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Theorizing Decision-Making in International Bureaucracies: UN Peacekeeping Operations and Responses to Norm Violations

Kseniya Oksamytna
City, University of London, UK

Oisín Tansey
King's College London, UK

Sarah von Billerbeck
University of Reading, UK

and

Birte Julia Gippert
University of Liverpool, UK

Many international organizations (IOs) provide assistance to governments through country offices or peacekeeping operations. Sometimes, government authorities in countries receiving IO services violate norms that underpin the IO's engagement. IO officials must then choose between confrontational and conciliatory responses. These responses are located on a spectrum that ranges from a firm and public response to silence and downplaying. How do IO officials decide on their response? Based on over 200 interviews with UN peacekeeping officials, we argue that the factors that shape their decision-making are found across three categories: individual, departmental, and positional. In terms of individual characteristics, previous experience, career security, and the length of service at a particular duty station matter. Regarding departmental factors, politicization of work, professional composition, and the type of interlocutors predispose departments to be supporters or critics of authorities in recipient countries. In terms of positional considerations, the place of a post or department in the IO hierarchy, relations with other IO entities, and the distance from the field play a role. While important in its own right, decision-making by civilian UN peacekeeping officials is informative about similar processes in other complex international bureaucracies that employ individuals from diverse backgrounds.

Muchas organizaciones internacionales (OOII) prestan asistencia a los Gobiernos a través de oficinas en esos países o de operaciones de mantenimiento de la paz. A veces, las autoridades gubernamentales de los países que reciben servicios de las OOII quebrantan las normas que sustentan el compromiso de las OOII. Los funcionarios de la OOII deben entonces elegir entre emitir respuestas de carácter confrontacional o de carácter conciliatorio. Estas respuestas se sitúan dentro de un espectro que abarca desde respuestas firmes y públicas hasta respuestas basadas en el silencio y en la minimización del asunto. ¿Cómo deciden los funcionarios de las OOII cuál será su respuesta? Partimos de la base de más de 200 entrevistas con funcionarios de mantenimiento de la paz de la ONU, con el fin de argumentar que los factores que dan forma a su toma de decisiones se encuentran divididos en tres categorías: individuales, departamentales y posicionales. En cuanto a las características individuales, se considera que son relevantes la experiencia previa, la seguridad en la carrera y la antigüedad en el servicio dentro de un lugar de destino determinado. En lo que se refiere a los factores departamentales, vemos como la politización del trabajo, la composición profesional y el tipo de interlocutores predisponen a los departamentos a ser partidarios o críticos de las autoridades de los países receptores. Con respecto a las consideraciones posicionales, tanto el lugar que ocupa un puesto o un departamento dentro la jerarquía de la OI como las relaciones con otras entidades de esa OI y la distancia existente desde el terreno juegan un papel importante. Si bien la toma de decisiones por parte de los funcionarios

civiles de mantenimiento de la paz de las Naciones Unidas es importante por derecho propio, también resulta informativa sobre procesos similares en otras OOII que emplean a personas de diversos orígenes en burocracias complejas.

De nombreuses organisations internationales (OI) apportent leur aide aux gouvernements par le biais de bureaux nationaux ou d'opérations de maintien de la paix. Parfois, les autorités gouvernementales des pays recevant un service des OI violent les normes qui sous-tendent l'implication des OI. Les officiels des OI doivent ensuite choisir entre la confrontation et la conciliation. Ces réponses se situent sur une palette qui va de la fermeté et la publicité au silence et à la minimisation. Comment les officiels des OI décident-ils de la réponse à adopter ? En nous fondant sur plus de 200 entretiens avec des officiels du maintien de la paix de l'ONU, nous affirmons que les facteurs qui façonnent leur prise de décisions peuvent être personnels, ou bien en lien avec leur service ou leur fonction. En termes de caractéristiques individuelles, l'expérience antérieure, la sécurité professionnelle et la durée du service à un poste particulier sont importantes. À l'égard des facteurs liés au service, la politisation du travail, la composition professionnelle et le type d'interlocuteurs prédisposent les services à soutenir ou critiquer les autorités des pays bénéficiaires. Sur le plan des considérations vis-à-vis de leur fonction, la place d'un poste ou d'un service au sein de la hiérarchie de l'OI, les relations avec les autres entités d'OI et la distance par rapport au terrain jouent un rôle. Bien qu'elle soit importante en elle-même, la prise de décisions par les officiels civils du maintien de la paix de l'ONU nous renseigne quant aux processus similaires dans d'autres OI qui ont recours à des personnes aux profils divers au sein de bureaucraties complexes.

International organizations (IOs) codify, promote, and implement international norms. Their charters refer to specific values, and their programs and activities are often framed in a language that identifies particular normative goals. For example, the UN is guided by the humanitarian imperative of saving lives (Binder and Golub 2020); international financial institutions promote good governance and poverty alleviation (Weaver 2008); and the African Union has committed itself to the norm against undemocratic changes of government (Tansey 2018).

IO officials engage closely with government authorities in states that receive IO services. Yet these authorities can sometimes violate the norms that underpin the IO's engagement. For example, while the World Bank may emphasize the norms of gender-inclusive development and environmental sustainability, governments receiving World Bank financing may wish to shirk such commitments. IO officials in situations of this nature face a difficult choice: on the one hand, they need to cooperate closely with government authorities in recipient states to achieve key objectives; on the other hand, they need to uphold and promote the norms embedded in their IO's legal and programmatic documents. When government authorities violate those norms, IO officials thus have to make tough decisions on how to respond, often in ways that have implications for those who rely on their services as well as for their organization's legitimacy and credibility (Gippert 2017). Yet we know little about *how* IO officials respond, or *why* they respond the way they do.

The literature on decision-making by IO officials has thus far focused on international bureaucrats' behavior vis-à-vis different actors, such as donors (e.g., Hirschmann 2021; Dijkstra et al. 2022) or officials in other departments within the same organization (e.g., Trondal et al. 2013; Hartlapp, Metz, and Rauh 2014) and other IOs (e.g., Margulis 2021; Schuette 2023). However, the scholarship has only recently started examining how IO officials navigate relationships with government authorities in states receiving IO services. This work has focused primarily on the ways in which IO officials exercise influence (Eckhard and Ege 2016; Busch et al. 2021), but with little attention to IO officials' decision-making around it. Responses to norm violations by government authorities in recipient countries require difficult decisions that are among the most consequential that an IO makes, yet the scholarship has largely failed to map this important terrain.

We fill this gap by shifting the focus toward IO officials' decision-making when faced with government authorities in recipient states who violate norms that underpin the IO's engagement in that country. To do this, we examine decision-making by civilian UN peacekeeping officials. Mandates of most UN peacekeeping operations include a set of "liberal" objectives, but missions frequently operate in illiberal settings marked by political violence and repression. The risk of violations of norms underpinning UN mandates by government authorities in countries hosting peacekeeping operations—hereinafter host states—is thus high, enabling us to empirically observe how UN officials react. These observations, in turn, can contribute to a broader understanding of how international bureaucrats in similar situations deal with norm violations.

Our analysis is based on more than 200 interviews with former and current UN peacekeeping officials. We make two main contributions. The first is conceptual and concerns the nature of responses by IO officials. We introduce a "conciliation-confrontation spectrum" that captures the variation in IO officials' reactions to norm violations by host state authorities. At one end of the spectrum, officials can take a strong stance and condemn or sanction host state authorities, while at the other end, officials can essentially look the other way or even downplay or conceal violations.

The second contribution is a new theoretical framework detailing factors that shape IO officials' responses. We demonstrate that the factors that shape IO officials' decision-making when faced with norm violations by recipient governments fall into three categories: individual, departmental, and positional. In terms of individual characteristics, previous experience, career security, and the length of service in the host country influence IO officials' predisposition for confrontation or conciliation. Departmental factors include politicization of the department's work, its professional composition, and the type of interlocutors. Positional considerations include the location of the post or department in the IO hierarchy, its relations with other IO entities, and the placement of the post or department in relation to host state authorities.

This article has four parts and a conclusion. The first section reviews the literature on decision-making in international bureaucracies, identifying the gap that we seek to fill. In the second section, we outline our case selection and methodology. In the third section, we develop

our conceptual contribution and introduce the conciliation-confrontation spectrum on which IO officials' responses to norm violations are located. In the fourth section, we develop our theoretical contribution and investigate how individual, departmental, and positional factors predispose UN peacekeeping officials towards either confrontation or conciliation when faced with norm violations by host state authorities. We conclude by summarizing our findings, outlining the policy implications of our argument, and suggesting directions for further research.

Decision-Making in International Bureaucracies

How do bureaucracies make decisions? The public administration and management literature on such decision-making had for a long time been dominated by rational choice models that assumed that individuals act as utility-maximizers and that individual behavior could be aggregated at the level of the organization (Zey 1992). However, other scholars have pointed out that these models fail to account for the "complexity of modern organizations" and the fact that information may be imperfect or open to interpretation (Miller, Hickson, and Wilson 1999, 44). Scholars have emphasized the role of power in decisions, the possibility of organizational conflict, the wider societal setting of decision-making, and role conceptions of different officials (Weick 1995). These considerations are especially relevant in large, decentralized bureaucracies: Lipsky (2010, xi) highlights that officials in such organization have "wide discretion over the dispensation of benefits or the allocation of…sanctions," so they have some autonomy in responding to cooperative or noncooperative behavior by beneficiaries.

The literature on decision-making in international bureaucracies has followed a similar trajectory, with a large body of scholarship focusing on rationalist models, and others bringing in sociological concepts of identity, sensemaking, and expertise. For example, the principal-agent literature conceptualizes how IO officials implement tasks delegated to them by member states (e.g., Hawkins et al. 2006). After delegation, member states monitor implementers' behavior and may use the threat of sanctions, such as budget reductions, to alter it (e.g., Dijkstra 2016). By contrast, constructivist and sociological institutionalist scholars suggest that IO officials—mostly well-educated, highly skilled, and hyper-mobile professionals—derive a sense of purpose from applying their expertise to solving international problems and justify a claim to authority on this basis (Barnett and Finnemore 2004; Fleischer and Reiners 2021). Both strands of scholarship agree, however, that IO officials, especially those based in offices away from IO headquarters, make the vast majority of day-to-day choices with at least a degree of independence.

UN peacekeeping officials enjoy considerable autonomy from the Security Council and the New York Secretariat. Peacekeeping mandates often include competing goals or vague political compromises (Lipson 2010; Blair, Di Salvatore, and Smidt 2022), thus requiring interpretation by mission officials. As Karlsrud (2013) observes, heads of peacekeeping missions—Special Representatives of the Secretary-General (SRSG)—act as norm arbitrators by adjudicating between competing imperatives that flow from complex and ambiguous mandates or from incongruity of mandates with the reality on the ground. The fact that missions are based in "the field" and thus geographically distant from New York gives officials autonomy by virtue of the lack of close and immediate oversight (Benner, Mergenthaler, and Rotmann 2011). While we know that officials in peace-keeping operations enjoy a degree of autonomy, we have a limited understanding of how they respond to host state authorities' behavior that violates norms that underpin peacekeeping mandates. Our analysis seeks to address this gap by offering an original "conciliation-confrontation spectrum" that captures the range of responses available to UN peacekeeping officials when dealing with noncooperative host state authorities as well as a theoretical framework for understanding how officials formulate those responses.

The IO literature does not currently offer a compelling account of how IO officials react to difficult dilemmas, but it makes several observations that can serve as a starting point for such theorizing.[1] First, both rationalist and constructivist accounts indicate that individual officials' motivations matter. The principal-agent literature suggests that international bureaucrats make decisions with a view to furthering their self-interest, for instance, to protect their jobs (Pollack 2003; Hawkins et al. 2006; Dijkstra 2016). Constructivist scholars, conversely, argue that international bureaucrats make decisions with a view to helping their IO fulfill its mission—a mission with which they often personally identify (Barnett and Finnemore 2004; von Billerbeck 2020a; Ege, Bauer, and Wagner 2021). This suggests the importance of looking at IO officials' individual characteristics in developing a framework for understanding decision-making in international bureaucracies.

Second, since most IOs are organized into thematic, geographic, or administrative divisions (Trondal et al. 2013), officials' self-interested behavior may entail championing the interests of the department in which they work (Hanrieder 2015; Salton 2017). Constructivist scholars also acknowledge the importance of organizational *sub*cultures that develop in different units of the same IO (Barnett and Finnemore 2004; Chwieroth 2008; Hall 2016). This points to the importance of including departmental interests and identities in the framework for analyzing IO officials' decision-making.

Third, international bureaucracies are by nature hierarchical organizations. Yet while decisions are supposed to flow from the top to the lower levels or from headquarters to field offices, the picture is not so straightforward in reality. Patz and Goetz (2019, 37) stress that divergent views exist "inside bureaucracies, both at different hierarchical levels and in different departments." Rationalist scholars have thus recognized international bureaucracies as "complex agents" (Elsig 2011). While some scholars (e.g., Knill et al. 2019) argue that complexity may prevent international bureaucracies from acting concertedly and consistently, it may as well lead to different—though not necessarily incoherent—decisions depending on the level at which they are taken. Constructivist scholars, while noting the tendency of international bureaucrats to please superiors (Woods 2004), simultaneously suggest that many officials bend rules and defy "the bureaucracy" in order to achieve results (Caplan 2004; Felix Da Costa and Karlsrud 2013; Campbell 2018). They may be especially inclined to do so when they work in close contact with the recipients of their services (Weaver 2008). This points to the importance of relations within the IO hierarchy and positions that officials occupy vis-à-vis key interlocutors inside and outside the organization.

In this article, we build on these insights to propose a theoretical framework for explaining IO officials' decision-making when faced with norm-violating behavior by government authorities in recipient states. We identify specific in-

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[1] Our aim is not to validate or disprove any particular theory but to draw on them in order to develop a framework for understanding empirical phenomena of interest to us.

	UNTAC, Cambodia (1992–1993)	UNPROFOR, former Yugoslavia (1992–1995)	UNTAES, Croatia (1996–1998)	UNAMSIL, Sierra Leone (1999–2005)	MONUC/MONUSCO, DRC (1999–ongoing)	UNMISET, East Timor (2002–2005)	UNMIL, Liberia (2003–2018)	UNOCI, Côte d'Ivoire (2004–2017)	MINUSTAH, Haiti (2004–2017)	UNMIS, Sudan (2005–2011)	UNMIT, East Timor (2006–2012)	UNAMID, Sudan (2007–2020)	UNMISS, South Sudan (2011–ongoing)	MINUSMA, Mali (2013–2023)	MINUSCA, CAR (2014–ongoing)
Human Rights	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Democratization	■	□	□	■	■	■	■	□	■	□	■	□	■	■	□
Electoral Assistance	■	□	■	■	■	■	■	□	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Civil Society	■	□	□	□	■	■	□	■	■	□	■	□	■	■	■
Gender	■	□	■	□	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■

Figure 1. "Liberal" tasks in peacekeeping mandates.[2]

dividual, departmental, and positional factors that shape IO officials' likelihood of reacting in a confrontational or conciliatory manner to norm violations. Since we are dealing with complexities of human decision-making, the factors in our framework *predispose* IO officials to respond in a particular manner, but they do not, individually or in combination, *causally determine* decisions. As officials acquire experience, change departments, or move up in the IO hierarchy, their predispositions change, but at every point in time, there exists a constellation of factors that make IO officials *likely* to respond in a particular way to norm-violating behavior by government authorities in recipient states. We present a nuanced framework based on UN officials' own reflections about how they choose a course of action from a spectrum of possible responses. Before presenting this spectrum and the decision-making framework in full, we outline our case selection and methods.

Case Selection and Methodology

In order to investigate how and why IO officials respond to norm violations by governments in countries receiving IO services, we focus on the case of the UN peacekeeping bureaucracy. The UN peacekeeping bureaucracy includes senior civilian leadership of peacekeeping operations, civilian officials working in those missions, and officials at New York headquarters overseeing and supporting missions' work. We focus on UN civilian peacekeeping officials for three reasons: (1) the size and substantive importance of the UN peacekeeping bureaucracy; (2) the prevalence of norm-violating behavior by host country authorities; and (3) the relative lack of attention to civilian officials (beyond top leadership) in the literature.

First, the UN peacekeeping bureaucracy is one of the world's largest international bureaucracies: at its peak ten years ago, it employed 22,437 civilian staff across its peacekeeping operations, complemented by approximately 1,000 officials at New York headquarters (Coleman 2020). It is

also substantively important: UN peacekeeping operations constitute one of the main instruments of the international community for responding to crises, and they are ambitious undertakings aimed at reforming host states.

Second, the UN is an organization that "embodies and projects norms and principles at the international level" (von Billerbeck 2017, 287), but UN peacekeepers regularly face norm-violating behavior by host country authorities. Most mandates of multidimensional peacekeeping operations are based on a set of "liberal" norms: peacekeepers are tasked not just with security and stability, but also with promoting human rights, encouraging democratization, supporting free and fair elections, revitalizing civil society, and advocating for gender equality (Di Salvatore et al. 2022; see figure 1). These are reflective of a set of norms relating to the principles of non-discrimination, human dignity, and fundamental freedoms enshrined in the UN Charter.

However, some host governments, often through their security forces, violate these norms. There are often divergences between peacekeepers, who need to implement their mandates based on "liberal" norms, and host state authorities, who may seek to preserve repressive domestic political orders (von Billerbeck and Tansey 2019; Duursma, Lindberg Bromley, and Gorur 2023). Consequently, UN peacekeepers must contend with host governments that engage in sporadic or regular violations of norms that are central to UN peacekeeping mandates. It presents peacekeeping officials with a difficult choice: should they tolerate such behavior or confront the authorities, potentially straining relations with their close partners? UN peacekeeping is therefore a compelling case study of IO officials' responses to norm violations by government authorities in countries where IOs deliver their services.

Third, decision-making in the UN peacekeeping bureaucracy is relatively under-researched, especially compared to studies of decision-making in other IOs, such as the European Commission (e.g., Pollack 2003; Hartlapp, Metz, and Rauh 2014) or the World Bank (e.g., Weaver 2008; Park 2010). Studies of meaning- or decision-making in UN peacekeeping have focused on headquarters-driven reforms (Benner, Mergenthaler, and Rotmann 2011; Coleman, Lundgren, and Oksamytna 2021), views and priorities

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[2]Tasks mandated at any point throughout the existence of missions on which we have interview data (see Appendix). We exclude non-multidimensional missions (e.g. UNISFA) and missions without mandate data (e.g. UNMIK). This is based on Di Salvatore et al. (2022).

of New York-based UN officials (von Billerbeck 2020b; Oksamytna and Lundgren 2021), senior civilian mission leadership (Karlsrud 2013; 2015; Bove, Ruffa, and Ruggeri 2020), military peacekeepers or commanders (Harig and Jenne 2022; Ruffa and Rietjens 2023), or a single peacekeeping operation (Barnett 2002; Paddon Rhoads 2016; Salton 2017; for an exception, see Howard 2008). Decision-making by civilian officials in UN peacekeeping operations—political affairs officers, rule of law experts, or electoral advisers—has not received comparable attention.[3]

We contend that the case study of the UN peacekeeping bureaucracy lends itself to comparisons with other IOs, thus making our findings relevant beyond our specific case. The functions and employment conditions of civilian officials in UN peacekeeping operations resemble those of other international bureaucrats in field-focused IOs. UN peacekeeping officials monitor human rights, build host state capacities, and advocate for gender equality—functions that other international bureaucracies also perform. While employment in UN peacekeeping operations is temporary (although missions can last a decade or longer), short-term contracts are increasingly common across IOs (Heldt et al. 2022). Thus, our framework is likely to be relevant to IO officials under the following scope conditions: they have some decision-making autonomy, are part of vertically and horizontally differentiated organizations, and work closely with authorities in countries that receive IO services.

Our data come from over 200 semi-structured interviews with current and former UN officials who have worked in various peacekeeping missions and at UN headquarters, including eight SRSGs and twelve deputy SRSGs. Interviewee selection followed a non-random strategy (Bernard 2013, chapter 7). We focused on officials who had dealt with noncooperative host country authorities in their careers and sought to capture variation in seniority, function, and experience (Aberbach and Rockman 2002; von Soest 2023). The interviews took place in 2019–2022 in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), New York, London, Berlin, and remotely.[4] To facilitate candid conversations, we offered the option of full anonymity or partial identification to all interviewees. We asked about known instances of host government's norm violations but also encouraged officials to reflect on incidents they had themselves identified as requiring difficult decisions. While some norm violations are more severe than others, in deciding on their responses, peacekeeping officials assess each incident in the specific country context. For example, the beating of a journalist by the security services in relatively democratic Liberia raised as much concern as the jailing of a score of activists in DRC.

Our conclusions are based on data saturation. Data saturation in qualitative research is attained when no new themes, patterns, or findings emerge from collecting additional data (Guest, Bunce, and Johnson 2006, 65; Fusch and Ness 2015, 1409). The saturation point varies for different projects, but researchers can assess saturation based on the richness and thickness of their data, where richness refers to quality (how detailed and intricate data are) and thickness to quantity (how much data there are). For this project, we conducted a large number of interviews, and their transcripts contain highly nuanced information. We used this material to inductively identify factors that matter for UN peacekeeping officials' decision-making. We refined our list

through several iterations, cross-checking it between all authors and removing overlap. We then systematized these factors into three categories described above: individual, departmental, and positional. We again cross-checked interpretations between authors to ensure alignment and to reconcile ambiguities.

Importantly, all the researchers involved observed similar patterns and themes early on, and the observations remained consistent following the analysis of additional interview material or after accounting for the rank and function of interviewees as well as the time and place of the mission where they serve(d) (Gioia, Corley, and Hamilton 2012). This led to a high degree of certainty surrounding the conclusions we had drawn from our data. When deploying our empirical material throughout this article, we use illustrative quotations that reflect the key patterns we identified (von Soest 2023, 282).

The Conciliation-Confrontation Spectrum: Options for Responding to Norm Violations

In this section, we develop a spectrum of potential responses available to UN peacekeeping officials when they are faced with norm violations by host country authorities. Unlike in cases of loans or assistance programs by the international financial institutions, which come with specific conditions that the client government can implement or flout and thus produce observable indicators of IO officials' leniency in the face of non-cooperation (e.g., Nelson 2014), there are only informal expectations that governments hosting peacekeeping operations cooperate in fulfilling "liberal" objectives of UN mandates. When this turns out not to be the case, UN peacekeeping officials need to decide on an appropriate response, again informally and in an *ad hoc* manner. The conciliation-confrontation spectrum demonstrates that they have a wide range of options to choose from in responding to such norm violations.

In UN peacekeeping, the Security Council authorizes peacekeeping operations and issues mandates that provide a set of tasks that peacekeeping troops, police officers, and civilian officials should implement. While mandates have become increasingly specific (Oksamytna 2023), they offer limited guidance on formulating responses to particular norm violations. UN officials know that mandates need interpretation: mandates "are pretty detailed [but]…there is always the possibility of reading between the lines."[5] In addition to the challenge of mandate interpretation, peacekeeping officials need to navigate the relationship with the host government carefully as they rely on it to uphold peacekeepers' protected status under international law, grant visas, custom clearances, and flight authorizations; allow access to populations in need of assistance; and in general provide continuous consent for the mission (Piccolino and Karlsrud 2011; Paddon Rhoads 2019; Duursma 2021). The June 2023 request by the Malian government for the immediate withdrawal of the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), in part due to dissatisfaction with the mission's investigations into human rights violations that might have involved Malian security forces, is a stark illustration of these risks. The decision to confront or conciliate host country authorities that violate UN norms may thus have serious implications for the achievement of peacekeepers' overall objectives.

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[3]A recent exception is Buitelaar's (2023) study of human rights officials in UN peacekeeping operations.

[4]See the Appendix for further details. Unless the location is specified, interviews were conducted remotely.

[5]Interview with Riccardo Ceva, former Coordination Officer in UNMIL, March 31, 2021.

More confrontational   *More conciliatory*

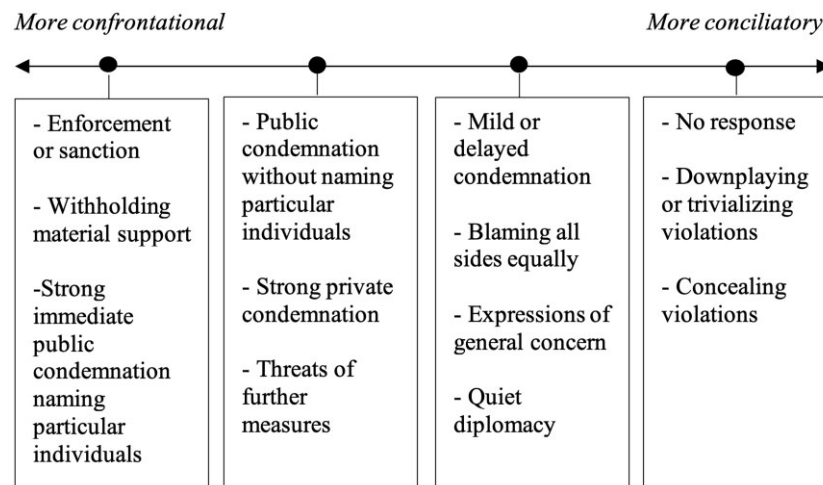| - Enforcement or sanction

- Withholding material support

-Strong immediate public condemnation naming particular individuals | - Public condemnation without naming particular individuals

- Strong private condemnation

- Threats of further measures | - Mild or delayed condemnation

- Blaming all sides equally

- Expressions of general concern

- Quiet diplomacy | - No response

- Downplaying or trivializing violations

- Concealing violations |

Figure 2. The spectrum of IO officials' responses to norm violations by host country authorities.

We conceptualize the spectrum of responses available to UN peacekeeping officials based on interview data and examples discussed in the peacekeeping literature. At one end of the spectrum lies the most confrontational response, which involves punitive action. In exceptional cases, mission officials can authorize an enforcement action against actors breaching norms that underpin UN peacekeeping mandates. Other forceful options include withholding support or cancelling joint operations or activities. Officials can also seek to impose reputational costs through naming and shaming. At the other end of the spectrum lies the most conciliatory response, in which officials decline to react in any meaningful way or even downplay or conceal violations. In between are options such as mild expressions of concern, quiet diplomacy, and private or delayed condemnation. A former UN official described their choices in the face of norm violations by the host government in the following way: "it's a gradation tool, you can go public and criticize the authorities…[or engage] behind closed doors…to try and stop that."[6] This spectrum of possible responses is summarized in figure 2.

For example, the UN Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UN-OCI) took military action to quell post-electoral violence by an incumbent who refused to relinquish power after losing the vote (Piccolino and Karlsrud 2011). The SRSG implemented the mandate to protect civilians by deploying UNOCI helicopters to prevent the defeated incumbent's forces from shelling the population, which tilted the balance in favor of the genuine winner of the election, although some member states challenged this interpretation of the mandate (Karlsrud 2013). In a slightly less confrontational response, the head of the UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) threatened to withdraw support by reportedly telling the interim government that if the Haitian police continued using disproportionate force against protestors, the mission would no longer protect the capital.[7] This was a credible threat considering how reliant the host government was on the mission to maintain order. An even less confrontational response was the expression of general concern after the 2018 election in DRC, whose results are widely regarded as fraudu-

lent.[8] The UN mission, MONUSCO, praised the elections as a peaceful transfer of power (United Nations 2019). The most conciliatory response came from the UN-AU Hybrid Mission in Darfur (UNAMID), accused of suppressing information about human rights violations by the Sudanese military (Elbasri 2016). A UN-commissioned independent review revealed the mission's "practice of censoring itself in its reporting" on incidents involving abuses by Sudanese government forces (United Nations 2014, 7). Faced with similar norm violations—violence and intimidation against civilians—officials in UNOCI and UNAMID offered vastly different reactions.

Having established the spectrum on which responses to norm violations can fall, we argue that peacekeeping officials at all levels decide how to react to such incidents. For example, some officials have publicized norm violations by leaking internal UN reports to the press (Human Rights Watch 2008; Hirschmann 2020). At the working level, peacekeeping officials can facilitate or withhold various kinds of assistance: for instance, they can provide advice on fundraising. As a former UN official recalled, cooperation "can sometimes happen at lower levels; a local UN official striking a deal with the local government official or finding some money from a donor."[9] UNAMID's example is illustrative: the allegations about non-reporting of abuses concerned not only UNAMID's senior leadership but also the Chief of Staff and senior officials in the Communications and Public Information Division, the Humanitarian, Protection Strategy Coordination Division, and the Political Affairs Section, while the mission's spokesperson was among the few who advocated a confrontational response (Elbasri 2016). This variation suggests that explanations located at the level of the UN as an organization, such as those related to the overarching norm of impartiality (Paddon Rhoads 2016; Laurence 2019), or at the level of the profession, such as those related to a "peacebuilding culture" (Autesserre 2014; Goetze and Bliesemann de Guevara 2014), do not tell the entire story: not all peacebuilders or UN officials act in the same manner when faced with similar choices, both within and across missions.

[8]Mo Ibrahim and Alan Doss, "Congo's Election: A Defeat for Democracy, a Disaster for the People," *The Guardian*, 9 February 2019.

[9]Interview with Adriaan Verheul, former human rights, political affairs, and disarmament official in UNTAC, MONUSCO, and UNMIS, April 1, 2021.

We do not argue that a more confrontational response is always the best way or that UN officials do not pursue forceful responses because of a lack of integrity or courage. UN peacekeepers might downplay norm violations for the sake of achieving other important goals, like averting a breakdown of the peace process. When officials do not speak up for fear of being expelled by the host government, it is because "people obviously think that being able to be on the ground prevents harm from happening…[and] the main reason that people want to stay is because they believe that they can make a difference."[10] However, conciliatory responses might have long-term effects on the governance and human rights situation in host countries (von Billerbeck and Tansey 2019).

In this section, we conceptualized the nature of, and variation in, IO officials' responses to norm-violating behavior by government authorities in recipient countries. Our original spectrum helps us advance three arguments: first, UN peacekeeping officials react differently to similar norm violations across and within missions; second, they have a wide menu of potential responses; and third, officials at different levels of the bureaucracy make consequential choices. The next step is to understand how UN peacekeeping officials arrive at those choices, and we proceed to examine the factors that influence their decision-making.

Decision-Making By UN Peacekeeping Officials

As illustrated above, not all peacekeeping missions respond to norm violations by the host government in the same way, and there are multiple approaches that UN officials can follow. In this section, we identify the factors that shape UN officials' decision-making that fall into the individual, departmental, and positional categories. In terms of individual characteristics, officials' previous experience, career security, and the length of service at a particular duty station influence their predisposition to confront or conciliate host state authorities. Departmental factors include politicization of the department's work, its professional composition, and the type of interlocutors with which it interacts. Positional considerations include the place of the post or department in the IO hierarchy, relations with other IO entities, and the placement of the post or department vis-à-vis host state authorities.

These factors, summarized in table 1, are not mutually exclusive; officials can be guided by one or more of these considerations in deciding how to react to norm violations by host state authorities. However, interviewees have systematically acknowledged that all of these factors matter in UN peacekeeping officials' decision-making and suggested specific ways in which they do so.

Individual Characteristics

Characteristics of individual international bureaucrats can influence IO performance and priorities (Copelovitch and Rickard 2021; Heinzel and Liese 2021; Heinzel 2022). Individuals who work in a peacekeeping operation vary in their previous experience—both national and institutional—as well as career security and the length of service at a particular duty station. Each of these characteristics shapes their propensity to react in more conciliatory or confrontational ways to norm violations by host state authorities.

Previous experience. When discussing decision-making by the head of their mission, interviewees noted that in choos-

ing whether to confront or conciliate host state authorities, leaders' nationality and career history come into play.[11] A former Director of Political Affairs in two large peacekeeping operations highlighted the importance of "political upbringing" as well as "the professional experience that the person would have had."[12] Characteristics of officials below the leadership level are also important: one needs "to look at the heads of [departments in a peacekeeping operation] and see which countries they come from, and then [one can] get a bit of a sense of where their priorities may lay."[13] Given the growing emphasis on local ownership (von Billerbeck 2016), peacekeeping officials from Western or Northern countries are especially cautious about being tactful, which might make it more difficult to criticize local politics. They therefore gravitate towards the more conciliatory end of the spectrum: "there's a lot of self-censorship…[since] being straightforward on these issues entails taking a lot of risks for your career, again, or even for your reputation: [you might be seen as] neo-colonial."[14]

Peacekeeping officials' previous experience includes not only national but also professional background. For example, the first head of the UN Mission in Liberia (UN-MIL), Jacques Paul Klein, was a retired US general who "ran the whole country like a military camp."[15] He had previously headed the UN Transitional Administration for Eastern Slavonia, Baranja, and Western Sirmium (UNTAES) and "thought that Liberia should have been administered as a protectorate of the UN for two years" (Cheng 2018, 178). Klein's forceful approach was praised for preventing rebel violence but also for deterring large-scale norm violations by the transitional government. As one interviewee reflected, Klein was "an interesting choice of SRSG, which I don't think is irrelevant…[A] US military reserve officer, he…was the strong arm,"[16] which entailed a confrontational approach in responding to host government's norm violations.

Shortly before the 2005 elections in Liberia, which saw Ellen Johnson Sirleaf become president, Klein was replaced by Alan Doss, who came from the UN Development Programme (UNDP) background and took a more conciliatory approach: UNDP officials "live and breathe by what a government wants…and all of a sudden, it's like Ellen Johnson Sirleaf could do no wrong, and [UNMIL is willing to provide] everything she wants…Part of that is his [Doss'] UNDP background'.[17] Doss' diplomatic approach opened UNMIL to criticism that it was not sufficiently vocal in publicly pointing out norm violations by Liberian authorities: "UNMIL always saw no evil, heard no evil and spoke no evil of the president."[18] In general, many civilian peacekeepers come from UN "specialized agencies where you have that training: you work with the government, you support the government, you don't do politics, so you will not be critical," and it may include "working very well hand in hand with the worst human rights violators you may ever see."[19] Therefore, officials' previous experience in national or international posts can predispose them to be more conciliatory or confrontational in dealing with norm violations.

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[10] Interview with a UN official, April 2020.

[11] Interview with an anonymous source, January 2020.

[12] Interview with Ray Torres, former head of Political Affairs Departments in MONUSCO and MINUSCA, April 2021.

[13] Interview with a former UN official, January 2021.

[14] Interview with an NGO leader and former UN official, February 2020.

[15] Interview with a former UN official, January 2021.

[16] Interview with an anonymous source, March 2021.

[17] Interview with an anonymous source, March 2021.

[18] Interview with an anonymous source, April 2020.

[19] Interview with Ray Torres.

Table 1. Factors influencing UN officials' decision-making

Individual	Departmental	Positional
Previous experience	Politicization of work	Place in IO hierarchy
Career security	Professional composition	Relations with other IO entities
Length of service at a duty station	Type of interlocutors	Position vis-à-vis host state authorities

Career security. We have already discussed the risk that confronting the host government may carry for a peacekeeping mission in terms of consent and access, but there may also be repercussions for individual officials' careers (Johnstone 2011; Buitelaar 2023). A confrontational approach may result in being declared *persona non grata*—"PNG-ed" in UN parlance—and asked to leave the country. Officials who have a promise of employment after the peacekeeping posting, either at the UN or in their country, may find it easier to be forthcoming than those who do not. In one of the missions, an official had to leave the country after making a statement critical of host country's behavior but subsequently received a senior governmental position in their own country, and the boldness of their statement "probably…[had something] to do with that also."[20]

Interviewees suggested that member states or senior UN leaders should provide peacekeeping officials with a "guarantee…[of a future] job in a different mission or somewhere" if they expect them to play difficult or politically sensitive roles.[21] Confronting host state authorities "takes courage, it takes ethics, but it also should take the support of the United Nations as a whole…If an SRSG or director of political affairs or director of human rights…needs to make a statement…that person should be able to find a job, at least, in a softer country."[22] A promise of job security can empower officials to express public criticism of host state authorities—a response located towards the more confrontational end of the spectrum—without the fear of ruining their careers.

Length of service at a duty station. While being new to one's post and lacking expertise in host country politics might prevent peacekeeping officials from understanding the subtle ways in which authorities violate norms, officials who stay in the same country for many years might fail to notice, or prefer not to notice, local elites' machinations. An interviewee compared it to Stockholm syndrome: after working with national institutions every day for years, one "cannot see what's really going on."[23] As another interviewee suggested, "when you have people who served in the same mission for [up to fifteen] years, well, there's something wrong…You lose the distance; you lose the critical capacity. You know people perfectly…[and] you adapt to that way of doing things and you lose the drive to analyze what's being done."[24] The situation can get to a point "where everyone is quite familiar with each other…[and] you end up with a sort of stasis…where there is not an impetus to take things forward."[25] This is how a for-

mer UN official with experience in five missions explained it:

> When you are a diplomatic service, you rotate. I think it's healthy. You still keep your perspective and your distance. When you are working on a daily basis with people, we are all human beings. We may not see things as clearly as when you come fresh.[26]

In this way, a long time spent working at a particular duty station makes officials subconsciously predisposed towards options at the more conciliatory end of the spectrum.

Departmental Factors

Many interviewees highlighted the importance of the UN's overall organizational culture, stressing that "if you're part of a UN mission, then you're supposed to act according to UN values."[27] At the same time, every UN peacekeeping mission, like other complex international bureaucracies, consists of several departments with distinct organizational subcultures. As one interviewee opined, "rarely a peacekeeping mission is [a single entity] but is rather a term for a collection of sections that closely work together but that also have different mandates individually."[28] These two views are not contradictory: officials' identities are "concentric circles where identification towards the unit level requires some degree of identification towards the [international bureaucracy] as a whole" (Trondal et al. 2013, 135). Distinct subcultures within peacekeeping operations predispose officials working in different departments to react in particular ways to host state's norm violations. Departments differ in the degree of politicization of their work, professional composition, and the type of interlocutors.

Politicization of work. Departments within a peacekeeping operation differ in the degree of politicization of their work. An interviewee described "people working in stabilization…[or] reintegration" as "very efficient people that have usually quantifiable objectives…[but who] don't have to analyze the political implications…[and] are not really expected to be critical [of host state authorities]."[29] The technical side of electoral affairs sections' work may also have a low degree of politicization:

> The benefit of being the electoral division is [that] our mandate is pretty simple…We need to deliver free, fair, and transparent elections. It's pretty clear what we have to do, where[as] [for] others, it might be a little bit [more complicated]…It doesn't put us in [delicate situations].[30]

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[20]Interview with Michel Noureddine Kassa, representative of NGO "Initiative pour un Leadership Cohésif" and former UN official, Kinshasa, February 2020.

[21]Interview with a former UN official, April 2020.

[22]Interview with Ray Torres.

[23]Interview with an anonymous source, January 2020.

[24]Interview with Roberto Ricci, Chief of OHCHR Emergencies Section and former head of Human Rights Departments in MONUC and MINUSTAH, July 2019.

[25]Interview with a former UN official, December 2020.

[26]Interview with Marta Henriques-Pereira, former political affairs, human rights, judicial affairs, and legal affairs officer in MONUSCO, UNMIS, UNMIT, MINUSTAH, and UNMIK, June 4, 2021.

[27]Interview with a UN official, March 2021.

[28]Interview with an anonymous source, February 2021.

[29]Interview with Ray Torres.

[30]Interview with a former peacekeeping official, March 2021.

By contrast, handling pre-electoral repression or post-electoral intransigence by defeated incumbents is a job for senior mission leadership or political affairs colleagues, which necessitates criticizing host country authorities. Officials in departments whose work is not obviously politicized may not consider confrontation with host state authorities their responsibility and prefer options towards the more conciliatory end of the spectrum.

The work of some departments is politicized in almost every context. Human rights sections always expect some confrontation with host country authorities (Majekodunmi 2002). There is thus a difference between human rights divisions and other departments in peacekeeping operations:

> The role of the human rights division is probably one of those that is sometimes more at odds with…other, less political sections, in a sense that it is…the human rights section's task to collect information about human rights violations and also to publicize some of that information…Within the peacekeeping operations, they have a bit of a difference, the room to be critical, which I think is interesting because they're not maybe necessarily bound to this need to be as diplomatic as you can to protect your mandate.[31]

This is not lost on colleagues in other departments in peacekeeping missions, who believe there should be space for more nuance in engagement with host state authorities:

> Human rights: generally very principled…maybe principled to a fault, like they can only see things as black and white. Either it's a violation of human rights or it's not a violation. They'll just advocate for the non-violation, whereas things can be a little more complicated and difficult.[32]

Therefore, departments that have relatively less politicized tasks, such as program delivery, are less predisposed to react strongly to norm violations than departments that focus on tasks like governance reform or human rights promotion.

Professional composition. Human rights departments in UN peacekeeping missions are often staffed by specialists in human rights advocacy. Officials in departments dealing with the rule of law—often lawyers—are also attuned to noticing behavior that deviates from norms underpinning peacekeeping mandates. This is not always the case for departments that draw on diverse professions, like civil affairs:

> The rule of law pillars are usually technicians. They are all technicians, all lawyers…There's no jok[ing] around. There is no dancing…Political affairs is this borderline…You find those who are…a little bit stricter, and those are usually the ones who deal with policy mostly…[Whereas] civil affairs…[is] a little bit more, "Okay, let's engage on a personal level. Let's engage as a human and let's work together." [33]

Engaging on a personal level may entail being more understanding of deviations from norms that underpin UN mandates and choosing options towards the less confrontational end of the spectrum, as compared with colleagues in departments with a different professional composition. Another interviewee also mentioned that civil affairs units are not dominated by a single profession and therefore flexible: "the civil affairs department…is a little bit more flamboyant…because we need to think a little bit outside of the box.

But there is always a line that you cannot walk over."[34] The existence of 'a line one cannot walk over' suggests that such departments are aware of the danger of being too conciliatory but still seek creative ways of working cooperatively with host country authorities.

An interviewee summarized the importance of professional composition of different departments by reflecting on her experience of working in the UN Transitional Authority in Cambodia:

> Civil Administration people…They are administrators…Bureaucrats don't want truth – bureaucrats want order. They don't want to rock the boat…For a human rights lawyer, it is the rule of law, right? For an administrator, it is law and order. And there is a huge difference between the rule of law and law and order. The rule of law is based on human rights, justice [while] law and order is "anything goes, as long as it's order."[35]

These examples highlight the importance of professional composition of departments within peacekeeping operations in terms of both homogeneity and the type of professions from which departments draw their personnel.

Type of interlocutors. Human rights sections in peacekeeping operations engage with survivors of abuses, which makes them attentive to the needs of those whose rights may be violated by the host government. Human rights officials believe that they represent "convicted prisoners, excluded indigenous populations, women marginalized by gender discrimination, trafficked children, a silenced media" (Majekodunmi 2002, 139). Such interlocutors make human rights officials predisposed to be critical of host government authorities if those authorities ignore or abuse the population, so human rights officials are likely to prefer options towards the more confrontational end of the spectrum.

Conversely, departments that support host country authorities, such as those working on security sector reform, tend to take a different approach:

> [T]he office of human rights…had a specific mandate that was a bit distinct from [the rest of the mission]. We, for instance, in security sector reform, comply with human rights, we follow human rights, but when we come to work with the security sector, we come from…a different perspective, from a security sector perspective, [seeking to contribute] to making that institution work, and we are not just there to criticize what is missing.[36]

To give another example, political affairs departments, by virtue of engaging closely with high-ranking host country politicians, may develop more positive opinions about the latter than other departments: "there's certain favoritism always because you develop relationships with people, but that's the same everywhere with political affairs in the whole world. It's not an objective profession'.[37] As this quote suggests, this close relationship, while indispensable for working with host country authorities, is a challenge for maintaining a critical distance. Some departments are more likely to develop such relationships than others, depending on the type of interlocutors.

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[31]Interview with an anonymous source, February 2021.

[32]Interview with a UN official, March 2021.

[33]Interview with Riccardo Ceva.

[34]Interview with Riccardo Ceva.

[35]Interview with Yasmine Sherif, former Human Rights Officer, UNTAC, March 2021. On similar dispositions among administrators in the UN Temporary Executive Authority in in West New Guinea (UNTEA), see Tudor (2022).

[36]Interview with an anonymous source, March 2021.

[37]Interview with an anonymous source, June 2020.

Positional Considerations

In international bureaucracies, officials' behavior is shaped "by their specific location within the bureaucratic structure" (Trondal et al. 2013, 140). In peacekeepers' decision-making, the place of their post or department in the UN hierarchy, relations with entities beyond the mission, and their position vis-à-vis host state authorities play a role. While it is unsurprising that perspectives may differ between New York headquarters, mission headquarters, and mission field offices (Felix Da Costa and Karlsrud 2013; Karlsrud 2015; Paddon Rhoads 2016; Buitelaar and Hirschmann 2021), positional considerations create specific predispositions for responding in a conciliatory or confrontational manner to norm violations by host country authorities.

Place in the IO hierarchy. Due to the nature and visibility of their post, heads of peacekeeping missions face unique pressures as compared to officials at New York headquarters or in small offices in remote parts of the host country. Mission leaders play a key role in mediating between local power brokers, engaging closely with the host government and other influential political players, all the while upholding norms enshrined in mission mandates. Concerns about balancing these objectives put pressure on mission leaders to try and maintain a cooperative relationship with the host government, which may entail foregoing public criticism: "For an SRSG to be successful, they have to have a good relationship with the president. You don't want them PNG-ing people left and right, and shouting all around the world [about alleged UN meddling]…We put our representatives on the ground in a very difficult position."[38] In other words, as the head of mission, "you're exposed" if things go wrong.[39] For example, due to their position, mission leaders might find it difficult to criticize electoral fraud committed by a would-be president because they know they are "going to have to work with whoever comes into power anyway. By taking a strong stance against that person before they come into power isn't going to help the UN."[40]

Additional evidence of the importance of positional considerations emerges from a comparison of responses by mission leaders and their subordinates in the UN mission in East Timor:

> The human rights section would be more zealous about adherence to human rights principles, and a case in point, they were going to produce an annual report that was very critical. And when I shared it with mission leadership for feedback, they [said] that you may be right, but this is going to cause a big backlash and make it more difficult to achieve the goals we want to achieve. So [the mission leadership asked to]…soften the language in some places and deliver those same messages verbally in meetings rather than in a public report.[41]

Mission leaders can be more conciliatory than both their subordinates and colleagues at New York headquarters. For example, the leadership of the peacekeeping mission in DRC was reluctant to release a report on political repression prepared by the mission's human rights section "for fear of upsetting relations" with the Congolese president and "deflected repeated requests" from the Department of

Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) (since renamed the Department of Peace Operations, DPO) and the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) to make the report public (Human Rights Watch 2008, 93). The report was eventually published after being leaked to the press. These examples suggest that mission leaders are particularly cognizant of the risks inherent in confronting host country authorities, whereas posts or departments positioned differently do not face the same pressures.

Relations with other IO entities. In addition to relations with DPO, some parts of peacekeeping missions have strong links with UN specialized agencies. For example, in DRC, the human rights section of the peacekeeping mission was integrated with the OHCHR country branch. The additional reporting line to Geneva provided the section with a platform for speaking out against norm violations. The section could ask OHCHR to denounce problematic practices by host country authorities in a communiqué that appeared to come from Geneva if the mission itself found it difficult to make such a statement.[42] In other missions, human rights sections and OHCHR country offices, while remaining structurally separate, issued joint reports (e.g., MINUSTAH and OHCHR 2017). The OHCHR connection equips human rights sections with another important resource: a uniform and rigorous methodology for reporting violations, developed by Geneva-based UN staff, enabling human rights officials to confront host state authorities without attracting accusations of partiality.[43]

While the integration of the human rights unit of the peacekeeping mission in DRC and the OHCHR country branch empowered officials to be critical, in other cases, separation between departments enabled officials to pursue confrontational responses. At the beginning of the article, we discussed how UNOCI took decisive action against the loser of the 2010 election in Cote d'Ivoire. There was a high degree of confidence in the UN-certified election results: the UN High Representative for the Elections was structurally separate from UNOCI and could verify the process and outcome independently. Interviewees believed that it enabled UNOCI to be outspoken against the attempt to undermine the election result,[44] and the mission's deputy head characterized the separation as a productive strategy (Doss 2020). Depending on the context, integration or separation can help or hinder responses on the confrontational end of the spectrum, but relations within and beyond the IO bureaucracy undoubtedly shape officials' decision-making.

Position vis-à-vis host state authorities. All peacekeeping operations work "in the field." "The field" means countries where peacekeeping operations are deployed when viewed from UN headquarters in New York, as well as peacekeeping offices and bases across the host country when viewed from mission headquarters in the capital (Felix Da Costa and Karlsrud 2013). In both cases, distance from authorities in the host country's capital creates different pressures and incentives for being more or less conciliatory.[45] For example, it might be easy for UN headquarters officials to push the SRSG to criticize host country authorities because someone based in New York is "not the one who has to see [the president] at receptions."[46] Due to their location, se-

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[38] Interview with a UN source, December 2020.

[39] Interview with a UN official, February 2021.

[40] Interview with Adam Day, Head of the Geneva Office, UN University Centre for Policy Research, and former political officer or adviser in MONUSCO and DPO, January 2020.

[41] Interview with a UN official, March 2021.

[42] Interview with a UN official, January 2021.

[43] Interview with a UN official, February 2020.

[44] Interview with an anonymous source, February 2021.

[45] This may be the case in other IOs as well: for instance, World Bank Country Directors are "attuned to the interests of borrowing governments" (Weaver 2008, 23) and increasingly based in "the field" as opposed to Washington headquarters (Honig 2020), which may create predispositions towards conciliatory responses.

[46] Interview with a UN official, February 2021.

nior mission officials feel the need to be cautious with host country authorities:

> [As a] mission, you are the one in the field…If things go wrong, you are the one who's going to be accountable…Of course, there's a different way of looking at things than those who are in DPKO in New York…You try to make sure that you abide by some principles…But at the same time, you have to find a way…[to] get your messages through…Because of the kind of work you do on that, you are forced to become a diplomat.[47]

In one case, DPO officials had "so little trust in the mission leadership and such a sense that [mission officials] were abandoning a lot of core business by being too under the radar" about host government's norm violations that it led to considerable tensions between New York headquarters and the mission.[48] Officials at New York headquarters often want peacekeeping operations to behave "stronger with the [host country] interlocutors."[49]

Furthermore, New York-based officials are not personally invested in the continuation of specific missions because they oversee several of them. For example, in the early 2010s, New York was keen to speed up UNMIL's drawdown through the handover of security responsibilities to the Liberian security forces, which was several years overdue. UNMIL officials were reluctant to confront the Liberian government over the slow pace of reforms: unlike their New York counterparts, their field-based jobs were tied to the continuation of that particular mission. When peacekeeping was expanding, officials could easily go from one posting to another, but that era ended around the mid-2010s (Coleman 2020). In UNMIL's later stages, "there [wa]s nowhere else for anybody there to go…[so] you will keep a low profile because you want to keep this job."[50] This is how a former UN official described the situation: "The government was comfortable, the mission was comfortable, everybody was comfortable" with UNMIL's continuation,[51] which disinclined field-based officials to pressure the Liberian government to speed up reforms aimed at enhancing the efficiency and accountability of the security sector.

In addition to the differences between New York headquarters and the mission, there are also differences between mission headquarters and subnational offices. The location of mission headquarters in the capital, at the centre of national political life, requires closeness to the government. Conversely, peacekeeping officials in locations across the country witness daily and first-hand the suffering of vulnerable populations marginalized by capital-based elites:

> [Some officials] have a lot of regular contact, daily contact with communities. They're often stationed in field offices, smaller towns. They become a lot more attuned to the local community, maybe [more] than others, but on the flipside, their perspective gets colored that way.[52]

For example, in DRC, peacekeeping officials based in the conflict-affected east, where the Congolese army had abused the population for decades, were among the most prominent critics of joint operations with the army. Conversely, the mission leadership, which had to maintain relations with capital-based Congolese officials, "gave little weight to their concerns…[and dismissed] the humanitarian and political implications of the operations" (Paddon Rhoads 2016, 148).

Besides the proximity to the recipients of assistance and limited interactions with capital-based elites, officials in subnational offices have another resource that allows them to be forthcoming in their criticism: a micro-level understanding of local politics. When local elites engage in manipulation, officials in subnational offices are well-equipped to analyze what is going on. For example, some candidates for elections pretended to be NGO members in order to join peacekeepers on UN flights and campaign across the country, thus undermining the norm of fair electoral competition. This is how a subnational office employee commented on it: "There was scrutiny from our side in the field, because we know these people, but of course in [the capital]… if you give an ID card and it says you are an NGO, a local NGO, you are going to fly."[53]

These three sets of positional factors—the place in the IO hierarchy, relations with other IO entities, and position vis-à-vis host country authorities—help explain why some officials or departments might be more or less inclined to confront norm-violating host country authorities. Together with the two categories discussed above (individual characteristics and departmental considerations), positional factors form a part of the integrated framework that enables a deeper understanding of decision-making in the UN peacekeeping bureaucracy. These findings have relevance for other IOs that employ individuals from diverse backgrounds across departments with different subcultures and with horizontal and vertical connections within and outside the bureaucracy. This theoretical argument also has significant implications for policy, as discussed in the concluding section.

Conclusion

In this article, we fill a gap in the literature on the behavior of international bureaucracies by examining how IO officials make decisions—perhaps the most consequential decisions—regarding whether to confront or conciliate recipient country authorities who violate norms that underpin the IO's engagement in that country. Drawing on over 200 interviews with civilian UN peacekeeping officials has enabled us to advance two main findings, one conceptual and one theoretical. First, we demonstrate that officials have discretion to respond in a variety of ways to norm violations by host governments. We conceptualize a conciliation-confrontation spectrum that captures how vastly those responses range: from decisive action to counter or denounce violations, to ignoring and downplaying wrongdoings. Second, we propose a comprehensive and nuanced theoretical framework for understanding how individual characteristics, departmental factors, and positional considerations predispose international bureaucrats to pursue confrontational or conciliatory responses.

Our findings also have implications for policy. IO leaders and member states often want the IO bureaucracy to promote certain norms. By being aware of the full set of factors that shape IO officials' propensity to react in confrontational or conciliatory manner to norm violations, IO leaders and member states can shape the composition of the international bureaucracy to make desired responses more likely. For example, both the UN Secretary-General and member states influence, formally or informally, appointments and

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[47] Interview with a former senior UN official, March 2021.

[48] Interview with Adam Day.

[49] Interview with a UN official, February 2021.

[50] Interview with a former UN official, March 2021.

[51] Interview with a former UN official, December 2020.

[52] Interview with a UN official, March 2021.

[53] Interview with Wouter Van Quickelborne, political affairs officer in DPO and former civil affairs officer, UNMIL, January 2020.

tenures of leaders of peacekeeping missions (Oksamytna, Bove, and Lundgren 2021; Lundgren, Oksamytna, and Bove 2022). Member states and UN leaders also lay down formal rules and shape informal practices governing the length of peacekeeping officials' employment, affecting how many years officials stay at a particular duty station. Member states, upon the Secretariat's recommendations, decide on peacekeeping budgets, including the number or seniority of officials in each department of a peacekeeping operation, which is an opportunity to downsize or enlarge departments with certain predispositions. UN leaders oversee the development of job profiles for different peacekeeping roles, which allows them to shape the types of professions that comprise the peacekeeping bureaucracy. They can also redraw horizontal and vertical relations between different departments. By doing so, they can change the bureaucracy's predisposition to react in particular ways to norm violations by government authorities in recipient countries.

Finally, our findings open avenues for future research. For example, there is scope to explore interactions between individual, departmental, and positional factors. In peacekeeping, officials in stabilization support units often work with the host government's security forces and thus gravitate towards being supporters rather than critics of the state. Yet they are also likely to be based in remote field offices and implement small-scale projects for the benefit of local communities, pulling them towards siding with marginalized populations against capital-based elites. Future research could examine how different predispositions coexist, conflict, or reinforce each other. Our framework can also be applied to other scenarios besides norm violations and to other IOs besides the UN peacekeeping bureaucracy. Norm violations by government authorities in countries hosting peacekeeping operations are a good example of situations in which IO officials must make difficult choices, but international bureaucrats may have to decide on how to react to other types of noncooperative behavior by host government authorities, such as rhetorical criticisms of the IO itself. In a different scenario, IO officials may have to make difficult choices (and incur career risks) when their colleagues transgress international norms, for instance, by exploiting or abusing the local population (e.g., Hirschmann 2017). While this article has focused on a qualitative case study of the UN peacekeeping bureaucracy, we believe that our findings apply more widely. IOs differ in terms of professional diversity, structural organization, and the degree of reliance on governments in countries where they deliver services, but the framework we have developed can aid future research on the role of individual, departmental, and positional factors across different issue areas and different IOs. This research could draw on diverse methodologies, such as archival or quantitative methods.

Supplementary Information

The data underlying this article will be made available on the UK Data Service from September 2024, at https://reshare.ukdataservice.ac.uk.

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