

World Politics and United Nations Peace Missions

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World politics influence peace missions. The prevailing material and ideational conditions of the international system have an impact on international initiatives to promote peace. In the bipolar system that characterized the Cold War, UN peacekeeping operations mainly developed as a response to inter-state conflicts with the mandate to stabilize and contain, rather than resolve, armed conflicts. At the end of the Cold War, world politics changed and so did peacebuilding. In a world order dominated by the USA, a new liberal international order expanded. The UN deployed peace missions mostly to intra-state wars with extensive mandates reflecting a liberal conception of peacebuilding. These evolutions show that peacebuilding is a child of its time: movements in the tectonic plates of world politics influence its conception and execution.

Looking at today's world politics, scholars and practitioners agree that we have entered a new era. The unipolar system characterized by US preeminence has waned and new actors exert power on the international stage. This concerns in particular Russia and China, but also regional powers, such as Brazil, South Africa, India, and Turkey. The structural changes have led to increased geopolitical competition and a fading of the enthusiasm about liberalism that accompanied the end of the Cold War. This shift from unipolarity to multipolarity begs the question of how it influences UN peace missions.

The workshop aims to gather scholars to explore this question and to reflect on the effects of changing world politics on peace missions. We define peace missions in a broad sense, as including good offices engagements, special political missions, and peacekeeping operations. We welcome contributions that address the link between world politics and peace missions from various theoretical perspectives and using diverse methods.

The workshop is relevant to several ongoing debates in the literature. First, it speaks to current discussions on the future of UN peace missions. Scholars and practitioners recognize that the UN has faced challenges to prevent or address armed conflicts, such as in Libya, Syria, or Ukraine. The workshop aims to generate ideas on how the UN can remain relevant and effective in a shifting global order. Second, the workshop adds to the debates on the effects of power shifts on international organizations. By exploring the influence of different states, including regional powers, it sheds light on the various ways in which power manifests in discussions on UN peace missions. Third, by providing a macro-level perspective on UN peace missions, the workshop contributes to a better link between peace research and international relations theories.