

Chapter 11

Evaluating the Conflicting Interests in the United Nations: Comparative Analysis of UN Resolutions Policy Output Regarding Conflict-Related Violence (CRSV)

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ABSTRACT

The chapter sheds light on the sophisticated competing interests in the United Nations (UN) system. These can be found in the organization's policies, which are related to conflict-related violence (CRSV) and sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) by the UN. In a systematic and by taking qualitative starting point, the authors compared the prior criticism associated with SEA. The authors focused on nuance and an individualistic approach. The UN resolutions from the abovementioned policy areas are analyzed in a structured and focused comparison. This comparative case study aims to make visible contradictions and accompanying problems between the UN's interests by placing policies concerning SEA in a larger context. By comparing policies for both SEA and conflict-related violence (CRSV), the study seeks to show how conflicts between priorities can be seen in policies.

INTRODUCTION

The UN Charter clearly states the UN's goal to promote and encourage respect for human rights. Furthermore, according to Article 101 of the Charter, all personnel must act according to the highest standards of efficiency, competence, and integrity (Liivoja, 2008). In addition to the guidelines set in the UN Charter, peacekeeping efforts since the end of the Cold War have increasingly received more robust

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mandates to use weapons, partly to enable stronger protection of the civilian population (Kirschner & Miller, 2019). The UN identifies peacekeeping efforts as one of the most important tools for maintaining international peace and security (UNSC, 2018). However, peacekeeping operations whose personnel commit criminal violations and abuses of human rights, mainly through sexual exploitation and sexual abuse, have been well-documented for many years (Burke, 2017). Several reports have pointed to peacekeepers' involvement in the trafficking, rape, and sexual abuse of minors and adults (O'Brien, 2011; Smith, 2017; Westendorf & Searle, 2017). The accusations surrounding the abuses have shocked the international community, demanding action (Nguyen, 2015). The UN has been singled out as responsible for allowing the abuses to occur (Nguyen, 2015). This type of institutional problem within the UN has been demonstrated several times, including when operations in the Central African Republic and Somalia reported allegations of abuse in 2015 and 2014, respectively (Burke, 2017). Critics argue that the phenomenon should be highlighted as part of a problematic institutional culture that prioritizes militarized and patriarchal forms of security (Smith, 2017).

Rather than an institutional problem, the UN's handling of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse has painted violence as a legitimate problem (Smith, 2017). International organizations, such as the United Nations, must manage external demands to obtain and maintain legitimacy (Bromley & Powell, 2012). Here, legitimacy is defined as the belief or perception within a specific audience that the exercise of authority is appropriate (Tallberg et al., 2018). Many organizations struggle with managing and complying with the external demands placed on the organization, especially when these demands come into conflict with, or jeopardize, benefit-maximizing activities which peacekeeping operations can be considered to be (Bromley & Powell, 2012; UNSC, 2018). When outsiders' expectations of an organization conflict with management's interests, organizations may try to gain legitimacy without necessarily changing implementation (MacLEAN & Behnam, 2010). To deal with pressure from outside actors, previous research has shown that organizations such as method adopt formal policies to avoid legal sanctions and public scrutiny (Bromley & Powell, 2012).

The link between legitimacy and effectiveness is particularly visible in peacekeeping efforts (Billerbeck, 2020b). If operations are not seen as legitimate, i.e., actions and goals are considered inappropriate according to shared norms and principles, it can affect how the peacekeeping operations are responded to (Billerbeck, 2020b). Concerning this, the UN's handling of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse can be considered unmanageable. On the one hand, there is the interest and obligation to protect the civilian population; on the other hand, there is an interest for the UN to preserve and protect its credibility and image. These two interests visibly existed on two different sides and collided, not least when alarms about child abuse by UN staff were tried to be silenced by the leadership within the UN hierarchy in 2015 (Westendorf & Searle, 2017). Motives for prioritizing the legitimacy of peacekeeping operations exist. Lack of legitimacy risks affecting the will to cooperate among the population where the effort operates, donors who contribute resources risk withdrawing them, and states risk not renewing mandates. Consequently, it becomes urgent for the UN and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations to strengthen the image of legitimacy (Billerbeck, 2020b). Furthermore, it becomes relevant to ask whether policies directed at the staff of one's organization differ from policies directed more generally at conflict parties.

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