Local Peace, International Builders

How the United Nations Builds Peace from the Ground Up

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Book Summary

My book manuscript investigates how United Nations peacekeepers prevent local-level disputes from destabilizing post-conflict settings. Most research on local-level conflict suggests that UN peacekeepers neglect to address local grievances driven by individual, family, or clan-based agendas. I focus instead on the UN's efforts to limit the destabilizing impact of these disputes. I argue that UN peacekeepers succeed in containing disputes by enforcing intergroup cooperation.

Drawing on social psychological and behavioral economic models of cooperation, I develop a theory of local-level peacekeeping that illustrates how domestic perceptions of the UN as an unbiased actor shapes peacekeepers' ability to prevent local disputes from escalating. Because civilians living in a post-conflict setting perceive the UN as unbiased, they find UN peacekeeper threats to punish any party that violently escalates a dispute credible. As a result of this deterrent effect, the presence of UN peacekeeping patrols encourages residents of post-conflict settings to cooperate rather than fight. By promoting a peaceful means to address grievances, UN peacekeepers reduce civilian demand for armed groups to intercede in local disputes.

The manuscript offers four sets of evidence in favor of this argument. First, I analyze an original cross-national dataset of UN peacekeeping deployments in thirteen Sub-Saharan African states between 2000 and 2017. Second, I examine UN peacekeeping operations in Mali using qualitative data from interviews, archival documents, and secondary sources as well as a difference-in-difference approach to identify the causal effect of UN peacekeeping efforts on local-level violence. Third, I use data from a lab-in-the-field experiment conducted with 512 residents of Bamako, Mali, to show that the UN increases intergroup cooperation between Malians of different ethnicities. Fourth, I present the results of a survey experiment implemented with 874 Malians in eight neighborhoods of Bamako and twelve villages of Central Mali. The results of the survey experiment demonstrate that UN peacekeeping patrols decrease the probability that a local-level dispute will become violent.

Together, this manuscript's theoretical contributions and empirical evidence point to the existence of a previously unacknowledged mechanism—localized peace enforcement—through which UN peacekeepers build peace and mitigate political violence in the aftermath of civil wars.

Book Chapter Outline

Chapter 1: Introduction

This book investigates the connection between local-level UN peace operations and macro-level peacebuilding outcomes. How can peacebuilders prevent disputes from unraveling promising state-level peace? Under what conditions do peacebuilders successfully stop disputes from undermining important long-term goals? These are the questions this work sets out to investigate. I identify a key mechanism by which local-level peacebuilding can contribute to the long-term security of a state: the promotion of intergroup trust and cooperation within communities. I argue that UN peacebuilders are particularly well-suited to this task because local actors perceive them as unbiased enforcers of intracommunal disputes. The empirical evidence offers credible identification strategies that compare the effect of local-level UN peacebuiling to that of peacebuilding led by foreign states perceived as biased and that of domestic governments absent a peacebuilding operation. I show that UN peacebuilding operations limit the macro-level impact of intracommunal disputes.

Chapter 2: Localized Peace Enforcement in Context

There surrounds a great deal of confusion surrounding peace operations. Opponents and supporters of peace operations alike take advantage of this opaqueness. For this reason, discussions about peace operations tend to be emotive and politically charged. In order to provide the conceptual clarity necessary to undertake a rigorous analysis of peacebuilding, this chapter seeks to define and survey the academic literature on peace operations and the containment of intracommunal disputes. First, I explain why it is important to study peace operations as a distinct political phenomenon. Second, I provide a working definition of local-level peacebuilding, the unit of analysis of this study. I contextualize local-level peacebuilding within the broader framework of peace operations. Third, I provide a working definition of the containment of intracommunal disputes, the dependent variable of this study. Fourth, I assess existing research on peacebuilding. I take stock of existing theories of the containment of intracommunal disputes, namely: capacity, information, and legitimacy. For each theory, I identify the primary mechanisms and short-comings. Although scholars have devoted increasing attention to local-level conflicts, I conclude that the connection between intracommunal disputes and macro-level peacebuilding outcomes remains undertheorized and poorly understood. In the following chapter, I introduce my theory about how unbiased peacebuilders can limit the macro-level impact of intracommunal disputes by promoting intergroup cooperation at the local level.

Chapter 3: A Theory of Local-Level Peacebuilding

This chapter introduces a new theory to explain how UN peacebuilders limit the impact of intracommunal disputes on macro-level peace. Local populations possess prior beliefs about the biases of international actors. I argue that when domestic populations perceive

of peacebuilders as unbiased, peacebuilders can promote intergroup cooperation, incentivize the peaceful resolution of disputes, and contain the escalation of local-level conflict. First, I define intergroup bias and overview existing uses of the idea of international bias, particularly in the mediation literture. Second, I identify the conditions under which peacebuilders promote cooperation between members of different social groups within the same community. I highlight the perception of peacebuilder bias as a key variable in this regard. I also explain how intergroup cooperation lays the foundation for the peaceful resolution of intracommunal disputes. Third, I suggest that the peaceful resolution of intracommunal disputes directly advances four positive macro-level outcomes: (1) rule of law; (2) economic development, (3) demobilization of armed groups; (4) legitimacy of state institutions. Fourth, I explain how my bias-based argument interacts with and complements existing theories about the UN's ability to contain intracommunal disputes (see Chapter 2).

Chapter 4: Cross-National Evidence

Over the past two decades, the United Nations has devoted an increasing amount of resources to local-level conflicts. The UN now sends military observers, peacekeeping troops, and police to problematic areas to limit the impact of intracommunal disputes on hard-won national-level peace. With these operations in mind, this chapter presents a cross-national study of the UN's efforts to stop the escalation of local-level violence using an original dataset. First, I outline a research design that assesses the effectiveness of locally deployed UN personnel using original data from thirteen Sub-Saharan UN deployments: Mali, Sierra Leone, Sudan, Darfur, South Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo, Chad, Central African Republic, Cote d'Ivoire, Mali, Liberia, and Burundi. Second, using a negative binomial count model, I examine whether locally deployed UN personnel succeed in limiting the impact of intracommunal disputes. For robustness, I use measures of violence from different datasets, fixed effect models, and pre-process the data using coursened exact matching (CEM) to account for selection effects. A third section discusses the results of those regressions in the context of the theory. A final section concludes and identifies a key short-coming of the evidence–the inability of cross-national observational studies to distinguish between underlying mechanisms. I suggest that closer exploration of a single case—Mali—allows for an investigation of the theoretical mechanisms at work.

Chapter 5: Qualitative and Quantitative Evidence from Mali

In this chapter, I begin an in-depth investigation of the case of Mali. Mali allows me to compare the effect of two different types of international interventions in the same setting: the French military intervention and subsequent peacebuilding operation, which began in January 2013, and the multidimensional United Nations peacebuilding mission (MINUSMA), which deployed starting in April 2013. The chapter proceeds in six parts. First, I provide some relevant historical context for the Malian case. Second, I describe the *cercle*-month level dataset ranging from January 2012 to December 2017 that I've collected, including the outcome variable, explanatory variables, and control variables. Because of the focus on

one single case, I am able to collect more granular data than I did at the cross-national level. Third, I present the results of a negative binomial regression analysis that estimates the association between UN and French peacebuilding and counts of civilian victimization in Mali. Fourth, I show that UN and French peacebuilders select into the most violent areas of Mali. To account for these selection effects, I conduct two difference-in-difference estimations (for the UN and France) that demonstrate that the UN decreases levels of civilian victimization to a substantively and statistically significant extent while France does not. A final section concludes with a discussion of the results of the chapter and the generalizability of the findings to other contexts.

Chapter 6: Micro-Level Evidence from a Lab Experiment in Mali

Using a research design pre-registered with Evidence in Governance and Politics (EGAP), this chapter presents evidence consistent with my theory from fieldwork conducted in Mali. As a test of my argument, I conducted a lab-in-the-field experiment with 512 subjects in Bamako, Mali in February and March 2016. An experimental approach allows me to isolate the effect of international peacebuilding while holding constant a set of other factors that may be otherwise correlated with a propensity to cooperate. A lab experiment is particularly well-suited for this type of question because it allows observation of actual cooperative behavior under circumstances that do not introduce additional factors that may bolster or undermine cooperation. In this experiment, I recruited Malians from one of the dominant non-Tuareg ethnic groups to play a trust game in which they send money to an anonymous Tuareg Malian; whatever amount they choose is doubled; and their Tuareg partner chooses an amount to send back. Non-Tuareg Malians will send more money to their Tuareg partners if they believe that their attempts at cooperation will be reciprocated. Participants are randomly assigned to a control group or one of two treatments in which they are told that either the UN or France will punish low contributions with a fine. The expectation of the game is that if the non-Tuareg participants believe that the Tuareg partner will send a high amount back—because they believe that the Tuareg partner will be punished by the international enforcer if she does not—then they will send a high amount to the Tuareg player from the start. The experiment suggests that international peacebuilders increase intergroup cooperation. The UN is particularly effective at this task, increasing contributions to Tuareg Malians by approximately 32%. France is significantly less effective compared to control, increasing contributions by only about 5%.

Chapter 7: Survey Experimental Evidence from Mali

This book argues that intergroup cooperation enforced by UN peacebuilders promotes the peaceful resolution of intracommunal disputes and, in so doing, helps establish the rule of law. This chapter tests this argument. I present the results of a survey experiment pre-registered with Evidence in Governance and Politics (EGAP) conducted with 874 Malians living in different parts of Bamako and villages of Central Mali. I demonstrate that intergroup cooperation bolstered by the UN promotes nonviolent forms of conflict resolution. I also offer

evidence suggesting that in the long run, localized peace enforcement operations by the UN at least partly contribute to the strengthening of the domestic rule of law. The experiment asks respondents to evaluate the likelihood that a local dispute over land ownership will become violent. I find that respondents believe that a local dispute is less likely to escalate in the presence of a UN or unbiased peacebuilder compared to France or a biased peacebuilder. I also find that when UN peacebuilders enforce intracommunal disputes, aggrieved parties are likelier to take their disputes to a formal court rather than a traditional leader. However, localized peace enforcement does not change the perception that formal institutions such as the local police and local courts will effectively resolve the dispute.

Chapter 8: Conclusion and Policy Implications

The book suggests three direct policy implications in regard to local-level peacebuilding. First, the UN should continue to invest heavily in policing. A small number of UN police can on their own nearly eliminate the risk that an intracommunal dispute will become violent. Of the three types of UN personnel—military troops, military observers, and police—police carry the brunt of the localized peace enforcement burden and are uniquely capable of reducing levels of violence at the local level. Second, the UN should consider a division of labor in the deployment of its personnel, based upon their national origin. Because of a lack of perceived bias from a colonial past, non-Western UN personnel are best suited for policing and intensive localized operations. Western personnel are best saved for peacekeeping duties as military troops where I find that they likely decrease levels of violence and, at worst, do not increase violence. Third, the UN must couple localized peace enforcement operations with security-sector reform and institution-building in post-conflict settings. The effectiveness of localized peace enforcement relies upon long-term statebuilding to lock in short-term gains from intergroup cooperation. While localized peace enforcement disincentivizes violent forms of conflict resolution, only the presence of UN-bolstered security and judicial institutions can incentivize peaceful and legal forms of conflict resolution.