

THE ROLE OF HOST-STATE CONSENT AND COOPERATION IN THE SUCCESS OF UN PEACEKEEPING OPERATIONS: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF SIERRA LEONE AND SOUTH SUDAN*

Dr. Öğr. Üyesi Zeynep Ariöz

Bandırma Onyedi Eylül Üniversitesi

ORCID: [0000-0001-7470-5407](#)

ROR ID: [ror.org/02mtr7g38](#)



Abstract

The effectiveness of United Nations peacekeeping, long considered a key mechanism of international conflict resolution, has remained a subject of ongoing debate. This study investigates the critical role of host-state consent and cooperation in determining the success of UN peace operations. Focusing on two multidimensional UN missions—UNAMSIL in Sierra Leone and UNMISS in South Sudan—the research examines how variations in host-state consent and cooperation influence operational effectiveness. Both missions were authorised under Chapter VII of the UN Charter and deployed in countries characterised by fragility and prolonged conflict marked by persistent violence. Despite these structural similarities, the outcomes of the two missions diverged significantly. To shed light on this divergence, the study adopts a most-similar systems design and finds that sustained host-state consent and cooperation was a key determinant of mission success. These findings highlight the importance of host-state cooperation beyond strategic consent, with implications for the future of peace operations in fragile and complex contexts.

Keywords: United Nations, Peacekeeping operations, Multidimensional missions, UNAMSIL, UNMISS, Africa

Birleşmiş Milletler Barışı Koruma Operasyonlarının Başarısında Ev Sahibi Devletin Rızası ve İşbirliğinin Rolü: Sierra Leone ve Güney Sudan'ın Karşılaştırmalı Analizi

Öz

Birleşmiş Milletler barışı koruma faaliyetlerinin etkinliği, uzun süredir uluslararası çatışma çözümünün temel bir aracı olarak kabul edilmekle birlikte, hâlâ süregelen bir tartışma konusudur. Bu çalışma, BM barışı koruma operasyonlarının başarısını belirlemede ev sahibi devletin rızası ve iş birliğinin kritik rolünü incelemektedir. Sierra Leone'deki UNAMSIL ve Güney Sudan'daki UNMISS olmak üzere iki çok boyutlu BM misyonuna odaklanan bu araştırma, ev sahibi devletin rızası ve iş birliğindeki farklılıkların operasyonel etkinliği nasıl etkilediğini analiz etmektedir. Her iki misyon da BM Şartı'nın VII. Bölümü uyarınca yetkilendirilmiş ve kırılganlık ile sürekli şiddetin damga vurduğu, uzun süreli çatışmalar yaşayan ülkelere konuşlandırılmıştır. Bu yapısal benzerliklere rağmen, iki misyonun sonuçları önemli ölçüde farklılık göstermiştir. Bu farklılığı açıklığa kavuşturmak amacıyla çalışma, "en çok benzeyen sistemler" araştırma tasarımını benimsemekte ve ev sahibi devlet rızası ve iş birliğinin görev başarısında temel bir belirleyici olduğunu ortaya koymaktadır. Bulgular, stratejik rızanın ötesinde ev sahibi devletle sürdürülebilir işbirliğinin önemini vurgulamakta ve kırılgan ve karmaşık bağlamlarda gelecekteki barış operasyonları için önemli çıkarımlar sunmaktadır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Birleşmiş Milletler, Barışı koruma operasyonları, Çok boyutlu misyonlar, UNAMSIL, UNMISS, Afrika

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Yazar email: zaroz@bandirma.edu.tr



The Role of Host-State Consent and Cooperation in the Success of UN Peacekeeping Operations: A Comparative Study of Sierra Leone and South Sudan

Introduction

United Nations (UN) peacekeeping operations (PKOs) have long played a central role in efforts to maintain international peace and security. Although these operations have evolved over time, they have continued to follow the core principles of “host-state consent, impartiality, and the non-use of force” (Bellamy et al., 2004). Because these missions are mostly deployed in highly complex and challenging contexts (Fortna, 2004; M. Gilligan & Stedman, 2003; Ruggeri et al., 2018), cooperation with the host state is essential for the successful implementation of the mission. It reflects both the parties’ support for political solutions and their acceptance of third-party involvement. Most quantitative studies underline how UN PKOs help to lower violence, prevent the recurrence of conflict, improve civilian security, and support peace agreements (Di Salvatore & Ruggeri, 2017; Fortna, 2008; Hegre et al., 2019; Hultman et al., 2013). It is also found that peacekeepers can prevent the spread of conflict (Beardsley, 2011; Beardsley & Gleditsch, 2015). Moreover, some studies show a significant relationship between operations and post-war peace (Doyle & Sambanis, 2000, 2006; Fortna, 2008; M. J. Gilligan & Sergenti, 2008; Sambanis, 2008). Moving beyond the question of whether UN PKOs are effective, some studies have explored the conditions and factors that influence their effectiveness (Bove & Ruggeri, 2016, 2019; Haass & Ansorg, 2018; Hultman et al., 2013, 2014; Salvatore, 2018). In this agenda, host-state consent has emerged as one of the key concept and is acknowledged as a significant influence on the effectiveness of PKOs (Duursma et al., 2024; Passmore et al., 2022; Pushkina et al., 2022). Recent studies show that missions with host-state consent are more likely to respond to violence perpetrated by rebel groups than by government forces, thereby helping to reduce civilian deaths (Carnegie & Mikulaschek, 2020; Phayal & Prins, 2019). Furthermore, Fortna (2008) demonstrated that in maintaining peace, consent-based operations under Chapter VI are equally

successful as enforcement missions under Chapter VII. Following the literature, this study explores how the level of host state consent and cooperation with UN PKOs influences their success. While acknowledging the contributions of the large-scale research, this study contributes to the literature by adopting a case study approach to analyse the outcomes of peace operations. This study examines whether host-state consent and cooperation are decisive factors in explaining the varying outcomes of UN peace operations. The study expects that securing host-state consent and cooperation enhances the likelihood of UN mission success. To analyse this, the missions in South Sudan and Sierra Leone are selected as case studies due to their similar dynamics yet significantly different outcomes. UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) in South Sudan presents challenges due to compromised host-state consent and a low level of cooperation. In contrast, in Sierra Leone, UN Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) offers a successful example of a peacekeeping operation, providing insights into how host-state consent and cooperation positively influence such missions.

The study employs a comparative case analysis using the most-similar systems design (MSSD) approach (Bennett & Elman, 2007; Seawright & Gerring, 2008). By comparing the two cases, this research examines how host-state consent and cooperation—within a similar context—can influence the effectiveness of peacekeeping efforts. The key limitation of this study – related to the most-similar case comparisons approach —is the difficulty of finding perfectly comparable cases. Although Sierra Leone and South Sudan share many structural similarities, some contextual differences remain. The study argues that UN PKOs are more successful when host-state consent and cooperation are present. To assess this, it focuses on key areas of peacekeeping efforts, including the protection of civilians (PoC), progress in Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR), and state-building initiatives.

The rest of the study is organised as follows: The first section reviews the literature on host state consent and performance of peace operations. The second section analysis the missions of South Sudan and Sierra Leone. The subsequent section compares and discusses the missions. The conclusion offers a summary of key insights and provides recommendations for future research.

1. Host-State Consent and Cooperation in UN Peacekeeping

The performance of UN peace operations has long been debated. Indicators of success have usually focused on maintaining ceasefires and preventing violence or renewed conflict. Accordingly, the absence of large-scale violence and the implementation of peace agreements are often used to assess

effectiveness (Beardsley, 2011; Fortna, 2004; Howard, 2008). More studies, however, argue for evaluating success in the long term by linking peacekeeping with peacebuilding. An increasing number of studies suggest conducting long-term evaluations to assess the performance of PKOs. Within this framework, mission effectiveness is assessed not only by the cessation of violence but also by the strengthening of economic and institutional capacities necessary for sustaining peace (Di Salvatore & Ruggeri, 2017, 2020; Diehl & Daniel, 2010; Doyle & Sambanis, 2000). In this regard, recent research has increasingly emphasized the importance of host-state consent for achieving sustainable peace. According to Labuda (2020), host-state consent is fundamental to the implementation of UN peacekeeping operations. Fortna (2008) demonstrates that with the consent of host state even limited missions can be as effective as more robust ones in achieving lasting peace. This is also supported by the seminal study of Doyle & Sambanis (2000), which shows that consent and cooperation are as important as enforcement capacity to mission success. Similarly, Howard (2008) argues that party consent is the most critical factor in the successful termination of wars.

The consent has long been a foundational principle in the design of peacekeeping missions, particularly those deployed under Chapter VI of the UN Charter, which are based on peaceful measures and technically require the consent of the parties involved (Diehl, 1993). However, the term “parties” remains ambiguous, as it can refer to a range of conflict actors, including both state authorities and local armed groups. In practice, however, the deployment of UN operations generally proceeds with the consent of the state recognized by UN. Moreover, the concept of consent itself is contested in the literature. It is not always granted voluntarily; rather, it may be shaped by temporary strategic interests and can evolve over time. Scholars have categorized consent into various forms such as “‘none,’ ‘partial,’ ‘restricted,’ and ‘re-restricted’” (Yuen, 2020). Moreover, as Sebastián & Gorur (2018) emphasize, consent concerns not only the acceptance of the mission itself but also the acceptance of its mandate. Cooperation mechanisms between UN missions and host states often begin with formal agreements; however, the success of the mission ultimately depends on the host state's political will and capacity to implement commitments. As the Capstone Doctrine (DPKO, 2008) highlights, even when the main parties’ consent to the deployment of a UN PKOs, this does not necessarily guarantee consent at the local level. Building on past experiences, recent UN efforts, including A4P+ (DPO, 2018) and the C-34 reports (UN General Assembly, 2023), underline the importance of cooperation with host states to ensure a shared understanding of mission mandates.

However, in fragile or failed states, where UN peacekeepers are often deployed, it can be difficult to identify a single authority representing the country to provide consent. In such cases, 'strategic consent'—the host state's calculated choice to accept a mission for political expediency rather than genuine commitment (Doss, 2015)—does not guarantee local cooperation and may weaken operations. Thus, rather than focusing solely on strategic consent, this study emphasizes the cooperation between the host state and the UN missions. Paris (2006) is one of the first to emphasise that local cooperation is essential for effective peacebuilding, as the lack of host-states consent creates significant operational and political challenges. He highlights that post-conflict states tend to instability and renewed violence, making them fragile to peacebuilding activities. According to Diehl & Daniel (2010) the effectiveness of a peace operation, especially in peacebuilding area, is partly determined by its ability to leverage local resources. Since strategic consent does not always guarantee cooperation, and may 'variable' (Bellamy et al., 2004) local ownership is essential for meaningful engagement. Autesserre (2014) emphasizes that good cooperation at the local level is at least as important as at the national level for achieving sustainable peace, linking the failure of operations to peacebuilding efforts that neglect local dynamics.

Without cooperation, peacekeepers may face restrictions, denied access, or manipulation, hindering their ability to implement the mandate. Challenges related to local ownership have long undermined peace operations. As Pouligny (1999) highlights, the absence of a deep understanding of local contexts, languages, and practices frequently contributes to mission failures. Language barriers seriously hinder efforts to foster cooperation with local communities, affecting key areas such as intelligence and operational coordination (Yilmaz, 2005). In this context, consent may initially serve as a strategic prerequisite for mission deployment, but it becomes meaningful in practice through cooperation with the host state.

2. Case Studies: Peacekeeping and Peacebuilding in South Sudan and Sierra Leone

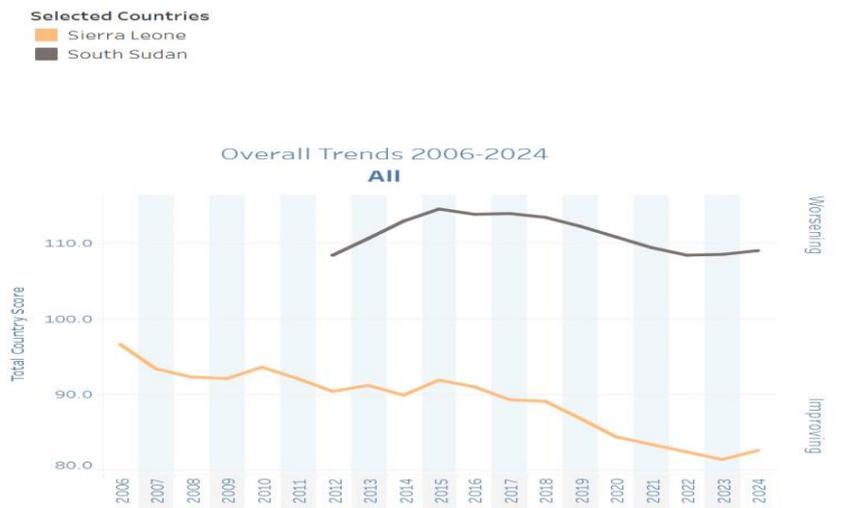
Since the post-Cold War era, the UN Security Council has increasingly authorised Chapter VII operations to address internal conflicts marked by systematic violence and seen as threats to international peace and security. In this context, the concept of the "failed state" emerged to describe countries that lose legitimacy, lack authority over their territory, and become sources of poverty, violence, and terrorism, thereby endangering both regional and global stability (Rotberg, 2002, 2003). These states have also characterised by the inability to

provide basic services to their populations and by persistent development challenges, while posing security risks. In this context, the integrated consideration of security and development provided the ground for the notion of the “fragile state” to enter the policy agenda, with such states being characterised by weak policies, institutions, and governance (OECD, 2007; World Bank, 2006). A fragile state is characterised by its inability to maintain coercive authority over its territory, to enact and enforce binding legislation, and to deliver basic public services. Despite variations in the literature, it is generally defined by three features: weak authority, low legitimacy, and limited capacity to deliver services (Stewart & Brown, 2009). In this regard, fragility is closely linked to the level of state capacity.

Based on the Weberian tradition, state capacity is defined as the state’s ability to effectively implement policies. Such capacity requires both the consolidation of sovereignty and military control over a defined territory, as well as the existence of effective institutions supported by a professional bureaucracy (Fukuyama, 2004, 2013). In a more systematic formulation, Hanson & Sigman (2021) identify three core dimensions of state capacity: extractive, coercive, and administrative. Yet, later contributions have expanded this definition further, stressing that state capacity is multidimensional, also comprising productive, transformative, legal, relational, and political aspects (Cingolani, 2013). Within this broader perspective, institutional capacity—referring to the effectiveness and quality of political and economic institutions—plays a crucial role in shaping overall state capacity (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012).

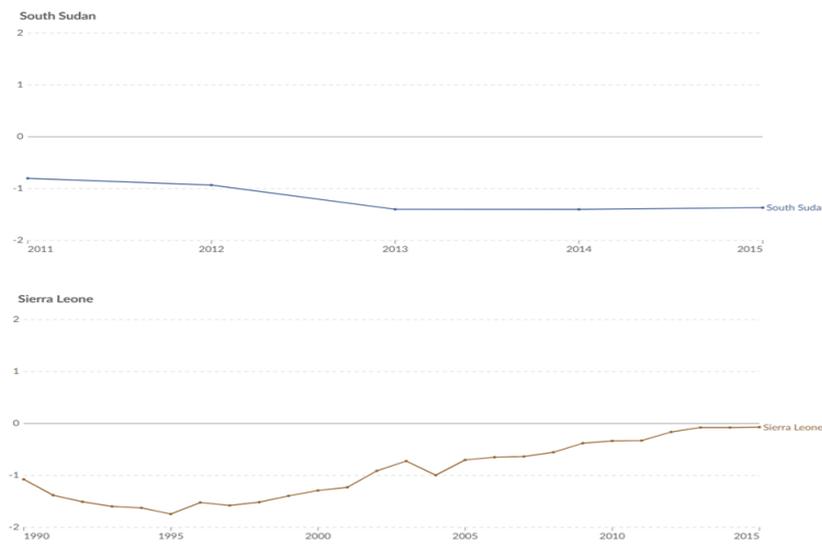
State capacities are commonly measured through indices such as the State Capacity Index (SCI) and the Fragile States Index (FSI). On these measures, some states—especially in Sub-Saharan Africa—consistently rank at the bottom. Sierra Leone and South Sudan score poorly on the SCI and are classified as fragile states in the FSI, as shown in Figures 1 and 2.

Figure 1: The Fragile States Index (FSI).



Source: <https://fragilestatesindex.org/> FSI, produced annually by the Fund for Peace, measures the vulnerability of states to conflict and collapse using twelve political, social, and economic indicators. Higher scores indicate greater fragility.

Figure 2: The State Capacity Index (SCI).



Source: <https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/state-capacity-index> SCI assesses 21 indicators across three dimensions—extractive, coercive, and administrative—with higher values indicating stronger capacity.

The persistent fragility of Sierra Leone and South Sudan, as indicated by these indices, created the conditions for the deployment of UN peace operations. Both missions were deployed in contexts characterized by civil war, deep societal divisions, and weak state capacity. Sierra Leone and South Sudan have long faced extremely high poverty rates, with World Bank data showing that about 60% of Sierra Leoneans (2018) and nearly 80% of South Sudanese (2016) live below their national poverty lines (World Bank, 2018). Both countries also ranked at the bottom of the Human Development Index, reflecting low levels of health, education, and income. In 2022, Sierra Leone ranked 181st and South Sudan 191st out of 193 countries on the Human Development Index, with scores of 0.477 and 0.385 respectively (United Nations Development Programme, 2022). According to World Bank data on GDP per capita, Sierra Leone (USD 873) and South Sudan (USD 1,080) rank among the twenty lowest-income economies worldwide, far below the global average of USD 13,664 in 2024 (World Bank, 2024b).

However, these “pathologies” are rooted in colonial legacy. Both Sierra Leone and South Sudan were shaped by strong British colonial influence. Colonial borders ignored local social realities, contributing to persistent ethnic and societal divisions. These administrations left behind weak or absent state institutions, a legacy still visible in poor governance (Herbst, 2000; Young, 2012). According to the Worldwide Governance Indicators, Sierra Leone and South Sudan consistently rank within the bottom 10–20th percentiles across key dimensions—political stability, government effectiveness, rule of law, corruption control, regulatory quality, and accountability—reflecting severe governance challenges (World Bank, 2024a). This institutional weakness was compounded by extractive economic structures inherited from colonial rule. Both countries exhibited high resource dependence, with natural resource rents exceeding 20% of GDP in Sierra Leone (diamonds) and 60% in South Sudan (oil), latter fuelled conflict (World Bank, 2021). Revenues from natural resources have been captured by political elites, serving both to consolidate their wealth and to sustain conflict. In Africa, the combination of natural resource dependence (Fearon, 2005) and the colonial legacy of patrimonial institutions has undermined economic performance (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2010). Moreover, poverty, weak or exclusionary institutions, and political instability create conditions under which ethnic groups are more likely to resort to violence. Ethnic diversity alone does not directly predict the outbreak of civil war; however, in combination with these factors, it can significantly increase the likelihood of violence—a pattern particularly evident in Africa (Collier & Hoeffler, 2004; Fearon & Laitin, 2003). In Sierra Leone and South Sudan, resource dependence—“blood diamonds” in Sierra Leone and oil in South Sudan—further complicated these dynamics, as reflected in Collier and Hoeffler’s (2004) “greed versus grievance” model.

According to this model, opportunities for resource predation provide material incentives for rebellion, while the grievances they generate are instrumentalized to mobilize support and finance, thereby reinforcing cycles of violence. These multi-layered conflicts involved multiple actors and competing interests, often resulting in “wars within wars” (Jok, 2021, p. 363). In South Sudan, between January 2013 and September 2018, the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data (ACLED) project recorded more than 4,000 conflict events across 718 distinct locations, underscoring the scale and geographical dispersion of violence (Bakumenko, 2025). Similarly, in Sierra Leone, the civil war between 1991 and 2002 reached high-intensity levels and caused widespread atrocities against civilians. Since independence, both countries have faced multiple forms of organized violence, including state-based, intrastate, and one-sided conflict. Such violence has involved killings, sexual violence, displacement, and other atrocities by both state forces and armed groups (Uppsala Conflict Data Program, 2024).

In response, the Security Council has deployed missions with mandates extending beyond ceasefire monitoring. As outlined in Boutros Boutros-Ghali’s *An Agenda for Peace*, peacebuilding involves “support for the transformation of deficient national structures and capabilities, and for the strengthening of new democratic institutions” (1992, p. 33). The Brahimi Report defined it as “activities undertaken on the far side of conflict to reassemble the foundations of peace and provide the tools for building on those foundations something that is more than just the absence of war” (UN General Assembly, 2000, para. 13). Reflecting this vision, post-Cold War operations have been tasked not only with ensuring security but also with consolidating state authority, reforming army and police, supporting elections, and assisting in the construction of democratic institutions. In some cases, mandates have even included providing support for the reconstruction of failed states (Doyle & Sambanis, 2006).

The reconstruction of fragile and or failed states has often relied on international intervention, with peacebuilding regarded as a central instrument of state-building. While peacekeeping focuses on short-term stabilization through security and civilian protection, peacebuilding entails longer-term efforts to address conflict’s root causes by promoting political inclusion, institutional reform, and socio-economic recovery (Doyle & Sambanis, 2000; Paris, 2006). Within this framework, state building is often pursued alongside peacebuilding, reflecting the Weberian legacy that sustainable peace requires a functioning state capable of exercising authority, delivering services, and upholding the rule of law (Fukuyama, 2013; Rotberg, 2002). In line with this, the liberal perspective offers a strong foundation for understanding contemporary peacebuilding practices, particularly through its emphasis on democracy, institutional reform,

and international cooperation (Richmond & Franks, 2009). The liberal paradigm assumes that democracy and peace are closely associated, and that external support contributes to the stabilization of post-conflict states. Thus “peacebuilding has tended to represent a top-down variant of liberal peace” (Costa & Karlsrud, 2012, p. 55). Liberal peacebuilding is defined as the promotion of democratic governance, market-oriented reforms, and the rule of law in post-conflict societies, with the assumption that these elements together provide the foundations for sustainable peace (Newman et al., 2009). In this regard, institution-building and the role of external actors are regarded as main characteristics of peacebuilding (Berg, 2020). This perspective is also consistent with realist insights, which emphasize that peace requires statist, top-down approaches to ensure stability and authority (Ripsman, 2020).

However, the limitations of externally imposed, top-down models of peacebuilding that overlook local dynamics are now widely acknowledged. The cases of Sierra Leone and South Sudan illustrate these tensions: While UNAMSIL combined peacebuilding measures with local cooperation and achieved a relatively successful transition, the impact of UNMISS remained much more limited due to weak host-state consent and complex domestic dynamics.

To examine this variation, the study adopts MSSD, selecting UNAMSIL and UNMISS as comparable cases of multidimensional UN peace operations in intrastate conflicts within fragile states. Both missions were multidimensional operations under Chapter VII, each deploying over 17,000 personnel with mandates covering capacity-building, civilian protection, and, when necessary, the use of force. UNAMSIL benefited from sustained host-state consent and cooperation from local and regional actors, whereas UNMISS operated with contested consent and struggled to build cooperation. By holding constant structural conditions—internal conflict, instability, violence against civilians, weak capacity, and the need for intervention—the design isolates host-state cooperation as the key independent variable. To assess its impact on outcomes, the study also employs process tracing of interactions between the mission and the host state.

2.1. Sierra Leone – UNAMSIL: A Case of Host-State Consent and Cooperation

2.1.1. The Context of the Conflict

After independence, the legacy of colonial rule hindered the development of strong state institutions and entrenched patrimonial structures. These

dynamics fostered corruption and ethnic tensions, while an extractive economy allowed elites to capture Sierra Leone's resources, weakening state capacity and public service delivery. This fragile political and economic context created fertile ground for rebellion, with grievances over corruption and exclusion combining with opportunities to exploit diamond resources. The civil war in Sierra Leone began in 1991 with the invasion of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), and the situation in the country was exacerbated by poor authority and successive military coups. Despite the holding of elections in 1996 and the signing of a peace agreement, violence persisted, culminating in a coup in 1997 that ousted the democratic government. Regional actors failed to bring about stabilisation, and the attack on Freetown in 1999 highlighted the ongoing devastation. Sierra Leone went through a brutal civil war from 1991 to 2002, resulted in more than 25,000 battle-related deaths (UCDP, 2024).

In 1990, on the eve of the war, the country already ranked among the world's poorest, with a GDP per capita of only USD 154.8 (World Bank, 2024b). It also recorded a very low Human Development Index score of 0.275 in 2001, placing it in the "low human development" category (UNDP, 2003). Sierra Leone's life expectancy at the turn of the century was among the lowest in the world, at just 49.8 years, reflecting the country's severe human development challenges (World Health Organization, 2025). According to UNDP report, the war was driven by a predatory state, reliance on mineral rents—mining accounted for nearly 90% of exports—structural adjustment pressures, and poor institutional capacity. Between 1990 and 2002, about 57% of the population lived on less than one US dollar a day. These conditions were compounded by a traumatised, marginalised youth population and strong interference from regional actors (Kaldor & Vincent, 2006).

The Sierra Leone Civil War exemplifies the "new wars," marked by intra-state conflict, the involvement of non-state actors, blurred lines between combatants and civilians, and the use of violence for political and economic control (Kaldor, 2012). It involved multiple actors: RUF and its allies, including Charles Taylor's National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL), fought against the Sierra Leonean Army (SLA) and pro-government groups like the Kamajors. However, the government was supported by Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG), the United Kingdom, and the UN. The state's failure to provide basic services to the population in the country, coupled with the growing dissatisfaction due to the power struggle among specific interest groups, led to the rise of insurgent of RUF. This also reflected deeper structural problems rooted in long-standing extractive institutions that concentrated power and wealth in the hands of a few, neglected essential services, and fuelled unrest, civil war, and ultimately state failure (Acemoglu & Robinson,

2012). The RUF lacked a coherent ideological orientation, but it nevertheless adopted a discourse centered on social justice, as expressed in its pamphlet slogan: “We are fighting for a new Sierra Leone, a new Sierra Leone of freedom, justice and equal opportunity for all” (RUF, 1995). RUF, initially emphasized grievances such as corruption and inequality. In practice, however, this rhetoric was quickly overshadowed by the movement’s reliance on diamond revenues, estimated at between \$25 and \$125 million annually, which became the primary means of sustaining and expanding its military campaign (UNSC, 2000). The civil war, driven by state collapse, socio-economic exclusion, and competition over diamonds, was exploited by armed groups motivated more by greed than by ideology. These groups engaged in predatory violence and criminal opportunism (Collier & Hoeffler, 2004) The RUF committed atrocities including mass amputations, forced labour in diamond mining, child recruitment, and sexual violence, while government forces also engaged in killings, looting, and diamond smuggling. Both sides systematically targeted civilians, making them the primary victims of the conflict (Human Rights Watch, 1998).

2.1.2. Cooperation Mechanisms Between UNAMSIL, the Host State, and Local Actors in Sierra Leone

The relationship between UNAMSIL and the Sierra Leonean government evolved within a framework of consent-based peacekeeping, reflecting both international norms and the state's urgent need for external support. In the late 1990s, violence escalated, particularly with the rebel offensive in Freetown. In response, UN officials, together with regional actors, used diplomatic channels to open negotiations between the government and rebel forces. These efforts culminated in the Lomé Peace Agreement, which outlined the terms for a ceasefire and expand the UN peacekeeping activities. With the formal consent of the Sierra Leonean government, the UN was tasked with supporting the implementation of the agreement under Chapter VII of the UN Charter. UNAMSIL was established in cooperation with both the government and other parties to implement the Lomé Peace Agreement and to support the DDR program, with an authorized force of over 17,000 military personnel (UNSC, 1999). However, as the conflict remained unresolved, the host government accepted an expanded role for UNAMSIL. In response to this evolving and dynamic context, the mission’s mandate was broadened, and UNAMSIL’s troop strength was significantly increased—supported by enhanced military resources, additional training, and direct assistance from the United Kingdom (UNSC, 2001a). The Council urged the government and RUF to continue dialogue and national reconciliation, including reintegrating former combatants into civil society and transforming the RUF into a political party, despite structural and

objective impediments (UNSC, 2001b). These efforts reflected both the international community's commitment to stabilizing Sierra Leone and the evolving, consent-based cooperation between the UN, the host government, and other involved parties. The success of UNAMSIL is largely attributed to its diplomatic engagement and holistic implementation strategy, which aimed to reinforce state authority while maintaining dialogue among all parties—even in the face of early setbacks such as the kidnapping of UN personnel (Tisei, 2014).

The key achievement of UNAMSIL was its ability to establish cooperation not only with the host government but also with a wide range of local actors. The mission led DDR programme by engaging both the Sierra Leonean government and former combatants, including members of the RUF and the Civil Defence Forces (Kamajors), to facilitate progress in disarmament and reintegration (Sesay & Suma, 2009). DDR played such an essential role in stabilization, as disarming, demobilizing, and reintegrating former combatants restores centralized authority in the country. Furthermore, the mission led several Joint Committees to coordinate efforts such as the Relief, Reconstruction, and Rehabilitation Committee and the National Recovery Committee, all of which were crucial to Sierra Leone's peace process (Malan et al., 2018). UNAMSIL's support for the 2002 general elections, in close partnership with the government and local actors, was crucial in restoring democratic governance and public authority (UNSC, 2002). UNAMSIL also promoted local ownership by appointing national leaders to key positions within the mission (Adekeye, 2021).

2.1.3. Outcomes and Peacebuilding Successes

Peacebuilding is a multidimensional process encompassing security, political processes, justice and human rights, socio-economic recovery, and institutional capacity (UN, 2010). Within this framework, UNAMSIL contributed across multiple dimensions. UNAMSIL's role was critical in reducing mistrust between the parties and in supporting state capacity in Sierra Leone. The mission's positive relations with the government, the RUF, and other actors—combined with a robust military presence—played a key role in its effectiveness. In this regard, the mission has been acknowledged as one of the most successful UN operations (Olonisakin, 2008)

In the security sector, the DDR programme disarmed over 75,000 combatants, including child soldier and women, while collecting 42,330 weapons and over 1.2 million rounds of ammunition. Nearly 55,000 ex-combatants received reintegration support—ranging from vocational training and agriculture to formal education, with more than 12,000 pursuing studies at secondary schools and universities (UN, 2005). Ruggeri et al. (2013) suggest that in the case of

Sierra Leone, the mission's success depended on its ability to overcome local mistrust and maintain a robust presence on the ground. Thus, UNAMSIL achieved significant outcomes in key areas essential for post-conflict stabilisation in Sierra Leone.

In the political sphere, UNAMSIL also contributed to the restoration of state authority by providing essential logistical and security support to the 2002 general elections, which helped re-establish government legitimacy (Malan et al., 2018). In the area of justice and human rights, UNAMSIL supported transitional justice through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the Special Court, while also promoting human rights awareness at the local level. It reconstituted the Sierra Leone Police, with 15 percent women, and oversaw the construction of police stations, courts, and training facilities to strengthen the rule of law (UN, 2005). Reports by the High Commissioner for Human Rights noted steady progress in promoting and protecting human rights in Sierra Leone (UN Economic and Social Council, 2005). With its expanded mandate and robust capacity to protect civilians, the mission further strengthened its legitimacy in the country (Olonisakin, 2008).

UNAMSIL also supported economic recovery and governance reforms. The mission assisted state authority over the natural resources by supporting legal diamond trade based on the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme. Government revenues from diamond exports surged from \$10 million in 2000 to \$160 million in 2004. UNMISS, in cooperation with UN agencies, initiated small-scale projects that created jobs for ex-combatants and unemployed youth. The mission helped restore state authority in former rebel areas by training police force and constructing police stations (UN, 2005).

Over its six years of operation, as reflected in its final report before withdrawal, UNAMSIL built strong partnerships with the regional actors, donors, civil society, and the host government, contributing to the country's transition to post-conflict recovery. This collaborative effort helped establish a stable security environment, restore state authority across the country, and achieve meaningful progress in security sector reform (SSR) and the regulation of the diamond-mining industry (UNSC, 2005). The durability of peace after UNAMSIL's withdrawal is largely credited to strong local leadership and active civil society engagement (Adekeye, 2021; DPO, 2003). A public opinion survey in Sierra Leone showed that most of the citizens view UNAMSIL's peacekeeping efforts very positively (Krasno, 2005).

Beyond its security functions, UNAMSIL exemplified core elements of the liberal peacebuilding model. In addition to overseeing DDR and securing democratic elections, the mission supported SSR and judicial reform. It also promoted transitional justice through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission

and the Special Court. Furthermore, UNAMSIL worked with international donors to align recovery with governance and economic reform frameworks. Sierra Leone's peacebuilding strategy was structured around key pillars, including the rebuilding of security institutions, the consolidation of state authority and political stability, the strengthening of governance, and the advancement of economic and social development. Taken together, these measures demonstrate how UNAMSIL combined short-term stabilization with longer-term liberal peacebuilding objectives, making it one of the more frequently cited post-Cold War success stories (Doyle & Sambanis, 2006; Olonisakin, 2008; Paris, 2006).

2.2. South Sudan – UNMISS: A Case of Compromised Consent and Limited Local Engagement

2.2.1 The Context of the Conflict

South Sudan gained independence in 2011, following a six-year peace process initiated by the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), which ended more than two decades of civil war between the Sudanese government and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM). According to the World Bank, at independence South Sudan faced acute development challenges: more than half of the population lived in poverty, health indicators were among the lowest in the world, and only about 27 percent of those over fifteen were literate. These conditions were accompanied by widespread child labour, low levels of school attendance among children and youth, and persistently high rates of youth unemployment (Guarcello et al., 2011). By 2013, around one in ten South Sudanese suffered severe food insecurity. Life expectancy stood at just 42 years, maternal mortality was among the highest worldwide, and although enrolment had improved, only about 10% of children finished primary school, while less than 2% continued to secondary education (Humanitarian Practice Network, 2013). When South Sudan became independent in 2011, oil provided nearly 98 percent of state revenue. The country inherited most of the region's reserves but still depended on Sudan's infrastructure to refine and export crude (U.S. Energy Information Administration, 2012).

Country emerged as a state burdened by a legacy of militarised patronage networks and deep-rooted interethnic divisions. Chronic underdevelopment, limited state capacity beyond urban areas, and catastrophic human development indicators—such as high maternal mortality, low literacy, and minimal access to basic services—left the country heavily fragile (Day et al., 2019). These chronic structural weaknesses have shown little improvement over time and, in some

areas, have worsened. In 2021, South Sudan ranked last globally on the Human Development Index, with a score of 0.385, a life expectancy of 55 years, and a gross national income per capita of just USD 768 (United Nations Development Programme, 2022 World Bank, 2024b).

The post-independence period quickly gave way to internal political struggles and unresolved structural tensions, culminating in a new civil conflict. The conflict in South Sudan erupted in 2013, rooted in political rivalries and state fragility. Elite-driven peace agreements prioritized power-sharing among leaders while neglecting communal grievances and societal facts (Jok, 2021). South Sudan's "kleptocratic governance"—defined by militarised patronage and elite enrichment—further undermined institutional development. The financial collapse revealed internal divisions, which caused the political-military compact to rapidly disintegrate and led to civil war; despite multiple peace agreements being signed, including the 2015 and 2018 accords, the conflict continued (Waal, 2014). The UN mission in the country, like others across Africa, has been deployed in a context marked by the involvement of marginalized youth in violence and by deep social fragmentation caused by prolonged armed conflict. Like many African states, South Sudan faced the simultaneous challenges of state- and nation-building, which ultimately contributed to the emergence of ethnically driven politics and, at least in part, to the outbreak of violence (Jok, 2021). The conflict in South Sudan has an asymmetrical structure, involving the SPLA loyal to President Kiir, the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-in-Opposition (SPLM-IO) led by Riek Machar, and a range of ethnic militias and armed youth groups. The SPLM initially advanced the "New Sudan" vision, emphasizing equality, and democratic and pluralistic state. After independence, however, this ideological narrative quickly eroded, and political competition became dominated by ethnic divisions (Guarak, 2011).

In the country, decades of exclusion fostered deep ethnic grievances, which were further intensified by power struggles and competition among armed groups over political authority and resource wealth. The concentration of oil revenues in the hands of political elites intensified factionalism within the ruling SPLM, while ideological and ethnic divisions—particularly between Dinka and Nuer elites—provided a basis for mass mobilization (Johnson, 2016). The presence of multiple actors with shifting alliances has complicated peace efforts and deepened local violence. The conflict has produced a pattern of violence marked by sexual abuse, looting, the destruction of civilian property, and the arbitrary detention and torture of civilians, often along ethnic lines. Both government and opposition forces have been responsible for killings and for the recruitment and use of child soldiers (Human Rights Watch, 2015). It is estimated

that nearly one million people were displaced and 400,000 lost their lives during the conflict in South Sudan (Blanchard, 2018).

2.2.2. Contested Consent and Limited Cooperation Between the Host-State and UNMISS in South Sudan

Following the establishment of South Sudan as a sovereign state, UN launched UNMISS to support peacebuilding and state building, which was well received by the government; however, the outbreak of violent conflict soon after independence undermined these efforts. The country soon descended into violence, marked by large-scale military confrontations, widespread human rights violations, and serious breaches of international humanitarian and human rights law, resulting in thousands of deaths (UNSC, 2014c). In response, the mission was reinforced by a new resolution, and its mandate was reprioritized to focus on the protection of civilians, monitoring human rights, and facilitating humanitarian assistance (UNSC, 2014b). The government interpreted the resolution, enacted under Chapter VII and mandating the protection of civilians, as violation of sovereignty—despite the inability of its own security forces to ensure adequate protection. There was also no unified view among SPLM leaders regarding the role of the UN; while some accepted its mandate, others viewed it as a new form of colonialism (Johnson, 2016). Moreover, the civilian protection sites established by UNMISS were perceived by the government not as neutral safe zones, but as shelters for rebel forces (Jok, 2021). UNMISS faced accusations of siding with opposition forces, which contributed to restrictions on its movement and public protests the UN in the country. Tensions between the Government of South Sudan and UNMISS escalated during the crisis, fuelled by growing anti-UN sentiment, which undermined perceptions of the mission's neutrality.

The presence of the UN was perceived as a threat to the sovereignty and fragile authority of the newly independent state. Contrary to the government's expectations, updated mandates focused more on the protection of civilians than on safeguarding the country's territorial integrity. This shift in focus, along with the bad legacy of the previous UNMIS mission and growing anti-UN sentiment, contributed to escalating tensions between the government and UNMISS, ultimately hindering the mission's ability to carry out its mandate. As Johnson notes, "UNMISS was squeezed between a rock and a hard place" (2016, p. 98).

2.2.3. Outcomes and Peacebuilding Successes

UNMISS's mandate centered on four pillars: PoC, facilitating humanitarian assistance, promoting human rights, and supporting the peace process. In the security sector, UNMISS has operated with more than 17,000 troops and around 1,400 police personnel, combining its military presence with police force to provide a safer environment. UNPOL (UN Police) supported the South Sudan National Police Service through technical assistance, community-police committees, and capacity-building programmes. Following the outbreak of conflict in 2013, the mission created protection sites in Juba, Wau, Bentiu, Bor, and Malakal, where tens of thousands of displaced civilians sought refuge under UNMISS protection (UNSC, 2023).

In the political sphere, the mission supported the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD)-led peace process and the implementation of Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan, provided technical assistance to the constitutional process, and facilitated the Sant'Egidio mediation efforts (UNSC, 2022). In justice and human rights, UNMISS offered urgent shelter and security to over 200,000 civilians who were directly at risk. The mission strengthened monitoring and investigations and facilitated the release and reintegration of armed groups including child soldiers. The mission deployed Rule of Law Advisory Section and supported mobile and circuit courts, improved the prison system, and backed military justice and special courts for conflict-related sexual violence and livestock disputes. It also advanced a Security Sector Transformation Roadmap, launched community violence reduction projects, and provided technical support for judicial, anti-corruption, and legal reforms (Day et al., 2019).

UNMISS assisted in the integration of former Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A) into South Sudan's police forces; however, the legacy of militarised patronage networks undermined meaningful reform efforts (Waal, 2017). Due to the ongoing conflict, the mission's initial focus on state-building was gradually replaced by the protection of civilians, which, in Berdal's words, ultimately evolved into the mission's "*raison d'être*" (2017, p. 16). The revised mandate for UNMISS reflected a perception of the government as a threat to civilians, which hindered any meaningful collaboration with state-led efforts. UNMISS's growing emphasis on civilian protection led the government to increasingly view the mission as an "adversary" (Wells, 2017). As a result of the government's negative perceptions, PoC efforts could not be fully implemented, and the protection of civilians remained largely limited to designated PoC sites. These sites triggered a crisis between UNMISS and the host state and were, at times, directly targeted by government forces.

According to UN reporting, several structural challenges further impeded effective implementation of the protection mandate. These included difficult terrain, restrictions on the mission's freedom of movement imposed by the government, and inadequate resources to maintain a protective presence in remote areas (Day et al., 2019, p. 13). The Secretary-General repeatedly reported that UNMISS personnel were routinely obstructed by the government through roadblocks, access restrictions, extortion attempts, and harassment by security officials—all of which significantly hindered the mission's ability to carry out its mandated task (UNSC, 2014a, para. 67, 2016, para. 74). Furthermore, the government took steps to expel key UN staff from the country, including human rights officers, further undermining the mission's operational effectiveness and damaging its overall legitimacy. The mission was caught in a dilemma between respecting state sovereignty and protecting civilians (Johnson, 2018). When peace talks resumed in 2017 and culminated in the signing of the Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (RARCSS), UNMISS struggled to be recognised even as a neutral third party, as “compromised” host-state consent contributed to its marginalisation and limited effectiveness (Duursma et al., 2024).

Following the escalation of violence, UN Security Council largely removed capacity-building tasks from the mandate. This significantly limited the mission's contribution to long-term institutional reforms. As a result, UNMISS shifted towards short-term protection and humanitarian functions, and curtailed its impact on sustainable peacebuilding.

3. Key Insights and Discussion

The cases of UNAMSIL and UNMISS illustrate that the depth and consistency of host-state consent substantially influence the effectiveness of UN PKOs. Sierra Leone and South Sudan share notable structural similarities in the conditions shaping their conflicts and the challenges faced by UN peace operations. Both countries have been marked by post-colonial struggles, widespread violence and poverty, and limited state capacity. In both countries, the economy is heavily dependent on natural resources, showing fragility to external shocks. Ethnic diversity and marginalised youth populations—often drivers of violence—are also common features. These structural weaknesses undermined state legitimacy and contributed to conflict in both cases. The UN missions in Sierra Leone and South Sudan were deployed in contexts that reflect the characteristics of “new wars” (Kaldor, 2012). These conflicts are asymmetric, involve both state and non-state actors, and are driven by a combination of

identity-based mobilisation and greed over natural resource control. They are also marked by widespread violence against civilians.

Sierra Leone and South Sudan reflect notable structural similarities. However, the level of cooperation between the UN mission and the host government varied considerably across the two cases. While UNAMSIL operated with strong and sustained host-state consent, UNMISS faced contested and often hostile relations with the South Sudanese authorities. In Sierra Leone, the government actively collaborated with UNAMSIL, facilitating disarmament efforts, national recovery, and post-conflict elections (Olonisakin, 2008; Sesay & Suma, 2009). By contrast, in South Sudan, “compromised” consent undermined UNMISS’s ability to implement its mandate effectively (Duursma et al., 2024). In Sierra Leone, host-state consent and cooperation had been maintained through the UN’s sustained diplomatic efforts and enabled more effective peacekeeping and post-conflict recovery. In South Sudan, suspicion toward the mission mandate—particularly regarding the protection of civilians—led to mistrust between the host state and the mission. Thus, the mission encountered obstruction, restricted access, and the expulsion of key UN personnel. According to the ACLED Conflict Index (2024), Sierra Leone is categorized as low and largely inactive in terms of conflict intensity, whereas South Sudan is classified among the highest levels of conflict.

These contrasting dynamics highlighted the crucial role of host-state consent and cooperation in determining the effectiveness of peacekeeping operations, particularly in the challenging context of fragile states. These insights also align with the literature (Duursma et al., 2024; Fortna, 2008; Ruggeri et al., 2013), suggesting that effective peacekeeping relies not only on enforcement capacity but also on the degree of host-state consent and cooperation.

Table1. Comparison of UNAMSIL and UNMISS

Variable	Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) – Outcomes	South Sudan (UNMISS)– Outcomes
Host State Cooperation with the UN	High - Government implemented UN reforms	Low -Government perceived the UN as an opponent
Security	Successful - Violence reduced and war officially ended	Unsuccessful - Continued armed violence and displacement
Capacity-Building	Implemented - Support for rebuilding the army and police force; re-establishment of local administration	Ineffective - Obstructed by lack of cooperation
DDR	Completed - 75,000 ex-combatants disarmed and reintegrated	Partially implemented - Blocked or delayed by authorities

Variable	Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) – Outcomes	South Sudan (UNMISS)– Outcomes
PoC	Permitted - Safe areas established for civilians	Highly restricted - Government opposed PoC sites
Human Rights Monitoring	Enabled - reported abuses; established the Special Court and Truth and Reconciliation Commission	Limited - Expulsion of staff; reporting obstructed through access restrictions
Support for Elections	Strong - Provided logistical and security support for the first elections in 2002.	Weak - Participated in election planning, but with limited operational reach
Peace Process and Long-Term Impact	Democratic elections held- transition to post-conflict stability	Ongoing conflict- state remains fragile

Source: Author's compilation based on information retrieved from the official UNAMSIL and UNMISS mission websites (UNAMSIL: https://peacekeeping.un.org/mission/past/unamsil/press_kit.htm UNMISS: <https://unmiss.unmissions.org/>).

Conclusion

Host-state consent and cooperation are crucial for enhancing the effectiveness of UN peace operations. This study compares the missions in Sierra Leone, UNAMSIL and South Sudan, UNMISS to examine how variations in host-state engagement shape peacekeeping outcomes. Both missions were multidimensional, authorised under broad mandates, and deployed in contexts defined by the dynamics of "new wars" in fragile states characterised by poor state capacity. Despite these similarities, the outcomes of these operations diverged significantly. The comparison between UNAMSIL and UNMISS illustrates that sustained consent and cooperation is a crucial factor for the effectiveness of the mission. In Sierra Leone, the host-state consent and willingness to collaborate with the UN enabled the implementation of disarmament, institutional reforms, and a transition to sustainable peace. However, UNMISS was perceived as adversary by the host-state, lack of cooperation hindered effectiveness of the mission. As a result, the mission's operational capacity was weakened, and its mandate became increasingly constrained. Over the years, the UN has conducted peacekeeping operations worldwide and developed general principles regarding their effectiveness based on its vast experience. Yet, identifying the political and contextual determinants that explain why some operations succeed while others fail remains a challenging problem. Future studies can address this problem through in-depth, mission-specific analyses. From a policy perspective, UN peacekeeping must adopt a

more flexible and adaptive approach to changing and complex contexts such as South Sudan.

For Ethics Issues: sbfdergi@politics.ankara.edu.tr

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