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Peacekeeping for profit? The scope and limits of 'mercenary' UN peacekeeping

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Abstract

Developing states furnish the vast majority of UN peacekeeping troops, a fact academics and policymakers often attribute (at least partly) to developing states' supposed ability to derive a profit from UN peacekeeping reimbursements. In this article, we argue that this 'peacekeeping for profit' narrative has been vastly overstated. The conditions for significantly profiting from UN peacekeeping are in fact highly restrictive, even for developing states. We begin by highlighting two potent reasons for re-examining the peacekeeping for profit narrative: developing states emerged as the UN's principal troop contributors in a period of stagnant reimbursement rates when UN peacekeeping was becoming *less* financially attractive; and the quantitative evidence scholars have presented as supporting the peacekeeping for profit narrative is flawed. We then identify the scope conditions within which peacekeeping for profit provides a plausible explanation for a developing state's UN troop contributions. First, the deployment and its attendant reimbursements must be significant not only in absolute and per-soldier terms but also in relation to the state's total armed forces and military expenditure. Second, the state must have an exceptional ability, compared with other troop contributors, to benefit from UN reimbursements. The scope for generalized profit-making from either equipment or personnel contributions is limited by intense political pressure against reimbursement rate increases. Individual states can nevertheless make a profit if they (1) invest in inexpensive and old but functional equipment, especially if deployed with usage restrictions, and/or (2) limit the deployment allowances (rather than salaries) they pay their peacekeepers. We establish that only a limited subset of developing states meets the plausibility conditions for the peacekeeping for profit narrative – and many top UN troop contributors do not.

Keywords

financial incentives, peacekeeping, personnel contributions United Nations

Introduction

At her Senate confirmation hearing in January 2017, current US Ambassador to the United Nations (UN) Nikki Haley emphasized that states contributing personnel to UN peacekeeping operations often do so for financial reasons: 'a lot of times they're doing it just to make money and it's not about whether they're protecting people' (US Senate, 2017: 81). Her insistence that 'many of those countries actually make money off of the peacekeeping missions' (US Senate, 2017: 19) echoed a long-established but deeply problematic narrative about UN peacekeeping, which this article challenges.

The UN reimburses states at standardized rates for the costs associated with deploying personnel and equipment to UN peacekeeping operations. The received wisdom is that these rates exceed many developing states' actual costs, allowing them to pocket the difference. The

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opportunity to derive a profit from peacekeeping, in turn, is held to help explain why developing states contribute so heavily to UN peacekeeping, furnishing over 90% of UN military peacekeepers.[1]

This 'peacekeeping for profit' narrative is frequently encountered in the media (e.g. Axe, 2010; Burrows, 2014; Mackenzie, 2016) and in UN policy discussions, especially but not exclusively when diplomats are speaking informally. Haley referred to it in the context of addressing sexual exploitation and abuse by UN peacekeepers. It has also been linked to problems with peacekeeper effectiveness:

> 'Some [states] see peacekeeping as a money-making opportunity [. . .] Those governments also say that there should be no risk to their peacekeepers [. . .] They avoid costs, and they make a lot of money off it.'[2]

Concerns about profit-making pervaded a bitter multi-year debate about increasing the troop cost reimbursement rate (Bosco, 2013; Coleman, 2014) and form a persistent undercurrent in triennial negotiations about equipment reimbursement rates (see below).

The peacekeeping for profit narrative is similarly common in the academic literature. It has long been raised as an explanation for developing states' peacekeeping contributions (Bobrow & Boyer, 1997: 727; Khanna, Sandler & Shimizu, 1998: 180; Berman & Sams, 2000: 253–254; Lewis & Mayall, 1996: 123), and has become so well established that scholars often treat it as an unproblematic fact. Pouliot, for example, qualifies his argument for viewing peacekeeping personnel contributions as markers of hierarchy by noting, 'other factors are also at play, of course: poor countries subsidize their military by lending it to the UN' (2016: 243). Several recent studies that engage this narrative in more detail either qualitatively (Sheehan, 2011: 144–145; Sotomayor, 2013: 35–36) or quantitatively (Victor, 2010; Bove & Elia, 2011; Gailbulloev et al., 2015; Ward & Dorussen, 2016; Kathman & Melin, 2017) also uphold its validity.

Studies differ on whether the profit motivation applies roughly equally to all lower-income troop contributors (Gaibulloev et al., 2015:13) or is stronger for countries that are poorer (Bove & Elia, 2011; Victor, 2010: 221), democratizing (Sotomayor, 2013: 35), or face security threats (Kathman & Melin, 2017: 3–4). However, they broadly agree that, '[p]roviding military personnel to UN peacekeeping constitutes a benefit for developing countries but [. . .] a cost for developed countries' (Sheehan, 2011: 144). The profit motivation is thus assumed to apply to some significant extent to most developing states contributing UN peacekeepers, and especially to 'many major UN personnel contributors' (Gaibulloev et al., 2015: 7) or 'countries deploying large [UN] peacekeeping forces' (Bove & Elia, 2011: 704). It may operate alongside other motivations such as enhancing national prestige and regional stability (Victor, 2010), averting coups (Bobrow & Boyer, 1997: 727; Kathman & Melin, 2017: 153–155), deploying alongside allies (Ward & Dorussen, 2016), or allowing troops to gain operational experience (Sheehan, 2011: 145). Peacekeeping for (national) profit is also sometimes conflated with the separate argument that individual peacekeepers secure financial benefits (e.g. Bobrow & Boyer, 1997: 727), though this article makes the case for disentangling these narratives. Critically, however, peacekeeping for profit is nevertheless seen as significant in its own right. Victor calls it 'a major incentive for developing countries to participate in UN peacekeeping' (2010: 221). Bove & Elia (2011: 701, 710) see 'mercenarization' as 'among the main drivers of peacekeeping'. Gaibulloev et al. (2015: 1) suggest that 'some countries specialize in supplying UN peacekeepers as a money-making venture'.

This article argues that the peacekeeping for profit narrative has been vastly overstated. It contains an element of truth: for some states, UN reimbursements exceed deployment costs and the resulting opportunity for profit constitutes a significant motivation for contributing UN peacekeepers. However, the conditions for profiting from UN peacekeeping reimbursements are highly restrictive, and financial benefits are not sufficiently common and substantial to adequately explain the prominence of developing states among UN peacekeepers.[3] The purpose of this article is thus to identify the limits within which profit-making provides a plausible explanation for a state's contributions to UN peacekeeping. We thus move beyond previous critiques of this narrative in policy circles (Coleman, 2014: 15) and the academic literature (Bellamy & Williams, 2013: 10–11;

[1] Data from UNDPKO (2015). Developing states are here defined as states accorded a discount in the UN peacekeeping scale of assessments.

[2] Interview with a high-ranking UN peacekeeper, June 2017 (see also Kinloch-Pichat, 2004: 178; Cunliffe, 2013: 169; Manuel 2016: 243). For concurring academic arguments, see Shimizu & Sandler (2002: 654) and Bove & Elia (2011: 703).

[3] In keeping with the literature to which we are responding, we focus on the possibility of states deriving a profit from UN reimbursements. National profit-making from illegal activities or from side-payments by other states (Henke, 2016) lie outside the scope of this article.

Cunliffe, 2013: 168–174) to systematically investigate the scope conditions of the peacekeeping for profit argument.

We begin by offering two major reasons for revisiting the peacekeeping for profit narrative, one qualitative and the other quantitative. First, the narrative's credibility is undermined by the historical fact that developing states emerged as the UN's most prominent troop contributors at a time when UN peacekeeping was becoming *less* financially attractive. Second, closer investigation of the quantitative evidence thus far provided in support of the peacekeeping for profit narrative reveals less support for the argument than commonly claimed. Both points raise important doubts about this narrative as a general explanation for developing states' UN peacekeeping contributions. If the narrative has merit, therefore, it must be in a more restrictive set of circumstances, and thus for a smaller set of states, than is typically assumed.

In the second part of this article, we identify the conditions under which it is plausible to assume that profit-making calculations significantly shape a state's UN peacekeeping contributions. We argue that peacekeeping-related payments must be situated in the receiving states' wider military and financial context, and we investigate UN equipment and personnel cost reimbursement policies to identify both the potential for profit-making and its limits. Profit motivations are most plausible for states that (1) have relatively small armed forces and modest military expenditures, and (2) possess large stocks of old but functional equipment with low maintenance requirements and/or pay low deployment benefits, as opposed to salaries, to their military personnel. Crucially, many developing states, including many top UN troop contributors, do not meet these conditions.

Two reasons to doubt 'peacekeeping for profit' as a general explanation for developing states' UN peacekeeping contributions

Why should we re-examine the peacekeeping for profit narrative? Beyond reiterating that the narrative is not uncontested (Bellamy & Williams, 2013: 10–11; Cunliffe, 2013: 168–174; Coleman, 2014: 15) and noting a growing literature on individual UN troop contributors' motivations that suggests a plethora of factors potentially outweighing national financial considerations,[4] we offer two reasons.

[4] See country chapters in Bellamy & Williams (2013) and country profiles in IPI/GWU/UQ (2017).

Historical perspective

The peacekeeping for profit narrative struggles to account for two historical facts about developing states' contributions to UN peacekeeping.

First, the financial incentives that supposedly motivate developing states existed for decades before these states emerged as the main contributors of UN peacekeepers. The UN introduced a standardized reimbursement rate for peacekeeping troop contributions in 1974, fully realizing that this favored some countries more than others: 'from the outset, it was recognized that there were wide variations in troop costs among troop-contributing countries' (UNGA, 2012: §3). The reimbursement rate was increased in 1977, 1980, and 1991, and smaller additional reimbursements for specialist personnel and troops' personal equipment were introduced in the same time frame (UNGA, 2012: §§4–5). The late 1980s were a high point for the profitability of contributing UN peacekeepers: the proportion of troop contributors' costs not covered by reimbursements was at a historic low in 1988 before increasing sharply in the 1990s (UNSG, 2000: Annex IV). Standardized reimbursement rates for military equipment, meanwhile, were mooted in 1993 and replaced a cumbersome system of individually negotiated rates in 1996 (UNSG, 1998).

Nevertheless, developed states furnished the bulk of UN peacekeepers throughout the 1990s. In 1995, Neack still argued that Western states 'dominated peace-keeping and probably will continue to do so', joined by 'a few non-Western states that lay claim to some prestige in international affairs through their UN activities' (1995: 194). Only in the early 2000s did first Asian and then African troop contributions surpass European ones (Perry & Smith, 2013: 3). The peacekeeping for profit narrative struggles to explain why these states did not respond to the purported profit incentive earlier.

Second, developing states emerged as the UN's main troop contributors at a time when peacekeeping was becoming *less* financially attractive for many of them. Several developing states, including major UN troop contributors, experienced substantial economic growth in the early 2000s and significantly expanded their foreign exchange earnings. Thus, they were 'less in need of hard currency reimbursement, which used to be [. . .] an interesting dimension for the troop-contributing countries from the South. Now Brazil, India, they [. . .] don't depend on the dollar income they get from the troops being deployed.'[5] Moreover, from 2002 through 2013

[5] Interview with a UN official, April 2013.

UN member states failed to agree on any troop cost reimbursement rate increases, even to keep pace with US dollar inflation. As will be discussed in more detail below, the monthly rate stagnated at $1,141 per deployed personnel from 2002 to 2011, rising to $1,210 in 2012 and 2013 only because the General Assembly approved temporary supplemental payments (UNSG, 2014: §§4–5). This represented a contraction of 18% in real US dollar terms: $1,210 in 2013 had the buying power of $934.43 in 2002.[6] For countries with higher national inflation not fully offset by changing exchange rates, the impact was even worse: top UN troop contributors experienced contractions of 30–40% in terms of local purchasing power (Coleman, 2014: 15).

Yet while the profitability of UN peacekeeping declined, the total number of troops contributed to UN peacekeeping increased from under 40,000 in 2002 to over 80,000 in 2012 (UNDPKO, 2016), and the bulk of these troops hailed from developing states. As a general explanation for developing states' UN contributions, the peacekeeping for profit argument struggles to account for this increased provision of peacekeepers at a time of falling profits. Some developing states may still have been able to derive a profit from UN peacekeeping in 2012, but virtually all faced a shrinking 'profit margin' – and for at least some troop contributors that margin had disappeared. This suggests the need for a closer investigation of *which* developing states can still plausibly be seen as substantially motivated by profit considerations.

The quantitative empirical findings are not robust

The peacekeeping for profit narrative has been bolstered by several recently published quantitative analyses that appear to provide systematic evidence in its favor. However, closer investigation reveals significant weaknesses in these results, suggesting further need to more rigorously investigate the scope conditions of peacekeeping for profit.

Most frequently, scholars present models that report a negative association between GDP per capita and UN peacekeeping contributions (e.g. Bove & Elia, 2011; Gaibulloev et al., 2015; Ward & Dorussen, 2016). While each of these articles makes important contributions to the literature on the determinants of troop contributions to UN peacekeeping operations, the negative association between GDP per capita and peacekeeping contributions that these articles report is not robust. We illustrate this first by re-examining the analyses in Bove & Elia's (2011: 703) article, which includes profit-making among its key hypotheses about the determinants of UN peacekeeping contributions and uses GDP per capita as a proxy for military salaries in the statistical models.

It is important to recognize that challenges arise in analyzing any relationship between personnel contributions and GDP per capita because the distributions of both variables are skewed. This can readily be seen in Figure 1 Panel A, a scatterplot of GDP per capita and UN peacekeeping personnel contributions in Bove and Elia's replication data. The vast majority of UN peacekeeping personnel contributions are small: half comprise fewer than 30 personnel, while only a handful of countries contribute large troop contingents.[7] GDP per capita is also skewed, with small states such as Qatar, Luxembourg, Iceland, and Norway as outliers featuring real GDP per capita in the year 2000 above $50,000 – by comparison, the US value is $38,000 in this data.

To help account for the skewed distribution of UN peacekeeping contributions, Bove and Elia use the natural log of personnel contributions as their dependent variable: the relationship in their analyses is thus actually the one shown in Panel B of Figure 1. Using logs is a common approach to handling skewed distributions. However, it does come at a cost, which in this case is to diminish the relative impact of large contributors in the analysis. The gap between 0 and 0.7 at the bottom of the scatterplot is the difference between contributing 1 and 2 troops – a difference that the analysis treats as equivalent to the difference between 2,000 and 4,000 troops (7.6 and 8.3, when logged). The overall results thus become more likely to be driven by small variations in small contributions, which risks the results being less representative of what drives the relatively small number of countries making the large troop contributions that constitute the bulk of UN peacekeeping forces. To the extent that 'token' force contributions may be driven by different factors than larger contributions (Coleman, 2013), this has the potential to substantially alter the analyses.

Furthermore, in testing the relationship between countries' incomes and peacekeeping contributions Bove and Elia do nothing to account for the skewed distribution of GDP per capita. If one were to use the natural log of GDP per capita, the relationship looks different – or indeed non-existent – as can be seen in Figure 1 Panel C. The

[6] US Department of Labor CPI Inflation Calculator, www.bls.gov/data/inflation_calculator.htm.

[7] For a discussion of this phenomenon, see Coleman (2013).

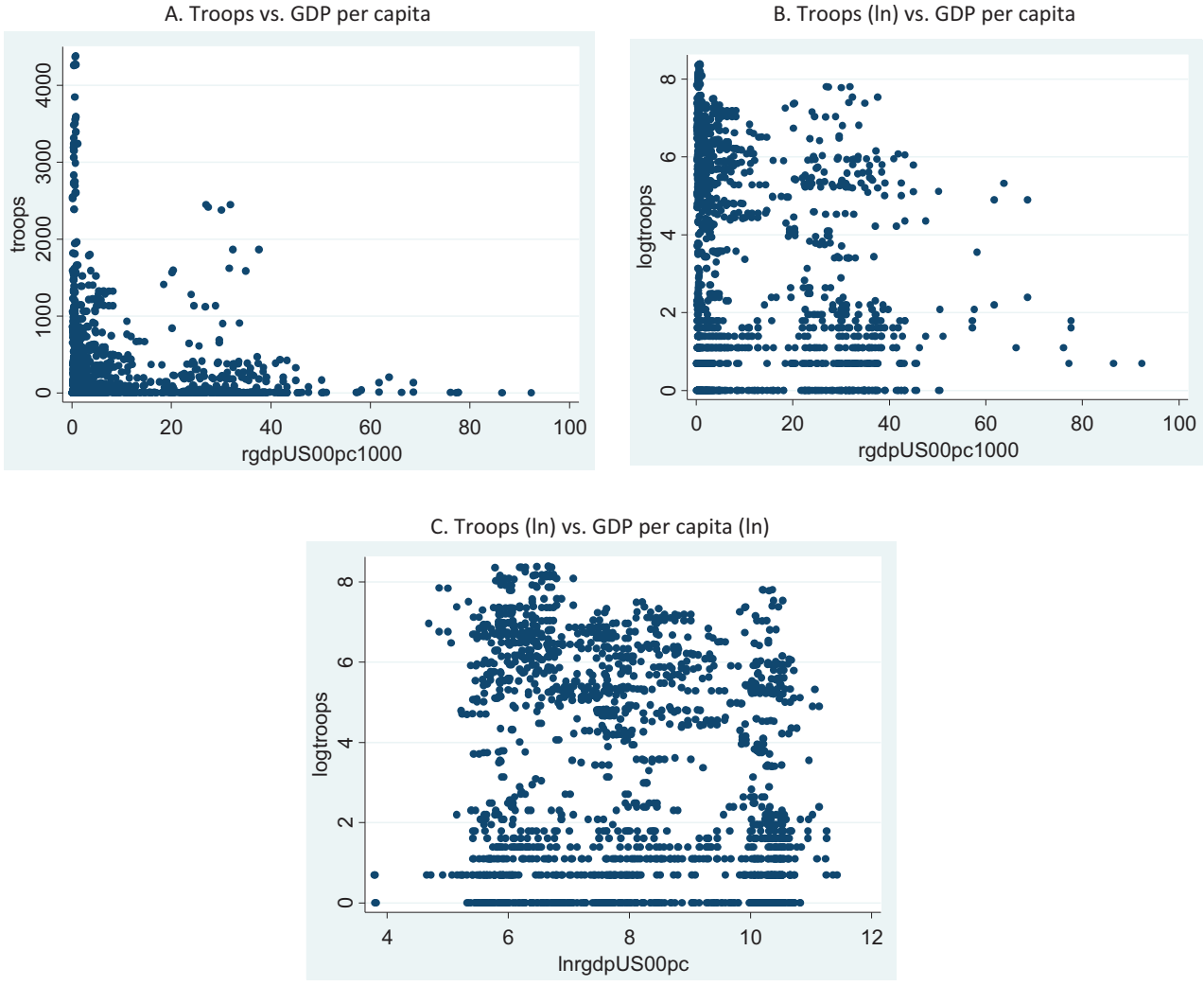

Figure 1. UN PKO troop contributions and GDP per capita (Bove & Elia, 2011)

skewed distribution of GDP per capita across countries is a strong reason for scholars to consider whether any results they find in their analyses are dependent on functional form assumptions or rest on the inclusion of outliers.

We test the robustness of the relationship between GDP per capita and troop contributions in this fashion, reporting our results in Table I. Our Model 1 is identical to Bove and Elia's Model 1 from their Table II.[8] In Model 2 we simply replace GDP per capita with the natural log of GDP per capita, and the coefficient becomes statistically insignificant. Moreover, the sign switches, suggesting a potential non-monotonic relationship, which we test in Model 3 by including both GDP per capita and its squared term in the same model. Model 4 does the same with logged GDP per capita. We report the results of Model 3 and Model 4 graphically in Figure 2. Both models suggest a weak inverted U shape relationship: very poor countries contribute somewhat fewer troops to UN peacekeeping operations, as do very rich countries, but the overall relationship is neither substantively large nor statistically significant. Ultimately, the significant negative coefficient on GDP per capita in Bove and Elia's Model 1 is driven by the greater weight placed on the contributions by outlier high income observations from countries such as Qatar, Iceland, and Luxembourg. By contrast, when GDP per capita is logged, greater weight is placed on the low-income countries' contributions and thus GDP per capita has a positive coefficient.

[8] We were able to replicate Bove and Elia's results exactly using the data and code they provided for the *Journal of Peace Research* (http://file.prio.no/Journals/JPR/2011/48/6/Bove%20and%20Elia%20Replication%20data%2048(6).zip). Table I reports replications and extensions of Bove and Elia's Table II Model 1, but equivalent results hold when replicating the additional five models of their Table II in a similar fashion. See Online appendix Tables A1–A5.

Table I. Replication and extension of Bove & Elia (2011) Table II Model 1: panel estimation of troop contribution of UN missions

	Model 1	*Model 2*	*Model 3*	*Model 4*	*Model 5*	*Model 6*	*Model 7*	*Model 8*
Real per capita GDP/1,000	–0.034*		0.019		–0.024		–0.024	
	(0.017)		(0.035)		(0.018)		(0.018)	
Real per capita GDP/1,000 (ln)		0.136		1.798		0.178		0.197
		(0.216)		(1.279)		(0.215)		(0.229)
Real per capita GDP/1,000 ^2			–0.001					
			(0.000)					
Real per capita GDP/1,000 (ln) ^2				–0.107				
				(0.078)				
Deaths per year	0.004**	0.005**	0.005**	0.005**	0.004**	0.005**	0.004**	0.005**
	(0.001)	(0.002)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)
Conflict intensity	0.204**	0.193**	0.203**	0.204**	0.180**	0.174*	0.139*	0.127
	(0.070)	(0.069)	(0.070)	(0.071)	(0.068)	(0.068)	(0.068)	(0.067)
Displaced people/1 x 10^6	–0.443**	–0.378*	–0.436**	–0.371**	–0.443**	–0.389**	–0.403**	–0.335**
	(0.157)	(0.147)	(0.157)	(0.142)	(0.157)	(0.147)	(0.138)	(0.128)
No. of concurrent PKOs	–0.035	–0.042	–0.041	–0.049	–0.050	–0.059	–0.054	–0.060
	(0.048)	(0.047)	(0.047)	(0.046)	(0.046)	(0.044)	(0.042)	(0.039)
Military expenditure/GDP	–0.006	0.029	0.016	0.009	0.000	0.031	–0.007	0.027
	(0.041)	(0.045)	(0.043)	(0.044)	(0.041)	(0.045)	(0.036)	(0.042)
No. in armed forces /1,000	0.531	0.540	0.535	0.528	0.530	0.536	0.101	0.113
	(0.287)	(0.285)	(0.285)	(0.284)	(0.289)	(0.285)	(0.231)	(0.228)
UNSC candidate	0.069	0.069	0.069	0.067	0.070	0.069	–0.028	–0.025
	(0.162)	(0.165)	(0.161)	(0.165)	(0.163)	(0.165)	(0.148)	(0.150)
Constant	3.643***	2.091	3.296***	–4.014	3.642***	1.893	4.426***	2.498
	(0.378)	(1.831)	(0.459)	(5.151)	(0.386)	(1.829)	(0.359)	(1.973)
N	1,748	1,748	1,748	1,748	1,727	1,727	1,476	1,476

*$p < 0.05$, **$p < 0.01$.

Further models show how the results are sensitive not only to functional form assumptions, but to the presence of outliers. Models 5 and 6 exclude the 21 out of 1,748 (<1%) observations in which GDP per capita is greater than $50,000. In Model 5, dropping even this small number of observations cuts the coefficient on GDP per capita nearly in half and makes it insignificant. In Model 6, it moderately strengthens the insignificant positive coefficient. Models 7 and 8 also truncate the sample, excluding observations in which the number of troops contributed is only 1 (272 observations, 15% of the total). In neither model is GDP per capita statistically significant. Thus, while Bove & Elia (2011) report consistently strong support for the 'mercenarization' hypothesis across the various models they present, our analyses suggest this finding is sensitive to functional form assumptions and in large part driven by the presence of outliers.

Other quantitative analyses reported as supporting the peacekeeping for profit argument have similar weaknesses. While Ward & Dorussen (2016) focus on the role of international networks in explaining peacekeeping contributions, they also include GDP per capita as a control variable. In the models they report, the relationship between GDP per capita and contribution size is consistently negative, but typically falls short of conventional levels of statistical significance. Yet when it does reach the threshold of significance in their Model 2, they write: 'the coefficient of rgdp_pc is negative and marginally significant, suggesting that poorer countries have financial incentives to provide peacekeepers' (Ward & Dorussen, 2016: 402). Just as in the Bove and Elia analyses, however, the coefficient on GDP per capita becomes positive and statistically insignificant when replacing GDP per capita with logged GDP per capita, suggesting that this result is not robust.[9]

Gaibulloev et al. (2015) focus on testing differences in personnel spillovers in UN and non-UN peacekeeping operations, making an important contribution on that topic, but they also examine the relationship between GDP per capita and peacekeeping contributions. Consistent with what we report above, they find

[9] See Online appendix Table A6.

Table II. Replication and extension of Gaibulloev et al. (2015) Table V Model 5: supply of UN peacekeepers (GDP per capita > $10 K)

Variable	*Model 5*	*No Gabon*	*No Croatia*	*No Belgium*	*No Italy*	*No Estonia*	*No Lithuania*
Spillover	–1.00	0.19	–0.16	–0.25	–0.18	–0.31	–0.16
	(1.43)	(0.60)	(0.54)	(0.64)	(0.52)	(0.96)	(0.36)
ln(GDP/POP)	–3.19**	–0.16	–0.22	–0.14	–0.24	–0.49	–0.08
	(2.66)	(0.53)	(0.69)	(0.36)	(0.77)	(1.32)	(0.23)
ln(POP)	1.55	0.77**	0.50†	0.88**	1.01**	0.87**	1.09**
	(0.72)	(2.54)	(1.74)	(2.75)	(3.57)	(2.71)	(3.48)
ln(OPEN)	–2.69**	0.41	0.28	0.21	0.67**	0.44	0.41
	(2.64)	(1.30)	(0.95)	(0.61)	(1.94)	(1.31)	(1.14)
ln(Military personnel)	–0.45	–0.26	0.05	–0.17	–0.34	–0.33	–0.38
	(1.12)	(1.10)	(0.22)	(0.64)	(1.56)	(1.28)	(1.51)
PKO	0.03**	0.05**	0.05**	0.04**	0.05**	0.05**	0.04**
	(2.68)	(8.32)	(8.12)	(6.04)	(8.08)	(8.46)	(6.83)
Share of missions	–4.42†	0.37	0.03	0.48	–0.05	0.30	–0.78
	(1.81)	(0.29)	(0.03)	(0.34)	(0.04)	(0.22)	(0.58)
Country FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Sample size	102	99	99	99	99	99	99

†$p < 0.10$, *$p < 0.05$, **$p < 0.01$.

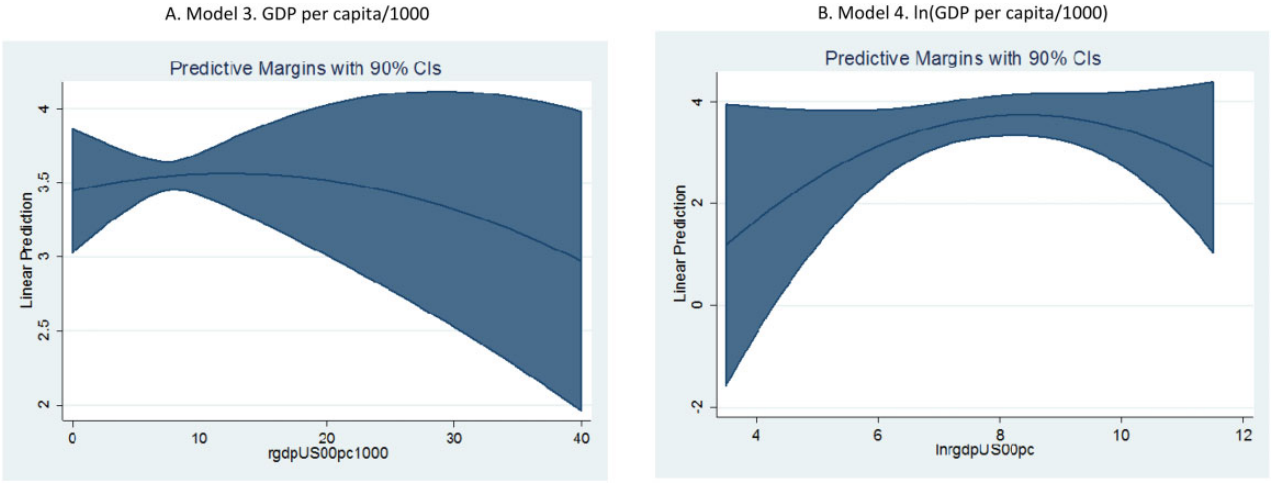

Figure 2. Marginal effect of GDP per capita, Model 3 (Panel A) and Model 4 (Panel B)

no significant negative association between logged GDP per capita and peacekeeping contributions in their full sample models of the supply of UN peacekeepers – in fact in two of four models the coefficient is positive and significant (contrary to their expectations). However, Gaibulloev et al. (2015) then split their sample into two subsamples by income (at $10,000 per capita GDP), and report a significant negative coefficient on logged GDP per capita for the medium/high income subsample. This is the primary evidence they note in their conclusion supporting the peacekeeping for profit argument.

Although Gaibulloev et al. (2015) account for the skewed distribution of GDP per capita by including logged GDP per capita in their models, they do not report any tests for outliers. Since their statistical analyses are spatial regressions with the contributions of 92 countries averaged across three time periods (1990–97, 1998–2005, 2006–12), they are working with small samples. They have 276 observations in models with all countries, and 102 and 174 in their two splits samples. These sample sizes risk the results being driven by outliers, which visual inspection of the data suggest are present. Figure 3 Panel A shows the relationship between change

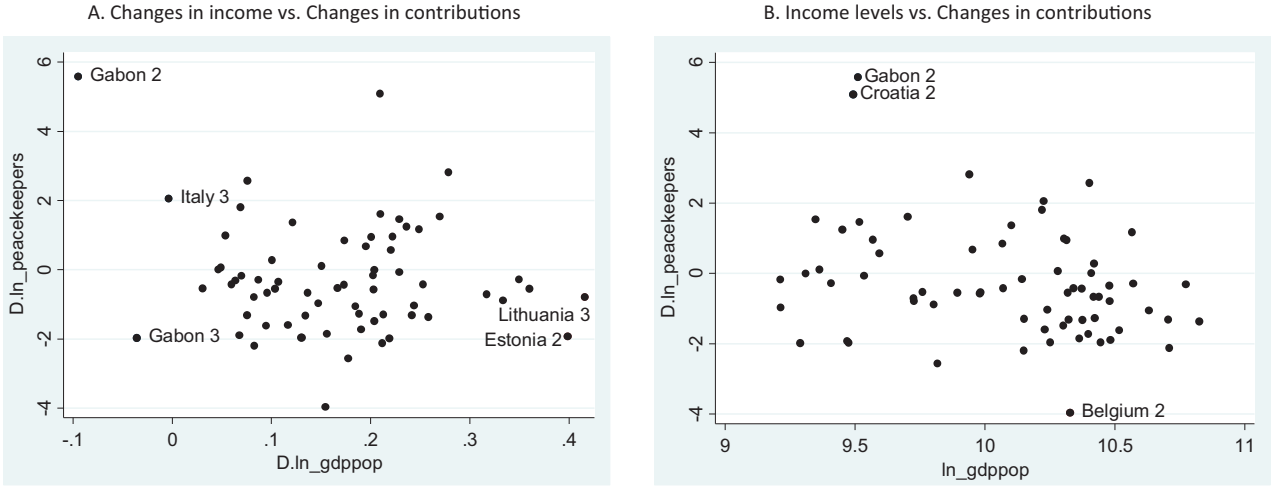

Figure 3. Income per capita and UN peacekeeping contributions (high income countries, Gaibulloev et al., 2015 data)

in GDP per capita and change in contributions to UN peacekeeping forces for the Gaibulloev et al. (2015) medium/high income sample used for Model 5 of their Table V. While several countries stand out, there is one especially prominent outlier: Gabon, the only African country in this sample, the country with the greatest one-period increase in UN troop contributions, and the only country with negative GDP growth across both periods. If Gabon were excluded, there would be no visible relationship between income growth and change in peacekeeping contributions in this scatterplot. Similarly, if we consider the relationship between income level and change in peacekeeping contribution (Panel B), three outliers exist: two medium-income states that increased peacekeeping contributions substantially in a single period (Croatia and Gabon) and one high-income state that decreased peacekeeping substantially in one period (Belgium). Re-running Gaibulloev et al.'s (2015) Table V Model 5 without any one of the outliers labeled in Figure 2 results in the coefficient on GDP per capita becoming insignificant (Table II).

In short, the quantitative evidence that has been reported as supporting the peacekeeping for profit argument is much weaker than it initially appears: there is no robust overall relationship between countries' income level and their UN peacekeeping contributions in the data. This finding complements the more qualitative reasons for doubting the peacekeeping for profit narrative as a general explanation of developing states' UN troop contributions. Profit-making may still motivate some UN troop contributors, but we need a far more nuanced understanding of which states it is most likely to be relevant for.

Scope conditions: When is 'peacekeeping for profit' a plausible explanation for a state's UN troop contributions?

If the peacekeeping for profit narrative cannot be assumed to capture the motivations of all developing countries furnishing UN peacekeepers, which states is it most likely to apply to? Two conditions are critical to the plausibility of profit-making as an explanation of a particular state's UN peacekeeping contributions. First, the state's deployment and attendant reimbursements must be significant not only in absolute terms but also relative to the state's total armed forces and its military budget. Second, the state must have an exceptional ability to exploit profit-making opportunities in the UN equipment and personnel cost reimbursement systems, since intense political pressure to limit reimbursement rate increases militates against more generalized profit-making. Only a limited subset of developing states meets these plausibility conditions – and many top UN troop contributors do not.

Condition 1: National significance of peacekeeping reimbursements

The peacekeeping for profit argument appears most widely applicable when the financial benefits UN peacekeeping reimbursements generate are presented as (large[10]) absolute numbers or in comparison to estimated per-peacekeeper costs. Total UN payments of $1.28 billion to Bangladesh in 2001–10 lend plausibility to the

[10] The peacekeeping for profit narrative struggles to account for small ('token') troop contributions generating very modest reimbursement payments (Ward & Dorussen, 2016: 394; Coleman, 2013).

Table III. Placing UN peacekeeping deployments and payments in national context

Country	UN troop deployment, Dec. 2015	2014 GDP per capita	Est. annual UN troop cost reimbursement	Est. reimbursement as % of 2014 military expenditure	UN deployments as % of 2015 armed forces
Ethiopia	8,264	574	132,091,776	33.52	5.99
Bangladesh	7,324	1,087	117,066,816	5.82	4.66
Pakistan	7,174	1,317	114,669,216	1.34	1.11
India	6,787	1,582	108,483,408	0.22	0.5
Rwanda	5,141	696	82,173,744	95.71[a]	15.58
Nepal	4,371	702	69,866,064	22.9	4.55
Ghana	2,885	1,442	46,113,840	25.49	18.03
China	2,876	7,590	45,969,984	0.02	0.12
Indonesia	2,681	3,492	42,853,104	0.61	0.68
Nigeria	2,558	3,203	40,887,072	1.81	3.2
Burkina Faso	2,536	713	40,535,424	24.46	23.05
Egypt	2,359	3,199	37,706,256	0.76	0.54
Morocco	2,308	3,190	36,891,072	0.91	1.18
Tanzania	2,258	955	36,091,872	7.85	8.36
South Africa	2,131	6,483	34,061,904	0.87	3.44
Senegal	2,095	1,067	33,486,480	13.96	14.96
Niger	1,893	427	30,257,712	n/a	37.86
Uruguay	1,441	16,807	23,032,944	2.52	5.76
Togo	1,435	635	22,937,040	n/a	15.94
Brazil	1,224	11,384	19,564,416	0.06	0.38

GDP per capita is current dollar amounts (World Bank). Military expenditure data are from SIPRI. Armed forces data are from IISS.
[a]Figure indicated in source to be highly uncertain.

contention that 'the financial benefits accrued by Bangladeshi peacekeepers [...] play an important role in supporting the economy' (Zaman & Biswas, 2015). Contrasting 'annual costs per military person' of $1,892–$10,199 in Bangladesh, Ghana, India, Nepal, Nigeria, Pakistan, and Senegal with the UN 'compensation per peacekeeper of over $12,000 per year' strongly suggests the importance of 'a donor-specific benefit from peacekeeping for countries contributing the most UN peacekeepers in recent years' (Gaibulloev et al., 2015: 3–4).

However, absolute and per-troop income figures must be placed in a wider national perspective to assess their political significance.[11] For example, India and Ghana have comparable per capita GDPs (World Bank, 2016), and Gaibulloev et al. (2015: 3) estimate both countries' annual per military person costs well below the UN troop cost reimbursement rate. In apparent accordance with the peacekeeping for profit logic, both are top UN troop contributors: in December 2015, India was the 4th largest contributor with 6,787 troops and Ghana the 7th largest with 2,885. Sustained for a year, these deployments would generate UN personnel cost reimbursements of approximately $108.5 million to India and $46 million to Ghana. However, India's armed forces counted 1,346,000 personnel in 2015 and its 2014 military expenditure was $50 billion, while Ghana's armed forces numbered 16,000 in 2015 and its 2014 military expenditure was $181 million (IISS, 2015: chapter 10; SIPRI, 2016). Thus in December 2015 India deployed just 0.5% of its armed forces as UN peacekeepers, Ghana 18%. The extrapolated annual UN reimbursement payments represented less than 0.25% of India's 2014 military expenditure but 25.5% of Ghana's. By these measures, the peacekeeping for profit narrative appears far more plausible for Ghana than for India.

Table III extends this comparison to the 20 top UN troop contributors in December 2015. It shows a striking variation in the significance of these states' UN peacekeeping commitments and attendant reimbursements relative to their total armed forces and military expenditure. For Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Ghana, Nepal, and Senegal (and probably also Niger, Rwanda, and Togo, though the relevant data are uncertain or unavailable) estimated UN troop reimbursement payments appear very significant compared to national military expenditure. These countries jointly furnished 28,620

[11] For a similar point on total reimbursements, see Cunliffe (2013: 171–172).

of the UN's total of 93,230 deployed military personnel (30.7%). For an almost equal number of top troop contributors, however, extrapolated UN reimbursements represented less than 1% of national military expenditure – yet Brazil, China, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Morocco, and South Africa jointly furnished 20,366 UN troops, or 21.8% of the total. Similarly, while some top UN troop contributors (e.g. Niger) deployed a large portion of their armed forces in UN missions, for others (e.g. India, China, Egypt, and Brazil) UN deployments affected only a small minority of their armed forces. Bove & Elia's (2011: 704) claim that 'for countries deploying large [UN] peacekeeping forces the earning is a significant proportion of the defense budget' thus applies only to certain contributors.[12]

In short, there are dramatic differences among developing states, including among the UN's top troop contributors, in terms of how significant their UN troop contributions and the attendant reimbursement payments are in their national context. Ceteris paribus, the peacekeeping for profit argument is most plausible for the subset of developing states deploying a large proportion of their armed forces as UN peacekeepers and for whom UN reimbursements represent a large proportion of national military expenditure.

Condition 2: Exceptional ability to profit from UN reimbursements

The UN offers two types of reimbursements to states participating in UN peacekeeping. The peacekeeping for profit argument is most commonly made with reference to personnel cost reimbursements, but reimbursements for deployed contingent-owned equipment (COE) have also been cited (Zaman & Biswas, 2015; Chinchilla & Vargas, 2016; Sotomayor, 2013: 34–36). One rebuttal is that frequent reimbursement delays diminish the financial attractiveness of peacekeeping contributions (Cunliffe, 2013: 174; Bellamy & Williams, 2013: 10; Sotomayor, 2013: 34). More fundamentally, however, for both reimbursement types the politics of rate negotiations ensure that general profit margins are narrow at best: since major UN financial contributors resist cost increases, rates arguably tend more towards inadequacy than towards generosity. Individual states can nevertheless derive a profit from UN peacekeeping, but only if, in comparison to other troop contributors, they (1) possess and maintain large stocks of cheap or old but functional equipment, and/or (2) limit the deployment allowances they pay to their UN peacekeepers. These characteristics depend on national policy decisions, not wealth levels, and are unevenly spread among developing states.

Profit-making and its limits in the COE reimbursement system

The UN has established monthly reimbursement rates for some 300 types of major equipment needed in peace operations, which are reviewed triennially by the COE Working Group (UNGA, 2017b).[13] States participating in a UN operation typically sign a Memorandum of Understanding that specifies the equipment they will provide and the applicable reimbursement rates. The COE system also provides for inspections to verify the quantity and condition of deployed equipment, and for reimbursement reductions for missing or non-operational items. The most reliable way for states to realize a profit within this system is to deploy functional equipment at a lower cost than the applicable reimbursement rates.

However, two factors limit the potential for generalized profit-making. First, most UN peace operations deploy in harsh environments characterized by armed conflict, limited infrastructure, and difficult terrain. Equipment used in such conditions undergoes considerable strain, which diminishes its durability (Coleman, 2014: 18). This limits the profitability of equipment deployments, since UN reimbursement payments cease for non-functional items and the costs of repairing or replacing equipment overwhelmingly accrue to the contributing state.[14]

Second, the COE Working Group closely scrutinizes reimbursement rates and limits rate increases. Formally, rates are based on the equipment type's 'generic fair market value' and 'estimated useful life': in purchasing the equipment, states are assumed to have 'bought a certain number of usage months' for a certain price, and they are reimbursed 'for making one of those months available for UN peacekeeping' (Coleman, 2014: 17). States also typically receive a monthly maintenance rate to cover the costs of servicing deployed equipment. The

[12] Over time, troop rotations spread the experience more widely but this does not affect the financial profitability of the peacekeeping contribution.

[13] States are also reimbursed for self-sustainment items, but these smaller per-troop payments offer less opportunity for substantial profit-making.

[14] In 2017, only seven equipment categories are eligible for UN-financed rotation under specific circumstances, at a maximum cost of $8 million per year (UNGA, 2017b: §§27–29).

Working Group gauges these factors partly through surveys of states' equipment costs. Survey responses are politicized, but the scope for manipulation is limited by the availability of cost data from previous surveys and commercial publications – and Working Group calculations typically discount outlier data. Moreover, the UN's major financial contributors participate in the Working Group, and often use their influence to limit rate increases and thus control peacekeeping costs. At their insistence, the Working Group capped the net average rate increase at 1.33% in 2011 (UNGA, 2011: §87) and 0.6% in 2017 (UNGA, 2017a: §23). In 2014, they refused to endorse any rate increases until the overall cost of all proposed adjustments was ascertained (UNGA, 2014a: §§79–85).

At best, changes to the COE system that enhance the financial attractiveness of furnishing equipment are slow, incremental, and tightly controlled. The scope for widespread, significant profit-making is correspondingly circumscribed. Individual developing states may nevertheless derive a profit from COE contributions, but only if they outperform other UN troop contributors – including other developing states – in terms of their equipment costs. They can do so by meeting one or (ideally) more of the following conditions.

First, they may acquire equipment at less than the 'generic fair market' price through domestic production, preferential international purchases, or equipment donations. Importantly, not all developing states benefit from, or even seek, especially low-cost equipment. Some, including top UN troop contributors India, Egypt, and Brazil, have 'significant financial assets [and . . .] launch new and costly weapons-procurement programs' (Theohary, 2015: 5).[15] Others face more severe budget constraints, but in a competitive global arms market they are not necessarily able to secure cheaper items *within* the equipment categories specified in the COE manual. Moreover, while they may be 'forced to be especially selective in their military purchases' (Theohary, 2015: 5), this is compatible with either a small number of high-cost purchases or more extensive procurement focused on lower-cost equipment. To maximize their ability to profit from the COE system, states must choose to invest in stockpiling relatively inexpensive equipment, as opposed to making 'prestige' purchases.

[15] These states may also acquire low-cost basic equipment, but UN COE reimbursements will be negligible within the larger context of their military expenditure.

Second, states may decide not to replace (some) equipment. Stockpiling older assets allows a state to take advantage of the fact that UN reimbursement rates do not vary with equipment age: as long as equipment is functional, the monthly rate is constant. However, to remain functional over long periods of time, equipment requires careful maintenance and stockpile management, which not all developing countries choose to invest in (Howe, 2001: 42; Omitoogun, 2001: 6–7).

Third, states can derive a profit within the COE system if their maintenance costs for deployed equipment are lower than the corresponding UN reimbursement rate. Some states may enjoy particular advantages in terms of robust equipment or low-cost spare parts that allow them to outperform the average maintenance costs identified by the COE working group, but there is little reason to expect the ability to do so to be related to national development levels. Short of such advantages, the surest way to reduce maintenance costs – and extend the lifespan of deployed equipment – is to limit its use. Problematically, usage restrictions do occur in UN peacekeeping operations (Coleman, 2014: 20), but imposing them is a national policy decision largely unrelated to national wealth levels.

In short, the politics of COE reimbursement rate negotiations militate against generalized profit-making. The peacekeeping for profit narrative is most plausible for the subset of states that make national policy decisions to procure and maintain substantial stockpiles of exceptionally cheap or old but functional equipment, and then preserve its lifespan by restricting it use within a peacekeeping operation.

Profit-making and its limits in the troop cost reimbursement system

As with COE reimbursements, the scope for generalized profit-making from UN troop cost reimbursements is limited by political pressure to restrict reimbursement rate increases. Indeed, this dynamic is more intense for troop cost reimbursements. With no standing working group charged with regularly reviewing this rate, negotiations have historically occurred on an ad hoc basis and been very protracted, not least because the UN's major financial contributors have tended to resist rate increases.

The most recent round of rate negotiations exemplifies these dynamics. It began in 2000, when the UN Secretary-General reported that the share of peacekeepers' costs not reimbursed by the UN had increased sharply in the 1990s (UNSG, 2000). The General

Assembly approved modest rate increases in 2001 and 2002, but argued that any further adjustments required better data on states' deployment costs (UNGA, 2001). Subsequently, states repeatedly failed to agree on a cost survey methodology, and a 2009 survey attempt failed (UNGA, 2012: §10). In the absence of survey data, developed states refused to accept any rate increases, to the mounting frustration of many UN troop contributors. As noted above, total monthly troop cost reimbursements stagnated at $1,141 from 2002 through 2011, rising to $1,210 in 2012 and 2013 only because the General Assembly authorized temporary supplemental payments (UNSG, 2014: §§4–5).

In 2011 the Secretary-General established an independent Senior Advisory Group to break the impasse. The group's recommendations included a new survey methodology (UNGA, 2012: §60–73), which was implemented in 2013–14. The survey sample included nine developing states (Bangladesh, Brazil, Egypt, India, Nepal, Nigeria, Pakistan, Rwanda, and Uruguay) and one developed state (Italy), which together furnished almost 58% of UN peacekeepers in 2010–12. Reported deployment costs among the developing states surveyed ranged from $1,126 to $2,412 if UN practice of considering only deployment allowances and personal equipment was followed, and from $1,304 to $2,665 if mission-specific pre-deployment medical, training, and transportation expenses were also included (UNSG, 2014: Table 3).[16] The reported average deployment cost for all states, weighted by each state's share of UN peacekeepers, was $1,536 on the more conservative measure and $1,763 on the more expansive one (UNSG, 2014: §28). Following the publication of these findings, General Assembly members reached agreement on a consolidated monthly reimbursement rate of US$1,332 that would gradually increase to reach $1,410 in July 2017 (UNGA, 2014b: §4).

Three aspects of these negotiations are significant for the current analysis. First, they were protracted and contentious: the final compromise was only reached after the 2014/15 budget deadline had passed, technically leaving UN peacekeeping unfunded for several days. Second, the negotiated rate increase was modest. The 2017 rate is below the weighted average deployment cost reported by the 2014 survey, even on the conservative cost definition. It is below the conservative 2014 cost estimate for three of the nine developing states surveyed, and below the more expansive cost estimate for eight of these states (UNSG, 2014: Table 3). The rate increase also fell short of keeping pace with dollar inflation: the 2002 total reimbursement of $1,141 would represent $1,578 in 2017.[17] Third, during the negotiations major financial contributors explicitly rejected developing states' argument that the UN should reimburse all their deployment costs. Most prominently, the US representative insisted, 'reimbursement to troop-contributing countries was never intended to fully cover the costs of their deployment' (Lieberman, 2014).

This history implies very limited scope for generalized profit-making from UN troop cost reimbursements. Nevertheless, some states can achieve a profit within this system. The key characteristic enabling profit-making, however, is neither low per capita GDP nor the low military salaries that proponents of the peacekeeping for profit argument contend follow from low per capita GDPs. The decisive factor is the size of the deployment allowance (if any) that states choose to pay to personnel they contribute to UN peacekeeping.

Critically, deploying personnel to a UN mission entails costs for the contributing state. The UN pays directly for international transport, but any expenses associated with assembling troops nationally, providing pre-deployment training and medical care, or paying deployment bonuses initially accrue to the contributing state. UN troop cost reimbursements are intended to compensate states for these *additional* costs arising from UN deployment, not to subsidize regular military expenditures such as salaries, which troops receive whether or not they are deployed abroad (UNGA, 2001: §8). This alone does not prevent states from using reimbursements to cover military salaries, or indeed other national spending priorities. However, they are only able to do so if their deployment costs are sufficiently small relative to the reimbursement rate – then they have money left over for these other uses. Fundamentally, therefore, a state's ability to profit from UN troop cost reimbursements depends on deployment costs, not national military salaries.

In turn, the single largest deployment cost for most states are deployment allowances, that is, bonuses troops receive while on UN missions. For the ten states participating in the 2014 UN troop cost survey, allowances constituted 68–95% of total reported deployment costs (UNSG, 2014: Table 3). This preponderance is also reflected in the composition of the UN's personnel cost

[16] The outlier deployment cost ($8,217) appears attributable to Italy.

[17] US Department of Labor CPI Inflation Calulator, www.bls.gov/data/inflation_calculator.htm.

reimbursement package before the consolidated rate was introduced: in 2013, 'pay and allowances' accounted for 85% of the total reimbursement package, $1,028 of $1,210 (UNSG, 2014: §§4–5). Consequently, to maximize their ability to profit from UN troop cost reimbursements, states must minimize the deployment allowances they pay.

As with COE reimbursements, therefore, a state's ability to derive a profit depends on national policy decisions, not development levels. Allowances may be highest in developed states – Italy appears to pay $7,821/month (UNSG, 2014: Table 3) – but many developing states still claim to transfer (at least) the full UN reimbursement amount to their peacekeepers. There is little systematic data to verify these claims (Coleman, 2014: 28), but two key factors militate against excessive skepticism about whether developing states generally pay these allowances (Victor, 2010: 221).

First, eight of the nine developing states in the 2014 UN cost survey reported allowances in excess of the 2013 UN allowance rate (UNSG, 2014: Table 3). Such declarations may be politicized, but the scope for misrepresentation was limited by an intense and interactive data-collection process (UNSG, 2014: §20).

Second, troops from developing countries are widely reported to derive a major financial benefit from deploying in UN peacekeeping operations. For example, Diallo (2016) reports that Senegalese soldiers returning from UN operations 'have a visible living standard higher than their fellows'. Governments, meanwhile, are held to welcome the opportunity to supplement low national military salaries with UN-funded bonuses (Chinchilla & Vargas, 2016: 3). Yet most troops deployed on UN missions receive only minimal funding directly from the UN. Staff officers and military observers receive a potentially lucrative mission subsistence allowance, but as of June 2017 only 3,504 of 83,571 military UN peacekeepers (4.2%) fell in this category.[18] The remaining military personnel receive only small leave allowances from the UN, totalling $11.78 per day in 2012 (UNGA, 2012: §79). For these troops to find UN deployments 'incredibly beneficial to participate in' (Kudesia & Rubinstein, 2009: 437), states must provide national deployment allowances.

Providing popular bonuses to national troops is sometimes subsumed into the peacekeeping for profit narrative (Bobrow & Boyer, 1997: 727), but the underlying dynamics are distinct and the scope conditions mutually exclusive. Military bonuses provide a plausible explanation for national peacekeeping contributions if members of the military have significant sway over national policy decisions (Cunliffe, 2013: 170) and states pay substantial deployment bonuses.[19] In fulfilling the second condition, however, a government reduces or eliminates its own ability to profit from UN peacekeeping by deploying 'really cheap' personnel (Gaibulloev et al., 2015: 7). There is thus a direct trade-off between using UN reimbursements to 'top up' military salaries and realizing a financial profit for the state from UN peacekeeping. Developing states adopt differing national policies in this regard (Sotomayor, 2013: 35), partly reflecting domestic political differences (Siegel & Feast, 2014).

In summary, the potential for states to profit from troop contributions to UN peacekeeping operations is limited by strong pressure to limit reimbursement rate increases. The peacekeeping for profit narrative is most plausible for the subset of developing states that choose to keep deployment allowances (if any) significantly lower than the UN reimbursement rate.

Conclusion

Despite its frequent affirmation by policymakers, journalists, and academics, the peacekeeping for profit narrative provides a poor explanation for the fact that developing states contribute the vast majority of the UN's peacekeeping troops. This article began by highlighting two reasons for doubting that financial benefits derived from UN reimbursement payments provide a general explanation for developing states' UN peacekeeping contributions. First, developing states emerged as the UN's most prolific troop contributors just as UN peacekeeping was becoming *less* financially attractive both overall and for individual top troop contributors. Second, the quantitative evidence adduced as supporting the profit-making narrative is flawed. We then argued that the scope conditions within which the peacekeeping for profit narrative is plausible are in fact highly restrictive. The troop-contributing state's UN deployment and attendant reimbursements must be significant not only in absolute terms but also in relation to its total armed forces and military expenditure. Moreover, the state must be exceptionally well positioned to profit from the UN contingent-owned equipment and/or troop cost reimbursement systems. In both systems, political

[18] Troop data from http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/resources/statistics/factsheet.shtml.

[19] The possibility of illegal enrichment by peacekeepers also exists, but is beyond the scope of this article.

pressure against rate increases militates against generalized profit-making by troop-contributing states. To nevertheless realize a profit, states must be able to deploy personnel and/or equipment at a lower cost than other UN troop contributors. Critically, this ability is not simply a function of a state's per capita GDP: it depends on national policy decisions regarding deployment allowances and equipment procurement and maintenance.

We do not contend that the peacekeeping for profit narrative is never accurate. However, its significance as an explanation for contemporary UN peacekeeping contributions has been vastly overstated. The narrative is most plausible for states with small armed forces and limited military expenditures that (1) acquire and maintain stocks of inexpensive and/or old but functional equipment which they use sparingly in missions, and (2) pay only modest deployment allowances (if any) to the UN peacekeepers they deploy. Many developing states – including many top UN troop contributors – do not meet these conditions. Their decisions to participate in UN peacekeeping are thus likely to be motivated by a range of political, security, and economic considerations other than state profit-making, which the burgeoning literature on peacekeeping contributions has begun to explore but which the peacekeeping for profit narrative tends to obscure.

At a time when the UN remains heavily dependent on developing states to furnish large numbers of peacekeepers for increasingly difficult and dangerous operations, it is important to recognize that the factors shaping individual states' participation decisions are complex and should not be reduced to a simplistic profit-seeking narrative. It may not ultimately be possible to develop a general theory of UN peacekeeping contributions (Bellamy & Williams, 2013: 436), but recent scholarship has made significant advances in exploring a range of factors potentially motivating troop contributing countries. We submit that in considering which groups of states are most likely to respond to particular factors, a simple dichotomy between developed and developing countries is unlikely to be helpful.

We also hope that in countering the peacekeeping for profit narrative, we have helped advance debates focused specifically on economic motivations and incentives for UN peacekeeping contributions. Recognizing that the scope for profiting from UN peacekeeping reimbursements is limited opens space for investigating the separate impacts of financial benefits for individual peacekeepers (see above), side-payments by third parties (Henke, 2016) or commercial opportunities realized through peacekeeping contributions. Moreover, even if they are not amenable to widespread profit-making, UN peacekeeping reimbursements do matter. They enable states that are unable or unwilling to finance their own deployments to participate in UN peacekeeping, and they can be used to incentivize particular kinds of peacekeeping contributions over others (Coleman, 2014). In a bid to enhance peacekeeping effectiveness, the UN is (slowly) moving towards considering a more capability-based reimbursement system (HIPPO, 2015: §211; UNGA, 2013: §80–82), an important reform that nevertheless elicits concern among troop contributing countries. This debate is far more likely to be productive if participants eschew simplistic narratives about profit-making by top UN personnel contributors.

Replication data

The Online appendix, dataset, codebook, and do-files for the statistical analysis in this article can be found at http://www.prio.org/jpr/datasets.

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