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EPIS REPORT ON PEACEKEEPING & CONFLICT PREVENTION

INTERVIEW WITH ELMAR BROK

Former Member of the European Parliament

Peacekeeping After the Russia-Ukraine War

What impact does Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine have on peacekeeping? Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine as a permanent Security Council member lays bare the UN's structural contradictions, eroding its legitimacy and paralyzing peacekeeping amid great-power conflicts. The future of global peacekeeping hinges on bold reforms to bridge the gap between the UN's ideals and its operational realities. These reforms offer a path to revitalize UN peacekeeping's global role.

AI in Conflict Prevention

How did the EU's Military Engagment change in the recent years? The European military mentality has shifted for a large part away from peacekeeping obligations. Of course, the European NATO members will increase their defence spending gradually in the coming years, which will give the European military the resources to better achieve their goals. Once these goals concerning peacekeeping have been defined, we can judge the effectiveness of these nations in achieving them.

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EPIS Basics:
R2P – A UN Norm For Mass Atrocity Prevention

What is R2P and its challenges/controversies? It is a UN norm that establishes a responsibility to protect one's own citizens and imposes a condition on sovereignty. If a state fails to meet that, the international community may intervene. Rooted in western legal tradition and without a clear legal framework, R2P has seen a number of failures and is not universally recognized as legitimate. Its place in the UN is contested, but there has not been a better option yet.

Editorial

Paul Behne

Paul Behne holds a M.A. in War and Conflict Studies from the University of Potsdam (DE). His research focuses on Middle Eastern security, international relations, and strategic analysis. With experience advising governmental and international organizations, Paul is motivated to bridge the gap between policy planning and field operations.

EPIS Report on Peacekeeping & Conflict Prevention

Dear reader,
In times of global power shifts, conflicts are erupting all over the world. This historic high since the Second World War is changing the way we live together. These developments are reshaping our alliances, economies, and the very structures that have shaped our global coexistence for decades. With these escalating crises, the need to reinvigorate and rethink solutions for peace has never been more urgent.

In this report, we outline the current trends in international peace efforts. We discuss the global balance of power and the new position of global players. The change of power in the US, the EU still seeking its position, NATO and the United Nations – once guarantors of international peace and security – are now challenged by internal division an eroded commitment to multilateralism. Yet our report also highlights progress. Tangible practices that offer new opportunities for peacebuilding. We discuss new perspectives on strategy, equality and effectiveness, and we analyse promising new approaches that utilise new technologies. Today, the concepts of peace and security are more intertwined than ever – sometimes appearing synonymous. While equating the two terms obscures their unique essence, it is essential to understand the interdependence of the two concepts. Peace comes from security, just as there can be no security without peace.

Two things have become clear in the development of this report: First, where there are conflicts, there is always conflict resolution. Around the world, countless individuals and organisations are working tirelessly to promote peace. Even if these efforts are not always successful, it is a powerful and hopeful thought to know that people stand up for one another. Today, it is important to be reassured of this. Second, we are in a critical phase of upheaval in human history. Conflicts are the symptoms of global power shifts, disruptive technologies, new and recurring beliefs. In order to shape this transition, we are all called upon to do our part, whether small or large. In doing so, we must pursue both security and peace.

As young academics, we strive to find new solutions, taking responsibility for our very future. This report is intended to be a small but not insignificant contribution – by raising awareness of the crises and, at the same time, discovering ways of overcoming them. We wish you secure and peaceful read.

Paul Behne
Editor of the EPIS Peacekeeping & Conflict Prevention Report

About the Article

What impact does Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine have on peacekeeping? Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine as a permanent Security Council member lays bare the UN's structural contradictions, eroding its legitimacy and paralyzing peacekeeping amid great-power conflicts. The future of global peacekeeping hinges on bold reforms to bridge the gap between the UN's ideals and its operational realities. These reforms offer a path to revitalize UN peacekeeping's global role.

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1. Introduction

The United Nations (UN), established in the wake of the Second World War, was founded with the primary objective of maintaining international peace and security, as enshrined in the UN Charter. At the heart of this mandate lies the institution of UN peacekeeping, which has evolved into one of the most operational and visible instruments for fulfilling the international community's collective responsibility to uphold global order. Peacekeeping missions are tasked with protecting civilians, preventing conflict escalation or relapse, and supporting national authorities in post-conflict recovery. Though lacking coercive power, these missions have frequently demonstrated effectiveness in de-escalating violence through non-violent conflict management tools. Designed to operate with impartiality and legitimacy, peacekeeping initiatives play a crucial role in fragile contexts, supporting the broader goals of stabilisation and sustainable peacebuilding. At present, more than 90,000 personnel from 125 member states participate in UN peacekeeping operations across military, police, and civilian roles. Despite being the largest financial contributor, the United States ranks 82nd in troop contributions, with just 31 personnel – approximately 0.00000009 per capita. The Russian Federation, a permanent member of the Security Council and active belligerent in the war against Ukraine, ranks 64th with 72 peacekeepers (0.00000049 per capita). In contrast, Ukraine, currently under direct military assault, ranks 44th, contributing 307 personnel (0.00000743 per capita). These figures reveal a structural asymmetry in the UN system, whereby smaller, often more vulnerable states bear a disproportionate burden in upholding the very principles of peace and security the system was designed to protect (Burkle, Goniewicz, & Khorram-Manesh, 2022). This article critically examines a core contradiction at the heart of the UN's institutional architecture: a peacekeeping system founded on collective enforcement and neutrality becomes fundamentally compromised when a permanent Security Council member engages in aggression. Russia's invasion of Ukraine reveals this structural weakness. By exercising its veto, Russia has blocked binding Security Council actions and obstructed any coordinated UN peacekeeping initiative. This dual role – as both enforcer and violator – erodes the credibility of the UN and exposes the limitations of its conflict management architecture in the face of great power impunity. The central argument advanced in this article is that the involvement of a permanent Security Council member as a belligerent actor reveals critical structural deficiencies in the UN system, specifically within the realm of peacekeeping and conflict management. These deficiencies compromise the UN's legitimacy, neutralize its enforcement capacity, and render its peacekeeping architecture ineffective in the face of geopolitical contestation. The article contends that the future viability of global peace operations depends on rethinking the normative and operational foundations of collective security. Extract of Source: Center for International Peace Operations (2024). Peace Operation 2024/2024.

2. The UN's Mandate and the Promise of Collective Security

The United Nations (UN), established in 1945, operates under the UN Charter, which tasks it with maintaining international peace and security, fostering cooperation, and promoting human rights. UN peacekeeping, a key instrument of this mission, has evolved over 75 years into a critical tool for global conflict management. Peacekeeping is guided by three core principles: (1) consent of the main parties to the conflict, (2) impartiality, and (3) non-use of force except in self-defence or defence of the mandate. These principles ensure missions deploy with host government approval, remain neutral, and avoid aggressive military action. Traditional peacekeeping missions focus on monitoring ceasefires in buffer zones to facilitate political solutions. Examples include operations in Cyprus and Western Sahara, where resolutions remain pending. Post-Cold War, peacekeeping has shifted to more complex Peace Operations, tackling tasks like elec-

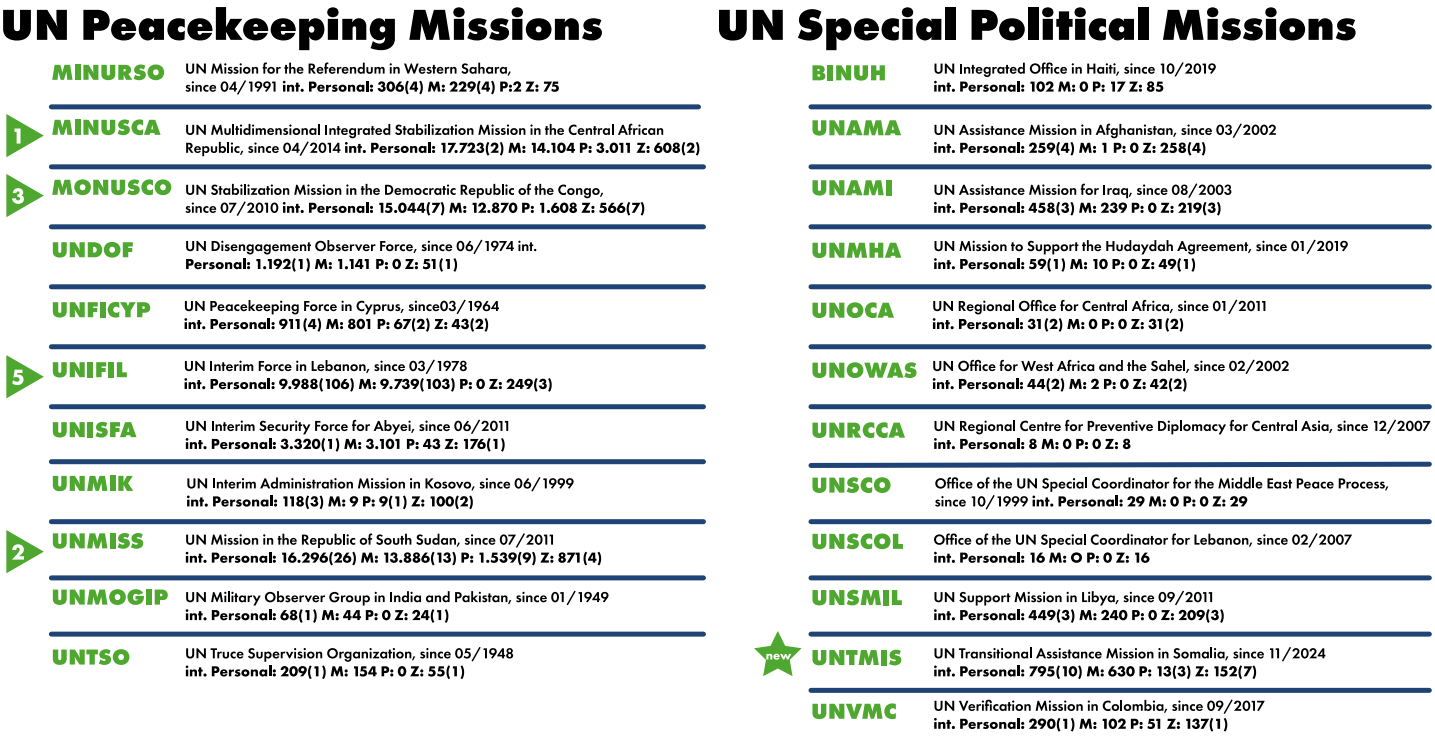

Figure 1: Extract of Source: Center for International Peace Operations (2024). Peace Operation 2024/2024. (https://www.zif-berlin.org/sites/zif-berlin.org/files/2024-12/Peace%20Operations%202024-2025.pdf)

tion support, civilian protection, and state-building. These broad "Christmas tree mandates" incorporate diverse objectives, such as human rights monitoring and disarmament, but often lack sufficient resources, challenging mission effectiveness. Deployments in unstable settings without solid peace agreements further strain adherence to the core principles (Benkler et al., 2023). UN peacekeeping relies on cooperation from member states, particularly the Permanent Five Members of the UN Security Council (P5), whose political support and resources are crucial. The global coalition of troop-contributing countries, drawn from 121 nations, highlights the UN's strength, but P5 backing is vital for mandate implementation (Paris, 2023). Host government consent remains critical but fragile, as seen in Mali, where counterterrorism priorities clashed with MINUSMA's human rights objectives, leading to restrictions and its planned withdrawal by 2023. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, MONUSCO's support for government military goals risks bias perceptions, complicating its ongoing transition toward closure. Weak Security Council consensus, with Russia and China's abstentions, further undermines these missions' effectiveness. When Russia and China abstain from resolutions, as with MINUSMA, missions lose leverage to influence conflict parties. Host governments, like Mali's, exploit this by challenging UN authority, while third-party support from non-UN actors reduces incentives for cooperation. The UNAMID mission in Darfur (2008–2020) faced systematic Sudanese government obstructions, such as movement restrictions, highlighting how lack of cooperation and weak P5 unity limit even robust missions. Collective security, the UN's ideal of nations uniting to prevent and resolve conflicts, is embodied in peacekeeping's global composition and Security Council mandates. However, political realities – P5 divisions, host government resistance, and normative disputes – undermine this vision. Tensions, exacerbated by events like Russia's actions in Ukraine, limit the Council's ability to authorize new missions or adapt existing ones (Benkler et al., 2023). The decline in peacekeeping personnel by 31% from 2015 to 2022 reflects these constraints (Paris, 2023). Critics argue that missions must prioritize local ownership and pragmatic mandates to regain legitimacy, as liberal approaches often fail to address local dynamics (Cassin & Zyla, 2023). The shift to pragmatic peacekeeping, conceptualized as scaled-down, flexible missions, remains largely theoretical due to Security Council gridlock, which stifles operational changes in peacekeeping operations. This shift risks

undermining ambitious liberal peacebuilding objectives as normative disagreements and geopolitical tensions hinder consensus on expansive mandates in a multipolar era. Yet, without unified P5 support and cooperative host governments, even pragmatic missions struggle (Benkler et al., 2023). The UN remains a key player in crisis management, but fulfilling collective security requires navigating these political obstacles and reforming to align with local needs (Cassin & Zyla, 2023). These challenges manifest acutely in the Russia-Ukraine War, exposing institutional peacekeeping flaws.

3. The Russia-Ukraine War: A Case Study in Institutional Contradiction

The Russia-Ukraine War, sparked by Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea and escalating with its 2022 full-scale invasion, has destabilized global security and exposed deep flaws in the United Nations Security Council, revealing a stark contradiction between its mandate to uphold peace and its operational realities. Russia's aggression, violating the UN Charter's prohibition on the use of force against a state's sovereignty, has displaced millions, disrupted global food and energy supplies, and challenged the UN's ability to respond. As a P5 member, Russia is tasked with maintaining international peace, yet its role as the primary aggressor undermines this responsibility. By deploying forces as "peacekeepers" in Ukraine's separatist regions of Donetsk and Luhansk in February 2022, Russia misrepresented peacekeeping, a move condemned by UN Secretary-General Guterres as a "perversion" that violates impartiality principles, as belligerent states cannot contribute peacekeepers (Burkle et al., 2022). This duality, coupled with Russia's use of private military companies like the Wagner Group, extends its destabilizing influence, challenging the UN's normative framework. Russia's veto power, enshrined in the UN Charter, allows it to block resolutions, such as the February 2022 draft condemning its invasion, paralyzing the Security Council. Despite majority support, this veto privilege enables Russia to obstruct peacekeeping proposals, including post-Minsk agreement talks, prioritizing national interests over global peace. The Council's paralysis is deepened by divisions, with China's reluctance to support Western initiatives and neutral stances by states like India and Brazil hindering consensus, echoing tensions in prior conflicts like Libya and Syria (Geis & Schröder, 2024). The General Assembly's non-binding March 2022 resolution condemning Russia's aggression lacks enforcement power. Proposals for a General Assembly-authorized peacekeeping mission risk escalation without Russian consent, a core UN principle alongside impartiality and non-use of force (Arif, 2022). Russia's rejection of NATO-affiliated peacekeepers further complicates mission composition. The UN's purpose of promoting peace clashes with the Security Council's structure, which empowers the P5 to flout international law when it serves their interests (Ekpe & Abumbe, 2024). Despite challenges, a Ukraine peace mission could de-escalate tensions, as shown by the OSCE's Special Monitoring Mission in Donbas from 2014 to 2019, but securing Russia's consent remains a hurdle. The UN's diplomatic efforts, like the Black Sea Grain Initiative, show potential, but the Council's paralysis prevents enforcement. The P5's moral responsibility, evident in the 1956 Suez Crisis where the conflict was averted, is often overridden by national interests, as seen in Russia's actions. The Russia-Ukraine War demands reform of peacekeeping principles and the Security Council to align the UN's operations with its mission, ensuring effective responses to conflicts involving great powers.

P5:
The Permanent Five members (P5) of the UN Security Council have veto power over its resolutions.

4. UN Peacekeeping in Crisis: Structural Flaws and the Need for Change

Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine, as a P5 Security Council member, exposes profound structural contradictions in the UN's mandate to uphold international peace, undermining its legitimacy and rendering peacekeeping

ineffective amid great-power rivalry. This aggression reveals foundational flaws in the UN's peacekeeping architecture, necessitating theoretical and institutional reforms to restore efficacy. Russia's deployment of forces as "peacekeepers" in Ukraine's separatist regions breaches impartiality, eroding normative frameworks like human rights and international law (Arif, 2022). The Security Council's veto power shields aggressors, as Russia's 2022 veto of a resolution condemning its invasion paralyzed UN action, prioritizing national interests over collective security (Hultman & Peksen, 2023). This paralysis hinders impartial peacekeeping operations, with Russia's refusal to consent blocking Poland's 2022 mission proposal (Benkler et al., 2023). When P5 members are belligerents, peacekeeping faces severe constraints. Council divisions, such as Russia and China's abstentions on MINUSMA in Mali, dilute mandates, while host states' restrictions compromise impartiality by aligning peacekeepers with local military goals (Cunliffe, 2025). The P5's institutional and moral duty to use vetoes responsibly, as seen in the 1956 Suez Crisis, is undermined by self-interest in crises like Ukraine (Ekpe & Abumbe, 2024). The lack of a structural mechanism to address P5 aggression in a multipolar world amplifies the urgency of reform (Paris, 2023). Proposals to limit veto use in aggression cases or expand permanent membership face resistance, risking further gridlock. Empowering the General Assembly to authorize peacekeeping operations during Council deadlocks offers a viable path, though it requires careful calibration to avoid escalation (Novosseloff & Tardy, 2023). Member states must pursue pragmatic reforms, such as normatively flexible training and regional partnerships, to support localized, adaptive missions (Cassin & Zyla, 2023; Tardy, 2023). Evolving norms, including International Criminal Court probes and sovereignty redefined to prioritize civilian protection, lack enforcement against P5 members. Compact, mediation-focused missions align with pragmatic peacekeeping demands amid fiscal and legitimacy challenges (Karlsrud, 2023). The Russia–Ukraine war highlights the need to overhaul collective security's foundations. Despite diplomatic efforts like the Black Sea Grain Initiative, peacekeeping's reliance on Council mandates limits its scope (Rothman et al., 2024). Reforming the Council to curb aggressor protection is essential to align peacekeeping with the UN's mission, ensuring resilience in a fractured global order. Russia's actions highlight broader UN peacekeeping crises, necessitating systemic reforms.

When P5 members are belligerents, peacekeeping faces severe constraints.

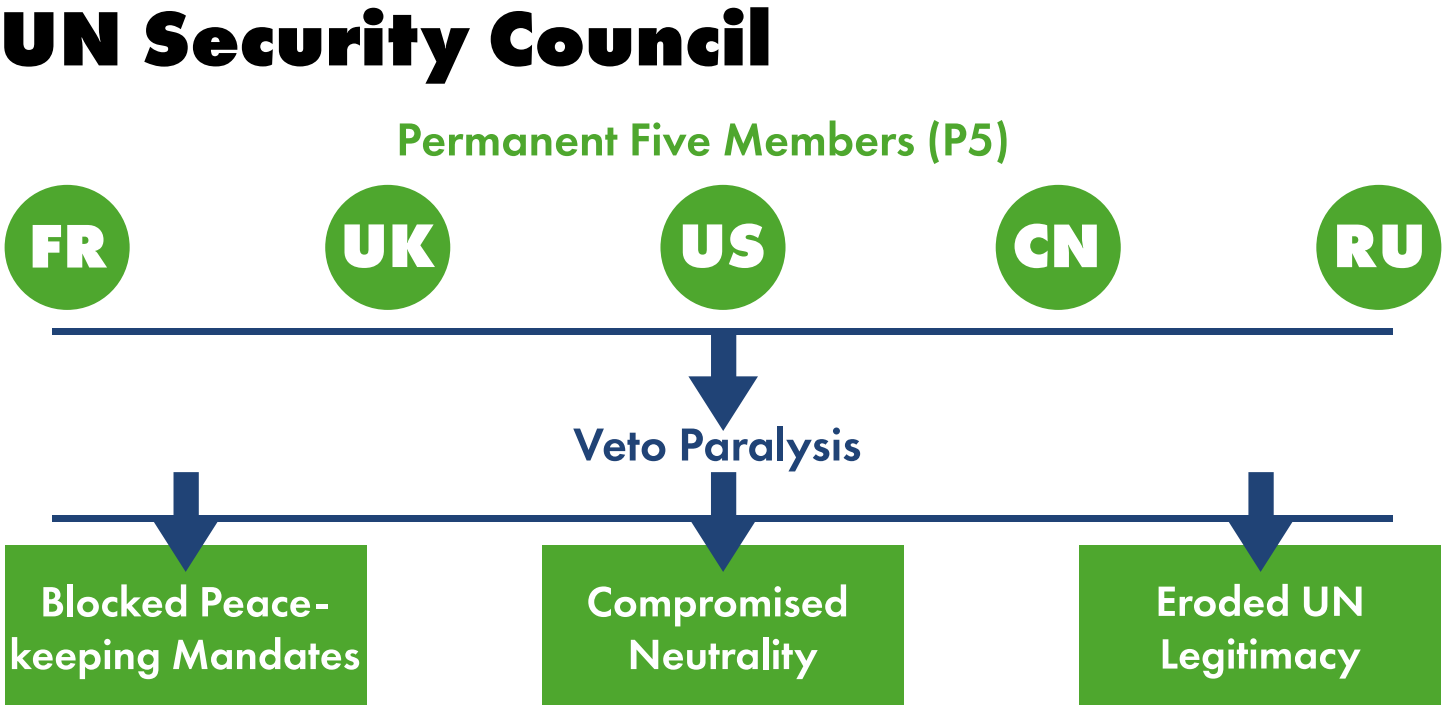

Figure 2: The UN Security Council

5. Policy Recommendations

Russia's 2022 UN invasion of Ukraine highlights systemic flaws in UN peacekeeping, necessitating reforms to restore legitimacy and effectiveness in collective security. To address P5 veto misuse, host government resistance, and operational constraints, the UN must reform its structures and adopt pragmatic, localized strategies (Paris, 2023). The following recommendations aim to enhance peacekeeping resilience and align with the UN's mandate.

- Reform Veto Use: Limit P5 veto power in cases of aggression through a UN Charter amendment, ensuring accountability and reducing paralysis, as seen in Ukraine (Hultman & Peksen, 2023).

- Adopt P5 Code of Conduct: Establish a binding code for P5 veto use, drawing on the 1956 Suez Crisis precedent, to promote ethical decision-making (Ekpe & Abumbe, 2024).

- Empower General Assembly: Authorize the General Assembly to approve PKOs during Council deadlocks, with consensus protocols to mitigate escalation risks (Novosseloff & Tardy, 2023).

- Prioritize Compact Missions: Shift to mediation-focused, flexible missions to address fiscal constraints and enhance local ownership (Karlsrud, 2023).

- Enhance Peacekeeper Training: Implement normatively flexible training to strengthen impartiality and engagement with local actors, addressing restrictions like those in Mali (Cassin & Zyla, 2023).

- Formalize Regional Partnerships: Strengthen regional partnerships, e.g., with the African Union, through joint training and mandate support to boost mission resilience (Novosseloff & Tardy, 2023).

- Establish P5 Consultation Framework: Create a standing P5-troop contributor consultation mechanism to ensure robust political backing for mandates (Benkler et al., 2023).

- Enforce Accountability Norms: Integrate civilian protection and accountability into mandates with enforceable sanctions for norm violations to uphold UN principles (Paris, 2023).

6. Conclusion

Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine as a permanent Security Council member lays bare the UN's structural contradictions, eroding its legitimacy and paralyzing peacekeeping amid great-power conflicts. The veto system enables aggressors to block collective action, while violations of impartiality undermine the principles of peace operations. This crisis highlights deep flaws in the UN's peacekeeping framework, demanding urgent rethinking of its normative and operational foundations. Compact, mediation-driven missions and regional partnerships offer a path to adapt to fragile contexts, but their success depends on unified political backing and local engagement. Reforming the Security Council to limit veto misuse and enhance General Assembly authority is essential to restore credibility. The Ukraine conflict reveals that without addressing these systemic challenges, the UN risks becoming irrelevant in managing global crises. Overhauling collective security is critical to ensure peacekeeping remains a viable tool for fostering peace, aligning with the UN's mission to uphold international stability in an increasingly contested world order. The future of global peacekeeping hinges on bold reforms to bridge the gap between the UN's ideals and its operational realities. These reforms offer a path to revitalize UN peacekeeping's global role.

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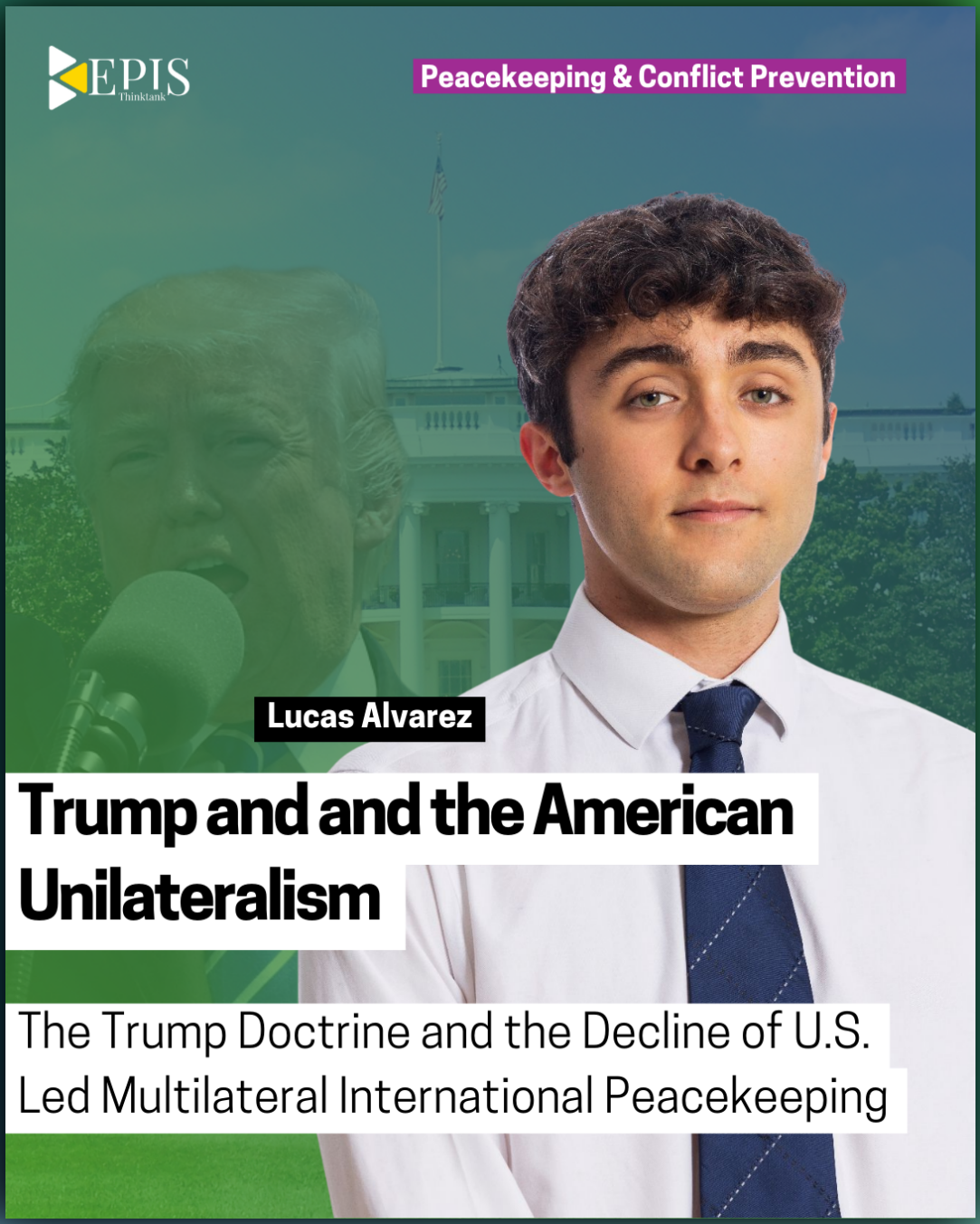

About the Article

How does the Trump doctrine influence the U.S.' unilateral engagement? The Trump doctrine follows that America's needs are of primary concern, and multilateral aid, support, and institutions with heavy reliance on U.S. funding and engagement, should be reduced, minimized, or eradicated. The Trump era is demonstrating the risks of American disengagement but also the limits of multilateralism and unilateralism.

About the Author

Lucas Alvarez is a penultimate-year History and Philosophy student at the University of Reading, specialising in East Asia through semesters in Seoul and Tokyo. As an incoming Genocide Watch intern, he will research Central and East Asian developments. He co-founded and manages the treasury of the university's Philosophy Society. Lucas is passionate about international law and aims for a career in international criminal law.

1. The Trump Doctrine and American Unilateralism

Almost every president has a guiding policy "doctrine", whether it be the Truman Doctrine of anti-communist containment, Carter Doctrine on control of the Persian Gulf, or the Monroe Doctrine on foreign intervention in the Western Hemisphere. Since the 47th President's entry into the White House, the "Trump Doctrine" has stood as the guiding principle of U.S. foreign policy. In theory, it follows that America's needs are of primary concern, and multilateral aid, support, and institutions with heavy reliance on U.S. funding and engagement, should be reduced, minimized, or eradicated. It was introduced in Trump's first term in office and acts as a departure from the nation's tacit historic role of being a global peace-maker and 'good cop' of the global power order. This shift has taken form many ways, with one example being the dismantling of U.S. institutions used to promote civil society as well as democracy globally, including but not limited to the Agency for International Development, Voice of America, and the National Endowment for Democracy (Haass, 2025).

his move from traditional U.S. support for multilateral institutions has prompted many to reconsider the historical role of these institutions and their future relevance. Since World War I and World War II, the United States has played a significant role in international policing, often in a unilateral manner, whether through Cold War containment efforts in Vietnam during the 1960s, interventions like Grenada in 1983, Korea in 1950, or the orchestration of Saddam Hussein's removal during the 2003 Iraq invasion. While unilateral action has long been a feature of U.S. foreign policy, often employed when strategic interests were at stake, such actions were typically framed within broader commitments to global leadership or moral responsibility. In contrast, Trump's approach is different in that unilateralism and isolationism are not occasional strategies, but guiding principles of his foreign policy. Unlike past interventions such as Korea or Iraq, which asserted America's leadership even while bypassing multilateral approval, Trump's stance has framed international institution engagement as a liability rather than a responsibility.

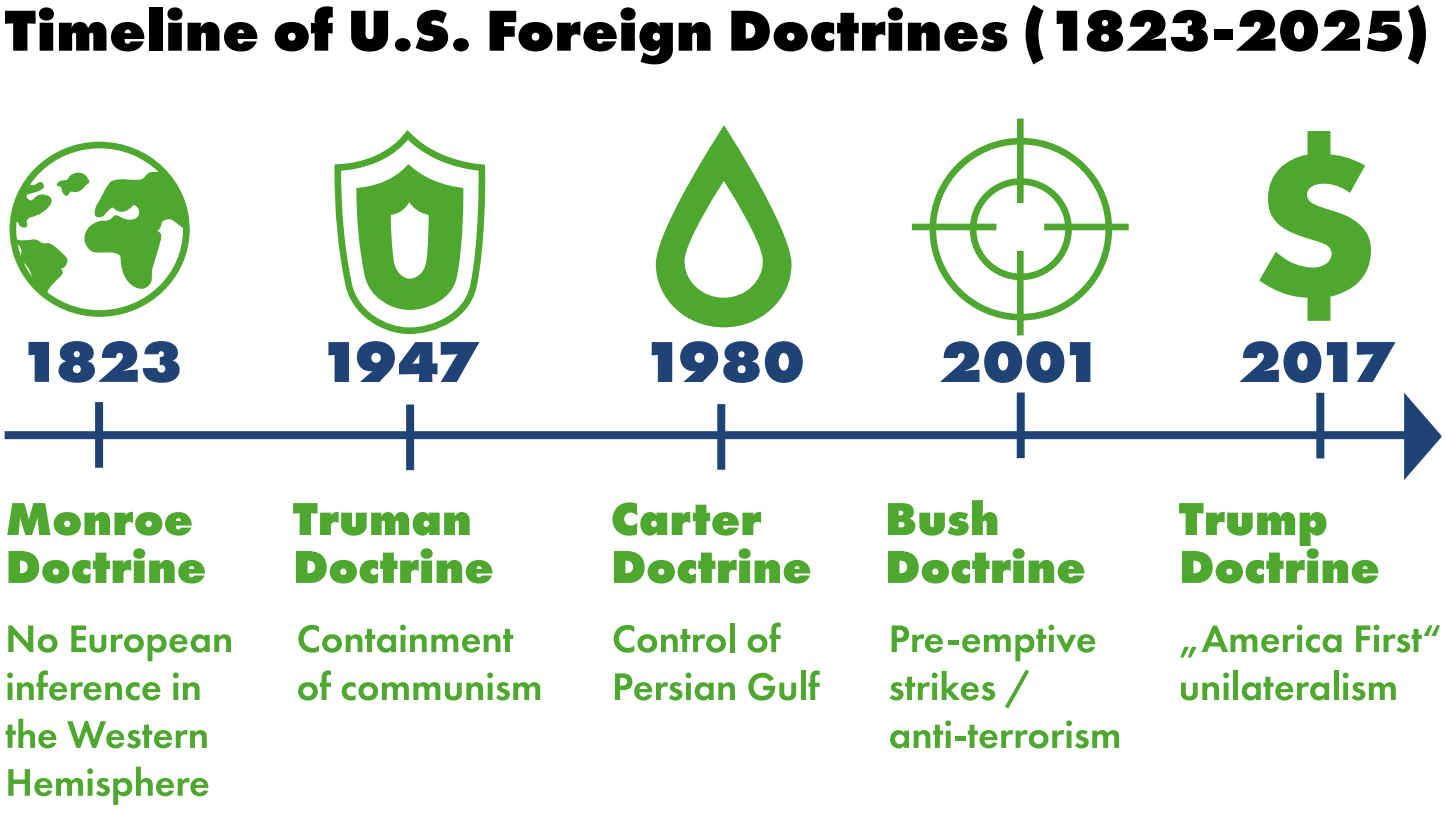

Figure 1: Timeline of U.S. foreign Policy Doctrines (1823-2ß25)

The Monroe Doctrine, with its emphasis on hemispheric dominance and limited foreign entanglement, continues to exist in American thinking, but Trump's interpretation leans further toward transactional disengagement and reduced global responsibility. This prompts thought on what lies in the future for U.S. foreign policy. The extent to which multilateral institutions can recover from the aftermath of Trump's second four year term (potentially eight) remains unclear. Much will depend on the direction of future administrations. A Democrat victory may aim to rebuild these partnerships, whereas another Trump-aligned figure could cement the current trajectory of retreat. One of the clearest regions where these changes have played out is in the Middle East, a region long shaped by American interventionism. For decades, U.S. foreign policy in the region has served as a test for wider global strategy, whether it be Cold War containment, oil-driven alliances, or counterterrorism campaigns. From the 1953 coup in Iran to the 2003 Iraq invasion, successive presidents have used both hard and soft power to secure U.S. interests, often under the banner of promoting stability or democracy. While each administration has employed different tools, they shared an underlying belief in sustained engagement, albeit frequently unilateral, rooted in the assumption that American leadership was essential to shaping the region's future, and framed as to their benefit. The Trump administration, by contrast, recalibrated this relationship. Moving from relying on long-term diplomatic structures and peacebuilding efforts, the emphasis in his first term shifted toward transactional diplomacy. This was most evident in the recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital and the withdrawal from the Iran nuclear deal, actions that reflected a disregard for international consensus and consideration for multilateral diplomacy (The White House, 2018; Landler, 2017). These actions reshaped America's credibility in the eyes of many, as European allies were unsure whether U.S. commitments to the region would remain intact beyond a single term. Under Trump, military disengagement is also portrayed as a strength. The sudden drawdown of troops in Syria, weakened trust among Kurdish allies, while bolstering the influence of Russia and Iran. The U.S. as of 2025 now has less than 1,000 troops in the country (The Japan Times, 2025). Instead of upholding the U.S.'s traditional role as regional stabiliser, the Trump Doctrine prioritises short-term gain over long-term partnerships, often with the assumption that others would step into the vacuum, which has proven to be true. Meanwhile, institutions that had once bolstered U.S. soft power, USAID, Voice of America, and the National Endowment for Democracy, have been either sidelined or completely shut down, furthering the ideological pivot away from global aid and support (Kenny, 2025). Whether the Biden administration's partial return to multilateralism and alliance-building repaired any of the damage from Trump's first term is unclear, but also irrelevant due to Trump's second term. The precedent set by Trump in his first term and the precedent he is setting now, suggests that neo-isolationism is a growing force in American political Republican identity, if not essential to its core. The U.S.'s future role in the Middle East, and indeed in the international order, now hinges not just on elections, but on whether the American public believes in the value of global leadership, and the need for an American global presence, which future elections will reveal.

The Trump doctrine:
Combines different policies under the umbrella of „America first".

2. The UN and Declining U.S. Commitment to Multilateral Peacekeeping

During Donald Trump's first presidency, the United States demonstrated a notable decline in commitment to the United Nations and its peacekeeping operations that he has maintained going into his non-consecutive second term. This was primarily through funding cuts and hostile rhetoric. In 2018, the Trump administration reduced U.S. contributions to UN peacekeeping by around $600 million, arguing that the burden of global security should be more equitably shared among member states (Carver, 2018). Trump consistently framed international institutions like the UN as inefficient and overly reliant on U.S. support, alig-

ning with his "America First" ethos. This narrative framed the UN as an organisation that was exploiting American generosity. The administration also withdrew from several UN bodies, including the Human Rights Council and UNESCO, citing perceived anti-American or anti-Israel biases, a sentiment that also led to his sanctions on the ICC in 2025 (The White House, 2025). The reduction in U.S. funding and political support under the Trump administration has had tangible effects on several UN peacekeeping missions. As the largest single contributor to the UN's peacekeeping budget in 2017-18, providing approximately 28.5% before Trump's cuts, the U.S. 2018 withdrawal created financial shortfalls that forced missions to scale back operations (Beaumont, 2017). In conflict zones such as the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUSCO) and South Sudan (UNMISS), missions faced operational constraints, including reduced personnel, limited mobility, and the downsizing of protective and humanitarian functions. Some have claimed, missions like MONUSCO have actively brought destabilisation, allowing perpetrators of the Rwandan genocide to take over refugee camps (Rubin, 2025). It also could be that the withdrawal of symbolic U.S. backing has weakened the political legitimacy and authority of these missions, allowing host governments and armed groups to challenge UN presence. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, President Félix Tshisekedi's government formally requested MONUSCO's withdrawal by the end of 2024, citing the mission's inability to restore stability, an assertion that reflected both mounting domestic dissatisfaction and diminished international support (Nantulya, 2024). For traditional allies, particularly in Europe and within NATO, doubt has been cast on America's reliability as a global leader and security partner. European powers like Germany and France have been prompted to explore more autonomous defense strategies, including renewed investment in EU-led missions and serious discussions around a potential European army. An example is the expansion of the EU's Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) and proposals for a European rapid-reaction force, directly led by concerns over U.S. unpredictability (Boot, 2025). However, German Chancellor Merz has openly declared that, even amid discussions of strategic autonomy, Berlin "still needs the United States" to guarantee its defense, showing that the talk of European independence may be incompatible with current political realities (Chassany, 2025). For adversaries, this retreat created openings for geopolitical gains. Russia and China, in particular, capitalised on the vacuum left by the U.S., increasing their influence in peacekeeping operations and diplomatic bodies. China, ramped up its financial and personnel contributions to UN peacekeeping and put forward stronger leadership in global governance discussions (Lee & Himani, 2025). The erosion of U.S. engagement signaled a possible shift in the international order, encouraging alternative powers to contest Western liberal norms with greater confidence.

3. NATO and the Strain on Transatlantic Security

Trump has been consistently critical of NATO, particularly concerning what he perceives as unfair burden-sharing among member states. He argued that the United States was disproportionately funding the alliance while other countries, especially in Europe, were failing to meet their financial commitments. Trump frequently cited the NATO guideline that each member should spend at least 2% of their GDP on defense, something fewer than a third of members were doing during his first term (CNN, 2018).
At the 2018 NATO summit in Brussels, Trump publicly chastised allies like Germany for relying heavily on U.S. military protection while investing relatively little in their own defense capabilities (Mason & Emmot, 2018). He even threatened them with his "go it alone" policy if allies didn't increase their spending, (a trade doctrine he still uses today, most recently seen at the Paris OECD summit) casting doubt on the U.S.'s commitment to Article 5, NATO's collective defense clause (Foster, 2025). Trump's aggressive stance on NATO burden-sharing, mixed with current global affairs, has significantly affected the alliance's idea of collective defense. While the Trump administration's ideological retreat from multilateralism led to a measurable increase in defense spending among several NATO member states, particularly in Eastern Europe,

this also introduced issues in alliance unity. Poland, for example, raised its defense spending from 2.7% of GDP in 2022 to 4.2% in 2024, with projections reaching 4.7% by 2025, making it one of NATO's top military spenders. It's important to note however, that while these increases coincide with U.S. pressure for burden-sharing, they also correlate with heightened security threats stemming from Russia's invasion of Ukraine (Oleksiejuk, 2025). More broadly, defense expenditure rose across the alliance:

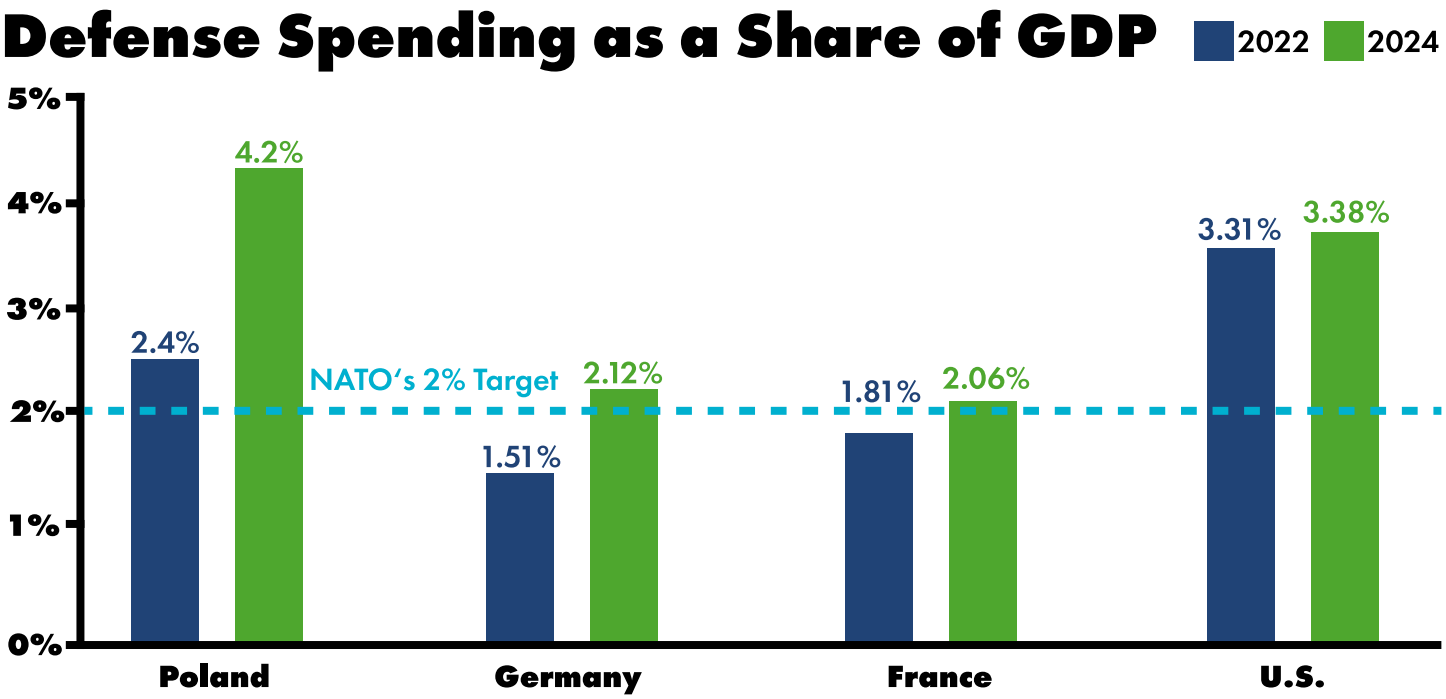

Figure 2: Defense Spending as a Share of GDP

the U.S. increased from 3.31% in 2022 to 3.38% in 2024, Germany from 1.51% to 2.12%, and France from 1.88% to 2.06%, signaling a broader shift in NATO's strategic priorities (NATO, 2024). The scolding from the U.S displayed faults in NATO's deterrence credibility. When the U.S., the cornerstone of the alliance's military power, shows uncertainty about defending its partners, adversaries like Russia may be emboldened to test NATO's resolve, as seen in its continued aggression in Eastern Europe. Furthermore, the alliance's ability to present a united front was compromised by intra-alliance tensions and rising political divisions, weakening the rapid coordination needed in a real-world military crisis. Trump's approach to NATO and broader foreign policy is a move away from traditional American leadership to strategic retrenchment. Historically, the U.S. played a central role in shaping and upholding multilateral institutions like NATO, positioning itself as a guarantor of global security and liberal democratic values. However, under the Trump Doctrine, this leadership gave way to a more inward-looking, transactional stance that prioritised national interests over collective commitments. While not full isolationism, this retrenchment recalibrated America's global posture, and changed assumptions about its role as the linchpin of Western security structures.

4. The Future of International Peacekeeping and Multilateralism Post-Trump

The Trump Doctrine's legacy, emphasising unilateralism, transactional diplomacy, and skepticism toward multilateral institutions, has left a lasting impact on the global order. As the United States swings between withdrawal and re-engagement under different administrations, the future of international peacekeeping and multilateral cooperation is uncertain. The post-Trump era will be shaped by three key factors: the durability of institutions like the UN and NATO, the growing influence of rival powers filling the void left by U.S. disengagement, and the unresolved debate over whether America will reclaim its traditional role as a global leader, a question that is especially dependent on which party wins the next election. The United Nations and NATO have survived numerous geopolitical

shifts, but the Trump presidency exposed their vulnerability when U.S. support wavers. While the Biden administration attempted to reverse some of Trump's policies, including rejoining international agreements and reaffirming commitments to NATO, the long-term effects of distrust and reduced funding may persist (U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, 2021). UN peacekeeping missions, already struggling due to budget cuts and political marginalisation, now face existential challenges. Can they function effectively without consistent American backing? Some argue that reforms, such as fairer burden-sharing and clearer mandates, could strengthen these missions. However, without steady U.S. leadership, the UN risks becoming a market for geopolitical rivalry rather than collective problem-solving. Similarly, NATO's future depends on whether European members can turn their talk of „strategic autonomy" into real military coordination, a goal complicated by political divisions and resource limitations. The decline of U.S. leadership has allowed other major powers to expand their global influence. China, for instance, has increased its participation in UN peacekeeping, invested heavily in infrastructure projects worldwide, and strengthened its diplomatic presence in regions like Africa and the Middle East. Russia, meanwhile, has exploited NATO's internal divisions and used asymmetric tactics to undermine Western initiatives. These trends suggest that multilateralism may not disappear but could instead evolve into a more fragmented system, where competing blocs pursue their own interests rather than upholding a unified global order. For smaller nations, this could mean navigating a world where they must balance relationships with multiple great powers rather than relying on U.S. protection. The future of international peacekeeping and multilateralism ultimately hinges on the United States itself. The Trump Doctrine reflects a broader skepticism toward global engagement that existed before his presidency and will likely endure after it. Public opinion on foreign policy has become increasingly polarised, with Republicans favoring a more isolationist approach and Democrats supporting renewed international cooperation. This division brings in the question, can the U.S. maintain a stable global role if its citizens no longer see value in leadership? The answer will determine not only America's electoral future but also the stability of the world order. In the decades ahead, the international system may swing between a multilateral order led by a recommitted U.S., a fractured system dominated by regional powers, or a chaotic landscape where institutions weaken and conflicts escalate. The Trump era is demonstrating the risks of American disengagement but also the limits of multilateralism and unilateralism. Whether the world moves toward cooperation or division will depend on whether the U.S. and its allies can reconcile national sovereignty with the need for collective security, or whether the post-Trump era becomes defined by intensified great-power competition.

The scolding from the U.S displayed faults in NATO's deterrence credibility.

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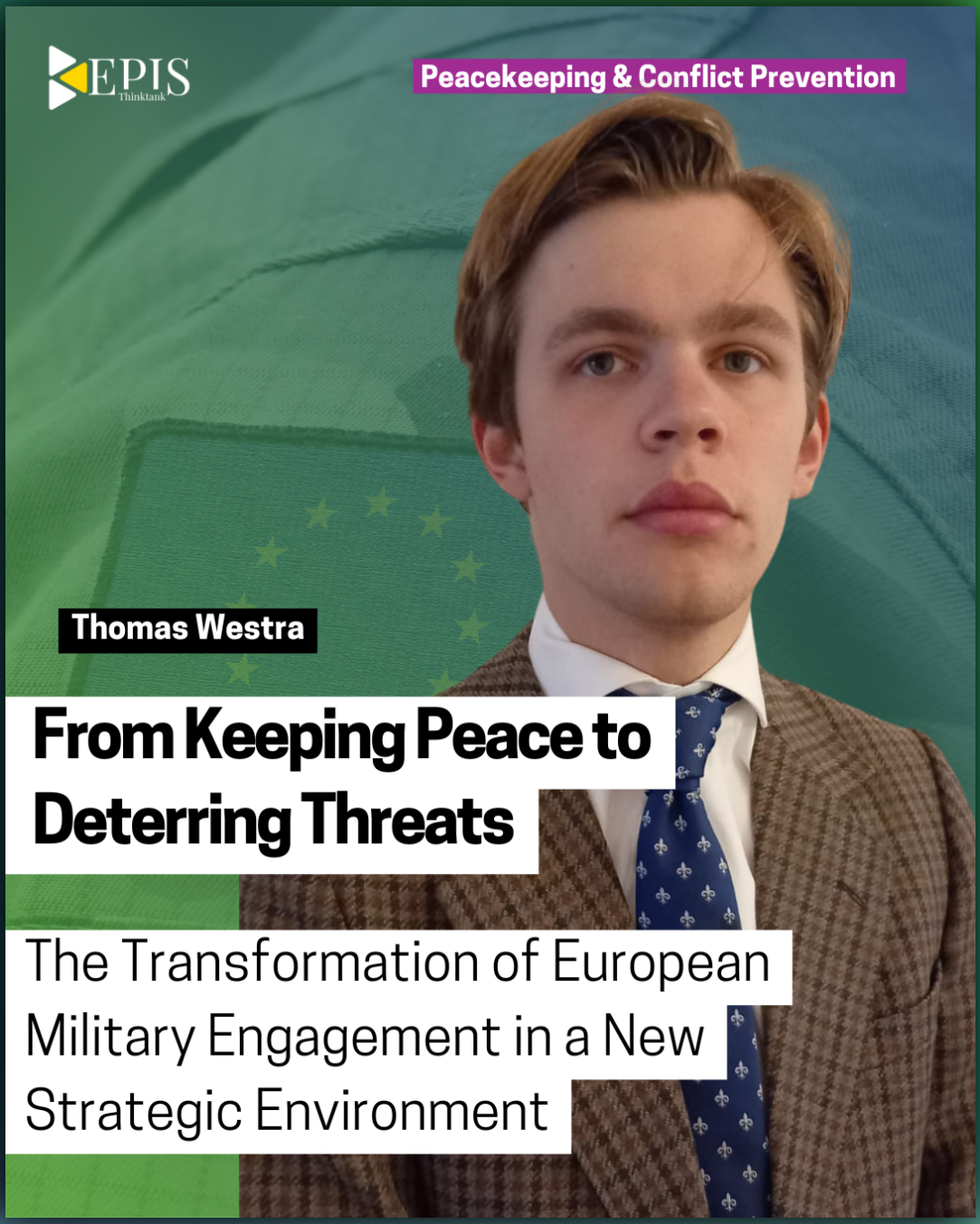

About the Article

How did the EU's Military Engagment change in the recent years?The European military mentality has shifted for a large part away from peacekeeping obligations. Of course, the European NATO members will increase their defence spending gradually in the coming years, which will give the European military the resources to better achieve their goals. Once these goals concerning peacekeeping have been defined, we can judge the effectiveness of these nations in achieving them.

About the Author

Thomas Westra studies history at Leiden University, focusing on the religious history of Europe in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages. He also carries an interest in global affairs and Military History in general.

Introduction

In the recent past, certain areas around Europe have become increasingly unstable, leading to conflicts in Ethiopia, Yemen, and of course, Ukraine, just to name a few (Lewis & McAllister, 2023). These conflicts, both old and new, are becoming increasingly important in their impact on global connections and trade, but also on the general instability in these regions (Snyman, 2024). The tradition to combat these explosions of violence has always been to send peacekeepers either under the banner of the United Nations or through individual nations (United Nations Peacekeeping, 2025). These peacekeeping efforts could then depend on the efforts of single countries or the combined efforts of multiple countries (European External Action Service, 2025). The shift in global security, combined with a new status quo within the first world, where large-scale warfare is seen as a more realistic possibility, tests the will of "Peacekeeping States" to commit their military power towards peacekeeping operations (Nogueira Pinto, 2024). This article will attempt to analyse the attitude towards peacekeeping operations, attempt to ascertain the cause of developments in the security situation for "Peacekeeping States," and predict possible trends and outcomes of these events.

Readiness 2030:
Outlines a plan to enhance the EU's readiness, resilience, and deterrence.

Part 1: Peacekeeping States, Peacekeeping Developments

MINUSMA was the United Nations' attempt at stabilizing Mali after ethnic rebellions in the Northern regions of Mali (United Nations Peacekeeping, 2025). This led to clashes with the Malian army followed by a coup d'état by the military (Lewis & McAllister, 2023). It was decided through United Nations Security Council Resolution 2100 to stabilise the country and develop a way in which democratic elections could be held again (United Nations Peacekeeping, 2025). In general, one could say that this was a "stereotypical" peacekeeping operation for the United Nations (Snyman, 2024). However, it is not so far-fetched to say that MINUSMA was a failure. These are the words of the Malian government at the time, stating that the UN forces should leave the country, as they were incapable of responding to security challenges (Al Jazeera, 2023). The UN mission in Mali consisted out of rotating contingents of Western, Asian and African militaries (United Nations Peacekeeping, 2025). Concerning this article, what is important to understand is that the development of the political will of contributing nations to send peacekeeping forces, what motivates them to commit to long-term operations, and what dissuades them from staying (Snyman, 2024). One should remember, however, that the MINUSMA mission ended on the request of the Malian government, not because there was a lack of political will within the UN (Lewis & McAllister, 2023). However, there still was something akin to a "peacekeeping fatigue" among the contributing nations (de Hek, 2025). Triggering articles such as The Mali Mission: Was It Really Worth It? in the Netherlands (de Hek, 2025), followed by German articles stating that "Russia's attack on Ukraine has changed German policymakers' view of the world. The alliance's eastern borders are now the top priority. With the withdrawal from Mali, a 30-year era of major foreign deployments is ending. What matters most now is the defence of Germany and NATO" (Nogueira Pinto, 2024). This is an example of how a changing worldview by the Western powers, combined with the lack of a peace guarantee within Europe, and seemingly ineffective peacekeeping operations can lead to a shift in attitude away from peacekeeping and towards a focus on possibly dangerous nation states (Snyman, 2024). This is best seen in the way EU defence spending has been treated in the past compared to

the present (European External Action Service, 2025). While in 2015 European defence spending was seen as a "toolbox for the enforcement of hard power," a generally vague description of anything to do with defence spending and perhaps indicative of the lack of purpose and direction, today the white paper for European defence, Readiness 2030, resembles a general mobilisation to combat a defined, dangerous threat: The Russian Federation (Nogueira Pinto, 2024). This is a hard shift in attitude, which means can have many possible outcomes for the future of peacekeeping (Snyman, 2024).

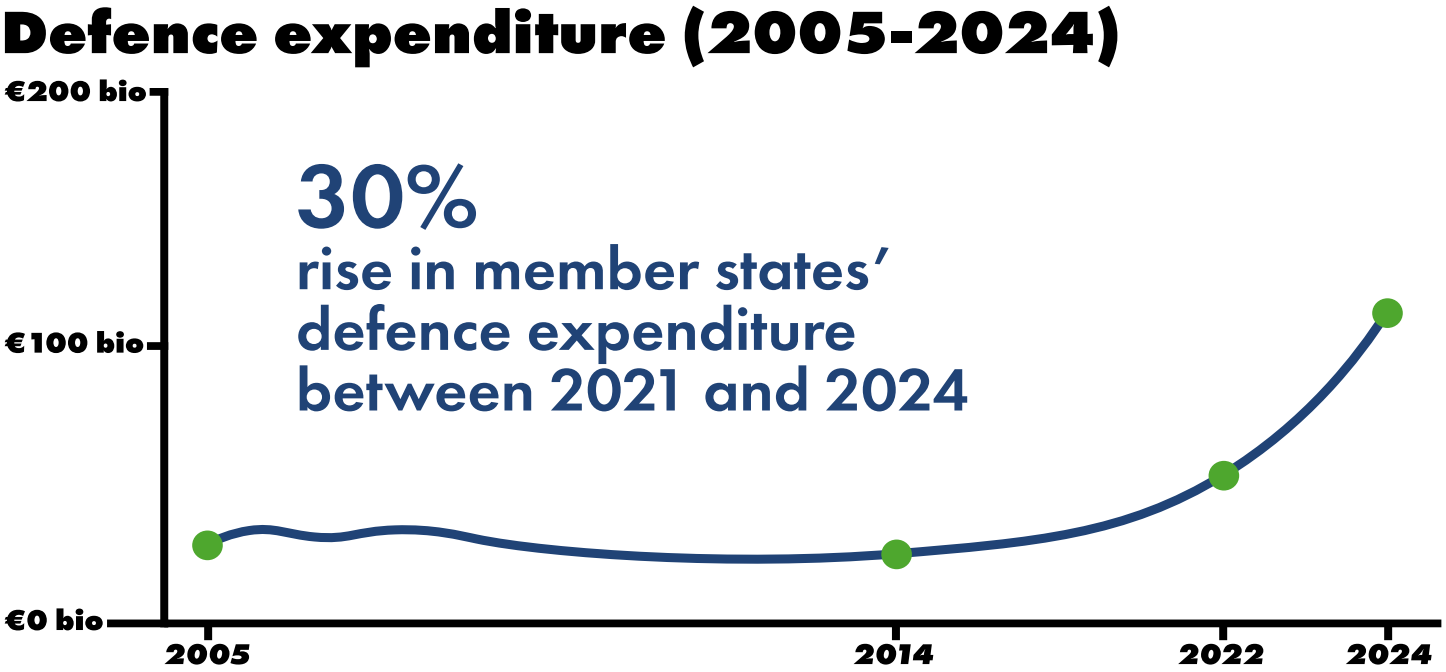

Figure 1: Digram showing the development of defence expenditure Source: https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/defence-numbers/

Part 2: Changes in the Security Situation for "Peacekeeping States"

When one takes a look at Europe, there is a core group within the EU which partakes in peacekeeping operations to such an extent that it becomes notable (European External Action Service, 2025). For example, the French military has a long tradition of operations in Africa, primarily in former colonies (Nogueira Pinto, 2024). The Germans, Dutch, Belgians and Irish can also be seen in these operations (Snyman, 2024). We will therefore focus primarily on these nations in order to limit the study and to create a clear comparison between countries. What has changed for these nations when it comes to peacekeeping commitments? The EU member states seem to be concerned with the military threat posed by the Russian Federation, a fear which has its origins in 2014, but peaked with the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 (Lewis & McAllister, 2023). This threat has changed significantly and rapidly in the past ten years (Nogueira Pinto, 2024). While European nations were more committed to combating the possible growth of terrorism in the Middle East and Sub-Saharan Africa, the priority for most of these Western armed forces has switched completely towards a capability more suited for large-scale warfare (Snyman, 2024). Not only does this mean that the military budget of these relevant nations has to be spent differently, but also that the presence of combat troops, air and sea assets has achieved a political value with regards to deterrence (Nogueira Pinto, 2024). For example, the stationing of combat units in the Baltic States on the Russian border is not only a military move, but also meant to send a political message (Lewis & McAllister, 2023). The location of military assets has been politicised (Snyman, 2024). Military equipment has also been tailor-made towards counter-insurgency or low-level intensity operations, which fit the bill well for peacekeeping missions (Klep, 1998). Helicopters for patrols, light vehicles and infantrymen are more useful for socially oriented patrols and rapid

responses to armed militias than, for example, tanks or jets (Klep, 1998). A telling example is when the Dutch military sold all of its Leopard 2 main battle tanks, considering them too expensive and unimportant for future conflicts, only to regret this decision after the 2022 Ukraine war started, and the role of the tank was reinforced on the modern battlefield (Snyman, 2024). The use of personnel, the equipment purchases, doctrine, training priorities and the stationing of units throughout the globe make it more difficult for the European peacekeeping nations to seriously consider peacekeeping operations without also having serious difficulties concerning their capability for conventional warfare (Nogueira Pinto, 2024). Besides Ukraine, other security threats around Europe are emerging, making it even more difficult to efficiently spread out military resources (Lewis & McAllister, 2023). Examples of these emerging threats are Houthi missile strikes on Red Sea shipping (Associated Press, 2025) and the emergence of new ways of warfare such as cyber warfare and drone warfare (Snyman, 2024).

Figure 1: The timeline from 2015 Peacekeeping involvement with light weapons to today's focus on deterrence with heavy weapons.

The increase in the production capacity of military equipment, something which small-scale operations do not require, is indicative of the war that the Western nations are preparing for – not a foot-patrol controlling border checkpoints, but thousands of rounds of artillery, tanks, and conscripts (Nogueira Pinto, 2024).

Part 3: Possible outcomes and effects

There are multiple possibilities concerning the change in military mentality within European countries, which have for a long time prioritised peacekeeping (Snyman, 2024). On the one hand, the large-scale investments in capability may mean that eventually, these nations can commit to peacekeeping operations just as effectively as before, successfully combining the responsibilities of a major peacekeeper with the responsibility of deterring the Russian Federation, among other threats (Nogueira Pinto, 2024). At the same time, we might see a decrease in the willingness and effectiveness of these nations with regards to peacekeeping (Snyman, 2024). This may lead to sacrificing the idea of flexible, lightly armed forces and equipment for a more "heavy-duty" conventional cold war doctrine-focused military (Snyman, 2024).The idea that these forces will be less suited to handle peacekeeping operations is not purely speculation, however (Klep, 1998). In the Dutch military for example, there were peacekeeping operations in former Yugoslavia and Lebanon (Klep, 1998). The Dutch military at the time had a small cadre of professional soldiers, combined with a large base of conscript troops lacking military experience, motivation, governmental trust and top-notch equipment (Klep, 1998). Compared with today, the Dutch military at the time was more quantity-focused than quality-focused, at least compared to the current Dutch standard today (Klep, 1998). The point of this divergence into Dutch

military history is to show that there is indeed a historical precedent for this problem, and at the same time the issue is becoming more relevant all the time (Klep, 1998). There is a call for conscription within the Netherlands and other EU member states in order to better counter the scale of Russian mobilisation (Nogueira Pinto, 2024). However, when the Dutch conscripts were also sent to Yugoslavia and Lebanon where they were ill-equipped and unsuited towards the subtle nuances of peacekeeping operations (Klep, 1998). Within the Dutch military history, there is the idea that conscripts in Lebanon could do nothing but get shot at, achieving little, and generally being in danger (Klep, 1998). Furthermore, the unsupported conscripts defending Srebrenica were not up to the task of handling the situation effectively, as they were underequipped and poorly trained for the task at hand (Klep, 1998). This, of course, combined with a lack of external support, led to the fall of Srebrenica (Klep, 1998). Perhaps this is a problem of the past, or a uniquely Dutch problem. However, the possibility of reintroducing conscription within EU militaries might still negatively affect the perceived effectiveness of these militaries with regard to peacekeeping operations (Snyman, 2024). There is a possible solution namely to keep a cadre of professional soldiers ready for such operations (Klep, 1998). However, in a time of crisis, uncertainty and apprehension, it seems that at the time of writing, the best professional soldiers are now in Eastern Europe, functioning as a credible deterrence, training Ukrainian soldiers, and trying to expand their capabilities (Lewis & McAllister, 2023). The possibility of a change in the way the mentioned EU member states fight wars might also change the wars they are committed to fighting (Snyman, 2024). Large-scale and long-term investments into military power might lead to a European military might which is capable of peacekeeping and deterrence at the same time (Nogueira Pinto, 2024). Furthermore, the possibility that a European power can engage in long-term peacekeeping missions without draining too much of the military budget or capabilities might lead to an increased willingness to partake in these expeditions (Snyman, 2024). In conclusion, we can see that peacekeeping by EU nations has come under strain (Snyman, 2024). The European military mentality has shifted for a large part away from peacekeeping obligations (Nogueira Pinto, 2024). This means a new mentality about what the military is used for, but also in what a military should be able to do best (Snyman, 2024). In the past we have seen nations which have been capable of conducting large-scale operations and low-intensity operations at the same time, but we have also witnessed countries that have failed in this task (Klep, 1998). In the future, a choice must be made about exactly how these goals are going to be achieved, but also where the priorities lie (Snyman, 2024). In the past few months, there have already been some developments in this field. The escalation between Iran and Israel, which led to direct American military involvement, has heightened tensions within Europe, but also divided the voting European concerning cooperation with the United States (Associated Press, 2025). Of course, the European NATO members will increase their defence spending gradually in the coming years, which will give the European military the resources to better achieve their goals (European External Action Service, 2025). Once these goals concerning peacekeeping have been defined, we can judge the effectiveness of these nations in achieving them (Snyman, 2024).

The European military mentality has shifted for a large part away from peacekeeping obligations.

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About the Interview

How has Elmar Brok shaped the EU's external action and crisis response? As one of the longest-serving MEPs, Brok played a key role in defining the EU's foreign policy, fostering transatlantic relations, and advancing the EU's global influence. His experience highlights the EU's need for stronger strategic cohesion to meet today's geopolitical challenges.

About the Interviewee

Elmar Brok is a German politician and member of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU). He served as a Member of the European Parliament (MEP) from 1980 to 2019 and was one of its longest-serving members. Brok played a key role in EU foreign affairs, notably as Chair of the Committee on Foreign Affairs. A close ally of Angela Merkel and advocate of European integration, he was influential in shaping EU enlargement, constitutional reform, and the EU's global diplomatic presence.

About the Interviewers:

Theodor Himmel is pursuing an advanced legal education as a Rechtsreferendar at the Regional Court of Baden-Baden. His expertise includes international arbitration and mediation, as evidenced by his Advanced LL.M. from Leiden University, where he focused on the EU and Singapore Mediation Conventions. As Chair of the EPIS Thinktank e.V., he leads international collaborations on foreign affairs and security policy, while also contributing to legal scholarship and policy advisory roles with government affairs.

Vincent Sipeer is pursuing an M.A. in National and International Administration and Policy at the University of Potsdam (DE). His research focuses on climate diplomacy and intergovernmental cooperation. Currently, he is involved in projects with the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth and prepares his participation in MUNs. Vincent aims to align regional interests with the discourse on climate security.

In this interview, we have the privilege of speaking with Elmar Brok, a prominent figure in European politics and one of the longest-serving Members of the European Parliament. With a career spanning nearly four decades, Mr Brok has been at the heart of major developments in the EU's foreign and enlargement policy, from German reunification to the Lisbon Treaty. Together, we will explore his political journey, his reflections on the current challenges facing the European Union, and his vision for its future role in the world.

Theodor Himmel:

Mr Brok, thank you very much for agreeing to this interview. I would first like to talk about your career as a European Member of Parliament and understand how you came to this position. At the beginning you were a journalist. Can you tell us why you were interested in journalism and how you got into the business?

Elmar Brok:

I first became a member of the Junge Union, Konrad Adenauer's youth organisation, because I had read a book written „German Statesmanship from Bismarck to Adenauer" written by Gordon Craig in the 60s. Adenauer was the first German politician to overcome the narrow nation-state mindset. The next day, I was a member of the youth organisation. I also did what you do as an instructor, reporting on shooting festivals or football matches when I wasn't playing myself to earn some pocket money. That later turned into a traineeship at Deutschlandfunk.

Theodor Himmel:

It's very interesting that you mention these initial activities: you wrote something and tried to get a feel for this everyday situation. Were there experiences that later became important to you in your work as a member of parliament in terms of formulation and powers of observation?

Elmar Brok:

Of course. It led to me learning the journalism tool, which is no longer modern in the age of social media. I was able to underpin political ambitions and goals with this craft and was quicker in the public eye than some others. I also learnt the right wording on the radio. For example, when journalists want a tone of 1.50 for a news programme, then you notice it's 1.50. It was a useful technique that often helped me. This was a helpful technique that often helped me.

Vincent Sipeer:

1.50 is an interesting term because all the reels, these little video snippets on Instagram and TikTok, are currently being used more and more for political communication and in the political media. Would you have dealt with these social media today?

Elmar Brok:

Well, I would have been more interested in the technique of keeping things short, but on the other hand, I don't know if I would have wanted to. Because there are no rest phases, there are no corrections. This race of blaming is unbearable. I'm not sure if I would have wanted to go into politics in this time when it's unlimited to expose someone with lies.

Vincent Sipeer:

Looking back on your almost four decades in the European Parliament, are there certain events or formative events which you would put in your top three?

Elmar Brok:

These are different events; sometimes they are small events that have had a big impact. Of course, the time of German reunification was of decisive importance. At the time, I was one of the two authors of the European Parliament's declaration on the fall of the Berlin Wall in November. Later still I was the coordinator of the EPP Special Committee on German Unity. Even then, 40% of euro laws had to be taken into account. That's probably why nobody today remembers that we had to get it through the European Parliament. The nine German states became members of the European Union in October 1990, eleven months after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Poland and other countries had to commit themselves for 14 years. The other thing, of course, was that I was lucky enough to represent the European Parliament at all intergovernmental conferences and treaty amendment conferences since Maastricht, from the Amsterdam and Nice treaties and the amendment conferences to Lisbon. I also was always one of the two representatives of the European Parliament. And the third, as Chairman of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, I was General Rapporteur for the enlargement of the European Union from 2004 to 2007. I accompanied, supported and took responsibility for the European states that then became members of the European Union. These are certainly three focal points of my political life, and I am very lucky to have been able to do this.

Strategic Autonomy:
The ability of the EU to act independently in security and foreign policy.

Theodor Himmel:

As you were one of the first negotiators of these European treaties from Maastricht to Lisbon, how did you feel about the failure of the European Union Constitution in 2004?

Elmar Brok:

A high degree of bitterness. Firstly because of Chirac's unbelievably reckless attitude, who, although he had a two-thirds majority, had done this referendum without need, just to show up the opposition, which was not actually required. This is purely personal, tactical behaviour, which is unbearable. That went well again, and only because the new President Sarkozy and Angela Merkel managed to write the constitutional treaty so well that it was once again in treaty form, but 95 per cent of the content was secured. And that was the Lisbon Treaty. If Angela Merkel hadn't happened to be there at the very beginning of her time as Federal Chancellor, it would have gone wrong. It was the historic leadership of Angela Merkel, and Sarkozy opened the door for this to be achieved.

Theodor Himmel:

Many of the EPIS fellows are currently in a phase where they are finishing their studies and trying to integrate themselves into political life. Role models and guidelines are often important. What role models did you have? Did they also come from other political orientations?

Elmar Brok:

Well, becoming a politician wasn't my career aspiration at first. I was a member of the Junge Union and the CDU, but I wasn't actively seeking a mandate, or even a European mandate. It didn't take long. I can only advise you against studying political science and then becoming an assistant in order to become a member of parliament. It can lead to a bad mood and disappointment. „I want to be a politician," said one person, and that was the worst we've ever had. The second point about role models for me was undoubtedly Adenauer and then Helmut Kohl, with whom I was able to work closely. But I had also read a lot about Adenauer in my younger years, and the nature of his policies, the motivation behind them, was decisive. But also many other countries, Robert Schumann, John F. Kennedy and Pope John XXIII with the Vatican. These were the pop stars of the time on the international stage that we all adored. Kennedy was the new face of a new, fragile world, a movement for civil rights and equality for all. And that has shaped everything decisively:European history but also the question of equality and justice and the rule of law. That's why I get so upset when I see Trump and some of his admirers attacking the rule of law, attacking the independence of the courts. It's the same with Orban or Putin. These people are shaping the future. This is not the free world in which I see Europe, North America and the whole world, and that must always be our goal, always defending on a small scale; that is the current history.

Vincent Sipeer:

Speaking of the EU-US relationship, you have always been in favour of close cooperation between these two identities. Would you agree that the relationship has deteriorated because of its complexity?

Elmar Brok:

There is no complexity: democracy and the rule of law on the one hand and rejection of these on the other. This complete non-acceptance of the opinions of others. The behaviour at Harvard is intolerable, as is the burning of books. You can argue about what you do individually but never question the principles of democracy and the rule of law. In many committees and in Congress I have always admired whether someone was a Republican or a Democrat. It didn't matter; they formed alliances across the ranks; they were friends across all ranks. That was a model for me of how you can live together across party lines. And today they don't talk to each other. There are real issues, as there always are, but overall this atmosphere is unbearable and destroyed.

Theodor Himmel:

If we focus again on your work, how did you, as chair of the committee, manage to moderate the overall European interest of the various committee members and deal with the various national interests?

Elmar Brok:

That is the task of politics. There are also different interests in the city council. If you only need the New Fountain in the city centre, but the outer district doesn't get a kindergarten, then the whole thing doesn't work and can fall apart. Then it doesn't work in the long term, and there is conflict and no common ground. I have also represented national interests, but the interests flow together, and here you have to be able to show understanding to colleagues from other countries that it is in your interest to use ours. It's the same in business. I can only negotiate and moderate with France if I know what interests the others have. And if I can find an answer that he is still satisfied with and that I can get along with, then we have the result of the compromise.. But every good negotiator must first know the negotiating position, the starting position, and the historical and cultural background of the other. The last book by Henry Kissinger, in which he wrote about 10 European leaders he met in his life, is also a contribution about Konrad Adenauer. And he always writes about the term „leadership through modesty", which is no longer understood today in Berlin across party lines. nauer pushed things through in his own interests but always took the interests of others into account. You don't have to bang on the table to be assertive. I think this understanding is

particularly important for the small states. Kohl once said to me at the Treaty of Amsterdam, "Guys, you're doing everything right; negotiate the treaty, and don't bother me every day so that I trust you. But if you're not careful on the last day of the last summit, if Germany doesn't stand by the small countries, then you've done everything wrong." I will never forget that. Would you ever say that again in Berlin

Vincent Sipeer:

What I'd like to look at again in the last three questions, and we're making a small leap here, is peacekeeping and the whole issue of crisis management. How do do you rate the effectiveness of the EU in its peacekeeping and crisis management missions compared to other current ones, such as the UN and NATO?

Elmar Brok:

For the first time, the European Union has been in a position to lead a territory of 27 voting states into a voluntary and economically better future and to make war among themselves impossible. In this respect, if you look at European history, peacekeeping is the most successful peacekeeping mission in the history of Europe.

The EU must overcome unanimity to act decisively in foreign and security policy.

Theodor Himmel:

If we look at the Western Balkans as an example of a peacekeeping mission, what role does the EU play in the post-conflict phase in the development of long-term peacebuilding? Does the EU have a responsibility to be a long-term partner there? And if so, how should this responsibility be expressed?

Elmar Brok:

Well, it has paid off in 19 years. Slovenia and Croatia are now members of the European Union. And they are relatively successful members of the European Union. Secondly, there have been no more armed conflicts with minor uprisings in Kosovo, for example. However, we can see that the political structure in most of these states is still very backward. When I look at the development in Albania, I realise that such a narco-city could become strong. When I see how Bosnia and Herzegovina's own constitutional issues are not being resolved. And when I see how things are developing in Serbia, then I have to realise that everything that goes into peace is sewn on the edge. This has to do with the fact that we are talking too much about EU membership as the only goal. This will now take 30 years with the perspective. Not that they have candidate status and have been given hope. I think that's wrong. But we have to build in intermediate stages that show the people there that we have achieved success by establishing close economic cooperation. For example, by creating the model of a common economy, as in Norway.

Theodor Himmel:

You stated that there should be several intermediate stages between the EU and possible states in order to create a rapprochement. Are there any other means that the EU can use in peacekeeping missions?

Elmar Brok:

Yes, apart from Kosovo, I don't think we have any more peacekeeping soldiers. This goes far beyond what we are doing with the Western Balkan states. It has successfully grown beyond that. But it has stagnated because the next steps are not being taken. I have attended a thousand of these conferences, where our foreign minister and our enlargement commissioner made reports. These are called "progress reports". For 35 years we have been making progress reports on the progress of the relationship with the membership of the European Union. That is 35 years of progress without getting anywhere. In my opinion, it doesn't have credibility with people. Instead, there are intermediate strategies that you can agree on. And then everyone can decide whether to go for pre-membership or not. That's what we had with the EFTA, which also dissolved because it was unsuccessful. Great Britain, Ireland and Denmark, former members of the EFTA, joined the EU early on. Great Britain has now left the EU,, but the other countries have all negotiated their way into the European

Economic Area first. And then the Austrians, the Swedes and the Finns used it as a base camp to negotiate with the member states. As I said with the European Economic Area, for example, we did it bilaterallyor in a slightly different way with Switzerland and, at some point, Norway. They turned it into cooperation and are happy with that.

Vincent Sipeer:

How do you see the future development of European foreign policy? Should the European Union continue with the mechanisms with the attitude it currently has?

Elmar Brok:

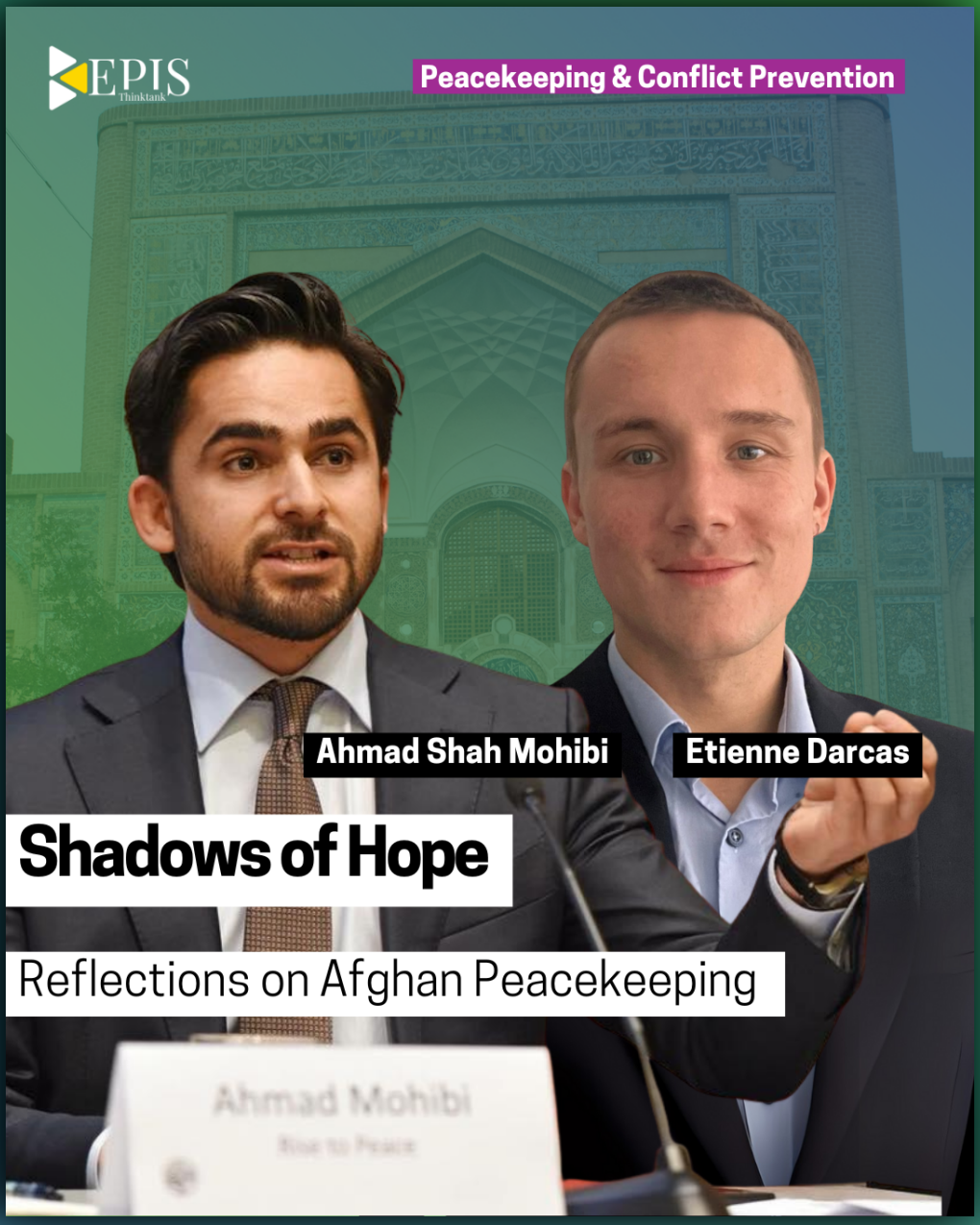
The European Union must change, as everything must change. It must become more capable of acting. It must turn conditions for enlargement into good forms of enlargement. We must have better decision-making options. The European Union is good wherever it has a majority decision. That includes the European internal market and cross-border tax policy, but especially in foreign and security policy, where we have these obstacles due to unanimity, which are blocking and not conducive. If you have a cohesion effect, a veto, or or a training effect, this must be overcome with other decision-making methods. We must have flexibility with the Treaty of Lisbon, with enhanced cooperation, a coalition of the willing and a permanent structure of cooperation in defence. But it is not used sufficiently. One thing can be done via the passerelle, which is listed in a number of points. We can thus arrive at other decision-making mechanisms without amending the treaty. But all of this needs to be tackled courageously and not just talked about. I hope today that the new federal chancellor will once again join forces with Tusk and Macron as a leading power. We must take the Poles on board in order to have these structural changes. You only have to read the Draghi Report. The question of procurement,, for example, is one of our important strategic issues. We have now decided on 400 billion euros, as long as possible for defence. But there are 180 European weapons systems. Everything is produced here in Germany and Europe in small quantities with thousands of different variations. For some reason, we are not making any progress. And do you see the starting points, apart from making fine speeches, for actually changing this? We have a Treaty of Lisbon, the European Defence Agency, which can do this. Everything is planned, and all this is lying around in a hut, not moving forward because we don't have people like Kohl or Mitterrand to organise it, to get a grip on it.

Theodor Himmel:

You just mentioned strategic autonomy in relation to President Macron's proposals. If you summarise this, what are the key capabilities that the EU has lacked to date in order to be able to act globally?

Elmar Brok:

Clearly the decision-making mechanisms,, and Ms von der Leyen has done nothing so far to improve the structures. She has even rejected the proposals from the Commission itself, which were discussed substantially and given a council together with the parliament to organise an intergovernmental conference. And the other point is that we must have a new difference in our interests from the previous European concepts of security: military, defence, foreign policy, trade policy, economic policy, and geopolitics. Finally, the trade agreements with Mercosur, India with the Philippines, India Australia is also safe politics in the high style, and that must first be found. We must do a much better job of implementing this strategic unity. Trump and Putin want to drive the European Union apart. They prefer to deal with the individual states; they say that too. But if we look at it as a single entity and also pursue a common policy, the common strength that gives us in this new world order in which there are world powers is no longer three – China, the USA and Russia – but four.



About the Article

Ahmad Shah Mohibi reflects on his experiences of peacekeeping in the Afghan war. Deriving lessons learned, he takes us through a historical journey with a strong forward-oriented tone.

About the Authors

Ahmad Shah Mohibi is the founder of Rise to Peace, a Washington-based nonprofit focused on countering violent extremism and advancing peacebuilding efforts. Born in Afghanistan, he served alongside U.S. forces as a teenager and later became a U.S. citizen, bringing frontline experience to policy and civil society initiatives. He now advises governments and international organizations on conflict resolution, drawing from over two decades of firsthand engagement.

Etienne Darcas is pursuing an M.A. in International War Studies at the University of Potsdam (DE). He is a professional field researcher and analyst with extensive experience in data collection, policy research, and fieldwork. His focus is on using independent research to inform public policy, governance, and community development. With a background in historical and social research, he has applied his skills in diverse environments, including government, media, and international relations. Passionate about interdisciplinary methods, he aims to explore complex historical and social issues related to conflict.

In Afghanistan, peace has always been an elusive dream, chased through decades of conflict, foreign intervention, and internal fragmentation. My life, from the battlefields of my childhood to the negotiation rooms of my adulthood, has been defined by this relentless pursuit of stability and peace, so that others wouldn't need to face the same pain that I and so many others had to. Yet, standing now at a distance, as both an Afghan and an American citizen, I recognize with painful clarity how our shared aspirations for peace have repeatedly dissolved amid broken promises and strategic miscalculations. Growing up during the bitter Afghan civil war, I never knew peace. My earliest memories are punctuated by explosions and gunfire. Violence reigned in the chaos of the Soviet withdrawal in 1989 and the economy collapsed. Some of my earliest memories were of working the poppy fields in the only viable large-scale industry available to Afghanistan at that time – opium production. Then 9/11 happened, and I, just a boy of 15, was transfixed by the horror of those people falling from the burning towers. The Americans came and quickly everything changed, or so it seemed at first. At sixteen, with few options available, I joined American forces not out of ideological conviction, but from a simple instinct for survival and a desire for change. Fighting alongside U.S. troops, I quickly learned how deeply complicated Afghanistan's reality was. We were a mosaic of tribes, ethnicities, and loyalties, resistant to any simplistic imposition of order from the outside. Eventually, I'd even be invited to go to America – a dream which had always seemed impossible to imagine. My journey to America was more than physical; it was transformative, providing me a lens through which I would forever see my homeland differently. Becoming American meant more than obtaining a passport; it represented the realization of freedoms that had been unimaginable to a young boy accustomed to perpetual violence. America embodied something precious yet intangible: hope, stability, and the opportunity for a life defined by possibilities rather than limitations. This was still the American century. But witnessing Afghanistan's peacekeeping efforts from this newfound vantage point also highlighted the disconnect between noble intentions and the gritty realities of a nation fractured by war. From the Bonn Agreement of 2001 to the Doha negotiations nearly two decades later, each diplomatic breakthrough carried seeds of its eventual unravelling. The Bonn Agreement itself, hailed as historic, excluded the Taliban from initial discussions, alienating a fundamental pillar of Afghan society and laying the foundation for perpetual insurgency. Similarly, the provisional government installed at Bonn, under Hamid Karzai, was inherently compromised, dependent on warlords whose support came at the cost of corruption and abuse of power. In enabling this outcome, Western forces inadvertently ensured that not only would the new Karzai government have a new, permanent foe who would regroup in Pakistan's friendly, Pashtun tribal regions and strike back in due course, but its political longevity relied on diminishing returns because of having to keep the powerful factions of Afghanistan on side – diminishing returns that would continuously erode Kabul's centralising ambitions. International peacekeeping missions, notably the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and later NATO's Resolute Support Mission, arrived with admirable objectives: security, stabilization, and state-building. Yet these missions often ignored the intricate social and political landscape of Afghanistan, adopting centralized solutions designed in foreign capitals. The emphasis on military solutions frequently overshadowed political reconciliation, fostering resentment among local populations who saw foreign troops as occupiers rather than liberators. Each drone strike, each military raid, reinforced Taliban narratives and boosted recruitment, deepening distrust in government forces and Western allies. We entered a vicious cycle of action and reaction, of recriminations, until nobody could trust each other at all. Negotiations themselves suffered from a lack of genuine leverage on Kabul's part. In Doha, the Taliban presented themselves as unified and confident, whereas Kabul's delegation, fractured by internal factionalism, electoral disputes, and

Loya Jirga:
Afghan grand assembly of elders for major national decisions and conflict resolution.

pervasive corruption, struggled to present a coherent stance. The U.S.-Taliban agreement of February 2020 further undermined Kabul by effectively treating the Taliban as equal partners, sidelining the Afghan government entirely and signalling to the Afghan populace that their government lacked true sovereignty. Implementation failures compounded strategic errors. Temporary ceasefires were routinely announced to international applause, only to collapse shortly thereafter. Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) programs became ineffective as former fighters frequently returned to insurgency or crime due to inadequate support or oversight. Moreover, aid and military support funnelled into the country became a source of corruption rather than stability, as exemplified by the Kabul Bank scandal of 2010, where $1.3 billion of ordinary Afghans' savings vanished into the pockets of elites closely connected to the government. Such a case would symbolize the pervasive corruption and impunity that have threatened the legitimacy of the Afghan government, as it highlighted how the average Afghan, trying their best to save up and invest, could easily have their earnings siphoned away in an unaccountable system by those who seemed to be hoarding international resources. By empowering kleptocratic actors within government, flooding resources into the country with little oversight and not only failing to enfranchise the man on the Afghan street, but disenfranchising him actively, was such a dysfunctional system born that fed on its own neglect and corruption These systematic failures, especially the neglect of genuine local ownership, significantly eroded trust in government institutions. Western assumptions about Afghan civil society frequently overlooked its robust traditional frameworks such as tribal councils and jirgas, which were vital in maintaining local governance and resolving conflicts. Instead, foreign aid often bypassed these traditional structures, fuelling corruption among centralized authorities in Kabul and exacerbating regional tensions. In this, Western assumptions about the actual strength of Afghan civil society proved to be ignorant – us Afghans have an extraordinarily powerful civil society, but it operates according to an internal social logic. Our society is not a Western one – we do not have an intelligentsia, backed up by a higher education system. What we have, though, is each other. The tribe, our tribe, with all its manifold and conflicting manifestations. To the Afghan on the street, the Loya Jirga process is sacred, and couldn't be substituted for a central government in Kabul. Going against this process was akin to a patient with an auto-immune disorder in their body-politic; deadly to outsiders, but liable to be turned against itself because of the tensions between the centralising model of government of Kabul, and the desire for autonomy in the provinces. This was a lesson learned far too late in the peacekeeping process when it was too difficult to turn back from the government that Karzai had come to represent. The Afghan National Army (ANA), intended as the backbone of national security, reflected these broader issues of governance and corruption. Despite international training and immense investment, ANA forces were plagued by endemic issues, including „ghost soldiers" whose salaries enriched corrupt commanders, undermining morale and effectiveness. By 2021, when the Taliban launched their final offensive, ANA forces, inadequately supplied and increasingly demoralized, swiftly collapsed. Despite this dysfunction, Afghan civil society demonstrated remarkable resilience. Educators continued teaching, journalists bravely reported truths, and activists tirelessly advocated for human rights, defying threats and violence from the ruling Taliban. Their determination underscored an essential truth: genuine peace must be cultivated from within, supported rather than dictated by international actors. For all the failures of the Afghan peace-keeping process, we Afghans can take pride in the resistance of regular people to the return of Taliban rule. Becoming an American citizen deepened my appreciation for the freedoms Afghans continued fighting for: basic rights, human dignity, and accountable governance. Yet, witnessing the chaotic U.S. withdrawal in August 2021, I felt a profound disillusionment. It was almost a sense of betrayal of those shared values. As the Taliban swiftly reclaimed power, tens of thousands of Afghans desperately

Real peace must grow from within, not be imposed by outsiders.

sought to flee, clinging to departing U.S. aircraft in haunting scenes reminiscent of those falling people from 9/11. These images encapsulated the tragedy of lost opportunities and broken promises. Of a lost home, and of a new home, far away from the chaos and violence of the Afghanistan of my birth – An America that may not always succeed at holding up its values of peace and liberty for all, but nonetheless is an attempt at something greater than the sum of its parts. The lessons of Afghanistan demand honest reflection. International actors must admit strategic missteps and re-evaluate engagement practices in fragile states. Peace cannot be time-bound nor imposed externally; it demands patient, sustained commitment rooted in genuine understanding of local realities. Protection for the vulnerable, particularly women, children, and minorities, must be prioritized, alongside support for grassroots mechanisms like jirgas, which have proven resilient through decades of conflict. My dual identity as Afghan and American reinforces my belief in bridging divides and fostering dialogue. As founder of Rise to Peace, I remain committed to advocating tirelessly for genuine solutions that recognize the complexities and potential of Afghanistan's own civil society. Afghanistan's painful history offers critical lessons for future international engagement, reminding us that real peace emerges organically, shaped by the hands of those it directly affects.

About the Article

What are current discourses about conflict-related sexual violence? The world is currently experiencing the highest number of conflicts since the Second World War, exposing civilians to increased levels of conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV), exacerbated by arms proliferation, disregard for international law and increasing militarisation. CRSV is complex and multifaceted in nature, shaped by intersecting dynamics of identity, power and ideology.

About the Author

Mareike Warmboldt holds a BA in International Studies from Leiden University and will begin the Erasmus Mundus Joint Master's Programme in International Humanitarian Action in fall 2025. Her work focuses on conflict transformation, peacekeeping, and human rights, supported by hands-on experience with NGOs.

1. Introduction

The world is currently experiencing the highest number of conflicts since the Second World War, exposing civilians to increased levels of conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV), exacerbated by arms proliferation, disregard for international law and increasing militarisation. The United Nations (UN) Special Representative on Sexual Violence pointed to a 50% increase in verified cases in 2023. Both state and non-state armed groups perpetrate rape, gang rape and abduction, disproportionately affecting displaced people (United Nations, 2024). CRSV is an omnipresent problem that is addressed and condemned by politicians, academics and the media, but is often reduced to individual incidents. The perpetrators include the military, police, armed groups and civilians, whereby the victims are predominantly women. However, insufficient documentation makes it difficult to grasp the full extent of these crimes (Heinrich Böll Foundation, 2023). Until the introduction of sexual violence as a concept to be studied theoretically and empirically, gender issues were historically neglected in conflict research, but are now a central part of the literature on the victimisation of civilians (Nordås and Cohen, 2021, p. 195). This corresponds with a larger trend of increased attention to CRSV as a matter of global security, especially within the UN Security Council (UNSC) and the UN Department of Peace Operations (DPO). The UNSC is more likely to pass resolutions and a greater number of resolutions on conflicts involving large-scale CRSV. Meanwhile, the DPO is at the forefront of ensuring gender mainstreaming in peacekeeping, focusing on protecting women from violence and encouraging their participation in conflict resolution (Johansson and Kreft, 2023, p. 188-190). CRSV elicits not only increased attention but also a more interventionist response than other forms of violence. Evidently, since the mid-2000s, peacekeeping has been proportionally more common in civil wars with reported CRSV than in those without (Johansson and Kreft, 2023, pp. 190-191). However, current responses have been criticised as insufficient to prevent or curb this form of violence, indicating that further research is needed to assess whether key policy initiatives have been successful and why they may have failed (Nordås and Cohen, 2021, p. 206).

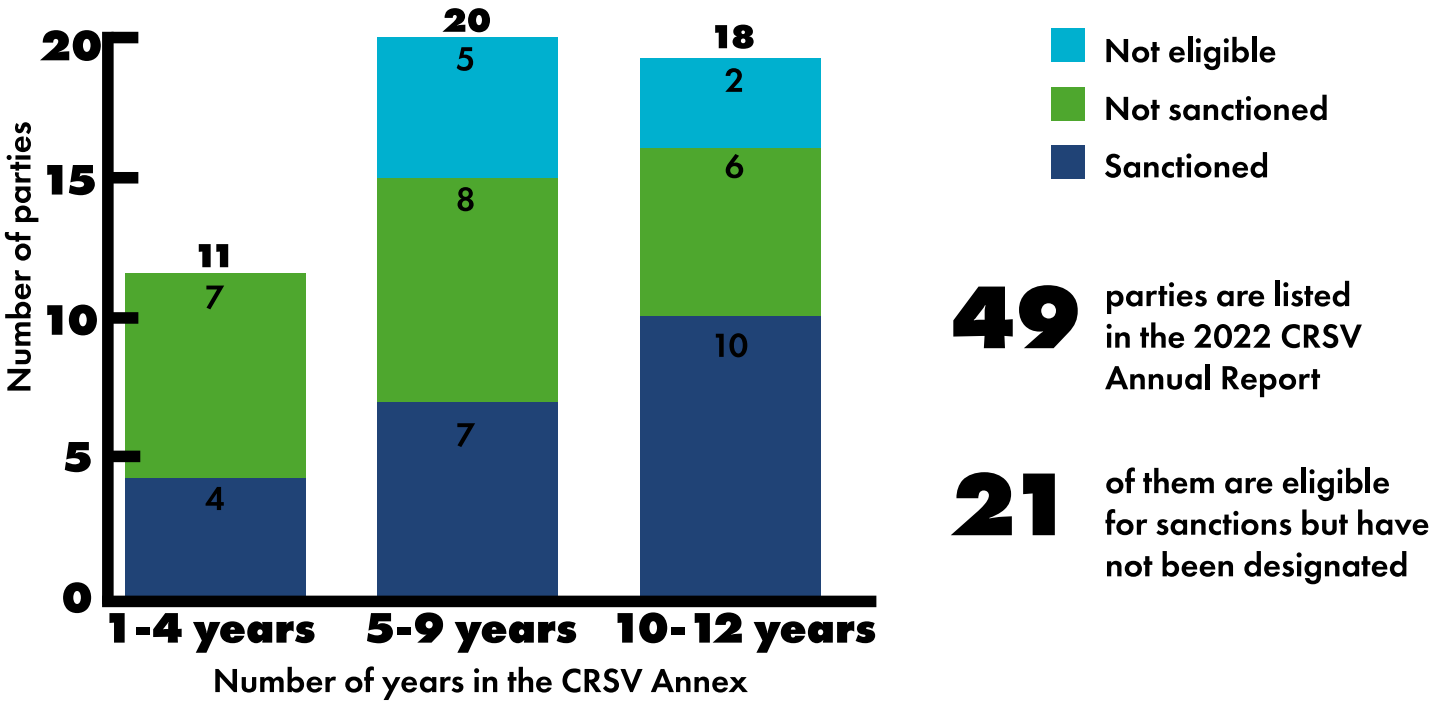


Figure 1: Source: Russo & McGowan (2024). Bridging Gaps in UN Tools that Address Conflict-Related Sexual Violence. (https://theglobalobservatory.org/2024/05/bridging-gaps-in-un-tools-that-address-conflict-related-sexual-violence/)

2. Definition and Legislative Framework

The investigation of CRSV is directly linked to political processes, in particular the recognition of sexual violence as a war crime, as well as activist efforts, especially by feminist movements. The war in the former Yugoslavia (1992-1995) and the genocide in Rwanda in 1994, which saw horrific cases of mass rape, were decisive turning points in the study of CRSV. The establishment of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) in 1993 and the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) in 1994 marked critical advancements in the legal recognition of mass rape as a crime against humanity. These statutes were the first to unambiguously categorize mass rape as such, setting a historic precedent in international law (Ayiera and Ayiera, 2010, p. 10). Feminist activists and scholars at the time argued that rape should be recognised as a 'weapon of war' and in certain cases as genocide, with violence often targeted specifically at women. CRSV is considered not only as an expression of gendered power structures, but also as a practice deeply linked to issues of identity politics. This form of violence often has complex symbolic meanings, as it goes beyond physical injury. Many researchers saw it as a continuation of violence against women that manifests itself even in peacetime (Nordås and Cohen, 2021, p. 196). Later studies show that CRSV can vary considerably in different conflicts, by different actors, in different forms, against different target groups (including male victims) and in specific locations. This challenges two fundamental assumptions of earlier studies: first, that sexual violence is an inevitable feature of war, and second, that all armed groups or soldiers would commit it if given the opportunity (Nordås and Cohen, 2021, p. 197). There is no universally accepted definition of CRSV, with definitions varying primarily in terms of which forms of violence are included and what constitutes a conflict-related context. The International Criminal Court (ICC) defines CRSV as acts involving direct physical force or the threat of coercion and includes seven types: rape, sexual slavery, forced prostitution, forced pregnancy, forced sterilization or abortion, sexual mutilation, and sexual torture. Meanwhile, the UN takes a broader approach, defining CRSV as any form of sexual violence that is directly or indirectly linked to conflict. This definition includes cases resulting from a climate of impunity for perpetrators, recognizing that sexual violence can be both an immediate tool of war and a byproduct of the instability that conflicts create (United Nations, 2024; Nordås and Cohen, 2021, p. 195). Furthermore, Security Council Resolution 1820 (2008) represents a pivotal step by the UN in recognizing and addressing the use of sexual violence as a tactic of war and terror. Adopted on June 19, 2008, it marked a groundbreaking moment in international policy by explicitly condemning sexual violence as a strategic method of warfare and recognizing its devastating impact on both individuals and societies. The resolution asserts that CRSV not only constitutes a violation of human rights but also serves as a significant barrier to peacebuilding, prolonging conflicts and destabilizing communities (United Nations, 2024). These developments in international law and policy have laid a critical foundation for understanding CRSV not only as individual acts of violence but as deeply embedded practices that reflect and reinforce broader social, political, and gendered power structures.

3. Literature Review

Building on the definitional and legal context, recent literature has explored the various dynamics, motivations, and implications of CRSV. This section reviews the evolving academic discourse, beginning with a focus on the functions and dynamics of CRSV, followed by a review of CRSV as part of the broader genocidal event in Rwanda in 1994.

3.1 Dynamics and Functions

CRSV occurs at the height of conflict, during population displacement and continues after conflict. It happens in homes, fields, places of detention, military sites, and camps for refugees and displaced persons. That is, victims are often targeted whilst performing daily chores like

collecting food and water. Further, sexual violence occurs within and around camps for refugees and displaced persons as well as in detention, where women and men have been raped, subjected to sexual mutilation, humiliation and torture. Perpetrators of CRSV include members of official armed and security forces, paramilitary groups, and non-state armed groups, civilians, including refugees and displaced persons, as well as humanitarian and peacekeeping personnel (Bastick, Grimm, and Kunz, 2007, pp. 13-14). Furthermore, evidence shows that governments are more likely to be reported as perpetrators of sexual violence than rebel groups. Exemplary, state officials were responsible for the overwhelming majority of sexual violence in the civil wars in both Peru and El Salvador (Nordås and Cohen, 2021, p. 205). However, peacekeeping is more frequently deployed in conflicts where CRSV is perpetrated by rebel groups rather than state forces. This is because peacekeeping requires the consent of the government to access civilian populations (Johansson & Kreft, 2023, p. 190). The literature on the motivations behind CRSV includes arguments about strategy, as well as arguments about sexual violence as a practice. While early literature often understood sexual violence as opportunistic and driven by private motives and individual urges, facilitated by a lack of organizational structure and discipline, or linked to a general breakdown of law and order, more recent research suggests that CRSV is a weapon of war. Some argue that, in certain conflicts, CRSV has been strategically employed to achieve military objectives. These objectives include instilling fear in civilians to encourage collaboration or compliance, demoralizing the enemy, forcing populations out of contested territories, and providing combatants with institutional rewards or compensation, which are considered part of the spoils of war (Bastick, Grimm, & Kunz, 2007, p. 14; Nordås & Cohen, 2021, p. 199). When committed against women and girls, sexual violence is often intended to humiliate their families and communities, wherein women and girls are "bearers of honour", and men are shamed for failing to protect "their" women. This dynamic is especially destructive when armed groups perpetrate public rapes, force family members to witness sexual violence against each other, or coerce individuals into committing such acts against their own relatives, thereby dismantling social cohesion and trust (Bastick, Grimm, and Kunz, 2007, p. 14). While framing sexual violence as a weapon of war was a successful choice by advocates and activists, which enabled sexual violence to become accepted as a critical security issue and as a policy priority for the highest levels of politics, some view it as a simplistic analysis, as it might overlook significant underlying sociocultural, political, legal and socioeconomic factors (Alexandre and Mutondo, 2022, p. 150). In line with this argumentation, sexual violence can be understood as a practice that arises not from direct orders or deliberate military strategy but as a tolerated or unpunished behaviour. When commanders are permissive, such violence can escalate due to peer socialization and the personal inclinations of combatants. High rates of sexual violence, therefore, do not necessarily reflect strategic intent but can occur independently of formal directives. The internal dynamics of rebel groups play a key role in shaping practices around sexual violence (Nordås and Cohen, 2021, p. 200). Ideology also influences the occurrence of sexual violence. For leftist groups, sexual violence often contradicts their declared ideals, such as gender equality, leading to restraint. Moreover, groups that abstain from sexual violence may have an advantage in recruiting women, as their reputation aligns with inclusive values (Alexandre and Mutondo, 2022, p. 159; Nordås and Cohen, 2021, p. 201). When understood as a practice, CRSV can be seen as a reflection of social attitudes towards women in peacetime; the difference lies only in quantity, intensity, and visibility. That is, peacetime and wartime rape are justified within a patriarchal society by the intention to dominate, humiliate, control or gratify a sexual need. This underlines the fact that acts of sexual violence during conflict are grounded in a complex web of cultural preconceptions, in particular regarding gender

CRSV:
Conflict-Related Sexual Violence encompasses a multitude of crimes of sexual nature.

roles (Alexandre and Mutondo, 2022, p. 149). Thus, violence against women cannot be understood independently of patriarchy as a social-political order that is based on male hegemony through dominance. Patriarchy centralizes power in both public and private spheres around men and enforces a binary gender ideology that excludes identities such as transgender and intersex individuals. Power hierarchies prioritize men over women and intersect with other forms of oppression, including racism, religious dominance, and ethnic discrimination. Gender and ethnicity often intersect to shape vulnerability to sexual violence (Ayiera und Ayiera, 2010, p. 13). In many contexts, marginalized groups, such as Indigenous populations or specific ethnic communities, are targeted based on their ethnicity. Certain groups, including single women, LGBTQ+ individuals, women heads of households, and displaced women and children, are particularly at risk during armed conflicts. Although publicly condemned, sexual violence is frequently tolerated as an expression of masculinity and dominance over femininity (Bastick, Grimm, and Kunz, 2007, p. 14). Accordingly, it is argued that sexual violence in conflict is not a new phenomenon but an intensification of pre-existing gender inequalities, reflecting and amplifying societal norms rather than creating new ones. The context of political instability and insecurity that occurs during conflict can provide the necessary conditions for large-scale sexual violence, as there is an absence of the rule of law in addition to ethnic, religious, and ideological conflict (Alexandre and Mutondo, 2022, p. 150). Yet, whether it is useful to view CRSV as a continuation of peacetime violations is contested amongst scholars. While the choice to commit rape and other forms of sexual violence is undeniably gendered and rooted in structural inequalities like patriarchy, it cannot fully explain the variations in the occurrence of such violence alone. Factors such as the timing, location, methods, perpetrators, and victims differ across contexts, indicating that while patriarchy is a necessary condition, it is insufficient as a sole explanatory framework (Nordås und Cohen, 2021, p. 199). The dynamics and functions of CRSV manifest in various ways across conflicts, however, these patterns take on their most extreme and systematic form in contexts of genocidal rape. The following section examines how these dynamics are amplified in genocidal campaigns, particularly in the case of the Rwandan genocide.

3.2 Sexual Violence as Genocide

Genocidal rape can be defined as a systemically organized military tactic of terror and part of the broader genocide event. Primary motivations for mass rape are first, generating fear in a subdued population since fear of rape is a common emotion women near or in combat zones experience. Genocidal rape capitalizes on this, enhancing stresses and anxieties already experienced by civilians, thus elevating widespread assaults to a tactic of terror. Second, the humiliation of the population, especially the male community, and the derogation of women are used as a tactic to destroy communities. Third, the "creation of a cohort of mixed-ethnic children" (Nharaunda-Makawa, and Kurebwa, 2021, p. 72) to maintain the humiliation and domination. These characteristics of genocidal rape are prominent when examining the 1994 Rwanda genocide, where women were subjected to sexual violence on a massive scale and "rape was the rule and its absence was the exception" (Nowrojee, 1996, 1; Nharaunda-Makawa, and Kurebwa, 2021, p. 73). Rape during the Rwanda genocide, especially targeting Tutsi women and girls, was well organized and encouraged by administrative, military, and political leaders as a tool to humiliate and annihilate the ethnic Tutsi population. During the Rwandan Genocide, sexual violence was pervasive, taking forms like rape, sexual enslavement, genital mutilation, and forced incest. An estimated 250,000–500,000 women were raped, often publicly or under humiliating circumstances. Women endured gang rapes, mutilation with weapons, and torture, sometimes in front of family members who were forced to participate. Many victims were killed immediately after the assault, and others

Despite increasing international attention, current responses remain insufficient.

were denied medical care or abortions. These acts were deeply tied to the genocide's broader patterns of torture, looting, and killings (Nowrojee, 1996, p. 1; Nharaunda-Makawa, and Kurebwa, 2021, pp. 71-74). During the Rwandan Genocide, sexual violence primarily targeted Tutsi women based on their gender and ethnicity, fueled by propaganda that sexualized Tutsi women as threats to Hutu society. Some Hutu women were also victimized due to political affiliations or relationships with Tutsi men. Survivors face social stigma, isolation, and rejection by their communities, and children born of rape are marginalized (Nowrojee, 1996, p. 2; Nharaunda-Makawa, and Kurebwa, 2021, p. 76). Genocidal rape, as seen in the Rwandan Genocide, exemplifies how sexual violence can function as a deliberate, systematic weapon of terror, humiliation, and ethnic destruction, profoundly impacting individuals and communities.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, CRSV is complex and multifaceted in nature, shaped by intersecting dynamics of identity, power and ideology. While early explanations perceived CRSV as opportunistic or inevitable, recent research highlights its strategic use and systemic roots, particularly within patriarchal and militarized structures. The literature reveals that CRSV is committed by a wide range of actors, including state forces, rebel groups, civilians, and even peacekeepers, and that its occurrence is shaped by factors such as group ideology, command structure, impunity, and social norms. While often portrayed as a tactic, CRSV also operates as a tolerated practice, reflecting broader societal inequalities. These dynamics become especially visible in the context of genocidal rape, where sexual violence is used systematically to terrorize, humiliate, and destroy targeted populations. Despite increasing international attention, current responses remain insufficient. Peacekeeping operations, while more frequently deployed in conflicts involving CRSV, especially by non-state actors, have limited effectiveness in addressing structural and sociocultural drivers. This means that reactive measures are not enough but a more comprehensive understanding of CRSV is required, accounting for variation across conflicts and addressing both strategic intent and embedded cultural practices. For peacekeeping in particular, this means moving beyond protection mandates to actively addressing root causes through gender-sensitive planning, accountability for perpetrators, and survivor-centred approaches. Understanding CRSV in its full complexity is essential for designing responses that not only protect civilians but also contribute to long-term peacebuilding and justice.

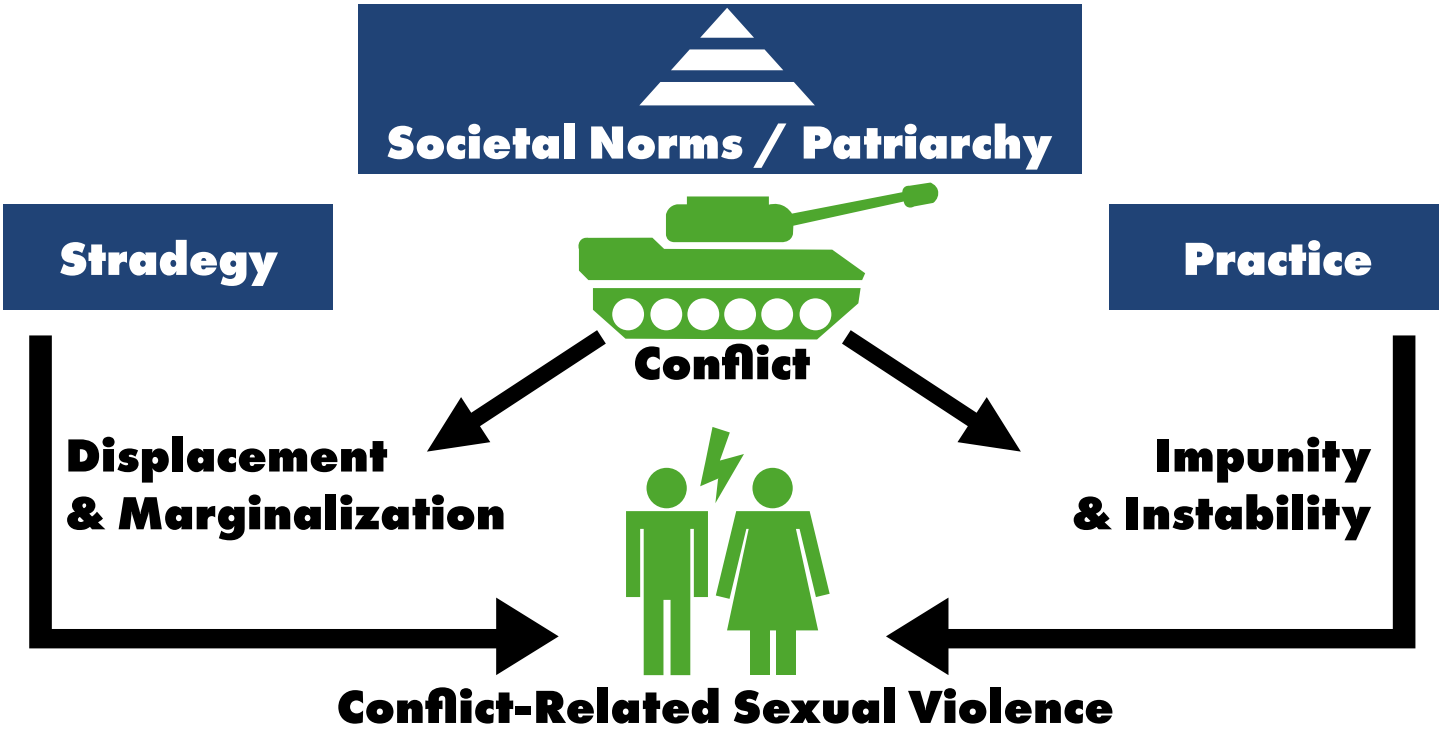


Figure 2: Chart about Conflict-Related Sexual Violence

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About the Article

What impact does the WPS Agenda have on NATO's Peace Operations and strategies? The enhanced operational effectiveness through the integration of the WPS agenda helps strengthening gender-transformative processes at NATO. Openness to restructuring and improvement is beneficial for everyone and thus contributes to NATO's overall goal: security for all.

About the Authors

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1. Introduction

Men fight as soldiers on the front lines, while women are the victims of violence. This highly gendered perception of wars and conflicts remains to this day, and stereotypes persist. It was only 25 years ago that the modern international community officially recognized that these images do not correspond to reality and never have (NATO, 2024). On the 31st of October 2000, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) released Resolution 1325 on "Women and peace and security", as the inaugural international resolution recognizing the impact of armed conflict on women, and advocating for increased female participation, protection, and integration during every part of conflicts. Furthermore, it urged gender perspective incorporation in peace operations (POs) and underscored the importance of specialized training for addressing the unique needs of women and children in conflict situations. Most important, Res 1325 redefined the perspective on women, from being sorely perceived as victims to be recognized as actors (UNSC, 2000). In response to the call for the international community to incorporate these perspectives into work, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), communicated the long-term goal to integrate Res 1325 both internally as an institution and externally within its missions (NATO, 2011). It seems like an ambitious task for a multinational security institution, as coherent gender mainstreaming goes hand in hand with a requirement for institutional change an adaptation of this change in every aspect of is peacekeeping, stabilization, and military missions. In this article, we seek to trace not only the recent history of gender perspectives in the military but also follow the operational evidence and shed light on successes, deformations and trends of mentioned Women, Peace and Security Agenda (WPS) implementation especially into NATO's peacekeeping missions. Irrespective of the challenges associated primarily with the military implementation of the WPS agenda, the positive impact on the effectiveness of NATO's POs is evident. Nonetheless to this day, some seem to think that "gender wokeness" is more a well-intentioned add-on than an actual benefit for societies, organizations, and, above all, people. For the military world especially, so-called operational realities and military conservatism tend to ignore the fact, that by now there is a known, and scientifically proven truth, which is also applicable to POs: Diverse armies are more effective (Lyall, 2020). And although the process is still far from complete and in some areas there are even setbacks in implementation, the operational realities speak for themselves. In the following, the effects of the implementation of the WPS agenda on NATO POs will therefore be exemplarily illustrated and a critical discussion of general trends of WPS implementation within NATO will be addressed contrasting the experiences at the operational level.

2. Structural Design of NATO's WPS Concepts

In 2007, seven years after the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 1325, NATO released a joint policy on implementing the WPS agenda together with the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC) (NATO, 2011). Two years later, the so-called Bi-Strategic Command Directive 40-1 (Bi-SC 40-1) was published, which serves as a guideline for mainstreaming gender perspectives throughout NATO structures (NATO, 2009). It operationalizes UNSCR 1325 by mandating the integration of gender considerations into all aspects of NATO missions, including the deployment of Gender Advisors (GENADs) to mission headquarters (NATO, 2009). However, academic assessments of NATO's implementation of the WPS agenda tend to adopt a critical tone. A central critique is that gender equality is subordinated to operational effectiveness, thereby reinforcing essentialist gender norms rather than challenging them (von Hlaty 2023, p. 20; Hurley, 2018, pp. 439-440). This instrumental approach risks militarising feminist goals and reducing women's inclusion to a functional means of enhancing mission success (Bastick & Duncanson, 2018, p. 559; Cockburn, 2011, pp. 15 – 17). In this context, the WPS agenda becomes less a tool

for structural transformation and more a legitimation of existing patriarchal military structures. Furthermore, feminist scholars highlight the deep entanglement of gender with military norms and the broader relationship between feminism and militarism. Since the 1990s, feminist research in international relations has exposed how military institutions reproduce binary gender roles: Equating masculinity with strength, violence, and protection, while constructing femininity as passive and in need of safeguarding. From this perspective, some argue that NATO, as a military alliance, may be fundamentally incompatible with genuine feminist goals (for example: Duncanson, 2017, pp. 39 – 58; Cockburn, 2021, pp. 48 – 57; Bastick & Duncanson 2018, pp. 556 – 559). In practice, NATO's WPS policies are particularly focused on out-of-area operations and POs, such as ISAF or KFOR. While these missions offer potential for operationalising gender perspectives, they are also embedded in complex environments shaped by local cultural, social, and historical dynamics. The implementation of gender norms in such contexts raises critical questions of legitimacy, cultural sensitivity, and the risk of reproducing colonial patterns of intervention, particularly in state-building and the protection of minorities (For critical research on peacekeeping missions see for example: Moreno et al., 2012, pp. 377-392). Feminist perspectives stress that sustainable peacebuilding must involve trust, cooperation, and the inclusion of local actors - especially women (Gordon, 2019, p. 78).

WPS agenda:
Promotes the inclusion of women in all aspects of peace and security.

3. NATO's Practical WPS Implementation

On its core, the implementation of the WPS agenda in NATO's military and civilian structures follows a dual logic. First, the operational effectiveness of NATO missions is to be increased, and second, female representation within NATO is to be enhanced (Wright, 2016). When considering these two objectives, the institutional structure of NATO as a multinational organization must always be taken into account before any analysis or assessment can be made. The composition of personnel in NATO missions is the responsibility of the member states, which deploy their personnel at their own discretion. Given that the European average for female military personnel is around 13%, it is hardly surprising that the proportion of women in NATO troops is similar (European Parliament, 2025). The organization does have direct influence on the recruitment of NICs (NATO International Civilians), but these are only recruited marginally for missions and are mostly deployed in headquarters. And although individual member states drive WPS forward by incorporating gender-transformative approaches into NATO missions through their national armed forces or, in the case of Sweden, by acting as a hub for the WPS agenda through the Nordic Centre for Gender in Military Operations, there is simply no critical mass of women in NATO to implement representation in accordance with their own ideals (von Hlaty, 2023, p, 125; Wright, 2016). Some scholars argue, that due to that, a partial decoupling of the WPS agenda from NATO's internal affairs take place, creating a discrepancy between external output and internal structures (Wright, 2016). POs in particular tend to have a credibility problem due to their advocacy role for the WPS agenda in mission countries and the simultaneous slow integration of WPS within NATO (von Hlaty, 2023, p. 5). Nonetheless, the WPS agenda is part of NATO's integrated approach, following a logic that recognises purely military means as insufficient to achieve NATO's operational goals. In NATO's POs, in particular, the WPS agenda is integrated into mission designs and forms part of the impact logic of the missions. The recognition of this central importance of the WPS agenda for NATO's operational effectiveness results in the political will to push ahead with the implementation of the agenda. Within NATO, the WPS agenda is spearheaded by the Gender Advisors (GENADs) and Gender Focal Points (GFPs) in the missions and the Secretary General's Special Representative on Women, Peace and Security on an institutional level. These roles are intended to raise awareness of gender-related issues and integrate this perspective into

strategic and operational planning and action (von Hlaty, 2023, pp. 141-142). However, the roles of GENADs and GFPs are not very differentiated. In contrast to comparable strong positions in the EU or the UN, the NATO GENADs operate based on the NATO Gender Functional Planning Guide, which is rather abstract and closely linked to NATO's primarily military operational logic (von Hlaty, 2023, p. 141). In particular, the role of GENADs has so far been primarily filled by civilians, which leads to fundamental challenges in linking civilian impact logic for NATO missions and their military implementation (Wright, 2016). Nevertheless, in recent years, functional and comprehensive structures have been implemented within the framework of the WPS agenda that can cover all relevant sections of NATO (Bastick & Duncanson, 2018, p. 555). Various missions were decisive for this development, as their specific gender-based challenges provided lessons for the further development of NATO structures. Particularly noteworthy are the KFOR mission, due to the high relevance of gender-based violence in the conflict; ISAF, a mission in which the role of female soldiers demonstrated key operational effects; and NMI, an advisory mission in which the WPS agenda was integrated into the mission design from its inception (von Hlaty, 2023, p. 125; Hurley, 2018, p. 439; Wright, 2016).

NATO itself presents the implementation of the WPS agenda as a success story.

4. Operational Effectiveness

Operational effectiveness through WPS integration is rooted in the gender-specific dynamics of wars. These vary depending on the war and operation. Consequently, the fundamental integration of gender perspectives into strategic and operational planning is instrumental in achieving mission objectives. The conviction that gendered perspectives and the associated greater involvement of women in NATO missions lead to increased effectiveness has been reinforced by numerous examples in recent years. Female Engagement Teams were deployed in ISAF because they achieved better results in certain operational situations (von Hlaty, 2023, p. 35). Due to the sociocultural conditions in the Afghanistan theatre of operations, Afghan women's access to and trust in male soldiers was limited. In many cases, however, female soldiers could establish contact and thus obtain essential information (von Hlaty, 2023, p. 35). This information led to a reduction in clashes between NATO soldiers and the civilian population, thereby reducing collateral damage (Bastick & Duncanson, 2018, p. 567). In addition, essential information about social structures and tensions was obtained, which could be used profitably in cooperation with local communities (Bastick & Duncanson, p. 567). This information could be leveraged over the longer course of the mission and led to fundamentally better communication and cooperation with parts of the Afghan population. The GENADs played a completely different role in NMI. The operational role of the GENADs here consisted primarily of communicating gender perspectives and integrating them into all parts of the mission and thus into the Iraqi armed forces. A key success of the GENADs was the establishment of a framework for gender mainstreaming in the Iraqi Ministry of Defence and other government institutions (von Hlaty, 2023, p. 130). Training and education in particular made it possible to create sustainable structures that can lead to transformative processes. The role of the GENADs was strongly promoted by NATO HQ and SHAPE at NMI, providing considerable support for the complicated task of communicating gender issues to a host country that was relatively reluctant towards gender issues (von Hlaty, 2023, p. 131). Due to the male-dominated institutional culture of the Iraqi Ministry of Defence, workarounds were created to slowly integrate gender issues. For example, the term 'inclusive security' was used instead of 'gender policies' in order to communicate within already familiar conceptual frameworks (von Hlaty, 2023, p. 136). This example illustrates the context-specific adaptability of gender concepts. It can be seen that the impact of GENADs is not only due to visible effects but also to their presence and continuous contribution of gender perspectives. An additional effect of GENADs at NMI arose from exchanges with their

counterparts in other organisations in the field, e.g. the UN or NGOs. These exchanges improved interagency cooperation, particularly with civilian stakeholders (von Hltay, 2023, p. 75). These positive examples are just a few of the many good arguments for integrating the WPS agenda to increase operational effectiveness. NATO itself presents the implementation of the WPS agenda as a success story. Publications such as 'How Can Gender Make a Difference to Security in Operations – Indicators' (NCGP, 2011) and 'Whose Security? Practical Examples of Gender Perspectives in Military Operations' (NCGM, 2015) showcase concrete successes of WPS integration.

5. Conclusion

In substance, operational effectiveness through WPS integration becomes evident in the shown cases. But the question remains if operational impact can truly create strategic and thus transformative processes. In some of the portrayed cases indicate that change is happing not only on an operational but also on an institutional level.

In ISAF, for example, the Female Engagement Teams helped to give the mission a certain public profile. The visibility of women in uniform not only supported the credibility of the mission's progressive goals but also normalised the association of women with the military (Wrigth, 2016). In the follow-up mission Resolute Support in particular, the continuous progress of WPS implementation could be seen, for example, in the creation of GENADs and their integration into the planning processes (Bastick & Duncanson, 2018, p. 566). A similar trend could be observed in NMI in Iraq. The Iraqi Ministry of Defence, which is traditionally very male-dominated, was confronted by the GENADs with female counterparts who, thanks to their military expertise, were able to play a visibly strong role within military structures in an advisory capacity (von Hlaty, 2023, p. 125). Through the constant presence of women in uniform and the planning role of the GENADs, gender was established as a cross-cutting theme at NMI, ensuring that the goals of the WPS agenda were continuously addressed (von Hlaty, 2023, p. 125). This can also be explained by the successful integration of the GENADs at NMI, which, unlike in KFOR, were part of the mission from the outset (von Hlaty, 2023, p. 126). These examples show that since the adoption of the WPS Agenda by NATO, GENADs have been successfully integrated as key institutional elements in many areas, thus creating a continuous approach to gender perspectives and gender sensitivity (Bastick & Duncanson, 2018, p. 566). Nevertheless, the process is slow, as the focus on NATO's operational effectiveness as a premise develops the transformation of NATO as an institution along an output logic, thereby keeping the fundamental gender-transformative discussion away from the core of NATO. In terms of output, however, NATO has transformative leverage over states in which it operates at their invitation by linking its support to a commitment to, or at least openness towards, the values of the WPS agenda (von Hlaty, 2023, p. 136). Within NATO, however, the leverage lies in the operational effectiveness of gender-sensitive mission design, and thus a great responsibility lies with the GENADs to transfer operational arguments into institutional logic. With NATO's 2024 WPS Policy NATO once again reaffirmed its commitment to the WPS Agenda. Along the key principles of gender-responsive leadership and accountability, participation, prevention and protection this recent do-

Figure 2: Transformative Process in WPS Implementation

cument drives institutional and operational development within NATO (NATO, 2024 A). There is a lot of criticism not only of Resolution 1325, but also of its implementation in various institutions. This criticism comes from all sides – in particular from feminists (too little feminism, too much military) and conservatives (too many values, too little reality). However, based on the examples presented, especially in the case of NATO as a military-political organization, it becomes clear that when implementing Resolution 1325, or on a larger scale when considering and integrating diverse aspects and perspectives of human interaction, the operational effect outweighs structural inertia and can also fuel structural processes. Or, to put it another way, openness to restructuring and improvement is beneficial for everyone and thus contributes to NATO's overall goal: security for all.

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About the Article

How is NATO translating its strategic realignment since the 2022 Madrid Summit into an effective military posture in its command structures, particularly important: clear guidelines and a strategic vision, people who know how to implement change, and time. People are and remain the critical factor: Interpersonal trust becomes a decisive success factor for effective cooperation.

About the Author

Penelope Wessel is a researcher specialized in German foreign and security policy, particularly the relationship between society and the armed forces, as well as NATO's eastern flank. In her work, she focuses on integrating a gender perspective into various areas of security policy. Under this premise, her master's thesis examined Germany's feminist foreign policy amid Russia's war in Ukraine. She has experience working within operational NATO headquarters, academia, think tanks and the German Bundestag. She holds an MA in International War Studies and a BA in Politics and History.

At the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Madrid Summit in 2022, heads of state adopted a new Strategic Concept in response of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. In the face of a fundamental truth, "The Euro-Atlantic area is not at peace" (2022 NATO Strategic Concept, p. 3) and the core tasks of deterrence and defense, crisis prevention and management, and cooperative security, the new main threat was also identified: "The Russian Federation is the most significant and direct threat to Allies' security and to peace and stability in the Euro-Atlantic area." (2022 SC, p. 3). While challenges such as terrorism, cyber threats and climate change remained, they clearly took a back seat to conventional deterrence. This strategic reorientation has operational consequences. How does the shift from out-of-area engagement to renewed territorial defence play out on the ground? And how do NATO's command structures, particularly on the operational level, translate high-level political strategy into effective military posture? Three measurements seem to be primarily important: clear guidance and strategic vision, people who understand how to implement change and time. NATO is a political-military alliance by design. And every strategic output is usually directed by the NATO Headquarter in Brussles. It is the political heart, responsible for the mentioned guidance, in this case already pointed out above in the New Strategic Concept. The translation into operational practice though is done by the military part of the alliance. Here, the Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE) oversees three operational-level headquarters: Allied Joint Force Command Brunssum (JFCBS), Naples (Italy) and Norfolk (USA). They are each responsible for distinct geographic areas of allied territory, for the planning, executing and support of NATO military operations. Looking at Russia as the most visible threat to Europe security, JFCBS seems to be from urgent importance, as it is responsible for NATO's eastern flank. And it also illustrates perfectly how NATO's focus has evolved. In the early 2000s, JFCBS was deeply involved in coordinating the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan. Today, it is a cornerstone of NATO's forward deterrence posture, supporting planning for exercises and readiness across the eastern flank. From out-of-area stabilization to high-intensity deterrence, JFCBS reflects NATO's operational adaptation to shifting strategic realities. Additionally, it is the only one of the three operational HQ permanently under European leadership, with a three-year rotation of command between Germany and Italy. Recently, the former Chief of the German Airforce, General Ingo Gerhartz, assumed command, which seems to be a coincidence, since JFCBS transformation reminds one of the German security policy transformations from out-of-area back to territorial defense. Looking at the subordinate commands, what remains of the experiences of the last decades? Missions such as the Kosovo Force (KFOR), which is a current example of NATO peacekeeping and peace enforcement, the NATO Mission Iraq (NMI), maritime security operations (e.g. Operation Sea Guardian) and air policing illustrate the breadth of ongoing engagement beyond allied territory. Although none of the named operations are located in the Joint Operational Area (JOA) of JFCBS, past operations represent an important reference point, which the HQ is profiting of in today's daily business. ISAF especially provided the HQ with valuable experience, and one could argue that it served as an operational testing ground and contribute significantly to the principle of "train as you fight", by improving the operational readiness, interoperability and adaptability of NATO forces. Out-of-area operations have been a key driver for the operational modernization, flexibilization and globalization of the alliance and these lessons learned now inform NATO's deterrence posture in Europe. Large scale exercises planned by JFCBS like BALTOPS or Baltic Sentry 2025 (BASN25) build on this institutional memory, and train NATO forces in multinational, high-readiness scenarios. So, the strategic vision and the operational centres for implementation are in place. Where

JFCBS:
is responsible for planning, executing, and supporting joint operations at NATOs eastern flank.

does NATO stand with its personnel? The complexity of NATO as an employer stems from its composition of 32 member states. This begins again at the political-strategic level: „NATO is determined to safeguard the freedom and security of Allies. Its key purpose and greatest responsibility is to ensure our collective defense, against all threats, from all directions. We are a defensive Alliance." (2022 SC, P. 3) What at first seems simple, later becomes highly difficult. This sentence is just the smallest common denominator, the compromise that everyone could agree on. So far so good, but at the workforce level the same challenge arises again. AT the JFC´s, individuals from 32 member states come together with their own political and military leadership and guidance, their experience in planning and executing, and work together for a certain period of time to translate this strategic goal into operational plans. They create words that explain how exactly NATO soldiers are going to safeguard the freedom and security of allies on the eastern flank. They plan, where, when and how NATO would react to an Article 5 scenario. They identify options, weaknesses, strengths and exit strategies for the tactical level. They basically script the alliance future in further detail. Success of this translation is the basic prerequisite for the effectiveness and efficiency of the alliance. Because in an era of renewed geopolitical confrontation, clarity and coherence in inside and outside communication are as critical as capability. Deterrence is, after all, not only about presence but about perception as well. Especially the subordinate commands of NATO serve as a prime example of a culture of interoperability, bringing together a wide range of disciplines, military cultures and nationalities. And in this context, interpersonal trust becomes a critical success factor for effective collaboration. It is a good reminder that institutions - regardless of their size or mission - are ultimately not based on procedures and structures alone, but on the people who bring them to life.

Deterrence is, after all, not only about presence but about perception as well.

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About the Article

What are the potentials and challenges of the use of AI in conflict prevention? The integration of AI demands inclusive governance frameworks, ethical reflection, and sustained interdisciplinary collaboration. To ensure that AI serves as a force for peace rather than an instrument of surveillance or control, future efforts must center on transparent, participatory, and context-sensitive implementation.

About the Author

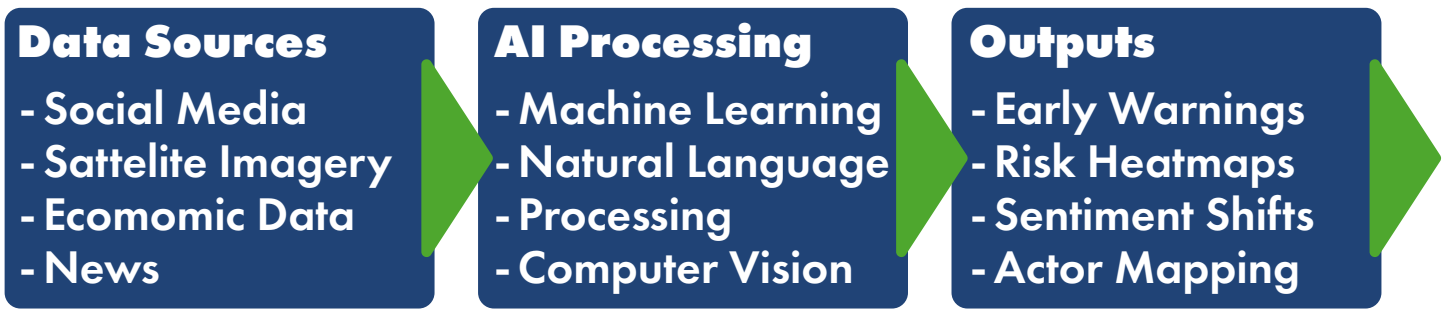
Müjgan Ekberli holds a Bachelor's in Politics and Public Administration from the University of Konstanz and is pursuing a Master's in Global European Studies. Her research focuses on EU governance, diplomacy, and global relations. She works at the Association of Public Insurers in Brussels on European financial integration. Müjgan aims to strengthen international relations through research, dialogue, and sustainable solutions.

1. Introduction

In recent years, the development of artificial intelligence (AI) has led to a significant transformation across many fields, including governance, security, and humanitarian intervention (Pauwels, 2020; Mandarava, 2024). Once limited to the sphere of computer science and robotics, AI is now integrated into institutional frameworks and normative discourses surrounding international peace and conflict prevention (Pasupuleti, 2025). A crucial question emerges as AI progressively enters early warning systems, predictive analytics, and peacekeeping infrastructure: To what extent can machine learning and data-driven algorithms contribute to anticipating and preventing conflict, and to what extent might they instead introduce new uncertainties, biases, and surveillance practices? Conflict prevention has traditionally relied on human-led diplomacy, social intelligence, and complex institutional coordination. These methods face systemic challenges in fragile or "rapidly changing environments" (Desai, 2020, p. 23). AI technologies, by contrast, promise real-time risk identification, enhanced pattern recognition, "anomaly detection and behavioral analysis" (Pauwels, 2020, p. 2). Such capabilities offer the potential to anticipate conflict dynamics before they escalate into violence, thereby enabling earlier and potentially more effective interventions (Mandarava, 2024; Kimaita & Irungu, 2024). However, these promises are embedded in critical uncertainties concerning data quality, algorithmic transparency, ethical accountability, and policy frameworks (Amen, 2024; Cheong, 2024). Many initiatives underscore both the promise and complexity of using AI in fragile political contexts. For instance, the Global Conflict Risk Index (GCRI), developed by the Joint Research Center of the European Commission, applies random forest algorithms that support early warning and conflict prevention efforts (Ferri et al., 2019). The AI-enhanced GCRI uses structural risk indicators, e.g. "regime type and [...] GDP per capita" (Ferri et al., 2019, p. 4), to predict the probability and intensity of conflicts at national and subnational levels. Similarly, pilot projects in Kenya illustrate the feasibility of integrating AI into early warning and response systems (EWRS), where machine learning algorithms are trained to detect rising tensions "based on historical, current and emerging data" (Kimaita & Irungu, 2024, p. 2332). The following chapters explore the dual character of AI in conflict prevention. The next section outlines the main potentials of AI while the final section critically discusses the challenges and ethical considerations.

2. Potentials of AI in Conflict Prevention

The potential of AI in conflict prevention lies in its capacity to analyze complex and large-scale datasets and generate and offer insights faster and more accurately than traditional methods (Pauwels, 2020; Mandarava, 2024). Early warning systems represent one of the most advanced applications, where AI supports the identification of conflict drivers through data analysis of trends, geographic distributions and linguistic dimensions (Mandarava, 2024). Once sufficiently trained, machine learning models can identify irregularities in communication, shifts in economic indicator, or signs of group mobilization, enabling the early detection of emerging risks before they become apparent to human analysts (Ferri et al., 2019; Kimaita & Irungu, 2024).



Impact Process of AI in Peacekeeping

In Kenya, for instance, AI-driven early warning and response systems are able to improve situational awareness by combining social media analysis with historical conflict records and live geospatial data (Kimaita & Irungu, 2024). The system enables more responsive and localized conflict mediation measures. According to Mandarava (2024), social media platforms play a critical role in such processes, allowing analysts to trace sentiment shifts, rising dissatisfaction, or coordinated disinformation campaigns. Consequently, real-time monitoring of social media keywords and emotional dynamics can serve as early indicators of potential instability (Mandarava, 2024). Furthermore, AI improves conflict mapping and key actor monitoring by using natural language processing and computer vision to analyze news media, social media platforms, and satellite imagery for indicators such as military mobilization, hate speech spread, or critical infrastructure damage (Pauwels, 2020; Abedin et al., 2025).

UCDP:
The Uppsala Conflict Data Program is the world's main provider of data on organised violence.

3. Case Studies: Real-World Applications of AI in Conflict Prevention

The application of AI in conflict prevention is no longer a theoretical concept but a growing reality across different regions and conflict settings. Several real-world case studies highlight how AI-driven systems have contributed to early warning and civilian protection. One of the advanced projects is the Violence Early-Warning System (ViEWS) (Hegre et al., 2019). This system "produces monthly forecasts at the country and subnational level for 36 months into the future and all three UCDP types of organized violence: state-based conflict, non-state conflict, and one-sided violence in Africa" (Hegre et al., 2019, p. 155). The ViEWS framework is composed of multiple constituent models that draw upon "decades of quantitative peace and conflict research" (Hegre et al., 2019, p. 156). Its predictive power is valuable for international organizations and NGOs seeking to allocate resources and design preventive interventions. In the context of active conflict, the Sentry system, developed by Hala Systems in Syria, stands out as an example of a tactical-level AI application (Hale et al., 2023). This system uses acoustic sensors, human input, and machine learning algorithms to detect and predict airstrikes in real-time. Once an imminent attack is identified, warnings are disseminated via mobile apps and social media to alert civilians and humanitarian responders. According to data published, "when the EWS consisted of sirens and social media messages, indicated that overall mortality was reduced by 20% - 30% when timely warnings are available" (Hale et al., 2023, p. 22). The Sentry system underscores the potential of AI to enhance civilian protection by providing timely, localized alerts in high-risk environments. In the realm of conflict simulation and decision-support tools, the CulturePulse platform developed in partnership with the United Nations represents a novel use of AI for peacebuilding (Gilbert, 2023). This initiative applies a digital twin approach to simulate the sociopolitical conflicts, such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. By modeling over "80 categories to each "agent," including traits like anger, anxiety, personality, morality, family, friends, finances, inclusivity, racism, and hate speech" (Gilbert, 2023), CulturePulse enables policymakers to test the potential outcomes of different interventions in a virtual environment. Another example is the peace process in Yemen, where researchers use machine learning tools to analyze transcripts of mediation dialogues (Arana-Catania et al., 2022). By identifying changes in language, the system provides insights into the evolving positions of the conflicting parties (Arana-Catania et al., 2022). This enables mediators to adjust their strategies and anticipate potential negotiation deadlocks more effectively. The project illustrates how AI can support the intangible aspects of peace negotiations by uncovering communication patterns and facilitating more informed mediation strategies. These diverse applications underscore a fundamental shift in the field of conflict prevention. However, the importance of critical reflection remains. Each system depends heavily on the quality and availability of data, the robustness of algorithmic mo-

dels, and the governance frameworks in which they are embedded. As these technologies continue to evolve, the standards must remain "ethically grounded, contextually aware, and appropriately governed" (Moshtagi et al., 2025, p. 5) to ensure that AI serves as a tool for peace rather than a source of new inequalities or blind spots.

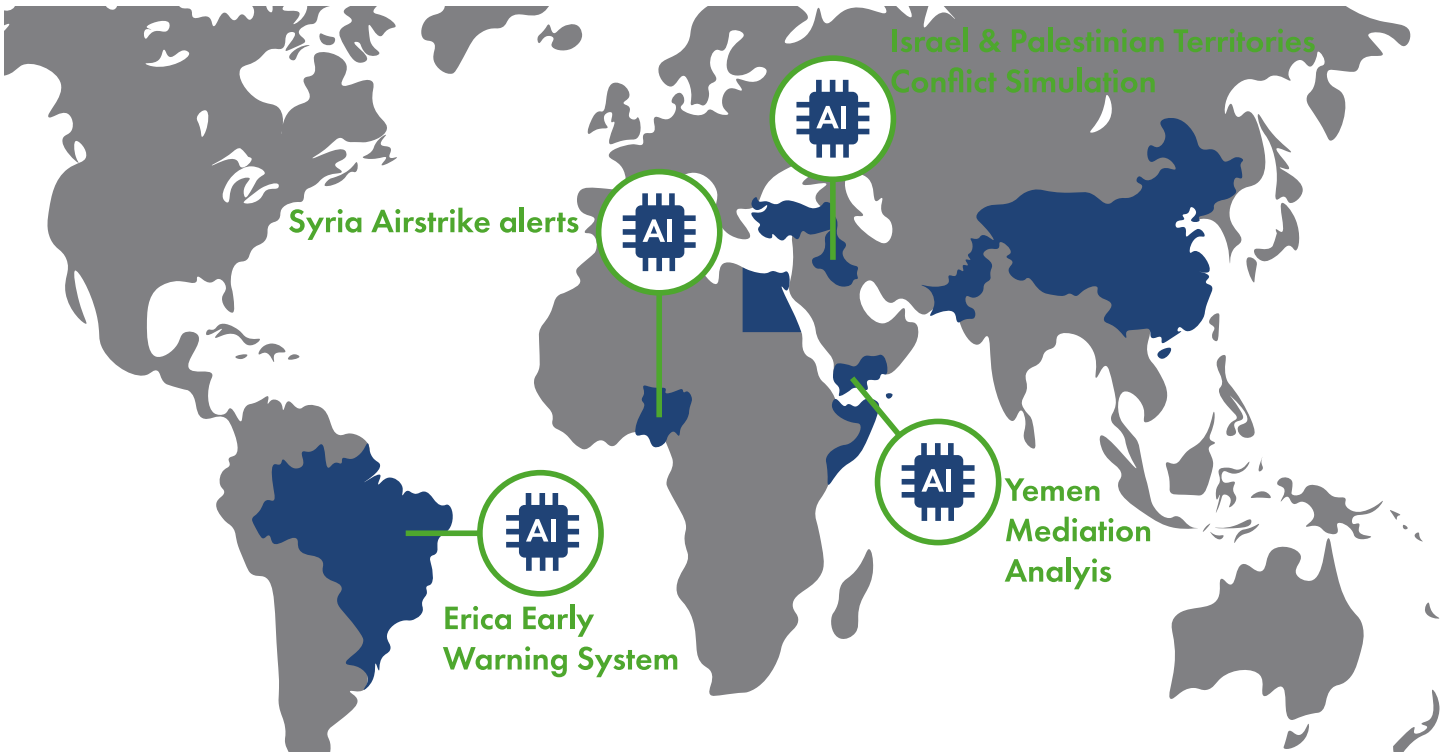


Figure 2: Localisation of AI in Peacekeeping

4. Challenges and Ethical Considerations in the Use of AI for Conflict Prevention

The increasing role of AI in conflict prevention offers great promise, but it also brings significant challenges and ethical considerations. One key challenge is bias in AI systems (Min, 2023). AI algorithms are trained on data, and if this data reflects existing societal biases, the AI system will likely reproduce and even amplify these biases (Min, 2023; Ntoutsi et al., 2020). For instance, if a risk assessment tool used in criminal justice is trained on historical criminal records that contain racial disparities, it may unfairly over-predict the risk of recidivism for certain racial groups (Min, 2023). This can result in discriminatory outcomes and further reinforce existing inequalities within the justice system (Min, 2023; Ntoutsi et al., 2020). Therefore, according to Cheong (2024), "meaningful AI accountability requires grappling with power imbalances between AI developers and those affected by their systems" (p. 8). Thus, it is crucial to include marginalized groups "who are most at risk of AI harms" (Cheong, 2024, p. 8) in policymaking. Another challenge is ensuring the responsible and ethical collection and use of data (Min, 2023). AI systems often rely on vast amounts of data, including personal information, to identify patterns and make predictions. However, the collection and use of this data can raise privacy concerns, especially for marginalized communities who may be disproportionately affected by privacy violations (Min, 2023). Min (2023) also states that it is important to implement privacy-preserving techniques and ethical data labeling practices to protect sensitive attributes and avoid bias and stereotypes. Building on this, according to Pauwels (2020), "[c]onflict prevention actors must understand the computational techniques on which they rely and the data sets in use, particularly how data is collected and the biases those data sets may represent" (p. 16). Moreover, algorithmic fairness is also a critical ethical consideration (Min, 2023). It refers to designing AI algorithms that produce equitable outcomes

across different demographic groups. However, achieving both fairness and accuracy can be challenging, as fairness constraints may restrict the ability of the model to make accurate predictions (Min, 2023) which makes it more difficult to accurately predict conflicts. Thus, according to Min (2023), it is crucial to find a balance between fairness and accuracy to ensure that AI systems deliver equitable outcomes without undermining their overall performance. This can be achieved by integrating fairness constraints into the objective function of the model during training and by applying regularization techniques that penalize biased predictions, thereby promoting algorithmic fairness. Furthermore, structural imbalances in the development and accessibility of AI technologies contribute to deepening existing geopolitical inequalities. While AI is sometimes portrayed as a democratizing force given the global accessibility of tools like ChatGPT, "AI development is still concentrated in a handful of states and companies" (Srivastava et al., 2024, p. 14). These developments raise concerns about technological dependency, data sovereignty, and epistemic inequality (Srivastava et al., 2024). Consequently, disparities in access to AI technologies may lead to conflict prevention strategies that disproportionately reflect the interests of powerful nations and corporate actors. Finally, the integration of AI into surveillance and behavioral prediction systems may infringe on privacy rights and civil liberties (International Committee of the Red Cross, 2019), particularly when used by authoritarian regimes or unregulated private actors (Pauwels, 2020). Therefore, in the International Review of the Red Cross (2020), the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) emphasizes the importance of maintaining human control and ethical oversight in AI applications during armed conflict and humanitarian operations. Mandarava (2024) further notes that the growing role of cyberspace in conflict settings requires robust international legal standards for digital governance. Furthermore, the potential for AI to displace humans from decision-making processes raises further ethical questions (Reder & Koska, 2024). While AI can enhance decision-making by providing data-driven insights, it is important to maintain human oversight and judgment. Thus, determining right from wrong is a fundamentally human responsibility and should remain so in the future. In conclusion, while AI holds transformative potential for conflict prevention, its benefits must be weighed against significant ethical, political, and technical constraints. A human-centered, participatory, and transparent governance framework is essential to harness the strengths of AI without compromising fundamental rights or undermining local agencies. In addition, bias in AI development also must be addressed to ensure fairness and prevent unjust outcomes.

5. Conclusion

These diverse applications underscore a fundamental shift in the field of conflict prevention.

From early warning systems to peace negotiation support, AI is already shaping how we identify risks, protect civilians, and design interventions. These new tools allow for faster analysis, broader data integration, and, in some cases, more timely responses than traditional, human-led approaches. However, with these advances come important questions: How do we ensure that AI supports rather than replaces human judgment? Can we trust these systems to be fair, especially in fragile political contexts where data is often incomplete or biased? And who ultimately controls the infrastructures behind these technologies? What emerges is a dual responsibility which is to embrace the opportunities AI provides while being critically aware of its limitations and risks. In summary, the integration of AI into conflict prevention requires more than technological innovation. It demands inclusive governance frameworks, ethical reflection, and sustained interdisciplinary collaboration. Ensuring that AI serves as a tool for peace, rather than a new source of inequality or harm, depends on how carefully and deliberately these systems are designed, implemented, and regulated. To ensure that AI serves as a force for peace rather than an instrument of surveillance or control, future efforts must center on transparent, participatory, and context-sensitive implementation.

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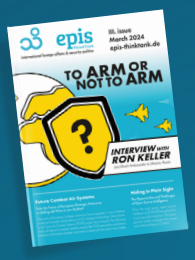

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Dominic Perfetti

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The United Nations Security Council is often criticised for its inability to reach consensus on critical issues. Yet, Resolution 2781, adopted on 30 May 2025, represents a rare success in multilateral cooperation. The UN norm "Responsibility to Protect" (R2P) was invoked in South Sudan as fighting intensified. Despite demonstrated consensus, what are the challenges to meaningful action?

Understanding R2P

R2P is a norm within the framework of the UN aimed at protecting populations from mass atrocities — genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and ethnic cleansing. Norms are widely accepted standards that guide how states act, though they are not legally binding. R2P was adopted at the UN World Summit in 2005 in response to the failures to prevent mass atrocities in the 1990s. This framework to address mass violence imposes a responsibility to act when mass atrocities are foreseeable. It redefines sovereignty as a responsibility. When states fail to protect their populations from mass atrocities, that responsibility may shift to the international community through R2P. In 2009, R2P adopted a three-pillar strategy for actionable atrocity prevention. Pillar one imposes a duty on states to protect their populations from mass atrocities. Pillar two encourages international assistance through third-party mediators, training domestic security forces, and preventive diplomacy (reminding governments of protection obligations). Pillar three calls for collective action if a state fails to protect its population through economic and diplomatic sanctions, UN peacekeeping operations, and military intervention.

Challenges and Criticism

At first glance, it may seem as though pillar three of R2P contradicts Article 2.7 of the UN charter, which declares that the UN is legally unauthorized to intervene in the domestic affairs of member states. However, Article 7 cites an exception — the Security Council may intervene if action is necessary to maintain international peace. If coercive action is deemed necessary, a member of the council will propose a resolution that lists specific measures to be taken. To pass, the resolution requires nine votes and no permanent member vetoes, after which military operations may be carried out by UN peacekeepers or authorised regional coalitions. Though the Security Council may agree that action is justified and necessary, a key question arises: if mass atrocities occur within a state, how does intervention in that state's domestic affairs "maintain international peace"? With mass atrocities often comes displaced persons, regional instability, and regimes that pose risks to neighbouring states. R2P assumes that mass atrocities increase regional security risks, justifying intervention in a state's domestic affairs to prevent the plausible disruption of international peace. Though R2P follows UN legislation, it is not uncontested in the international sphere. Concerns have arisen about the Security Council's ability to intervene in states' domestic affairs, especially militarily. UN legislation is largely based on Western legal traditions, including views on sovereignty. R2P is controversial: some states claim it legalises neo-imperialism while others claim it lacks a clear framework for action. As global crises mount, will R2P remain a dormant ideal or become a renewed call to action?

Further Reading Recommendation

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