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Protection of Civilians in Partnership Peacekeeping

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Executive Summary

In many of today's conflict contexts, the UN is no longer the primary security provider, with regional and subregional organizations and ad hoc coalitions of states assuming an increasing share of the global burden of peacekeeping. These non-UN missions sometimes deploy alongside UN missions through a wide range of cooperation arrangements termed "partnership peacekeeping." However, it is unclear how this trend toward partnership peacekeeping will impact the protection of civilians (POC). POC is not a central component of most non-UN missions, and their understanding and operationalization of POC differs. In particular, most non-UN missions adopt a more militarized approach.

To assess the effect of partnership peacekeeping on POC, this paper presents the findings of an analysis of more than seventy intrastate conflicts in Africa from 1993 to 2023. It evaluates how UN and non-UN missions, operating both independently and in parallel, affect violence against civilians. The analysis reveals that UN-led missions are associated with a reduction in violence against civilians by non-state armed groups, as are missions led by the African Union and European Union (analyzed together), while other non-UN missions do not significantly reduce civilian targeting. However, non-UN missions appear more effective in limiting state violence against civilians, a pattern noted in earlier studies, though still in need of a good explanation. Crucially, parallel deployments of UN and non-UN missions do not enhance civilian protection beyond when the UN deploys alone.

These insights challenge the assumption that partner-led peacekeeping can fully substitute for UN-led operations. As the UN rethinks its peacekeeping role in response to shifting global dynamics, it needs to preserve its multidimensional approach to POC while ensuring that partnership models are designed to mitigate, rather than exacerbate, risks to civilians.

Introduction

Protection of civilians (POC) is a central objective—if not the raison d'être—of contemporary UN peace operations. However, in many conflict contexts, the UN is no longer the primary security provider. Since 2015, when then-Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon declared a new "era of partnership peacekeeping,"[1] regional and subregional organizations, as well as ad hoc coalitions of states, have launched more than ten new peace operations, while the UN has not initiated any new peacekeeping operations during the same period.[2] In 2024, the secretary-general endorsed this global partnership for peacekeeping in the New Agenda for Peace and called for the strengthening of regional and subregional organizations to address an increasingly complex conflict environment.[3]

To date, there has been little examination of the implications of this shift toward partnership peacekeeping for the protection of civilians in armed conflict. Non-UN responses to armed violence are a welcome development given that new UN missions are unlikely in the current geopolitical landscape and existing ones face pressure to downsize or withdraw. However, POC is not a central component of all or even most non-UN missions. Even the African Union (AU), which has largely adopted the UN's approaches to POC, lacks the UN's experience and capacity to protect civilians.[4] Moreover, the parallel shift to regional peace enforcement and counterterrorism operations introduces new risks of civilian harm.[5]

Given these dynamics, this issue brief examines the impact of partnership peacekeeping on the protection of civilians. The first section traces the evolution of partnership peacekeeping. The second section compares understandings and practices of POC across different peacekeeping providers. The third section presents the results of statistical analyses on the effects of UN, non-UN, and parallel deployments on violence against civilians. The final section reflects on the implications of these findings for the future of partnership peacekeeping.

Partnership Peacekeeping

The term "partnership peacekeeping" encompasses a wide range of cooperation arrangements between UN and non-UN missions. Broadly, these arrangements can be categorized into sequential and simultaneous deployments.

In sequential deployments, a UN mission takes over from a non-UN mission or vice versa, with or without re-hatting (the transfer of troops from one mission to another). A recent example is the Central African Republic (CAR), where in 2014, the AU-led mission (MISCA) transitioned into the UN mission (MINUSCA) through re-hatting.

There are two types of simultaneous deployments: hybrid or joint missions and parallel missions. Hybrid or joint missions, where UN and non-UN actors operate under a shared command-and-control structure, have been relatively rare.[6] Parallel deployments, where a UN mission and one or more non-UN missions operate alongside each other, are more common.[7] Parallel deployments usually feature one larger mission and a partner organization with a smaller presence. The smaller mission may even be a purely political or civilian peacebuilding mission.[8] For instance, Somalia currently has a small UN political mission (UNTMIS) and two European Union (EU) training and capacity-building missions, while the AU leads the primary peacekeeping force (AUSSOM) with around 12,000 troops.[9] In other cases, a large UN mission operates

1 UN Security Council, *Report of the Secretary-General: Partnering for Peace: Moving towards Partnership Peacekeeping*, UN Doc. S/2015/229, April 1, 2015.

2 Allard Duursma et al., "UN Peacekeeping at 75: Achievements, Challenges, and Prospects," *International Peacekeeping* 30, no. 4 (2023), p. 17. This brief uses the term "peace operations" as a generic term for all deployment types involving uniformed personnel that are included in the statistical analysis. This includes peacekeeping operations led by the UN, regional organizations and ad hoc coalitions of states, and single states. It also includes ad hoc security initiatives (ASIs) such as the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) in the Lake Chad Basin region or the G5 Sahel Joint Force.

3 United Nations, "Our Common Agenda Policy Brief 9: A New Agenda for Peace," July 2023.

4 Kseniya Oksamytna and Nina Wilén, "Adoption, Adaptation or Chance? Inter-Organisational Diffusion of the Protection of Civilians Norm from the UN to the African Union," *Third World Quarterly* 43, no. 10 (2022).

5 UN Peacekeeping, "25 Years of Protecting Civilians through UN Peacekeeping: Taking Stock and Looking Forward," October 2024.

6 El-Ghassim Wane, Paul D. Williams, and Ai Kihara-Hunt, "The Future of Peacekeeping, New Models, and Related Capabilities," United Nations, October 2024.

7 Alexandra Novosseloff and Lisa Sharland, "Partners and Competitors: Forces Operating in Parallel to UN Peace Operations," International Peace Institute, November 2019.

8 These are not the focus of this brief and are not included in the analyses of this report unless they have a security mandate that comes with uniformed personnel.

9 Paul D. Williams, "The United Nations Support Office Model: Lessons from Somalia," International Peace Institute, September 2024.

alongside a similarly sized parallel force, as seen in late 2023 when the Southern African Development Community (SADC) deployed a robust mission to the Democratic Republic of the Congo (SAMIDRC) alongside the UN mission (MONUSCO).

The UN also uses the term "partnership peacekeeping" for situations in which non-UN missions deploy independently without a UN partner mission but with UN Security Council authorization. These missions often receive financial, technical, or logistical support from the UN.[10] This understanding of partnership peacekeeping is central to the secretary-general's New Agenda for Peace, which emphasizes supporting robust regional operations rather than deploying new UN peacekeeping operations.[11] Both parallel deployments and independent non-UN missions have increased over the past decade, while stand-alone UN missions have declined (see Figure 1).[12] It is worth noting that the term "non-UN missions" encompasses a diverse array of missions, including missions led by regional and subregional organizations, ad hoc coalitions of states, and even single states (e.g., UK operations in Sierra Leone and French missions in Mali, CAR, and Côte d'Ivoire).[13] Additionally, regional organizations can sometimes operate outside their home regions, effectively becoming international missions, as seen with EU operations in Africa.

Not all non-UN missions are guided by the UN's key peacekeeping principles of consent, impartiality, and limited use of force.[14] Instead, many function as peace enforcement or counterinsurgency or counterterrorism operations endorsed or authorized by the UN Security Council to support a government in the fight against a clearly identified aggressor.[15] In the New Agenda for Peace, the secretary-general explicitly states that when peace enforcement is required, the Security Council should authorize a multinational force or regional organization rather than a UN peacekeeping mission.[16] However, not all non-UN missions receive such authorization, particularly in the case of ad hoc security initiatives (ASIs) such as the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF), which combats Boko Haram in the Lake Chad Basin region. ASIs are based on collective self-defense or intervention by invitation and do not require AU or UN Security Council authorization, though the UN has endorsed several such initiatives.[17]

POC in Non-UN Missions: Mandates and Capacities

Given the diversity of non-UN missions, how do they differ from the UN—and from each other—when it comes to implementing POC? One key difference among organizations deploying missions lies in their understanding of POC in peace operations contexts, specifically their relative emphasis on proactive protection versus civilian harm mitigation. Proactive protection refers to peacekeepers protecting civilians from physical violence by third parties, through military force if necessary. Civilian harm mitigation entails ensuring that peacekeepers themselves do not pose a threat to the civilians they are deployed to protect. It not only covers intentional harm (such as sexual exploitation and abuse) but also unintentional harm to civilians resulting from excessive or indiscriminate use of force by peacekeepers.[18]

While the UN's POC policy addresses both proactive protection and civilian harm mitigation, the UN Department of Peace Operations (DPO) emphasizes proactive protection. Nearly all UN

10 Wane, Williams, and Kihara-Hunt, "The Future of Peacekeeping," p. 37.

11 Richard Gowan, "What's New about the UN's New Agenda for Peace?" International Crisis Group, July 19, 2023.

12 Data from: Corinne Bara and Lisa Hultman, "Just Different Hats? Comparing UN and Non-UN peacekeeping," *International Peacekeeping* 27, no. 3 (2020). The data has been temporally extended to 2023. Stand-alone missions may or may not be part of a sequential deployment. The data shows only whether they are, at the time of analysis, deployed alone or alongside another mission.

13 See: Corinne Bara, "Non-UN Peacekeeping," in Handbook on Peacekeeping and International Relations, Han Dorussen, ed. (Edward Elgar Publishing, 2022).

14 Ibid., pp. 102–103.

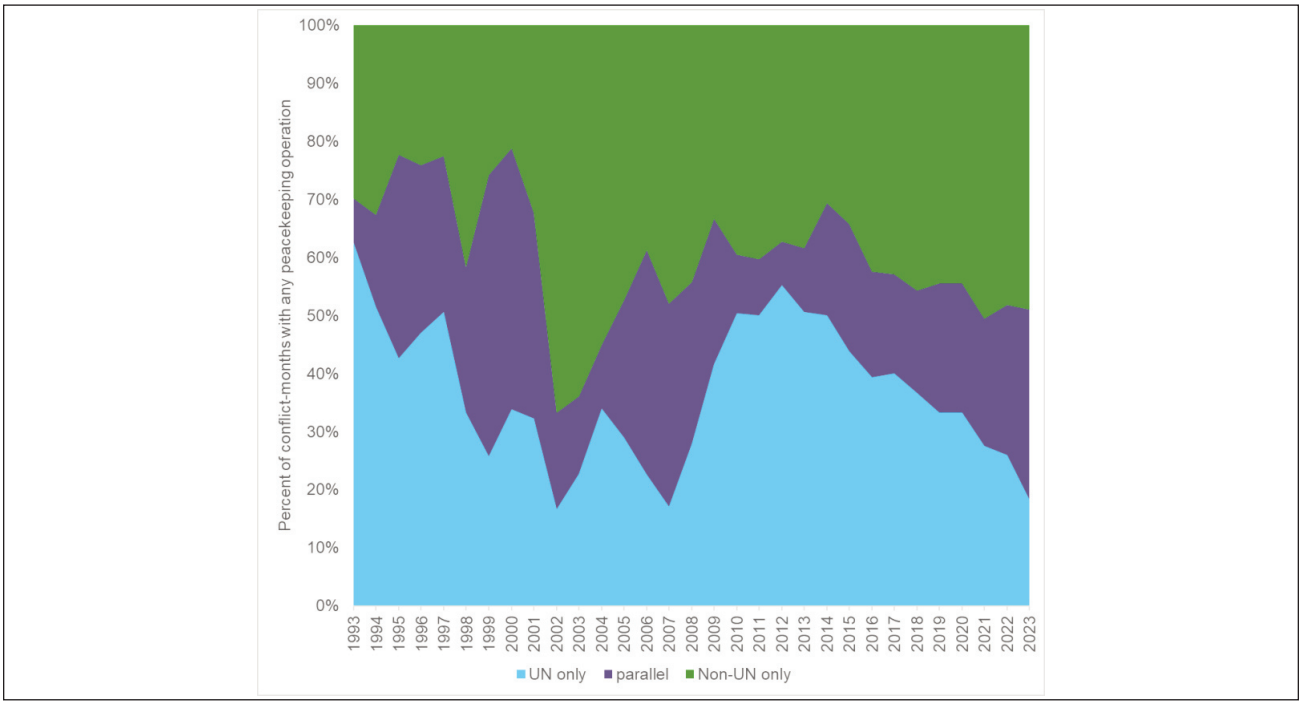
15 For a discussion on whether AU stabilization operations should be called peace enforcement operations, see: Cedric de Coning, "Peace Enforcement in Africa: Doctrinal Distinctions between the African Union and United Nations," *Contemporary Security Policy* 38, no. 1 (2017).

16 United Nations, "Our Common Agenda Policy Brief 9," p. 25.

17 Cedric de Coning, Andrew E. Yaw Tchie, and Anab Ovidie Grand, "Ad-Hoc Security Initiatives, an African Response to Insecurity," *African Security Review* 31, no. 4 (2022); Andrew E. Yaw Tchie, "How Do Ad-Hoc Security Initiatives Fit in Africa's Evolving Security Landscape?" *IPI Global Observatory*, June 14, 2023.

18 Oksamytna and Wilén, "Adoption, Adaptation or Chance?" p. 2,363.

Figure 1. Relative frequency of UN, non-UN, and parallel peacekeeping operations, 1993–2023



missions in the past twenty-five years have had a proactive protection mandate.[19] The AU and EU—the two largest non-UN peacekeeping providers—have largely aligned their conceptual understandings of POC with that of the UN.[20] The mandates of many AU-led or -authorized missions explicitly include POC, or POC tasks are at least listed in relevant documents.[21] However, the AU has made quicker progress in formalizing preventive protection policies, particularly regarding collateral damage mitigation. This focus, reflected for instance in the AU's Compliance and Accountability Framework,[22] stems in part from the AU's experience with the AU Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), which faced criticism for its indiscriminate use of force.[23] NATO, the fourth-biggest peacekeeping provider, focuses most strongly on civilian harm mitigation, at least among the more frequent providers of peacekeeping. As outlined in its 2016 Policy for the Protection of Civilians, NATO emphasizes minimizing civilian harm resulting from its own operations. Protecting them from third-party violence is secondary and is seen more as an operational means to an end, namely the success and legitimacy of counterinsurgency operations.[24] In a similar vein, newer counterinsurgency operations in Africa, such as the MNJTF and the G5 Sahel Joint Force, have focused on measures to mitigate civilian harm from their own operations.[25]

When it comes to translating POC policy into practice, most non-UN missions share a key

19 Paul D. Williams, "Two Decades of Civilian Protection Mandates for United Nations Peacekeepers," in *The Individualization of War: Rights, Liability, and Accountability in Contemporary Armed Conflict*, Jennifer Welsh, Dapo Akande, and David Rodin, eds. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023).

20 Andrew E. Yaw Tchie and Lauren McGowan, "The United Nations–African Union Partnership and the Protection of Civilians," International Peace Institute, March 2025; Matthias Dembinski and Berenike Schott, "Converging around Global Norms? Protection of Civilians in African Union and European Union Peacekeeping in Africa," African Security 6, nos. 3–4 (2013).

21 Jide Martyns Okeke and Paul D. Williams, eds., *Protecting Civilians in African Union Peace Support Operations: Key Cases and Lessons Learned* (Durban, South Africa: ACCORD, 2017).

22 Tchie and McGowan, "The United Nations–African Union Partnership and the Protection of Civilians," p. 5.

23 Oksamytna and Wilén, "Adoption, Adaptation or Chance?" p. 2,366.

24 Stian Kjeksrud et al., "Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: Comparing Organisational Approaches," Norwegian Defence Research Establishment (FFI), 2011; Joachim A. Koops and Christian Patz, "UN, EU, and NATO Approaches to the Protection of Civilians: Policies, Implementation, and Comparative Advantages," International Peace Institute, March 2022.

25 Tchie and McGowan, "The United Nations–African Union Partnership and the Protection of Civilians," pp. 9–10.

characteristic that sets them apart from UN peacekeeping: a heavily militarized approach. UN missions follow a multidimensional and multitiered approach to POC, integrating military, police, and civilian personnel and linking protection efforts to activities aimed at bringing about a political solution to conflict.[26] The use of force by the UN is generally framed within the broader objective of protecting civilians and supporting a political process rather than solely defeating threats. While robust military measures are sometimes necessary to deter or neutralize actors that pose an immediate danger, they are complemented by engagement with local communities, mediation efforts, and the strengthening of institutions to create a sustainable protective environment. By contrast, most non-UN missions rely almost exclusively on military force, often with no or very few police and very few, if any, civilian personnel.[27] This robust posture allows them to help combat immediate threats, but they lack the capacity to undertake the broader engagement necessary for sustained civilian protection.

A large body of evidence establishes that UN missions, under certain conditions, can reduce deaths from the intentional targeting of civilians by non-state armed groups.[28] However, there is less certainty about the extent to which the UN reduces violence by government forces, as the need to maintain host-state consent limits peacekeepers' ability to protect civilians from the host state.[29] By contrast, research on POC in non-UN missions remains scarce. Available studies indicate that non-UN missions alone do not generally mitigate the targeting of civilians by non-state armed groups. However, they can have a dampening effect on government targeting of civilians.[30]

Research is particularly scarce on the effect of parallel deployments on POC. Recent research has found that non-UN missions operating alone, regardless of size, do not significantly reduce battle violence among combatants.[31] However, when these missions operate in parallel with a sizable UN mission, their effectiveness in reducing violence improves. This finding suggests that even in conflicts where military intervention seems necessary, the comprehensive, multidimensional approach of the UN is crucial in offsetting the potential negative effects of a heavily militarized approach to peacekeeping. This finding aligns with critiques of counterinsurgency strategies.[32]

This paper extends this prior research beyond battle violence to examine the protection of civilians in UN and non-UN missions, whether deployed separately or in parallel. The central question it explores is whether parallel deployments create a "partnership benefit" for the protection of civilians. Does the simultaneous presence of UN and non-UN missions make both kinds of actors more effective in reducing civilian casualties as the different missions reinforce, complement, and support each other? After all, there is a logic to robust peacekeeping and peace enforcement—namely, to permanently weaken or even remove those armed actors that pose a threat to civilians. It is therefore possible that the use of military force by non-UN troops, which the UN may be unwilling or unable to employ, could help secure areas enough for UN troops, police, and civilians to engage in broader POC activities. These efforts might include reforming security forces, disarming combatants, monitoring human rights violations, conducting police patrols, and facilitating local conflict resolution.

26 UN Peacekeeping, "25 Years of Protecting Civilians," p. 13.

27 Linnéa Gelot, "Civilian Protection in Africa: How the Protection of Civilians Is Being Militarized by African Policymakers and Diplomats," *Contemporary Security Policy* 38, no. 1 (2017). Among non-UN missions, EU missions are the most diverse. Only a quarter of EU missions have had a military component, and the rest have deployed police, border guards, monitors, judges, and administrators. See: Bara and Hultman, "Just Different Hats?" p. 354.

28 Much of this research is summarized in: UN Peacekeeping, "25 Years of Protecting Civilians."

29 See: Allard Duursma, Sara Lindberg Bromley, and Aditi Gorur, "The Impact of Host-State Consent on the Protection of Civilians in UN Peacekeeping," *Civil Wars* 26, no. 1 (2024).

30 Bara and Hultman, "Just Different Hats?"; Wukki Kim and Todd Sandler, "How Do Non-UN Peacekeepers Affect Civilian Violence? An Instrument Investigation," *International Peacekeeping* 29, no. 5 (2022); Wukki Kim and Todd Sandler, "Non-UN Peacekeeping Effectiveness: Further Analysis," *Defence and Peace Economics* 33, no. 5 (2022).

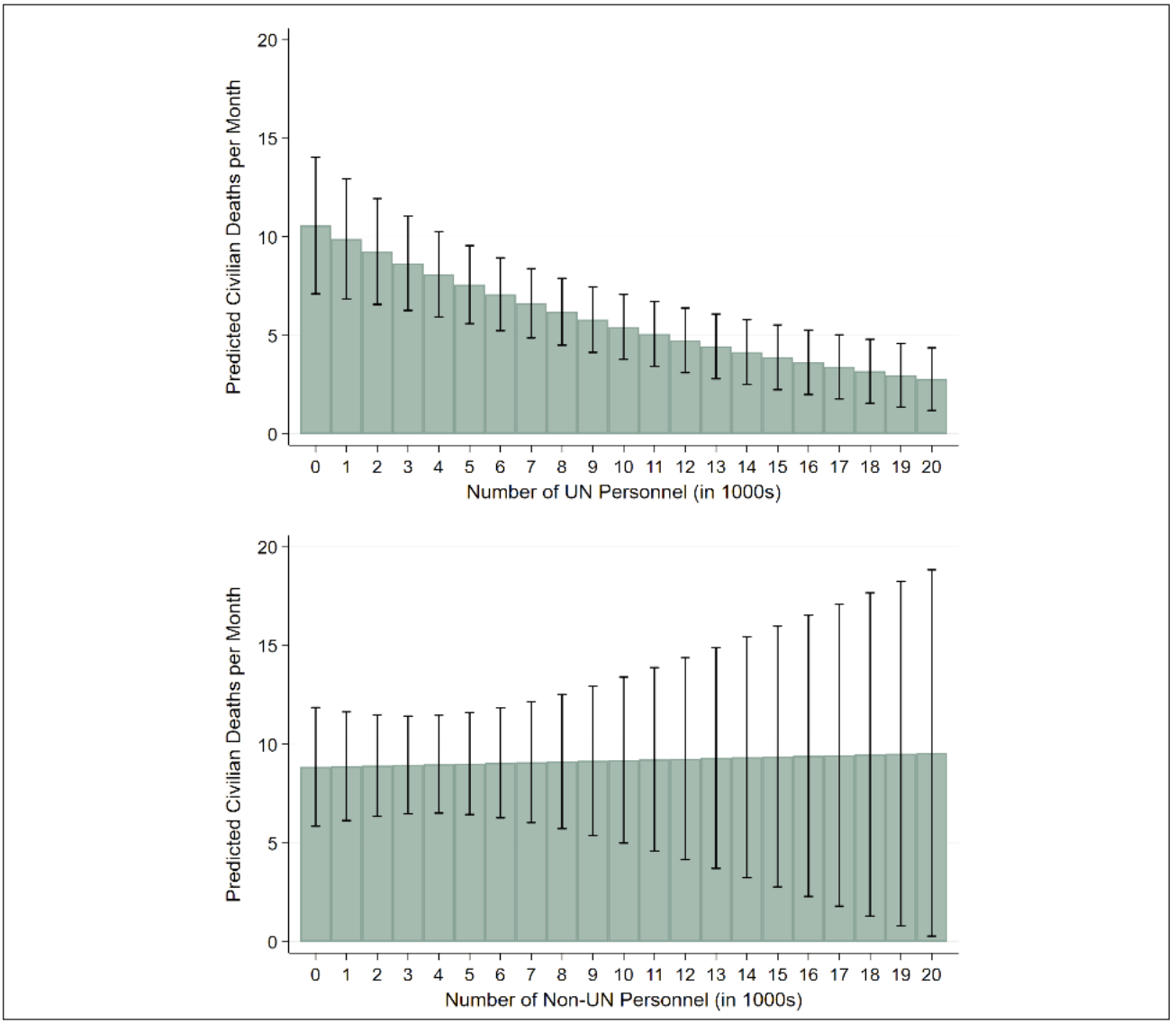
31 Maurice P. Schumann and Corinne Bara, "A New Era: Power in Partnership Peacekeeping," *International Studies Quarterly* 67, no. 3 (2023).

32 Corinne Bara and Maurice P. Schumann, "Partnership Peacekeeping Works: What Does This Mean in a Divided World?" *IPI Global Observatory*, October 17, 2023; Paul D. Williams, "Multilateral Counterinsurgency in East Africa," Small Wars & Insurgencies (2024).

Partnership Peacekeeping and Civilian Targeting

To assess the effect of partnership peacekeeping on POC, I conducted statistical analyses of more than seventy armed intrastate conflicts in Africa between 1993 and 2023 (see separate Annex for more detail on the methodology). These conflicts were observed on a monthly basis to capture shifts in conflict dynamics and fluctuations in the number of uniformed personnel deployed. The outcome of interest is civilian casualties resulting from intentional targeting by state forces and non-state armed groups.[33] To examine the impact of partnerships, I distinguish between UN and non-UN uniformed personnel (military and police) and employ models that assess whether the effect differs when they are deployed in parallel.[34]

Figure 2. Expected casualties from violence by non-state armed groups against civilians as UN/non-UN missions increase in size



33 See: Ralph Sundberg and Erik Melander, "Introducing the UCDP Georeferenced Event Dataset," *Journal of Peace Research* 50, no. 4 (2013); Shawn Davies et al., "Organized Violence 1989–2023 and the Prevalence of Organized Crime Groups," *Journal of Peace Research* 61, no. 4 (2024).

34 Data from Bara and Hultman, "Just Different Hats?". The data was extended in time to cover the years up to 2023. To assess peacekeeping effectiveness, the author compared contexts with peacekeepers to similar contexts without peacekeepers. Because no single statistical model captured the full complexity of peacekeeping effects, multiple models were used to account for variation between conflicts, particularly those with and without peacekeeping operations, which are not readily comparable. For further details and model results, see the Annex to this brief.

The first finding is that when operating independently and without a parallel deployment, only UN missions are associated with a reduction in violence against civilians by non-state armed groups. Non-UN missions in general do not appear to have the same effect illustrates this trend: as the number of UN peacekeepers increases, civilian casualties decline, while no significant reduction is observed for non-UN personnel.[35] These results reaffirm findings from previous studies but with more current data and with more specific attention to parallel deployments. In some respects, this lack of a protective effect of non-UN missions should not be surprising. If a military-heavy approach alone fails to reduce battle violence between combatants, it is even less likely to succeed in a complex task such as protecting civilians. POC typically requires a multidimensional approach, integrating military, police, and civilian components to address the incentives behind civilian targeting.

The second finding, however, is that there does not appear to be a benefit from parallel deployments when it comes to the protection of civilians. The statistical analyses demonstrate that the deployment of a large UN partner mission does not necessarily improve the record of non-UN personnel when it comes to protecting civilians from violence by non-state armed groups. Even more strikingly, the data suggests that parallel deployments may have a negative effect on UN missions in certain situations. Specifically, the research shows that when the UN deploys in parallel with larger non-UN missions (with approximately 5,000 personnel or more), evidence of the UN's impact becomes statistically uncertain. This does not necessarily mean that the UN becomes less effective but rather that the presence of a large partner may obscure or dilute the measurable impact of the UN's efforts.

A possible explanation for the lack of a partnership benefit when it comes to POC is the presence of countervailing effects. Many larger non-UN missions function as regime-support operations, bolstering the host state's capacity and conducting operations alongside it against non-state armed groups labeled as enemies. However, prior research indicates that non-state armed groups often respond to battlefield losses and a general weakening of their position vis-à-vis the state by attacking civilians. This occurs for two reasons: first, because civilians are the easier target if the opponent is strong, and second, because targeting civilians can be a strategic way to attract concessions from governments even when non-state armed groups are losing militarily.[36] UN missions may find it difficult to counteract these effects and proactively protect civilians, particularly when they are associated with parallel missions and the host-state government, for instance because they are conducting joint operations.

When it comes to civilian targeting by the government, the findings are the reverse: only non-UN missions deployed independently are associated with a reduction in civilian targeting by government forces illustrates this trend: as the size of non-UN missions increases, civilian casualties decline. While a similar pattern appears for UN missions, the results lack the statistical certainty needed to confirm the effect. Moreover, as with violence by non-state armed groups, there is no partnership effect from parallel deployments.

These findings are in line with previous research but raise a puzzling question: Why do non-UN missions appear more effective at reducing government violence than UN missions? One possible explanation is that if non-UN forces help host states reestablish authority and territorial control, they reduce the instances where the state might target civilians.[37] A more concerning possibility is that by taking on counterinsurgency roles, some non-UN forces may be shifting the risk of civilian harm from governments to the peacekeepers themselves. Further research is needed to determine the extent of this problem.

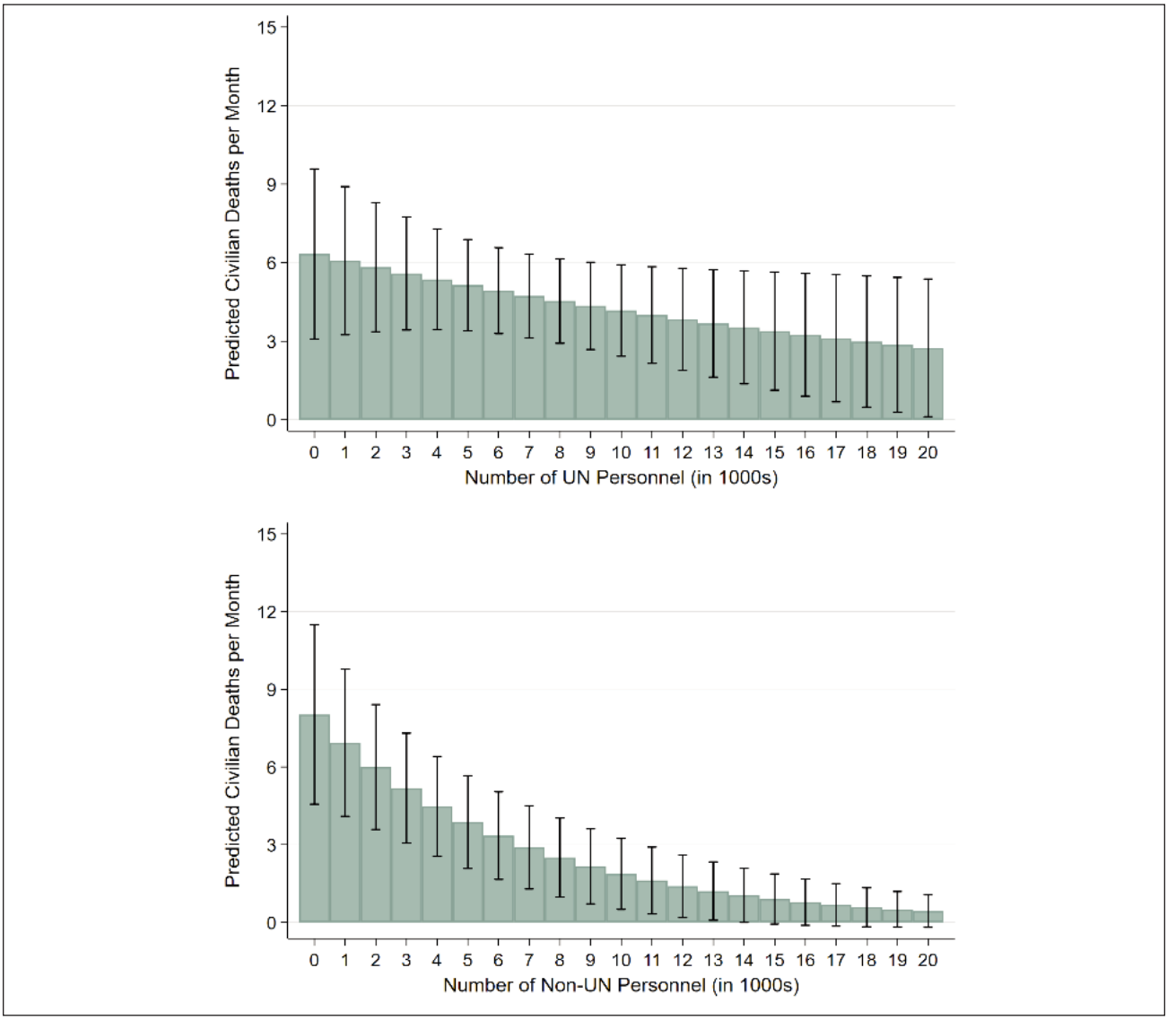
The above findings assess non-UN missions as a whole. However, as discussed above, non-UN missions can come in many different forms in terms of both the extent to which they operate

35 The gray vertical lines indicate uncertainty around the estimates.

36 Kjeksrud et al., "Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict," p. 17; Lisa Hultman, "Battle Losses and Rebel Violence: Raising the Costs for Fighting," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 19, no. 2 (2007); Reed M. Wood, "From Loss to Looting? Battlefield Costs and Rebel Incentives for Violence," *International Organization* 68, no. 4 (2014).

37 Evgenija Kroeker, "Where Do Peacekeepers Go? Unpacking the Determinants of UNSC-Authorized Peace Operation Deployments" (PhD dissertation, University of Oxford, 2023).

Figure 3. Expected casualties from government violence against civilians as UN/non-UN missions increase in size



under a POC policy and mandate and the extent to which they adhere to the peacekeeping principles of consent, impartiality, and limited use of force. While detailed mission-by-mission comparisons are beyond the scope of this study, distinguishing between missions deployed by specific non-UN actors results in more nuanced findings.

First, in order to understand the effects of partnership peacekeeping on POC, we can distinguish between the UN's most established partners, the AU (and its predecessor, the Organization of African Unity) and the EU, and other non-UN actors, such as smaller subregional organizations, ad hoc coalitions, and individual states.[38] Despite operational challenges, especially in AU-led missions like AMISOM, which operated in very difficult contexts,[39] the AU and EU have aligned their POC doctrine with the UN's framework to enable closer cooperation.[40] Compared to many

38 While there are important operational differences in the way AU and EU missions approach POC, it was not possible to analyze them separately due to the small sample size.

39 Paul D. Williams, "The African Union Mission in Somalia and Civilian Protection Challenges," *Stability: International Journal of Security and Development* 2, no. 2 (2013).

40 Koops and Patz, "UN, EU, and NATO Approaches to the Protection of Civilians"; Oksamytna and Wilén, "Adoption, Adaptation or Chance?"

other organizations, the AU and EU can also draw on a longer experience with peacekeeping, yielding important lessons learned that have allowed them to adapt their approaches over time.

The analysis conducted for this issue brief shows that unlike other non-UN missions, AU and EU deployments (analyzed together) are associated with reduced civilian targeting by non-state armed groups, as is the case with UN missions.[41] When it comes to addressing violence against civilians by the host state, the evidence for all peacekeeping providers is mixed, but AU-led and EU deployments (again analyzed together) have a greater impact than both UN missions and other non-UN missions. Either way, there is no evidence that either the UN or AU/EU missions are more effective at protecting civilians when working in parallel.

Second, among non-UN operations, one type of mission stands out for its heavy reliance on militarized approaches and explicit alignment with host-state counterinsurgency efforts: ad hoc security initiatives. These deployments include the Regional Coordination Initiative against the Lord's Resistance Army (RCI-LRA) from 2011 to 2019, the G5 Sahel Joint Force from 2017 to 2023, and the MNJTF since 2015.[42] In all three cases, a group of governments joined forces against insurgent groups to jointly address cross-border security threats. ASIs are, in many ways, the furthest away from peacekeeping as a defined practice and should therefore be analyzed separately. The research suggests that ASIs are not associated with a reduction in violence by non-state armed groups against civilians, providing further evidence that heavy-handed counterinsurgency approaches alone fail to protect civilians from the non-state armed groups targeting them.[43] Notably, analyzing these ASIs separately does not alter the finding that non-UN missions (with the exception of AU/EU missions) are overall ineffective at protecting civilians from violence by non-state armed groups. These findings underscore the limitations of military-centric strategies in preventing civilian targeting.

Implications for the Future of POC in Peace Operations

These findings provide a foundation for rethinking the future of partnership peacekeeping and the UN's role within it. The upcoming review of UN peace operations that was requested by member states in the Pact for the Future presents a unique opportunity for this dialogue.[44] A study commissioned by DPO on models of peacekeeping, intended to inform the 2025 UN Peacekeeping Ministerial in Berlin, can serve as a starting point.[45] The study outlines a modular approach to future operations, featuring missions tailored to specific tasks in a flexible manner. In principle, all the proposed models could be implemented as a partnership configuration or even by a non-UN mission alone. This, however, will require an evidence-based discussion on how to leverage the distinct strengths of various peacekeeping partners.

This study reinforces previous research showing that partner-led peacekeeping cannot fully substitute for UN-led operations when it comes to protecting civilians from violence by non-state armed groups. Missions led by the AU or EU—with their longer experience and more robust protection frameworks—may be exceptions, though this requires further research. Overall, the evidence suggests caution in relegating the UN to a purely supportive role in future peace operations, particularly since a UN partner mission does not appear to enhance the effectiveness of non-UN efforts to protect civilians.[46] One possible explanation is that certain missions—especially those focused on counterinsurgency—may inadvertently increase the incentives for non-state armed groups to target civilians.

41 Out of the different statistical models, the one that focuses on effects over time rather than between missions does not support this conclusion. See: Bara and Hultman, "Just Different Hats?"

42 De Coning et al, "Ad-Hoc Security Initiatives."

43 Analyzing the effect of ASIs on government violence does not make sense, as the host government forces are part of these collective security arrangements.

44 UN General Assembly Resolution 79/1 (July 17, 2024), UN Doc. A/RES/79/1, p. 17.

45 Wane, Williams, and Kihara-Hunt, "The Future of Peacekeeping."

46 Gowan, "What's New about the UN's New Agenda for Peace?"

These findings call into question the current logic of delegating peace enforcement and counterinsurgency operations to partners while authorizing and funding them through the UN.[47] There is insufficient evidence that such approaches effectively defeat these groups or reduce civilian harm. Although the secretary-general has acknowledged that overly securitized approaches are at best ineffective and at worst counterproductive and that these operations should be complemented by inclusive political efforts and nonmilitary strategies to address underlying conflict drivers,[48] there is no evidence that this combined approach offsets the negative effects of counterinsurgency on the protection of civilians.

Moving forward, there is a pressing need to discuss and develop both dimensions of protection—not only protecting civilians from armed actors but also safeguarding them from harm that may inadvertently arise from peacekeeping operations themselves. Any mission that frequently engages in offensive operations or aligns itself with one conflict party (often the host-state government) risks increasing civilian harm, particularly when excessive or indiscriminate force is used.[49] For the UN, these challenges, observed in partner missions and in its own experience with stabilization missions, offer valuable lessons.[50] In the upcoming review of peacekeeping, these insights can help clarify the UN's distinct approach to civilian protection, assess which strategies have proven effective, and guide the development of future operations—both independent and in partnership—that protect civilians from all forms of violence.

47 For a similar point, see: Williams, "Multilateral Counterinsurgency in East Africa," p. 2.

48 United Nations, "Our Common Agenda Policy Brief 9," p. 13.

49 Adam Day and Charles T. Hunt, "Distractions, Distortions and Dilemmas: The Externalities of Protecting Civilians in United Nations Peacekeeping," *Civil Wars* 24, no. 1 (2022).

50 Cedric de Coning, "Is Stabilization the New Normal? Implications of Stabilization Mandates for the Use of Force in UN Peacekeeping Operations," in *The Use of Force in UN Peacekeeping*, Peter Nadin, ed. (Routledge, 2018); Ingvild Bode and John Karlsrud, "Implementation in Practice: The Use of Force to Protect Civilians in United Nations Peacekeeping," *European Journal of International Relations* 25, no. 2 (2019); Lise Howard, "Peacekeeping Is Not Counterinsurgency," *International Peacekeeping* 26, no. 5 (2019).

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