup>96</sup> United Nations, *Yearbook of the United Nations* 1989, pp. 799–800

<sup>97</sup> United Nations Security Council, *Statement by the President of the Security Council*, S/20946, 3 November 1989

<sup>98</sup> United Nations Council for Namibia, *Report of the United Nations Council for Namibia, 40th Session*, U.N. Doc. A/40/24 (1986), paras. 375–377 (South Africa's ethnic “homelands” policy in Namibia) and paras. 414–415 (Koevoet atrocities and repression).

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*

provoked widespread resistance. Under martial law, occupation forces engaged in “cold-blooded” killings, disappearances, and torture, tactics that inflicted deep ethnic and regional trauma.<sup>100</sup> This legacy of ethnic division and violence formed a critical milieu as UNTAG deployed in April 1989.

As part of Resolution 435, South Africa was compelled to demobilise its multi-ethnic colonial army (SWATF), including affiliated tribal units. Over 9,000 of these ethnic forces were confined to base and disarmed under UNTAG supervision.<sup>101</sup> Two Bushman battalions were a special case: uprooted from traditional life, they remained encamped with family members and under close UN oversight to prevent disruption.<sup>102</sup> More troubling were remnants of Koevoet, a paramilitary unit officially disbanded but quietly reabsorbed into the police. These ex-combatants continued “*unacceptable conduct*”, including intimidation and assault against civilians and SWAPO returnees, drawing condemnation from the UN Secretary-General.<sup>103</sup> Resolution 640 explicitly demanded the disbandment of all paramilitary and ethnic forces, with specific attention to Koevoet and its command structure. By late October, under pressure, South Africa demobilised 1,600 of these fighters.<sup>104</sup>

UNTAG simultaneously advocated dismantling the apartheid-era system of “ethnic administration”, despite the Administrator-General’s objections that such measures lay “outside the scope of the UN plan.”<sup>105</sup> With widespread domestic support and pressure from the Secretary-General, these ethnically segregated local governments were sidelined, as UNTAG took control of administration.<sup>106</sup>

The independence process itself unfolded with minimal ethnic strife. Despite concerns in some quarters that long-standing tribal rivalries or dominance by the majority Ovambo group might derail unity, this did not materialise in the face of a common commitment to nation-building. UNTAG’s presence fostered an environment of political inclusivity and impartiality, diluting ethnic polarisation. Crucially, every party pledged to “*accept and respect the outcome of the elections if certified as free and fair*”<sup>107</sup>. This collective pact of

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<sup>100</sup> United Nations General Assembly, *Report of the Special Committee on Namibia*, A/40/24 (1985), para. 414.

<sup>101</sup> United Nations, *1989 P4 Chapter 3*, p. 797.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., pp. 798–799.

<sup>103</sup> United Nations Security Council Resolution 640 (1989), S/RES/640(1989), paras. 1–2.

<sup>104</sup> *1989 P4 Chapter 3*, p. 804.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., p. 801.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., pp. 801–802.

<sup>107</sup> Code of Conduct for Political Parties during the 1989 Election Campaign, signed 12 September 1989, Clause 8.

good faith was instrumental in preventing ethnic scapegoating or post-election reprisals. As a result, the UN-supervised election in November 1989 saw a massive turnout across all regions and groups, and polling day passed “*without incident*”.<sup>108</sup> SWAPO, which won a plurality of 57% in the Constituent Assembly vote<sup>109</sup> drew its support largely from the Ovambo heartland but also gained votes from other ethnic communities, reflecting a broad nationalist appeal. True to their pledge, both winners and losers accepted the verdict announced by UNTAG’s Special Representative. SWAPO formed a coalition Constituent Assembly and included members of other groups in drafting the new constitution, assuaging minority concerns. No significant ethnic or tribal violence flared up in the transition’s aftermath; on the contrary, observers noted a general unity among Namibians of all backgrounds.

In sum, ethnic divisions, while a factor the UN and Namibian actors had to contend with, did not ultimately prevent UNTAG from fulfilling its mandate. The mission’s effectiveness in Namibia can be partly attributed to its success in blunting the divisive legacy of apartheid: disarming ethnic militias, insisting on a unitary electoral process, and promoting equal political rights for all groups. Equally important, Namibian leaders and citizens demonstrated a remarkable determination to avoid ethnic polarisation by focusing instead on the shared goal of independence. The Namibian case shows that even in a society deliberately segregated by decades of colonial rule, a combination of decisive peacekeeping measures and genuine local commitment to unity can ensure a peaceful transition. UNTAG’s experience thereby underscores that managing the ethnic dimensions of conflict by removing structural inequalities and building inclusive political frameworks were vital for enabling the emergence of a stable, post-conflict nation-state in Namibia.

#### **e. Mandate Clarity and Feasibility**

The mandate of UNTAG in Namibia was defined explicitly in Security Council Resolution 435 (1978). That resolution approved the UN Secretary-General’s plan for Namibia’s transition and “*decided to establish a United Nations Transition Assistance Group to assist the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in carrying out his mandate.*” The core mandate was *to ensure Namibia’s early independence through free and fair elections under*

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<sup>108</sup> United Nations, *1989 Yearbook of the United Nations*, Chapter III: Namibia, p. 803.

<sup>109</sup> Inter-Parliamentary Union, *Namibia: Constituent Assembly, 1989 Elections*, IPU Parline Database.

*UN supervision and control*.<sup>110</sup> In practical terms, the UN plan set forth clear requirements to create conditions for credible elections. Every adult Namibian would be *eligible to vote, campaign and stand for election without discrimination or intimidation*, under secret ballot and with full freedoms of speech, assembly, movement and press.<sup>111</sup> To achieve this, the settlement proposal called for the *repeal of all remaining discriminatory laws*, the release of all political prisoners and detainees, and the *peaceful return of exiled Namibians* so that the entire population could participate freely in the electoral process.<sup>112</sup> These criteria were adopted as guiding principles of UNTAG's mandate and were to be "*scrupulously ensured*" by the UN Special Representative (SRSG) and his staff in Namibia.<sup>113</sup> Notably, Resolution 435 and subsequent Resolution 632 (1989) reaffirmed that the UN plan was the sole agreed basis for settlement and gave the Secretary-General full authority to carry out this mandate, calling on all parties to cooperate fully. The mandate's legal articulation was therefore unambiguous: UNTAG was empowered to supervise a ceasefire, monitor the dismantling of apartheid-era security structures, and guarantee conditions for an internationally acceptable election leading to independence.

UNTAG's mandate was operationalised through a robust institutional structure under Martti Ahtisaari. Rather than direct UN governance, the transition was a "*UN supervised*" process: Namibia continued to be administered by South Africa's appointed Administrator-General, but only "*to the satisfaction of*" the UN SRSG.<sup>114</sup> In practice, Ahtisaari could insist on Changes in laws or policing were necessary to meet the mandate's benchmarks, such as nullifying discriminatory regulations and releasing political prisoners as scheduled. The SRSG reported regularly to UN headquarters, and Security Council Resolution 632 required the Secretary-General to keep the Council informed of implementation progress, ensuring political oversight. Importantly, UNTAG's police component (CIVPOL) was given a strong role: about 500 UN police monitors were deployed (an increase from the 360 originally envisaged in 1978) to oversee the conduct of SWAPOL.<sup>115</sup> These UN police were mandated to "*take measures against any intimidation or interference with the electoral process*" while local authorities formally retained law-and-order duties. The military contingent, for its part,

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<sup>110</sup> United Nations General Assembly, *A/44/24*, "Report of the Special Committee on the Situation with regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples," 1989, Part II, para. 100

<sup>111</sup> United Nations, *Yearbook of the United Nations*, 1989, Chapter III: Namibia, p. 802.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 794–795.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 794

<sup>114</sup> United Nations, *Security Council Resolution 632 (1989)*, para. 4

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*



supervised the ceasefire and troop withdrawals, verifying that “*all hostile acts*” ceased. This extensive but clearly delineated authority structure allowed UNTAG to implement its mandate on the ground.

UNTAG’s mandate was ambitious in scope and constrained by a tight timeline, but it was largely feasible due to the clarity of its objectives. The transition timetable, as defined in the UN plan, allotted only around seven months from the April 1989 cease-fire (D-Day) to the election of a Constituent Assembly in November 1989. In that brief period, UNTAG had to oversee ceasefire compliance, repatriate tens of thousands of refugees, dismantle or reform oppressive state structures, and organise a UN-certified election; all tasks of considerable magnitude. Initial doubts about feasibility arose, particularly regarding resources and personnel. The plan approved in 1978 had envisioned about 7,500 peacekeepers, but by 1989 the UN faced budgetary pressures: some major powers pushed to scale down the military component. SG Javier Pérez de Cuéllar stressed to the SC that if fewer troops were deployed, specific tasks would have to be dropped, since the success of the mandate hinged on having adequate resources for all aspects of the settlement. In the end, a compromise force of about 4,650 troops was deployed (with additional personnel on standby)<sup>116</sup>, and despite this reduction, the core mandate was still achievable.

The mandate’s clarity, a single well-defined political objective (Namibian self-determination via free elections), helped keep all actors focused and deterred overt manipulation. Unlike some open-ended UN missions, UNTAG had “*clear political benchmarks that remained constant, such as an electoral mandate*”.<sup>117</sup>

In sum, UNTAG’s mandate was marked by exceptional clarity of purpose and carefully defined authority, which proved instrumental in guiding Namibia to independence. Legally, the mandate was unambiguously grounded in SC decisions that gave the UN broad supervisory control over the transition; operationally, that mandate was translated into a feasible action plan, thereby maximising the mission’s effectiveness.

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<sup>116</sup> David Lauter, “Day One of U.N.-Supervised Transition to Independence Begins in Namibia,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 1, 1989. Available at: <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1989-04-01-mn-808-story.html>.

<sup>117</sup> Arthur Boutellis and Lisa Sharland, *The Primacy of Politics: Comparing UN Transitions in Namibia, El Salvador, and Cambodia*, International Peace Institute, December 2022, p. 15. Available at: [https://www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/2212\\_The-Primacy-of-Politics.pdf](https://www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/2212_The-Primacy-of-Politics.pdf).

## 2. Case Study: UNPROFOR in Bosnia-Herzegovina

### 2.1 Background and Deployment of UNPROFOR

The violent disintegration of Yugoslavia in 1991-92 set the stage for UNPROFOR's deployment in Bosnia-Herzegovina. As fighting erupted first in Croatia and then spread to Bosnia by April 1992, the UNSC responded with a flurry of resolutions. In September 1991, even before Bosnia's independence, the Council imposed a general arms embargo on all of former Yugoslavia (Resolution 713), aiming to dampen the conflict's intensity. UNPROFOR itself was initially established in February 1992 by Resolution 743, originally to oversee a tenuous Croatia ceasefire as an "interim arrangement to create the conditions of peace and security required for the negotiation of an overall settlement."<sup>118</sup> Its presence in Bosnia soon followed, expanding in an improvised and incremental fashion.<sup>119</sup>

The extension began with a limited troop deployment to secure Sarajevo's airport for humanitarian flights, followed by broader authorisation to escort and protect relief convoys across Bosnia (Resolution 776).<sup>120</sup> As the war intensified, UNPROFOR evolved into a humanitarian shield operating within a live conflict zone, a mission far more complex than traditional peacekeeping. This shift reached a critical point in April 1993, when the Security Council, faced with atrocities in eastern Bosnia, declared Srebrenica a UN "safe area" (Resolution 819).<sup>121</sup> The safe zone concept was soon applied to five other at-risk enclaves: Sarajevo, Tuzla, Žepa, Goražde, and Bihać (Resolution 824).<sup>122</sup> UNPROFOR was tasked with deterring attacks on these zones and monitoring local ceasefires. In June 1993, for the first time, the Council authorised the use of force in self-defence, including NATO air strikes, to protect these areas (Resolution 836).<sup>123</sup>

Yet the resolutions outpaced the mission's means. UN military commanders estimated that 34,000 troops would be needed to credibly deter attacks on the safe zones, but only a fraction of that force was committed.<sup>124</sup> Instead, a scaled-down reinforcement of 7,600 troops was

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<sup>118</sup> United Nations Security Council Resolution 743 (1992), 21 February 1992, para. 5.

<sup>119</sup> United States Department of Defense, *United Nations Peacekeeping: Lessons from the Former Yugoslavia*, ADA313001, Washington, DC: Defense Technical Information Center (DTIC), 1996, p. 14. Available at: <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/tr/pdf/ADA313001.pdf>

<sup>120</sup> United Nations Security Council Resolution 776 (1992), 14 September 1992, as referenced in *Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>121</sup> United Nations Security Council Resolution 819 (1993), 16 April 1993, para. 1.

<sup>122</sup> United Nations Security Council Resolution 824 (1993), 6 May 1993, para. 3.

<sup>123</sup> United Nations Security Council Resolution 836 (1993), 4 June 1993, p. 15.

<sup>124</sup> *United Nations Peacekeeping: Lessons from the Former Yugoslavia*, Defense Technical Information Center (DTIC), 1996, p. 14.

approved in mid-1993 (Resolution 844)<sup>125</sup>, leaving UNPROFOR dangerously overstretched. By late 1993, around 20,000 peacekeepers were deployed across Bosnia; substantial, but inadequate for the demands of a sprawling, high-intensity conflict.<sup>126</sup> The mission's command structure also became more intricate with parallel operations in Croatia and Macedonia, and coordination challenges with NATO further strained decision-making.<sup>127</sup>

Despite these constraints, UNPROFOR delivered limited achievements. It sustained humanitarian aid deliveries, oversaw key local ceasefires, and facilitated the 1994 Bosniak-Croat federation agreement, helping stabilise large parts of the territory. Yet setbacks mounted as the war dragged on. Peacekeepers were often obstructed, harassed, or taken hostage by belligerents. Attempts to protect safe areas were repeatedly undermined. In July 1995, Bosnian Serb forces overran Srebrenica, resulting in the massacre of thousands; a failure that exposed UNPROFOR's limited deterrence capacity and marked a nadir in UN peacekeeping history.

The fall of Žepa soon followed, reinforcing perceptions of international impotence. It was only after NATO's Operation Deliberate Force in August-September 1995 that Serb leaders were compelled to negotiate. The Dayton Peace Accords ended the war later that year. UNPROFOR's mission formally concluded in December 1995, with its responsibilities transferred to NATO's Implementation Force (IFOR).<sup>128</sup>

Over nearly four years, UNPROFOR's role evolved dramatically: from a classical observer mission to a struggling hybrid operation, caught between humanitarian aims and the harsh logic of war. The following section evaluates UNPROFOR's performance through a factor-by-factor lens to understand the shortcomings that led to its failure.

## **2.2 Assessing UNPROFOR's Effectiveness: Factor-by-Factor Analysis**

### **a. Local Consent, Cooperation, and Ownership**

Effective UN peacekeeping hinges on the consent and cooperation of the local warring parties, a condition that was only ever lukewarm in the Bosnian theatre. UNPROFOR operated "in a hostile environment with the half-hearted consent of the warring parties."

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<sup>125</sup> United Nations Security Council Resolution 844 (1993), 18 June 1993, para. 2.

<sup>126</sup> U.S. DoD, *UN Peacekeeping: Lessons from the Former Yugoslavia*, p. 16.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 16–17.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., p.15.

From the outset, none of the Bosnian belligerents fully accepted the UN's neutrality. Each faction tended to view UNPROFOR as an obstacle to its military goals or a pawn of its enemies. Bosnian Serb forces (VRS) were especially bold: they harassed convoys, confiscated supplies, cut utilities to UN-protected areas, and even fired directly on UN personnel. On multiple occasions, they detained peacekeepers as hostages to deter NATO strikes or extract concessions. Serbs captured UN soldiers to stop airstrikes during the Goražde crisis in 1994 and again in May 1995.

Less acknowledged, the Bosnian government (Bosniak/Muslim) also defied UNPROFOR when it suited them. Although they invited peacekeepers and publicly supported the UN, their forces (ARBiH) sometimes gave them similar treatment. They sniped at UN troops, shelled the Sarajevo airport to implicate Serbs, and blocked UN movements. In 1993, rogue elements hijacked UN armoured vehicles, prompting a government crackdown on criminal brigades. In 1994, the Bosnian government's strategy included "obtaining as much humanitarian aid as possible... while discrediting the United Nations". Their cooperation was tactical; they wanted UNPROFOR present enough to draw sympathy but not enough to block military goals.

Bosnian Croats (HVO), backed by Croatia, also obstructed UNPROFOR. During 1992-93, they fought Bosniaks fiercely, especially in Mostar, where both sides seized peacekeepers, blocked convoys, and fired on UN forces. Less reliant on UN aid due to Croatian support, HVO forces sometimes shelled UN positions to pressure both the UN and their Muslim rivals. Only after the March 1994 Washington Agreement, which formed a Muslim-Croat Federation, did their stance shift. The two sides jointly requested UN monitoring and granted access across Federation lines. This local buy-in paid off: UNPROFOR rapidly deployed peacekeepers, cleared roads, and helped make the ceasefire stick.

In sum, UNPROFOR in Bosnia lacked the common consent of the belligerent parties, which is the bedrock of traditional peacekeeping. Warring factions obstructed movements, used civilians as roadblocks, and denied flight safety for UN helicopters. UNPROFOR had to negotiate or bargain for basic access. Concessions were fragile, often secured through third-party mediation or "carrot-and-stick" tactics. Only in late 1994, under US pressure via Jimmy Carter, did parties agree to a countrywide ceasefire (COHA), a fragile truce reached nearly three years into the war. Until then, UNPROFOR operated in defiance of, not in

cooperation with, the belligerents. The deterrent value of NATO's air power was limited because the Serbs soon realised UNPROFOR would not approve large-scale attacks.<sup>129</sup>

## **b. Military Balance of Power**

The balance (or imbalance) of military power among the warring factions in Bosnia deeply affected UNPROFOR's operating context and the prospects for peace. In the conflict triangle of Serbs, Croats, and Bosniaks in Bosnia, the Bosnian Serb forces maintained a significant military advantage for the majority of the war, particularly in heavy weapons. This was due to the legacy of Yugoslavia's breakup, which left the Serbs in possession of the majority of the Yugoslav People's Army arsenal. By early 1994, the Bosnian Serbs controlled roughly 70% of Bosnia-Herzegovina's territory, including almost all the strategic high ground around Sarajevo and other key cities.<sup>130</sup> This dominance was not just territorial but also material. Estimates at the end of 1993 indicated the Serb army possessed on the order of 330 tanks, 400 armoured personnel carriers, and 800 artillery pieces<sup>131</sup>, giving it overwhelming firepower relative to the Bosnian government's forces, which were straining under an international arms embargo. The Bosniak-led Army of Bosnia-Herzegovina (ARBiH), cobbled together from former territorial defence units and civilian volunteers, was severely underequipped at the war's outset due to prewar disarmament by the Serb-dominated JNA. Even after modest improvements by late 1993 (partly via illicit arms inflows and battlefield capture), the ARBiH inventory was estimated at only about 85 tanks, 130 APCs, and 300 heavy guns. In other words, the Serbs had roughly three to four times the heavy weaponry of the Bosnian government forces.

Croatia's regular army directly supported the Bosnian Croat forces (HVO), despite their smaller numbers. By 1994 the HVO was "extremely well-equipped" thanks to Zagreb's provision of arms: estimates ranged between 250-500 tanks, 400-600 Armored Personnel Carriers, and up to 2,000 artillery pieces.<sup>132</sup> Thus, in pure military terms, the Bosnian government was the weakest, especially in 1992-93.

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<sup>129</sup> This analysis is based on United States Department of Defense, *United Nations Peacekeeping: Lessons from the Former Yugoslavia*, ADA313001, Washington, DC: Defense Technical Information Center, 1996. Available at: <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/tr/pdf/ADA313001.pdf>.

<sup>130</sup> Steven Burg and Paul Shoup, *The War in Bosnia-Herzegovina: Ethnic Conflict and International Intervention* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1999), p. 139.

<sup>131</sup> *United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR)*, "The Arms Embargo Against the Former Yugoslavia," *UNIDIR/94/36*, Geneva: United Nations, 1994, p. 17. See also: "Army of Republika Srpska," Wikipedia, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Army\\_of\\_the\\_Republika\\_Srpska](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Army_of_the_Republika_Srpska)

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 57.

This imbalance had critical implications for UNPROFOR's mission. The siege of Sarajevo, the longest in modern Europe, was sustained by Serb artillery emplacements that UNPROFOR and the lightly armed Sarajevo defenders could not neutralise. UNPROFOR often had to rely on voluntary Serb cooperation or heavy-weapons exclusion zones.<sup>133</sup> Only in February 1994 did NATO (with UN authorisation) force a partial withdrawal around Sarajevo, which temporarily eased the artillery barrage. The arms embargo imposed by Resolution 713 in 1991 exacerbated the imbalance by freezing the status quo, which heavily favoured the Serbs. Bosniak leaders often argued this perpetuated their inferiority and fuelled their hopes for foreign intervention.

By January 1994, Bosnian Serb leaders believed "the war was over" in practical terms and sought a ceasefire to consolidate gains.<sup>134</sup> Their objectives focused on eliminating isolated Bosniak enclaves and cementing territorial corridors. Conversely, the Bosniak leadership hoped for a reversal of fortune and was reluctant to accept any ceasefire that legitimised Serb conquests. This asymmetry prolonged the conflict and undermined peacemaking.

In one striking example, during the 1994 Serb assault on Goražde, General Michael Rose declined to escalate NATO air strikes, warning: "You do not fight a war in white vehicles... We are not in the business of going to war in order to create conditions of peace."<sup>135</sup> His caution reflected the reality that UNPROFOR lacked both the firepower and political mandate to take sides. The Serbs, emboldened by their military edge, often tested the limits of UN/NATO deterrence and eventually overcame their "fear"<sup>136</sup> of Western military retaliation.

The Bosnian Army's capacity modestly improved in 1994-95, partly thanks to covert support and the creation of the Bosniak-Croat Federation. By then, ARBiH had about 60,000 troops and 120,000 reserves, though mostly light infantry.<sup>137</sup> These changes created a military stalemate that helped end the war but came too late to save UNPROFOR from its constraints. As a campaign plan noted, UNPROFOR's mandate ultimately focused on "containing the

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid., p. 56.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., p. 55.

<sup>135</sup> David Binder, "U.N. General Opposes More Bosnia Force," The New York Times, 29 September 1994. <https://www.nytimes.com/1994/09/29/world/un-general-opposes-more-bosnia-force.html>.

<sup>136</sup> Srebrenica 1993–1995 transcript, The Hague, Session 2 (2015), p. 55.

<sup>137</sup> United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR), "The Arms Embargo Against the Former Yugoslavia," UNIDIR/94/36, Geneva: United Nations, 1994, p. 55.

conflict and ameliorating humanitarian consequences”<sup>138</sup> until hard-power diplomacy could prevail.

### **c. External Interference**

The war in Bosnia-Herzegovina was never a sealed internal affair; it was fuelled and shaped by substantial external interference, from neighbouring states meddling on behalf of their ethnic kin to great powers and international organisations attempting to steer the conflict’s outcome.

Foremost were the roles of Serbia and Croatia. Serbia, under Milošević, provided critical backing to the Bosnian Serb entity, supplying arms, fuel, manpower, and financial support, effectively treating the Bosnian Serb army as an extension of its own war effort. This cross-border intervention was noted by the UN: Resolution 819 demanded Belgrade cease its military support, and the ICJ’s interim order urged Serbia to prevent genocide in Bosnia, implying it held sway over the Bosnian Serb forces.<sup>139</sup> By mid-1994, Milošević curtailed aid to Pale to pressure the Bosnian Serbs toward a settlement, but only after years of decisive support. Serbia’s hand was also visible through propaganda and logistical links.

Croatia, meanwhile, supported the Bosnian Croats and facilitated the establishment of “Herceg-Bosna”, a self-proclaimed Croat political and territorial entity established by Bosnian Croats. Croatian Army officers commanded HVO units, and heavy weaponry from Zagreb equipped Bosnian Croat forces. This support allowed for Croat-Muslim clashes in 1993 and obstructed UN aid deliveries, especially in contested areas like Mostar.<sup>140</sup> Croatian influence remained decisive until the Washington Agreement in 1994, when international pressure led to Croat-Muslim reconciliation.

On the positive side, some external actors pursued conflict resolution. The Contact Group and mediators like Vance and Owen proposed peace plans, but divisions among international powers weakened a unified strategy. The 1993 Vance-Owen Plan, for instance, was accepted by Croats under Western pressure but rejected by Serbs, while UNPROFOR remained on the ground managing ceasefires amidst wavering diplomatic backing.

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<sup>138</sup> This phrasing reflects a synthesis of UNPROFOR’s stated mandate and operational evolution as outlined in various UNSC resolutions and UN reporting (see e.g. UN Security Council Resolution 776 (1992).

<sup>139</sup> United Nations Security Council, Resolution 819 (1993).

<sup>140</sup> ICTY, *Prosecutor v. Kupreškić et al.*, Trial Judgment, IT-95-16-T, 14 January 2000, para. 126.

NATO played a pivotal yet inconsistent role. Authorised by the UN to enforce a no-fly zone and provide air support to UNPROFOR, NATO's capacity remained underused due to the "dual-key" system.<sup>141</sup> Only in 1995, after public outcry over atrocities, did NATO launch robust strikes (Operation Deliberate Force) that crippled Serb positions and shifted the war's momentum. Until then, UNPROFOR's credibility rested more on the perceived will of external actors than on its own mandate.

Another layer of external involvement came through Islamic networks. Several hundred foreign fighters from the Middle East joined the Bosniak cause, though they had little military impact. More consequential was the political backing from Gulf countries, which often came in the form of religious influence rather than tangible aid. The US sought to contain the rise of Islamic fundamentalism and to avoid repeating earlier missteps in the region, while still appearing supportive of Bosnia's Muslim-led government. To balance these goals, Washington reportedly authorised limited arms transfers and humanitarian airlifts, partly to dissuade Islamic countries from becoming more deeply involved.<sup>142</sup> These dynamics, though rarely acknowledged in UNPROFOR's official records, fueled Serb narratives that UN forces were sheltering Islamist militants, complicating operations on the ground.

In sum, Bosnia's war was heavily internationalised. Neighbouring states' military and political involvement exacerbated hostilities, while uneven Western engagement delayed decisive action. UNPROFOR's capacity to implement its mandate was repeatedly undercut by this external interference, both malign and, at times, beneficial. While NATO and diplomatic initiatives eventually shifted the balance, the mission spent much of its time navigating competing outside agendas, often with limited authority to shape events.

#### **d. Ethnic Dimensions of the Conflict**

The Bosnian war was fundamentally an ethno-national conflict; Serbs, Croats, and Bosniaks vying for territory and survival, and this fact coloured every aspect of UNPROFOR's mission. The violence often aimed to displace or eliminate other ethnic communities through ethnic cleansing, a practice condemned by the UN Security Council as a grave violation of

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<sup>141</sup> U.S. Department of the Army, *Peacekeeping and Related Stability Operations: The U.S. Army's Role in Peacekeeping Operations*, Pamphlet 525-100-7 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1994), p. 139.

<sup>142</sup> This paragraph is based entirely on Bjarnason, *UNPROFOR: United Nations Protection Force in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia and Macedonia* (U.S. Army War College, 1995), pp. 72–73.



international humanitarian law. Resolution 819 explicitly “strongly condemns” the Bosnian Serb forces’ campaign of terror against Muslim villages in eastern Bosnia and declares any acquisition of territory by force and “ethnic cleansing” as unacceptable.<sup>143</sup>

Reports of mass killings and expulsions prompted international action, including the creation of safe areas and the establishment of a War Crimes Tribunal. Yet for peacekeepers, countering deep-rooted ethnic hatred required tools beyond conventional mandates. Each group’s zero-sum objectives obstructed compromise. For Serb nationalists, a multi-ethnic Bosnia was unacceptable. Their vision of an ethnically homogenous Republika Srpska drove brutal expulsions and sieges, most notably in Srebrenica.

The UN’s response, declaring Srebrenica a “safe area”, required both protection and demilitarisation. The Bosniaks were expected to halt attacks from within, while Serbs were expected to cease offensives. In reality, full demilitarisation was never achieved, and Serb forces never relinquished their aim of capturing the enclave. Despite the presence of lightly armed Dutch peacekeepers, Serb forces overran Srebrenica in July 1995, committing genocide against over 8,000 Bosniak men and boys.<sup>144</sup> UN commanders had earlier warned that without stronger action, the safe areas risked becoming internment camps for trapped civilians, a fear that became reality in Srebrenica and Žepa.

Ethnicity also shaped perceptions of UNPROFOR’s neutrality. Serbs accused the UN of bias toward Muslims; Bosniaks accused it of appeasing Serbs. Each group weaponised propaganda. For instance, Serb-controlled Kanal S portrayed the UN as a pro-Muslim tool of the West, while Bosniak media accused peacekeepers of cowardice or complicity in Serb aggression.<sup>145</sup> Government forces in Sarajevo leveraged civilian suffering to attract foreign sympathy and push for intervention. As a result, UNPROFOR’s impartiality satisfied no one. Its reputation suffered as all parties manipulated media narratives for strategic gain.

Aid distribution was similarly distorted by ethnic rivalry. Each faction sought to direct UN relief to its population while denying it to others. Bosnian Serb authorities had an explicit strategy of maximising aid to Serb-held areas while obstructing deliveries elsewhere.<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> UNSC Resolution 819 (1993), paras. 1–2.

<sup>144</sup> Human Rights Watch, *The Fall of Srebrenica and the Failure of UN Peacekeeping: Bosnia and Herzegovina*, October 15, 1995. Available at: <https://www.hrw.org/report/1995/10/15/fall-srebrenica-and-failure-un-peacekeeping/bosnia-and-herzegovina>.

<sup>145</sup> United Nations, *The United Nations and the Situation in the Former Yugoslavia: UNPROFOR Background Report*, p. 43.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

Convoys were looted, delayed, or allowed only if significant shares were handed to the faction in control. The Serbs used sieges to cut off electricity, water, and medical access to towns like Sarajevo and Srebrenica. On the Bosniak side, local actors sometimes diverted aid to their own military or used it for political patronage. UNPROFOR often had to rely on local authorities to fairly distribute aid, which rarely happened across ethnic lines.

The ethnic logic of the war also jeopardised Bosnia's pluralist identity. Sarajevo symbolised this battle; a multi-ethnic city besieged by forces that viewed coexistence as a threat. UNPROFOR's presence there, through checkpoints and aid, was as much symbolic as practical, asserting a commitment to preserving Bosnia's diversity. In contrast, many regions saw complete ethnic separation. In central Bosnia, post-war segregation between Croats and Muslims became entrenched, with UNPROFOR relegated to monitoring ethnic boundaries rather than fostering reintegration.

UNPROFOR's limitations in halting ethnic violence underscore how ethnic warfighting logic clashed with the UN's normative framework. The mission was not equipped to reverse ethnic cleansing by force, only to mitigate it. This made impartiality ethically sensitive. When peacekeepers did not intervene, they were considered indifferent. The safe areas were an attempt to balance neutrality with protection, but that promise failed disastrously in Srebrenica. Bosnia showed that in ethno-nationalist conflicts, traditional peacekeeping, premised on cooperation and neutrality, may be inherently ill-suited unless backed by robust enforcement and clear political will.

#### **e. Mandate Clarity and Feasibility**

UNPROFOR's mandate in Bosnia evolved rapidly and, many critics argue, incoherently, a reflection of the international community's ambivalence about how far to go in response to the war. Clarity and feasibility of mandate are crucial for any peacekeeping mission's success. In Bosnia, UNPROFOR was saddled with a mandate that was multi-layered, frequently revised, and only partially matched with resources, leading to confusion on the ground. There is a giant gap between the resolutions and the means available to commanders in the field. This gap encapsulates the twin problems of mandate clarity and feasibility.

At the outset, UNPROFOR was conceived (for Croatia) as a traditional peacekeeping force to supervise a ceasefire and protect designated areas (UN Protected Areas). However, when the mandate was applied to Bosnia's ongoing conflict, it became considerably more ambiguous.

SC resolutions piled on task after task without an overarching strategic concept. For example, Resolution 743 (1992) created UNPROFOR with a broad political aim: "to create conditions for an overall peace settlement," but in Bosnia, this translated into ad hoc humanitarian objectives rather than a clear end-state. The initial Bosnia-specific mandates (Res. 761, 776) were narrowly focused on facilitating relief delivery and securing the Sarajevo airport. These could be considered concrete. Indeed, UNPROFOR succeeded in keeping the airport open and escorting hundreds of aid convoys. However, as the conflict worsened, the Council expanded UNPROFOR's mandate without commensurate adjustments in force posture or rules of engagement to ensure feasibility. Resolutions 819 (April 1993) and 824 (May 1993) declared six "safe areas" and demanded they be free from armed attack. Resolution 836 (June 1993) then "enlarged" UNPROFOR's mandate under Chapter VII to deter attacks on safe areas, monitor ceasefires, promote withdrawal of hostile forces, "occupy some key points", and support humanitarian relief. The language of 836 was robust on paper; it even authorised UNPROFOR to "take the necessary measures, including the use of force, in self-defence." However, it omitted critical details. There was no clear definition of the geographic boundaries of the safe areas or what exactly constituted an "attack" on them. The mandate said UNPROFOR should "deter" attacks, a term open to interpretation. Could deterrence involve offensive action? The resolutions did not explicitly say UNPROFOR could proactively defend the enclaves beyond self-defence. Instead, they authorised use of force in self-defence and to ensure freedom of movement and protection of civilians. This deliberate ambiguity was the product of SC political compromise, especially to get Russia and non-aligned members who had diplomatic ties with Serbia on board.

Compounding the unclear scope, the feasibility of these tasks was questionable given the troop levels and equipment. When UNPROFOR commanders asked for 34,000 reinforcements to implement the safe area mandate, the Council approved only 7,600; enough to deploy perhaps a battalion to each safe area, not to hermetically seal an enclave under siege. In many safe areas, UNPROFOR's presence consisted of a company (roughly 100-150 soldiers) or less of troops, thinly spread and positioned as "visible tripwires" rather than a true defence force. This mismatch led to situations where the UN troops' only recourse when a safe area came under attack was to report the violation, perhaps call in a token air strike, and negotiate desperately, rather than actually secure the area. In essence, the SC handed UNPROFOR a Chapter VII enforcement-flavoured mandate but with Chapter VI-level means. The result was that UNPROFOR leaders often had to define their own mission

priorities to make sense of it all. Upon assuming command in January 1994, Gen. Michael Rose discovered that UNPROFOR's constantly changing mandate in Bosnia posed a dynamic challenge for its military planners, resulting in impromptu planning and disorganised execution. Rose's solution was to craft a campaign plan that translated the muddled UN mandates into a concrete set of military objectives for B-H Command.<sup>147</sup> This plan essentially reinterpreted the mandate in clearer terms: prioritise containment of the conflict, protection of humanitarian operations, and limited protection of civilian areas with the end goal of creating conditions for a peace agreement. The campaign plan concept, borrowed from military doctrine, helped impose internal clarity. But it was a workaround for the absence of a crisp mandate from above.

Another area of ambiguity was the use of force. The resolutions after mid-1993 (836, 844) implied UNPROFOR could call for NATO air support to protect itself and the safe areas. However, the command and control arrangements for such a force were convoluted. The UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the field SRSG retained a veto (the infamous "dual-key") over NATO strikes, often slowing proposed missions for fear of political ramifications or hostage reprisals. Peacekeepers on the ground were unsure how aggressively they could act without losing their neutral status. Gen. Briquemont sharply pointed out this dilemma, emphasising the gap between UNPROFOR's theoretical authority and its practical limitations: "I don't read the Security Council resolutions any more because they don't help me. There is a fantastic gap between the resolutions and the means available to commanders in the field."<sup>148</sup> The clarity issue also extended to the political end-state. Different UN documents and officials voiced different goals: Was UNPROFOR in Bosnia to deliver humanitarian aid? To enforce peace? To protect human rights? The original mandate (743) talked about facilitating an overall Yugoslav settlement; later resolutions talked about upholding the "peace plan" (like the Vance-Owen plan). But as those peace plans changed or failed, UNPROFOR was left without a clearly defined political blueprint to support. Thus, the mission often appeared reactive, putting out fires without a long-term strategy.

Feasibility was further undermined by logistical and operational challenges unforeseen by mandate drafters. Warring parties established hundreds of checkpoints that routinely disregarded UN mandates, forcing UNPROFOR to negotiate passage each time, a

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<sup>147</sup> William T. Johnsen, *United Nations Peacekeeping: Lessons from the Former Yugoslavia* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 1996), p. 21.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

burdensome process that is not reflected in Security Council decisions. The mandate did not anticipate dilemmas like factional violations of safe areas, minefields, or armed incursions from within the enclaves. These grey zones forced field officers to make judgement calls. Sometimes the situation led to hesitancy, other times to overreach.

In sum, UNPROFOR's mandate in Bosnia suffered from mission creep without mission clarity. It expanded from peacekeeping to quasi-enforcement tasks but never resolved the inherent contradiction in trying to "keep peace" where there was none. Bosnia was a textbook case of "wider peacekeeping"<sup>149</sup>, operations with the general consent of the parties, but in an environment too volatile for traditional peacekeeping. Although UNPROFOR was nominally a Chapter VI mission, it frequently found itself in Chapter VII situations. The mandate never squarely reconciled this. The result: when UNPROFOR succeeded, it was often through improvisation and diplomacy beyond its written mandate; when it failed, it was because the tasks asked of it were beyond what it could realistically achieve. The safe areas policy epitomised this. While morally imperative, it was militarily under-resourced and ill-defined, thereby almost guaranteeing a reliance on the belligerents' voluntary restraint, which did not materialise. In retrospect, Bosnia taught the UN that mandate and means must align. Vague promises of protection without the will or capability to implement them can do more harm than good, eroding UN credibility.

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<sup>149</sup> Michael J. Fallon, *The United Nations Protection Force's Effectiveness in Bosnia: Campaign Planning and Peacekeeping*, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 1996), 12. Available at: <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/tr/pdf/ADA313001.pdf>.

### **3. Results and Discussion**

This section addresses the central research question: *How do various factors contribute to the effectiveness and ultimate success or failure of UN peacekeeping operations?* It does so by comparing two contrasting case studies, (1) UNTAG in Namibia and (2) UNPROFOR in Bosnia, and testing five key hypotheses derived from peacekeeping theory. Each hypothesis highlights a factor thought to influence mission outcomes. By examining each factor in turn, we can evaluate similarities and differences between the Namibia and Bosnia missions, determine whether the factor was present or absent, and assess its impact on each mission's effectiveness.

#### **H1. Missions are more effective when local parties consent, cooperate, and take ownership of the peace process.**

The two cases illustrate the decisive importance of local consent and cooperation. In Namibia, H1 was strongly affirmed. With both SWAPO and the South African side committed to the UN process, UNTAG had the legitimacy and support needed to implement its mandate effectively. In Bosnia, H1's conditions were largely missing; a fundamental reason why UNPROFOR struggled. A UN mission can hardly succeed as a neutral peacekeeper when the warring parties themselves are not ready to lay down arms or respect UN authority. The contrast suggests that genuine local consent and cooperation were a cornerstone of UNTAG's success, whereas the lack of common consent in Bosnia fatally limited UNPROFOR's effectiveness.

#### **H2. Balanced military strength between belligerents increases mission success.**

These cases suggest that H2 is valid: a more balanced military situation makes peacekeeping more viable. In Namibia, although an imbalance existed initially, UNTAG's success was contingent on quickly reducing that disparity, effectively creating conditions of balance (or at least eliminating overwhelming dominance) as a foundation for the political process.

In Bosnia, the failure to achieve any balance of power during UNPROFOR's deployment kept the conflict hot and one-sided, meaning the parties had little incentive to cooperate with peacekeepers. In essence, where Namibia's mission benefited from a managed equilibrium, Bosnia's mission was undermined by unchecked military asymmetry. This comparison

supports the hypothesis that parity, or a checked balance between belligerents, is a key factor in mission success.

### **H3. Foreign support to warring parties reduces mission effectiveness.**

The role of external actors in the two cases could not have been more different, and the outcomes align with H3's expectation. Namibia benefited from a benign external environment. When foreign powers ceased supporting local belligerents and instead united behind the peace process, the UN mission had a clear path to succeed.

Bosnia, conversely, was sabotaged by foreign support to the combatants. Serbia's and Croatia's meddling stoked the war and gave local forces incentives to defy UNPROFOR. The lack of a single, unified international stance meant UNPROFOR received mixed signals (e.g., UN on the ground vs. NATO's limited strikes vs. great-power disagreements) and lacked the full backing needed to enforce peace. The comparison underscores that when outside states pour fuel on a conflict, peacekeeping missions are far less effective. Thus H3 is affirmed overall, but its relevance is only partial (high for Bosnia's failure, limited for Namibia).

### **H4. Ethnic divisions in the conflict make peacekeeping more difficult.**

The Namibia and Bosnia cases confirm that intense ethnic divisions greatly increase the difficulty of peacekeeping, though they also show that leadership and context can mediate this factor. In Namibia's case, ethnic divisions existed but did not drive the conflict, and both the UN and Namibian actors successfully minimised ethnic antagonism during the peace process. Consequently, ethnicity was not a serious impediment to UNTAG achieving its goals. By contrast, in Bosnia the conflict's ethnic nature was a central reason for UNPROFOR's failure. The hypothesis H4 is borne out in that Bosnia's deeply divided society and ethnically charged violence created a nightmare scenario for a peacekeeping operation. Thus, H4 is validated: deep ethnic divisions made the Bosnian mission far more challenging and contributed to its limited success, whereas the relative absence of such divisions in Namibia smoothed UNTAG's path.

### **H5. Clear, realistic mandates improve mission performance.**

The clarity and realism of the mandate emerge as a critical differentiator between UNTAG and UNPROFOR. UNTAG's focused, well-articulated mandate provided a solid blueprint for success. Every side knew the mission's scope and final objective, and UNTAG's structure was designed to meet that goal. This allowed effective coordination and gave the mission

credibility. UNPROFOR's mandate, by contrast, was a moving target which severely undermined the mission. The Bosnia case demonstrates that a confusing mandate can translate to paralysis in the field and can erode the mission's authority when expectations are unfulfilled. Thus, H5 is strongly supported: a clear, realistic mandate was a cornerstone of UNTAG's positive outcome, whereas the absence of such clarity in Bosnia contributed to UNPROFOR's shortcomings.

In sum, the contrast is clear: UNTAG succeeded because it entered a cooperative political environment with a coherent mandate, balanced military conditions and aligned international support, all in a context where ethnic tensions were managed through an inclusive process. UNPROFOR failed because none of these factors were present; there was no common consent, no clear strategy, a lopsided power balance, and intense external meddling amid an ethnically charged war, leaving the mission overwhelmed despite any isolated successes. These comparisons demonstrate that each factor's causal impact depended on context: all were mitigated by Namibia's favourable conditions but exacerbated Bosnia's conflict, ultimately determining the divergent outcomes.

As a result, Table 1 presents the complete findings of the assessment and comparison.

**Table 1. UN Peacekeeping Effectiveness: Cross-Case Factor Evaluation**

Factor	UNTAG	UNPROFOR	Relevance to effectiveness
Local Consent, Cooperation, and Ownership	✓	×	High
Military Balance of Power	✓	×	High
External Interference	×	✓	Partial
Ethnic Dimensions of the Conflict	✓	✓	Partial



Mandate Clarity and Feasibility	✓	×	High
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Source: Author’s own elaboration based on case study findings and referenced sources.

## Conclusion

This thesis set out to answer the question of what key factors influence the effectiveness of United Nations peacekeeping operations, as examined through a comparative study of UNTAG in Namibia and UNPROFOR in Bosnia. The research question was framed to probe why UNTAG succeeded in implementing Namibia's transition to peace while UNPROFOR struggled amid the Bosnian War and to determine which broad categories of factors most critically shape peacekeeping outcomes. In restating this question, the aim was to discern not just case-specific details but general insights into UN peacekeeping effectiveness.

Analytically, this thesis identifies five primary factors that influence peacekeeping effectiveness: (1) *local consent, cooperation, and ownership*; (2) *military balance of power*; (3) *external interference*; (4) *ethnic dimensions of the conflict*; and (5) *mandate clarity and feasibility*. Importantly, these variables are not isolated but mutually reinforcing. The findings clearly indicate that the first two factors were decisive. Local consent, cooperation, and ownership, together with a clear and feasible mandate, emerged as the most relevant determinants of peacekeeping effectiveness. Where a UN mission enjoyed genuine buy-in from the main local parties and had well-defined, achievable objectives, it was far better equipped to implement its core functions and adapt to challenges, leading to success.

Crucially, these two factors shaped the UN's ability to manage the other three. Strong local consent and a robust mandate enabled the mission in Namibia to mitigate initial obstacles related to external interference, ethnic tensions, and an uneven military balance of power. Despite facing all three challenges at the outset, UNTAG's effective mandate design and local cooperation allowed it to neutralise them. The mission, backed by unified international support, shepherded the withdrawal of South Africa's occupying forces and restrained its once-dominant military advantage, thereby levelling the playing field and building mutual trust among former adversaries. In Bosnia, by contrast, the lack of clear consent from all parties and the ambiguity of UNPROFOR's mandate left the operation ill-equipped to confront similar challenges. External interference in the Bosnian war severely undermined UNPROFOR's authority and freedom of action. Deep-seated ethnic divisions further intensified the conflict's brutality and complicated the mission's context, yet without local cooperation or a forceful mandate, the UN had scant ability to contain those forces. The warring parties exploited UNPROFOR's limitations. Lacking full consent, belligerents frequently obstructed UN operations and pursued military victory, making it impossible for

the mission to alter the adverse military balance of power or prevent atrocities. In the hierarchy of influences, these aspects were thus contingent factors; their positive impact manifested only when the overarching political conditions were favourable. Notably, local consent and mandate viability are interrelated preconditions that anchor all other aspects of a mission. In the words of Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, “When all parties consent, preventive deployment could help in several ways to control violence.”<sup>150</sup>

In sum, this comparative study highlights that even though each conflict had unique complexities, the fundamental factors of committed local cooperation and a coherent, feasible mandate were the linchpins of effectiveness. External pressures, ethnic strife, and power imbalances, while important, did not singularly dictate outcomes; rather, it was the UN’s ability (or inability) to manage those pressures through a clear strategy and local partnership that proved decisive. Moreover, the success of PKOs is conditional. Ceasefires may fail or succeed due to factors beyond a mission’s control. Even if the United Nations cannot address every external variable shaping a conflict, it remains the only international institution with the legitimacy and capacity to support peace on such a scale.

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<sup>150</sup> Boutros Boutros-Ghali, *An Agenda for Peace: Preventive Diplomacy, Peacemaking and Peace-Keeping*, UN Doc. A/47/277-S/24111, 17 June 1992, para. 24.

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