




Bastardizing Peacekeeping and the Birth of Hybrid Warfare

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Conflicts of interest/funding: None to declare.

Keywords: global health care; hybrid war; international humanitarian law; peacekeeping

Abbreviations:

EU: European Union
UN: United Nation
US: United States

Received: February 25, 2022

Revised: February 26, 2022

Accepted: March 1, 2022

doi:[10.1017/S1049023X22000425](https://doi.org/10.1017/S1049023X22000425)

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Burkle FM Jr., Goniewicz K, Khorram-Manesh A. Bastardizing peacekeeping and the birth of hybrid warfare. *Prehosp Disaster Med.* 2022;37(2):147–149.

United Nations (UN) Peacekeeping is the largest and most visible representation of the UN. It represents a collective investment in global peace, security, and stability. Peacekeepers protect civilians, actively prevent conflict, reduce violence, strengthen security, and empower national authorities to assume these responsibilities. Peacekeepers are not an enforcement tool but are highly regarded as an effective instrument for preventing resumption of civil war.¹ Over 90,000 personnel from 125 countries contribute troops, police, and civilian personnel. Whereas the United States (US) is the largest financial contributor to UN peacekeeping programs, they rank number 82 out of over 120, with 31 peacekeepers (0.00000009 per capita) assigned to the UN. Russia ranks 64th with 72 deployed peacekeepers (0.00000049 per capita), whereas Ukraine ranks 44th with 307 peacekeepers (0.00000743 per capita).² Peacekeeping training is robust both individually and collectively. In 2007, the UN developed the Integrated Training Service (ITS) as the responsible center for peacekeeping training that focuses on skills of non-violent conflict management to prevent or defuse potentially violent situations during their missions.

Bratersky, in 2018, is the first to write about the emergence of both China and Russia in developing alternate views and policies of peacekeeping and the implementation of them in practice.³ He writes that in the US and many European countries, the “goal of peacekeeping and conflict resolution is to protect individual rights and freedoms and to accomplish a democratic transition by replacing authoritarian regimes with liberal-democratic alternatives.” For both Russia and China, “as well as many other emerging powers,” their goal of conflict resolution and peacekeeping is restricted “to preserve and strengthen the local state structures so they can support law and order on their territory and stabilize the situation in the country and the region,” a philosophy that has allowed many autocratic “rising powers” the right to continue to rule.³ With the gradual emergence of autocratic regimes and erosion of liberal democratic institutions, the world experienced a fall from a peak of 45 democratic countries in 2010 to 37 in 2019,⁴ bringing with it increasing influence and the opportunity for re-interpretation of many crucial prior agreements that guided peacekeepers in the past.⁵

No operational conditions changed for peacekeepers until a Russian-led alliance with deployed peacekeepers were sent by the UN to Kazakhstan in January 2022. The main tasks of the Russian-led peacekeeping activities and views proved to be divergent on security, human rights, and approach to international affairs as compared to Western counterparts. Bratersky’s study emphasizes Russian peacekeepers historically do not act as neutral arbiters.⁵ Rather, they support one side, something that those who have observed these missions in practice discuss in private. From a Russian state perspective, supporting one side creates stability—it allows ownership of two-thirds of the struggle. One-sided support has been the practice in previous Russian peacekeeping efforts, for example in Moldova, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Nagorno-Karabakh; adding that “Although the Russians have labeled their involvement as a PKO [peace keeping operation], the Russian military has been anything but impartial;” and “What matters is that Moscow’s approach simply freezes the conflict and maintains control and does not shy about acting unilaterally”⁵ (it is most interesting that the author ends her theses by stating: “There is no reason to be surprised if Moscow deploys another ‘peacekeeping’ force to make a point. It is only a matter of time”).⁵

Fast forward to the current conflict in Ukraine. When President Putin announced on February 21, 2022 that he had signed decrees ordering military forces into two separatist regions of Ukraine for “peacekeeping” purposes and recognizing the regions’ independence, no student of the re-interpretation of “peacekeeping” by Russia was surprised other than the

fact that President Putin was now launching both the conflict and deciding the legal outcome as only a dictator can do. This of course led to immediate response from the UN's Secretary General who stated: "Let me be clear: the decision of the Russian Federation to recognize the so-called 'independence' of certain areas of Donetsk and Luhansk regions is a violation of the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine. Such a unilateral measure conflicts directly with the principles of the Charter of the United Nations – and is inconsistent with the so-called Friendly Relations Declaration of the General Assembly, which the International Court of Justice has repeatedly cited as representing international law." Also, by quoting the negative impact on the Minsk Agreements endorsed by the Security Council and selective interpretations of the principles of the UN Charter, he firmly stated that President Putin's selective interpretation of the role of peacekeepers was a "perversion of the concept of peacekeeping." He added that the UN stands fully behind the sovereignty, political independence, and territorial integrity of Ukraine, within its internationally recognized borders: "When troops of one country enter the territory of another country without its consent, they are not impartial peacekeepers . . . They are not peacekeepers at all."⁶

Russia is taking new ground in Ukraine, which began when Putin first took over Crimea in 2014. Russia initiated a "hybrid war" that has slowly created a new cold war, affecting the life of millions of civilians and military, not only in the border of two countries but globally.^{7,8} This new warfare has already caused a large number of deaths and injuries and is taking more lives day by day,⁸ Russia uses all components of a hybrid war, including "political, diplomatic, economic, and financial warfare, legal (lawfare), as well as socio-cultural efforts, with infrastructure, intelligence, and criminal groups widely used."⁹

In contrast to traditional wars, modern armed conflicts involve networks of state and non-state participants with various means of military and militia influences and strategies. Such a combination creates difficulties in predicting the means and strategies associated with an armed conflict.^{10–13} In addition, warfare in the 21st century constitutes multi-domain operations, asymmetry, and a hybrid approach.^{13–19} The target of warfighting in hybrid warfare is not limited to the military staff and includes even civilians by creating political instability, conventional assaulting methods, riots, disinformation, and influencing both social media and electoral outcomes.^{13,15} Consequently, it may result in a larger number of civilian casualties not included in earlier estimation tools for traditional wars. The inability to estimate the casualty rate^{20,21} influences the calculation of needed resources, which creates a troublesome situation for the affected state and international help

organizations. Particularly, the national health care contingencies organizations are dependent on predictions of medical support and resources needed to treat casualties.^{7,10,11,22} Currently, casualty calculation relies mainly on registered and recorded data from earlier conflicts. While such data exist for traditional wars,²³ it is missing in modern conflicts that reflect conflicting information regarding deaths and injuries from unreliable sources and the conflicting estimation methods often used in modern conflicts.^{24,25}

The core denominator in both Chinese and Russian global intrusions is the use of disinformation. In Russia's case, "peacekeepers" are being sent into the occupied areas to protect people according to international humanitarian law. However, the law clearly states that while peacekeepers can be military, they can definitely not be a member of either side in the conflict.²⁶ Traditional UN Peacekeepers "provide security and the political and peacebuilding support to help countries make the difficult early transition from conflict to peace."²⁷ The US Ambassador to the UN Linda Thomas-Greenfield asserted, "We know what they really are," adding that such a deployment is "nonsense," with the UN political affairs chief Rosemary DiCarlo adding she regretted Russia's order to deploy troops into eastern Ukraine as a reported "peacekeeping mission."²⁸

The public health consequences of a multinational war in this region will be costly, with both increasing mortality and morbidity.^{7,8} Whatever the reason, there is no justification in one country invading and taking over another country. Such an act should be strongly condemned by all international institutions. The European Union (EU) and UN, as well as other global institutions, must react decisively to show that the free world does not accept such assault and victimization. Having said that, this is not only Russia and China that should be blamed for what is going on globally, but also the rise of autocracy in the free world. Unfortunately, the former President Trump is no exception, having nourished a new world order that not only influences our social and political life but also the equity and right of all people to receive health care.^{29,30} The Trump administration's cancellation of global health aid packages, along with its internal actions against the Americans' welfare and health care and the disrespectful attitude towards the medical profession, public health leaders, and strategies have adversely affected the global health care scene, resulting in the appearance of several other tyrannical governments who play with people's lives.³¹ Defiling and bastardizing the established definition and work of peacekeeping to misrepresent their true objectives as an attempt to curry favor from an unassuming world of increasing autocracy is beyond comprehension.

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