



THE IMPROVEMENT POTENTIAL OF UN PEACEKEEPING, AND THE OFTEN-UNDervalUED IMPORTANCE OF PEACE FOR GLOBAL HEALTH: ONLINE INFORMATIVE AND EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES^{i,ii}

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Abstract:

The article presents documents on UN peacekeeping, with its success stories, such as the prevention of an armed conflict between countries before a possible aggression. But nowadays, the nature of conflicts has changed, with under-staffed and under-equipped UN peace contingents deployed to counter dangerous terrorists indistinguishable from civilians in areas where a peace agreement has not yet been reached. Sometimes, the Security Council is paralysed by vetoes, or its mandates are unclear. Under-financed UN peace missions face well-financed armed groups linked to organised crime that exploit natural resources such as oil or diamonds. UN peacekeeping has an important and impartial role in peace; some documents provide suggestions aimed at its improvement. Peace is also important for global health. Several papers presented in this article deal with the adverse effects of war on public health, consequent, e.g. to the discontinuation of control measures in belligerent countries. Or, when displaced populations are forced to hide in natural habitats, e.g. the equatorial forest, the increased contact with wild animals implies a higher risk that pathogens may jump from animals to humans. Poor hygiene practices in displacement camps amplify the risk of infections. In war-torn countries, the collapse of sanitary systems, surgery delivered in poor hygiene conditions, and the use of smuggled fake antibiotics may contribute to the development of antimicrobial resistance. Epidemics and antibiotic-resistant organisms can then spread to other countries, e.g. through large-scale population movements and air travel. For global health, it is necessary that people arriving from war-torn countries immediately undergo

ⁱ IL POTENZIALE DI MIGLIORAMENTO DELLE FORZE DI PACE DELL'ONU E L'IMPORTANZA, SPESSO SOTTOVALUTATA, DELLA PACE PER LA SALUTE GLOBALE: RISORSE INFORMATIVE ED EDUCATIVE ONLINE

ⁱⁱ ПОТЕНЦИАЛ СОВЕРШЕНСТВОВАНИЯ ООН МИРОТВОРЧЕСТВА, И ЧАСТО НЕДООЦЕНИВАЕМОЕ ВАЖНОСТЬ МИРА ДЛЯ ГЛОБАЛЬНОГО ЗДРАВООХРАНЕНИЯ: ИНФОРМАЦИОННЫЕ И ОБРАЗОВАТЕЛЬНЫЕ РЕСУРСЫ ОНЛАЙН

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health checks and receive the necessary medical care. However, the cessation of hostilities is of the utmost importance.

Keywords: online educational resources, preventive UN force deployment, impartial peacekeeping, global health

Riassunto:

L'articolo presenta documenti sull'attività delle forze di pace dell'ONU ed i loro successi, tra cui la prevenzione di un conflitto armato tra nazioni prima di una possibile aggressione. Ma adesso il tipo di conflitti è cambiato; forze di pace insufficienti per numero ed equipaggiamento sono impiegate per contrastare pericolosi terroristi, indistinguibili dai civili ed in aree dove non è stato ancora raggiunto un accordo di pace. Il consiglio di sicurezza talvolta è bloccato da veti, o fornisce mandati non chiari. Talune missioni di pace sottofinanziate fronteggiano, ad esempio, gruppi armati legati alla criminalità organizzata che sfruttano risorse naturali come petrolio e diamanti. *Le forze di pace dell'ONU, hanno un ruolo importante e imparziale, alcuni documenti forniscono suggerimenti volti a migliorarne il funzionamento.* La pace è anche importante per la salute globale. Vari documenti presentati in questo articolo trattano degli effetti negativi della guerra sulla salute pubblica. Questi sono dovuti, ad esempio, all'interruzione delle attività sanitarie nei paesi belligeranti. Oppure, quando le persone sono costrette a rifugiarsi in habitat naturali, ad es. la foresta equatoriale, la vicinanza agli animali selvatici innalza il rischio che agenti patogeni possano passare da questi all'uomo. La scarsa igiene nei campi che accolgono gli sfollati amplifica il rischio di infezioni. In paesi devastati dalla guerra, il collasso dei sistemi sanitari, interventi chirurgici effettuati in condizioni igieniche precarie ed uso di antibiotici falsi di contrabbando possono contribuire allo sviluppo di infezioni e di resistenza agli antimicrobici. Epidemie ed organismi resistenti agli antibiotici possono poi diffondersi ad altri paesi, ad esempio attraverso movimenti di popolazione su larga scala e viaggi aerei. Per la salute globale è necessario che, chi arriva da paesi devastati dalla guerra, sia immediatamente sottoposto a controlli sanitari e riceva le cure mediche necessarie. Ma la cessazione delle ostilità rimane una priorità.

Parole chiave: risorse educative online, dispiegamento preventivo delle forze ONU, mantenimento della pace imparziale, salute globale

Аннотация:

В статье представлены документы о миротворческой деятельности ООН с ее историями успеха, такими как предотвращение вооруженного конфликта между странами до возможной агрессии. Однако сегодня характер конфликтов изменился, и миротворческие контингенты ООН, не имеющие достаточного количества персонала и оснащения, направляются для борьбы с опасными террористами, неотличимыми от мирных жителей, в районы, где еще не достигнуто мирное соглашение. Иногда Совет Безопасности парализован вето или

его мандаты неясны. Недостаточно финансируемые миротворческие миссии ООН сталкиваются с хорошо финансируемыми вооруженными группами, связанными с организованной преступностью, которые эксплуатируют природные ресурсы, такие как нефть или алмазы. Миротворчество ООН играет важную и беспристрастную роль в установлении мира; в некоторых документах содержатся предложения, направленные на его улучшение. Мир также важен для глобального здравоохранения. Несколько документов, представленных в этой статье, посвящены негативным последствиям войны для здоровья населения, вызванным, например, прекращением мер контроля в воюющих странах. Или, когда перемещенное население вынуждено скрываться в естественной среде обитания, например, в экваториальном лесу, повышенный контакт с дикими животными подразумевает более высокий риск того, что патогенные микроорганизмы могут перейти от животных к людям. Плохая гигиеническая практика в лагерях для перемещенных лиц повышает риск заражения. В странах, охваченных войной, разрушение санитарных систем, хирургические операции, проводимые в плохих санитарных условиях, и использование контрабандных поддельных антибиотиков могут способствовать развитию устойчивости к противомикробным препаратам. Эпидемии и устойчивые к антибиотикам организмы могут затем распространяться в другие страны, например, в результате масштабных перемещений населения и авиаперелетов. Для глобального здравоохранения необходимо, чтобы люди, прибывающие из охваченных войной стран, немедленно проходили медицинский осмотр и получали необходимую медицинскую помощь. Однако прекращение военных действий имеет первостепенное значение.

Ключевые слова: образовательные онлайн-ресурсы, превентивное развертывание сил ООН, беспристрастное поддержание мира, глобальное здравоохранение

1. Aims of the teaching unit

The article is aimed at increasing knowledge and interest in the important role and the potential for improvement of UN peacekeeping for a more peaceful world. In turn, peace also may help mitigate some global health threats, such as infectious diseases and antimicrobial resistance.

2. Materials and methods

The educational and informative resources presented in this article are downloadable for free. They consist of text, graphs, images and videos. The teacher can use them with the method felt as the most appropriate. The subject is very complex, and this article is to be considered an introduction to a more complete study.

3. Introduction

The United Nations was founded to "...save succeeding generations from the scourge of war..." ([74](#) video).

According to "UN Peacekeeping: How do they decide to start a new mission?", the missions are deployed after the UN Security Council has authorised their deployment ([16](#) video). A mandate may range from simply monitoring a situation to peace enforcement and to cooperation with other multilateral institutions. Peacekeepers can be military personnel, police or civilians seconded from all the countries of the world.

"Deploying Peacekeepers" describes some of the steps to be taken in the deployment of peacekeepers ([51](#)). An assessment mission is charged to study the situation on the ground, then the Security Council decides whether to authorise a UN peacekeeping operation. Over time and on the basis of regular reports, the Security Council decides if and how to continue the mission.

The peacekeepers are deployed with the consent of the conflicting parties ([17](#)).

According to "What we do", the peacekeepers protect civilians, actively prevent conflict, strengthen security and help the national authorities create the conditions for a lasting peace. The UN peacekeeping is intended to support and not to substitute the national efforts ([5](#)).

A mandate may include disarmament and reintegration of fighters into society, monitoring elections, and establishment of judicial systems. Legal advisors and economists are also often deployed ([17](#)).

According to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Javier Pérez de Cuéllar, "...The essence of peacekeeping is the use of soldiers as a catalyst for peace rather than as the instruments of war...." ([65](#)).

Peacekeeping operations are guided by principles of complete impartiality and non-use of force except in self-defence and defence of the mandate. The UN does not have its own standing army; the member countries share the economic cost of a peacekeeping mission and provide the personnel ([17](#)).

"Where we operate - There are currently 11 peacekeeping operations led by the Department of Peace Operations" ([21](#)) and "Past peace operations" ([23](#)) contain maps of, respectively, ongoing and past peace missions.

According to "Our History", UN Peacekeeping was originally designed for peace missions in inter-state conflict; over time, the nature of conflicts has changed and often implies dealing with conflict within a state ([22](#)). The document provides information on the variety of tasks that UN peacekeepers now undertake, and the diverse professionalities required in addition to the military that, however, remains the backbone of most missions. In the future, certain specialised capabilities such as police, are expected to be more and more requested ([22](#)> police).

4. Success stories of UN peacekeeping, and difficulties encountered from the mid-1990s

At the beginning, UN military observers were requested to monitor the respect of a ceasefire agreement along a demilitarised zone between two countries, which occurred for instance, from 1949 along the India-Pakistan border (8 / 9).

But, after the fall of colonial empires, many new nations could not transition easily to independence, with consequent civil wars and humanitarian disasters. After the establishment of a cease-fire, the UN peacekeepers were requested to perform multidimensional operations. *Their mandates included demobilisation of former combatants and their reintegration into civilian life, helping displaced people to return home, and providing electoral assistance in countries with little-to-no democratic experience (8).*

“Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration” contains text, images and video. A video shows peacekeepers that, from a helicopter, drop leaflets to invite the combatants to lay down weapons and start a civil life. When members of armed groups decide to lay down weapons, they are helped to reintegrate into civil society (24). Other videos contained in this document show former combatants working in paid activities, and/or learning new professions.

“Our Successes” describes a success story of the UN Peacekeeping in Côte d'Ivoire (20). In this country, divided in half by a civil war, the Security Council authorised a peace mission. As a result, 70,000 combatants were disarmed and re-integrated into society, while free elections and a referendum were held, and most of the refugees returned to the country. Human rights violations were strongly reduced, and the economy started to grow.

After the end of the Cold War, the number of peacekeeping operations increased rapidly, but, in some cases, the Security Council was no longer able to authorise robust mandates, and the resources provided or the political support was not enough (22). Peacekeepers were deployed in geographic areas such as Somalia, Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia, where the belligerent parties failed to reach peace agreements. *According to this UN document, particularly in these peace missions, amid continuing hostilities and increasing casualties among civilians, the reputation of UN peacekeeping suffered.*

The most recent evolution of UN peacekeeping missions implies their deployment in the face of violent extremism. The document discusses the difficulty of facing dangerous terrorists, indistinguishable from civilians, where a peace agreement does not exist (8).

In countries where governments are corrupt and repressive, the army and police are primarily meant to protect the government and not the citizens. Here, enhancing the capability of such forces would only result in keeping such governments in power (8). “Redefining a UN peace doctrine to avoid regime protection operations” provides an additional reading on the subject (12).

According to “The changing face of peacekeeping: What’s gone wrong with the UN?”, *the peacekeeping mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo may have contributed to a*

lower level of violence and civilian casualties. But, here more than 100 armed groups are active, a peace process is lacking, and the structural problems that have allowed conflict to continue for nearly 3 decades are not being tackled (6).

In some African missions there is a trust deficit in the action of UN peacekeepers, sometimes encouraged by a political class that needs a scapegoat. The document attempts to analyse the reasons why the peacekeeping force fails to meet the expectations of host country authorities and citizens (6). The conflicts are changing, with adversaries more skilled, unclear political goals, opportunistic behaviours, tendency to fragmentation, and peace agreements more and more difficult.

According to “The Future of UN Peace Operations in a Changing Conflict Environment”, the number of fighters is dramatically increasing worldwide, which constitutes a major obstacle to the peace process (19). This is particularly true where the state authority has been weakened by poor governance and political exclusion.

5. The responsibility to protect

In 2006, the UN established the principle of the responsibility to protect. *According to this principle, a government is primarily obliged to protect the citizens, and if it fails to do so, then the international community may take collective action to do so* (8).

6. The vetoes and overcoming the difficulties of the Security Council in taking decisions

UN peacekeeping operations must be authorised by the Security Council; but, if one or more permanent members use the veto, no decisions can be taken (17).

“Security Council reform a must, to end paralysis” is the title of a 2023 UN document. According to the president of the UN General Assembly, “...*Violence and war continue to spread in regions across the world, while the United Nations seem paralyzed due largely to the divisions in the Security Council...*” (44).

“Security Council Data - Vetoes Since 1946” shows that the UK and France, differently from other permanent members, since 1990 are no longer vetoing any decision of the UN Security Council (41).

According to a UN document (42), most member states criticise the veto power, especially when a country is directly involved in a conflict and could be unable to exercise impartially the veto power. France has proposed that, *in cases of mass atrocities, the permanent Council members voluntarily and collectively suspend the use of the veto* (42 / 43). A map shows the countries that support the formerly mentioned proposal (43> Carte des soutiens à l’initiative franco-mexicaine d’encadrement du veto en cas d’atrocités de masse).

6.1 The Suez crisis: how the UN was able to make decisions despite Security Council vetoes

During the 1956 Suez Crisis (27) the UN Security Council, due to vetoes, was unable to make a decision on the issue (28). The then UN Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld solved this problem through the procedure established in Assembly Resolution 377 (V) “Uniting for Peace”, which *enabled the first emergency special session of the General Assembly to make the necessary decisions*. The UN General Assembly called for the ceasefire, the withdrawal of all foreign forces, and the deployment of the first UN Emergency Force to secure and supervise the cessation of hostilities.

By March 1957, all the foreign forces had withdrawn from the abovementioned area (27). In fact, according to a UN document, an emergency special session can be convened within 24 hours: “...if the Security Council, because of lack of unanimity of the permanent members, fails to exercise its primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security in any case where there appears to be a threat to the peace, breach of the peace, or act of aggression, the General Assembly shall consider the matter immediately....” (18).

7. The success of a UN peace operation established before a possible conflict

According to “An Agenda for Peace - Preventive Diplomacy, Peacemaking and Peacekeeping”, *UN peacekeeping operations have generally been set up after a conflict has occurred, but now is the time to plan for preventive deployment* (29 from page 16).

For instance, during a national crisis, there could be a preventive deployment, if requested by the government. Or, in disputes between states, if both countries feel that a UN presence on either side would deter an armed conflict, then a preventive deployment may take place (29).

Or, if one of the countries feels threatened, preventive deployment of UN force only along its side of the border can take place (29).

In this regard, a document deals with a UN peace mission involving the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, aimed at preventing disputes with bordering countries from turning into serious conflicts. In this peace mission, besides the preventive UN troop deployment, other means have been used, such as mediation and negotiation (30).

This mission was the first preventive UN force deployment aimed at conflict prevention; while considered an undeniable success and a model for the future, however, it remains the only example of UN force preventive deployment (31).

8. The financial difficulties of UN peacekeeping missions

Security Council fails to extend the mandate of United Nations Preventive Deployment Force in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” is the title of a press release of the UN (32). Despite the success of the aforementioned mission, the Security Council did not authorise its extension for another six months due to a veto. According to the delegate of

the vetoing country, *considered the financial difficulties of the UN*, the resources were better used in Africa and other regions suffering conflict and instability (31 / 32).

According to a recent UN document, the annual budget for UN Peacekeeping is \$6.1 billion (34), with a world population estimated at 8.2 billion (75). *Again, for comparison purposes*, according to a SIPRI document, the 2023 global military expenditure reached \$2,443 billion (33).

9. Delayed deployment of UN forces

A standing UN force does not exist. Each peacekeeping operation needs to be created ad hoc. In this regard, a former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan once described UN peacekeeping as “...the only fire brigade in the world that has to wait for the fire to break out before it can acquire a fire engine...” (17).

The speed with which a UN peacekeeping operation is deployed is a decisive success factor, but this is poorly understood. “Only as fast as its troop contributors: Incentives, capabilities, and constraints in the UN’s peacekeeping response” studies the causes of the delayed deployment of UN peacekeeping (50).

The countries that decide to contribute troops should assemble, prepare and equip their own peace contingents. The transportation of troops to the theatre of operations is organised by the country itself or by the UN. The motivations of a state to participate in UN peacekeeping, financial considerations, weak capabilities, and parliamentary hurdles are among the factors that may influence the speed of deployment (50).

9.1 The Rwandan genocide: delayed deployment of UN peace troops and lack of resources

There has been a long history of armed conflicts between the Tutsi and Hutu ethnic groups. UN involvement in Rwanda started in 1993 (55), after the Arusha peace agreements (56).

In April 1994, Hutu elements started perpetrating acts of genocide against the Tutsi (55). Many people fled abroad to escape the killings. *While emergency assistance on an unprecedented scale was provided by the UN and other agencies, even UN personnel were increasingly under attack.*

Some countries unilaterally withdrew their troops and, in April 1994, by decision of the Security Council the number of troops of the peace mission in Rwanda was reduced from 2,548 to 270. In May 1994, the Security Council decided to increase the strength to 5,500 troops; *but they arrived six months later and, in this timeframe, at least an estimated half a million people were killed* (55).

According to another UN document, in Rwanda, the life losses have been estimated at more than 1 million, with between 150,000 and 250,000 women raped (56). In Rwanda, out of 7.9 million population, 4 million have been unwillingly displaced (55). *Similar to what happened before other genocides, mass media spread hate speech, which may have increased racial hostility* (53 / 56).

The reports that the UN force commander in Rwanda wrote to the UN headquarters in New York, may help to understand how the peace mission was ill-equipped and unprepared to respond to the violent and politically unstable situation (57). According to these reports, logistic and financial support were lacking. Flak jackets were lacking for most personnel; communication equipment, helicopters, armored personal carriers and other vehicles, and medical supplies also were lacking. While clearing mines was an important part of the mandate, the basic equipment to clear the mines was lacking.

In 1999, considering the enormity of the Rwandan genocide, the UN Secretary-General commissioned an independent inquiry (55). The inquiry concluded that *the evident failure in the prevention of genocide was consequent to lack of resources and political will, and mistakes of judgement on the events.*

9.2 The mass-atrocities of Srebrenica associated with a limited number of UN troops

"The Fall of Srebrenica and the Failure of UN Peacekeeping - Bosnia and Herzegovina" is based on interviews with UN officials and testimony of the massacre survivors (54). According to UN estimates, as many as 34,000 troops were necessary to ensure the protection of the so-called "safe areas", that included Srebrenica. *Conversely, according to the UN officials in the field, only 3,500 were eventually deployed, which made it nearly impossible to repel attacks.*

In addition, the Security Council left unclear whether UN troops were allowed to use force only for their own self-defence, or whether force can also be used to protect the population. Subsequently, it was clarified that the mandate included "deter attacks against safe areas", but, according to a report of the UN Secretary-General, *due to a lack of troops, the defence of the "safe areas" was not guaranteed* (54).

Srebrenica remained under siege for longer than 3 years, with a population that, besides being exposed to violence, also suffered a shortage of food, water, electricity and medical supply. The UN soldiers, deprived of important spare parts of their weapons and completely out of fuel, patrolled regularly on foot; some of them were taken hostage (54).

According to a UN document, in Srebrenica, 150 UN lightly armed troops were facing 2,000 Serbs backed by armour and artillery (73 page 102).

10. Documents that formulate proposals aimed at a better functioning of peacekeeping missions

The Panel on UN Peace Operations, upon request of the Secretary-General, assessed the shortcomings of the existing system and provided several recommendations to improve its functioning (58). This document is called the Brahimi Report.

After the start of a ceasefire, or a peace agreement, the first 6-12 weeks often prove to be the most important in the establishment of a lasting and credible peace. For this reason, peacekeeping operations should be deployed within 30 days of the Security Council

resolution, and with personnel well equipped. In addition, well-qualified and experienced military officers, should be available for duty within 7 days, so they can plan the strategies before the arrival of troop contingents (58).

The UN Secretariat should be prepared for unforeseen demands, and not apply best-case planning assumptions where historically, local actors exhibit worst-case behaviours. Differently from the past, the mandates should be clear, while *forces, equipment, field intelligence and other capabilities should constitute a credible deterrent in the face of violent challengers* (58).

Nowadays, peace missions face well-equipped and well-financed challengers linked to organised crime that exploit resources such as oil, diamonds and other precious minerals for illicit activities (64). Consequently, peace missions work better if there are no financial problems, and with more flexibility allowed in the management of the budget (58).

According to the Brahimi Report (58), to ensure that the money spent on peacekeeping is efficiently used, more financial resources are urgently needed to enhance the capacity of Headquarters in planning and supporting peace missions.

“Regional Peacekeeping is not the Way” is a 1998 document written by Dorn W., a member of the Faculty of the Pearson Peacekeeping Centre. (63). The document discusses the utilisation of regional organisations in peacekeeping operations as an alternative to UN peacekeeping. When regional organisations come from countries close to the conflict area, they can be deployed faster and may exhibit a better understanding of the situation than the forces from an international community such as the UN. But, there are many undesirable consequences. In fact, *states close to the conflict area may have links to the conflicting parties, which makes difficult the conduction of an impartial peacekeeping force simply aimed at conflict prevention, mitigation and resolution.*

Although the UN peacekeeping missions have been sometimes questionable, *a global organisation raises less suspicion than a regional one.* The Charter gives the UN a primary mandate for the maintenance of global peace and security, and peacekeeping has also been developed through the efforts of several Nobel laureates. This implies a moral authority that regional organisations may not have. Again, according to the author, *future leaders should work for a stronger and more efficient UN peacekeeping* (63).

According to “We need UN peacekeeping, so how can we make it better?”, women, despite their skills in many fields, are surprisingly still underrepresented in UN peace missions (64).

UN peacekeepers, while protecting populations, are exposed to fake news and disinformation campaigns aimed at turning local people against them. To counter this hostility, the capability of spotting these disinformation campaigns on social media is needed (64). Social media and traditional mass media could help UN peacekeepers explain what they do and build trust with local populations.

The author, while not excluding hybrid peace operations involving regional organisations, points out that *the cost of deployment is much higher for NATO forces than for UN peacekeepers.* In addition, these latter are more easily accepted by the local population

that does not see them as occupation forces, and their participation in conflict is less controversial for public opinion in the country that provides the troops (64). According to the author, about 60% of peacekeeping operations are successful in avoiding relapse into violence within a decade after the departure of UN forces.

A document (7) provides suggestions aimed at improving the functioning of the UN Peacekeeping. “Future of peacekeeping”, and “Reforming peacekeeping” provide more information (11 / 10).

“Special measures for protection from sexual exploitation and abuse” is a 2024 Report of the Secretary-General of the UN. Sexual exploitation and abuse involving UN personnel undermine the image and credibility of a peacekeeping operation; they damage its impartiality in the eyes of the local population, and may impede implementation and effectiveness of a mandate. Despite the very many difficulties that are encountered, the Organization is committed to ending impunity at all levels. For instance, in 2024, Member States that contribute troops to peace operations are asked to certify that their national legislation ensures the imposition of sanctions commensurate with the gravity of the acts (76).

11. Causes of violent extremism and mitigation strategies

According to Jett D., professor of international affairs, lack of trust in the government and lack of hope for the future motivated the choice of young Africans that voluntarily joined violent extremist groups. *The international community could encourage repressive and corrupt governments to govern better, which would be much more effective than military action in response to violent extremism.* This kind of approach is promising, provided the international community has the will to do so (8).

A study of the UN Development Programme can help to understand what factors may increase the resilience to recruitment (15). These factors include confidence in police and in government, quality of family life, childhood happiness, education and religious tolerance.

According to “Preventing Violent Extremism Through Promoting Inclusive Development, Tolerance and Respect for Diversity”, violent extremism results from historical, economic, political and social situations, with regional and global power politics also playing a role. The banalisation of violence through media, movies, books, magazines and video games also contributes to violent behaviours (13). An increased level of tolerance and inclusion in the community may result in better management of diversity. Promoting social cohesion, gender equality, and a culture of global citizenship may mitigate the push towards violent extremism.

Anger and frustration, more than poverty, can push to violent extremism (13). Unemployment, poverty, lack of opportunities for upward mobility, inequalities, human rights violations, mistreatment of certain groups, and protracted impunity for corrupt behaviour are often cited as drivers of violent extremism.

Harsh treatment in detention facilities also may contribute to radicalisation, which reinforces the importance of the respect of human rights in the prisons ([66](#)> Tertiary> Counter-Terrorism> Module 2: Conditions Conducive to Spread of Terrorism> Drivers of Violent Extremism).

A state unable to provide basic rights, services and security, leaves room for violent groups that fill these gaps ([13](#)).

According to “Peace and Corruption”, there is a significative association between falling levels of peace and corruption within police, judiciary and government ([14](#)). At page 5 the pillars of a *positive peace* are summarised, with this latter concept encompassing several qualities beyond the mere absence of direct violence.

Globally, corruption has increased during the last 15 years, while the average level of peacefulness has been decreasing, as shown in figures 3 and 4 ([14](#)).

The document is based on data from: Transparency International, Freedom House, and Ibrahim Index. They provide information on, respectively, corruption, political liberty and quality of governance of governments ([8](#)).

11.1 Hate speech and malnutrition are associated with aggressivity

Often, hate speech has been identified as a precursor to atrocity crimes, including genocide. According to Alice Nderitu, UN Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, *hate speech combined with disinformation can lead to stigmatisation and discrimination*. Sometimes the mass media have been used to influence people and this has lead to large-scale violence, for instance in Europe and Africa, as we learn from history ([53](#) text and video / [56](#)). Hate speech can be countered, starting at school.

According to “Infant malnutrition predicts conduct problems in adolescents”, malnutrition is associated with aggressive behaviours later in life. *Since malnutrition is estimated to affect 200 million children, this problem is of particular concern* ([25](#)).

According to a document of Save the Children, in war-torn countries with many people forcibly displaced, it can be difficult for families to provide food for their children. Worldwide, as many as 10 of the 13 worst food crises are driven by conflict ([26](#)).

12. Rules that must be respected during a war

“Arms transfers to parties to armed conflict: what the law says” provides answers to common questions ([52](#)). Despite an extensively regulated international arms trade, all the armed conflicts are fuelled by a continuous supply of weapons, ammunition and spare parts. This happens overtly or covertly, thus contributing to violations of international humanitarian law.

Some documents deal with the international humanitarian law that protects hospitals and wounded or sick civilians. The violation of these rules are generally referred to as a war crime ([4](#)). This paper has links to documents of the [International Committee of the Red Cross](#).

“What is International Humanitarian Law?” (35) and a video “What are the rules of war?” also provide information (36).

The Resolution 2573 adopted by the Security Council on 27 April 2021, strongly condemns attacks against civilians, and attacks aimed at depriving them of objects indispensable for their survival. The Resolution “....*strongly condemns the use of starvation of civilians as a method of warfare.....*”; this latter can be considered a war crime (69).

The article 56 of “Convention (IV) relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War. Geneva 12 August 1949” deals with duties of an occupying power in the occupied territory, to ensure and maintain public health and hygiene. This refers in particular to the *prophylactic and preventive measures necessary to fight the spread of contagious diseases and epidemics* (37).

13. Links between armed conflict and threats to global health security

According to “1918 Influenza Pandemic (Spanish Flu)” this disease is so called because Spain was the only country that talked publicly of this pandemic. Differently from Spain, all other countries were involved in the war and information on the disease was censored (71). According to researchers, the disease may have started in a US military camp, with people living in crowded conditions and limited medical services, which promoted the spread of the disease.

According to “The Influenza Pandemic and The War”, in 1918 soldiers concentrated in barracks for weeks, with some of them likely infected, were then dispersed into other countries to combat, thus acting as disseminators of the pandemic (72).

“Intersecting realities: Exploring the nexus between armed conflicts in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo and Global Health” shows the timeline of conflict and health events in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (2 figure 2). In this region, persistently insecure due to the presence of armed groups, conflicts have coincided with outbreaks of dysentery, [cholera](#), malaria, Ebola, [measles](#), [monkeypox](#).

When civilian populations are forcibly displaced and enter natural habitats, they are exposed to increased contact with wild animals, which facilitates the transmission of pathogens. With precarious living conditions, limited access to clean water and poor hygiene practices the risk of pathogens jumping from animals to humans is higher (2 / 60> How does mpox spread?).

Human rights abuses, such as sexual violence imply an increased risk of sexually transmitted infections. In addition, the movements of displaced populations and of armed groups across the porous borders of this country, amplify the risk of infectious disease transmission abroad (2).

A graph shows the peaks of sleeping disease in Uganda, coincident with times of violent armed conflicts. The text provides information on the causes (49 figure 2). “Conflict and Emerging Infectious Diseases” studies the factors that may potentiate emergence and transmission of infectious diseases (3). In Afghanistan, with malaria

virtually eliminated in the late 1970s, *the collapse of control programmes consequent to a long civil war caused the reemergence of this disease.*

In Tajikistan, up to 1992, 200-300 malaria cases were reported annually. After a civil strife many people fled to Afghanistan and, on their return, reintroduced malaria parasites, *which brought the number of annual cases to 29,794 in 1997* (3).

In Kosovo, when the population returned to villages previously abandoned due to bombing, they found destroyed buildings and unhealthy environmental conditions, including the proliferation of rats, which resulted in a tularemia outbreak (3).

In several parts of Africa, the poor infection control practices in healthcare facilities amplified the transmission of Ebola virus disease. The collapse of sanitary systems consequent to the war, with substandard infection control, untrained staff and personal protective equipment, in some cases led to nosocomial disease transmission (3).

In Angola, an outbreak of Marburg hemorrhagic fever occurred between 2004 and 2005. Here, 30 years of civil war left, inter alia, destroyed infrastructure, medical services with untrained staff and lack of medical supplies. In healthcare centres, *reuse of needles and use of multidose vials were considered the main amplifiers of the epidemic* (3).

Again, the reuse of needles and utilisation of multidose vials are thought to have amplified an outbreak of Lassa Fever in Sierra Leone (3).

In 1990s, a significant recrudescence of sleeping sickness was observed in some parts of Africa, mostly in conflict affected countries. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, for instance, thanks to control measures the number of new cases fell from 33,000 in 1930 to $\approx 1,000$ in 1958. *Then, due to armed conflict, the control measures were interrupted and the new cases rose to 26,000 in 1998* (3).

“Lethal combination of hunger and disease to lead to more deaths in Gaza” is a document of the World Health Organisation. The hunger that weakens the body’s defences, the collapse of health system and lack of hygiene favour the spread of infectious diseases, e.g. diarrhoea and upper respiratory infections. All this creates a lethal situation (38).

“Mali - The crisis explained” is a video of Médecins Sans Frontières that discusses the sanitary disaster involving the population in this war-torn country, with malnourished and not vaccinated children (1).

13.1 Mpox: a public health emergency of international concern linked to conflict

In 2024 the World Health Organisation declared Mpox as a public health emergency of international concern, which requires a coordinated international response. A link provides information on the spread of the disease (61> Mpox outbreak: global trends).

According to “DR Congo: Conflict escalation linked to deadly Mpox threat”, armed conflict in the mineral-rich eastern part of this country, with 7.4 million people forcibly displaced and gender-based violence are linked to Mpox spread (62). *The lack of security consequent to military activities hinders the work of health authorities aimed at containing the virus.* In this country, 40% of the population is facing severe food shortage,

which may increase the risk of infectious diseases. Here, many other health threats have been reported, exacerbated by flooding and landslides.

13.2 The war weakens the detection and surveillance systems

The destruction of sanitary infrastructure, including disease surveillance systems, exacerbates the risk of zoonotic disease transmission, because outbreaks go undetected until they reach a critical stage (2).

According to “DRC: People are still dying unnecessarily from HIV”, again in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, HIV prevention and access to care remain huge challenges. Free testing, even for people with symptoms, is not provided in most health facilities. As a result, according to UN estimates, nearly one quarter of the people that carry HIV virus are unaware of it (70).

14. Armed conflict as a driver of antimicrobial resistance

“Tackling Drug-Resistant Infections Globally: Final Report and Recommendations” provides general information on health and economy damage consequent to antimicrobial resistance, and their mitigation. The victims attributable to antimicrobial resistance might be 10 million a year in 2050 (45 page 11).

“Antibiotic Resistance | Health” is an educational video that explains the factors involved in the development of antibiotic resistance, and what can be done to mitigate this global problem (40).

In conflict situations, inappropriate prescriptions from unqualified prescribers, drugs of unknown quality and/or outdated drugs may contribute to pathogen resistance (3 / 39).

According to “Antimicrobial resistance and the Iraq war: armed conflict as an under investigated pathway with growing significance”, while science and policy have been focusing on improper use of antibiotics as a driver of antimicrobial resistance, *now armed conflicts are also being investigated* (48). *Understanding the links between antimicrobial resistance and conflict is important for a global response.*

“Why bacteria love war wounds - Antibiotic resistance in the Middle-East” is a document of Médecins Sans Frontières that contains text, images and two videos (39 text and videos). In war-torn geographic areas, such as the Middle East, antibiotic resistance is a complex problem. Here, a bullet or shrapnel wound, and the dirt reaching wounds on the skin as a consequence of an explosion may inoculate our body with microorganisms resistant to drugs.

According to the report from a conversation with Moussally K. and Farra A., respectively epidemiologist and infectious diseases specialist of Médecins Sans Frontières working in Gaza, “...resistant bacteria will stay after the war, in soil and water, and cause difficult to treat infections....” (59).

According to “Antimicrobial resistance in the context of the Syrian conflict: Drivers before and after the onset of conflict and key recommendations”, even the

inhalation of dust may imply acute lung injury, and consequent risk of ventilator associated pneumonia (46). The population often has to use smuggled fake antibiotics, particularly in besieged areas. Surgery carried out by untrained personnel, with debridement often impossible due to lack of facilities, while the lack of rapid diagnostic tests for the best management of infections, increase the risks. Irregular electricity supply and spare parts of autoclaves often unavailable due to sanctions, compound the sterilisation process. The poor hygiene conditions in makeshift hospitals, also contribute to increase infections.

Again, according to the 2018 document (46), to improve the Syrian situation, the end of hostilities and the rehabilitation of the health system are urgently necessary. *Tackling antimicrobial resistance in countries where Syrian refugees find asylum, requires multifaceted action at international level.* Resistant organisms also may spread through large-scale population movements, air travel and international medical tourism.

According to “Antimicrobial Resistance & Migrants in Sweden: Poor Living Conditions Enforced by Migration Control Policies as a Risk Factor for Optimal Public Health Management”, migrants should be immediately screened for infectious diseases and receive the necessary medical care. This would benefit both migrants and host population, thanks to a better control of antimicrobial resistance (47). For best results, the authorities should reassure the newly arrived migrants that the health assessment does not influence their right to remain in the country.

15. Long-term consequences of war on health and environment

“Damage to Gaza causing new risks to human health” is a press release of UN Environment Programme; from this document, information on the environmental impacts can be downloaded (67> a preliminary assessment). The environmental damage of the conflict that started in 2023 is unprecedented, and may imply an irreversible deterioration of the ecosystem. The large amount of debris produced by the conflict may contain, inter alia, dust, asbestos, industrial waste and human remains, while unexploded ordnances pose serious immediate risks for children. Since November 2023 the transfer of waste to landfills was halted, which exacerbated the public health crisis. *With wastewater treatment plants out of service, freshwater and soil contaminated with pathogens and other hazardous substances, the population is exposed to immediate and long-term risks for health.* Besides the horrible direct consequences of war, the destruction of water infrastructure may imply further long-term undesirable consequences for population, environment and global food security, with impacts that may last decades.

“Impact of the Russia–Ukraine armed conflict on water resources and water infrastructure” (68) also provides information. For instance, with a damaged water supply, the mixing of sewage and drinking water increases the risk of a cholera epidemic.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

About the Author(s)

The author is a former middle school teacher, and wrote about 75 educational papers starting 37 years ago. Areas of interest: Health Education, Environmental Education and Prevention of Natural Disasters. The author has a University Degree in Biology.

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