

This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis in International Peacekeeping on 07 September 2023, available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13533312.2023.2255523>.

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To cite this article:

Giulio Levorato & Mattia Sguazzini (2023) A Perpetual (Liberal) Peace? An Empirical Assessment of an Enduring Peacebuilding Model, International Peacekeeping, DOI: [10.1080/13533312.2023.2255523](https://doi.org/10.1080/13533312.2023.2255523)

A perpetual (liberal) peace? An empirical assessment of an enduring peacebuilding model

Giulio Levorato¹, Mattia Sguazzini²

¹ *Dipartimento di Scienze Politiche e Internazionali
Università degli Studi di Genova
Piazzale E. Brignole, 3a, 16125, Genova, Italy
giulio.levorato@edu.unige.it*



0000-0002-4996-4746

Institution official page: <https://rubrica.unige.it/personale/UUpBU15u>

² *Dipartimento di Scienze Politiche e Internazionali
Università degli Studi di Genova
Piazzale E. Brignole, 3a, 16125, Genova, Italy
mattia.sguazzini@edu.unige.it*



0000-0001-9751-8508

Institution official page: <https://rubrica.unige.it/personale/UEJPX15v>

Abstract

How has the local turn approach been translated within peacebuilding mission mandates? Novelty introduced by International and Regional Organizations' strategic documents shape a new approach termed 'local turn' (LT) in the literature, which envisages a more context-sensitive peacebuilding focused on resilience and local ownership. While finding significant potential, academic debate describes LT as a strategic adaptation of the liberal peace paradigm, functional to the provision of means for a pragmatic retreat from (over)ambitious goals. The study builds on this by focusing on a rather unexplored type of primary source: mission mandates. Through automated text analysis, we trace the consistency of liberal peace and local turn features in the United Nations and European Union peacebuilding mandates over the past two decades. The results confirm a detachment between policy orientations versus goals and instruments already at the level of mandates and highlight traits of systematicity in the utilitarian use of LT as an exit strategy. This study enriches the literature on UN and EU peacebuilding and paves the way for further research on policy change in post-conflict reconstruction.

Keywords

peacebuilding, local turn, text analysis, United Nations, European Union

1. Introduction

How has the local turn approach been translated within peacebuilding mission mandates? In recent years, there has been growing disillusionment with post-conflict interventions conducted under the liberal paradigm¹. In response, International and Regional Organizations (IROs) undertook comprehensive reforms in the field, attempting to address some of the most evident limitations of the traditional peacebuilding model, typically found in the poor level of inclusivity², in the standardisation of solutions³, and in the mismatch between ambitions and capacity to deliver⁴. In their strategic documents, they did so by acknowledging the complexity of post-conflict scenarios and the need for coordinated, multi-level efforts to sustain stable and lasting peace based on community involvement and *resilience-building*. The term *local turn* has been used to describe this renewed focus on the ‘local’ and the resulting practical approach⁵.

Although most of the literature finds these novelties to be a fresh change, scholars have been prudent in evaluating their actual scope. While some argue that the local turn is (only) a first step in the right direction⁶, most contend that it is more a *pragmatic* change than a *paradigmatic* one, functional to make local actors responsible for the pursuit of externally designed goals⁷. Thus, the local turn approach would not challenge the core assumptions of liberal peace⁸, as it merely acknowledges the inherent complexity of war-torn countries in achieving democratisation and state-building goals, mainly due to the ‘societal self-reproduction of barriers to liberal modes of being’⁹.

The aim of the manuscript is to strengthen and build on this intuition by focusing on a rather unexplored type of primary source: mission mandates. So far, research has

¹ Belloni and Moro, “Stability and Stability Operations.”

² Mac Ginty, “Indigenous Peace-Making Versus the Liberal Peace.”

³ Autesserre, *Peaceland*.

⁴ Chandler, “International Statebuilding and the Ideology of Resilience.”

⁵ Mac Ginty and Richmond, “The Local Turn in Peace Building.”

⁶ Mahmoud, “How Can the UN Sustaining Peace Agenda Live Up to Its Potential?”; Richmond, “The Evolution of the International Peace Architecture”; de Coning, “Adaptive Peacebuilding.”

⁷ Joseph, “Resilience as Embedded Neoliberalism”; Ejodus, “Local Ownership as International Governmentality”; Paffenholz, “Perpetual Peacebuilding”; Randazzo, “The Limits of Rethinking Peacebuilding”; Baldaro and Costantini, “Fragility and Resilience in the European Union’s Security Strategy”; Belloni and Costantini, “From Liberal Statebuilding to Counterinsurgency and Stabilization.”

⁸ Randazzo, “The Limits of Rethinking Peacebuilding.”

⁹ Chandler, “International Statebuilding and the Ideology of Resilience,” 277.

focused on the study of strategic documents (i.e., general policy orientation)¹⁰, or the whole policy cycle (including practices on the ground) but on a limited number of cases¹¹. Therefore, we still know little about how the local turn approach was translated within the mandates and how it affected peacebuilding goals and programmes in the long term¹².

To fill this gap, the paper offers a quantitative content analysis of civilian peacebuilding mandates of the two most prominent organizations active in post-conflict reconstruction: the United Nations (UN) and the European Union (EU)¹³. Using a machine learning algorithm called *seeded latent Dirichlet allocation* (seeded LDA), we examine topics variation in mission mandates between 2001 and 2021 as a proxy for the impact of innovations fostered by the recent reform process. While this analysis gives us a clue to the ongoing changes in peacebuilding policies, a limitation that needs to be acknowledged is that inferences must be circumscribed to the adoption phase.

We argue that the utilitarian use of the local turn approach (i.e. functional for the disengagement of international actors from highly complex scenarios through delegation and control from a distance) is already observable at the mandate level, thus highlighting the need to include the systematic analysis of the policy adoption level to better understand the multiple factors influencing policy development in peacebuilding.

We expect to observe the first period of our timespan marked by a strong prevalence of the topic compatible with the liberal peace paradigm, underpinned by international interventionism, that reached its climax with the controversial application of the *Responsibility to Protect* (R2P) doctrine¹⁴ to the Libyan case¹⁵. Furthermore, we expect to witness an increasing emergence of the local turn topic in the second decade of the 2000s, as a reflection of the growing disillusionment in reaction to the Afghan and Iraqi failures. We also expect the emergence of localist features not to replace the characteristics of liberal peace, but to juxtapose them.

¹⁰ Randazzo, “The Limits of Rethinking Peacebuilding”; de Coning, “Adaptive Peacebuilding.”

¹¹ Autesserre, *Peaceland*; Ejodus, “Local Ownership as International Governmentality”; Paffenholz, “Perpetual Peacebuilding.”

¹² As briefly mentioned above, the term *local turn* must be strictly intended as an academic label, which therefore does not characterize the official jargon of the organisations under scrutiny. The term is used to describe the push by international decision-makers for local inclusion and localisation of global peacebuilding efforts.

¹³ For a similar analysis of UN peacekeeping mandates see Amicarelli and Di Salvatore, “Introducing the PeaceKeeping Operations Corpus (PKOC).”

¹⁴ ICISS, *The Responsibility to Protect*.

¹⁵ Raineri, *La crisi libica e l'ordine internazionale*.

The collected evidence reinforces the intuition of extant research, thus proving that the local turn approach constitutes a composite tool that has been used in a utilitarian way by both IROs, already within the mandates.

The contribution of this study to the academic debate is threefold. First, it enriches the literature on the UN and the EU by proposing one of the first systematic quantitative studies of civilian mission mandates over the long term. Second, it nourishes the critical peacebuilding literature with further evidence supporting some of its findings on a controversial issue (i.e., the persistence of liberal peace). Finally, by revealing traits of systematicity in the utilitarian use of the local turn approach, it highlights the need for more in-depth studies on policy change in peacebuilding, the actors involved and the impact of path-dependence mechanisms.

The article is structured as follows. After the introduction, we provide a brief *state of the art* and present the research gap. In the third section, we outline data and methods. The findings are discussed in section four. Finally, we draw our conclusions.

2. Towards the overcoming of liberal peace?

Cavalcante¹⁶ argued how in *An Agenda for Peace* (1992)¹⁷, the UN's first guiding document for peace operations, the former Secretary General (UNSG) Boutros-Ghali transformed the social science theory of democratic peace, according to which liberal/democratic societies do not (or rarely) fight each other¹⁸, into a strategic narrative, namely a tool 'to build a shared meaning of events, shaping perceptions, beliefs and behaviour of the public'¹⁹. Accordingly, a general policy orientation²⁰ rooted in the ideological principles of political liberalism²¹ emerged as the ideational component of a liberal policy paradigm in peacebuilding. As such, what has then been labelled *liberal peace*²² involved 'the simultaneous pursuit of conflict resolution, market sovereignty, and liberal democracy'²³ through the implementation of technical reforms aimed at the

¹⁶ Cavalcante, *Peacebuilding in the United Nations*.

¹⁷ "An Agenda for Peace."

¹⁸ Doyle, "Kant, Liberal Legacies, and Foreign Affairs"; Panebianco, *Guerrieri Democratici*.

¹⁹ Coticchia and Catanzaro, "The Fog of Words," 435.

²⁰ Hermann, "Changing Course."

²¹ Doyle, "Kant, Liberal Legacies, and Foreign Affairs."

²² Paris, "Peacebuilding and the Limits of Liberal Internationalism"; Richmond and Franks, *Liberal Peace Transitions*.

²³ Goodhand and Sedra, "Rethinking Liberal Peacebuilding," 239.

intertwined promotion of development, security and human rights. The realisation of this fixed agenda, constituting the practical component of the liberal peace paradigm (i.e., the appropriate set of instruments to be used to attain the policy goals), was primarily attributed by the report *In Larger Freedom* (2005)²⁴ to the international actors, a generic term designed to refer to Western countries and Western-based IROs, based on a principle of responsibility to protect (local) people from its incapable rulers.

Liberal peace can be understood as both a policy paradigm, thus as ‘a framework of ideas and standards that specifies not only [...] policy goals and instruments [...] but also the very nature of the problems they are meant to address’²⁵, and as a strategic narrative²⁶. For its specific nature, it has also been acknowledged how the liberal peace discourse became a fictional story²⁷ in which the ‘liberalism’ of intervention has often been overstated²⁸. The UN peacebuilding model was a source of inspiration and a point of reference for other IROs, particularly the European Union²⁹, which also followed the liberal peace paradigm since its inception in the world of conflict management and resolution (‘the best protection for our security is a world of well-governed democratic states’³⁰).

The decades-long performance of this model has been judged a failure by scholars, although for different reasons³¹, as it did not achieve the goal of ‘reducing the risk of falling or relapsing into conflict [and] laying the foundations for sustainable peace and development’³². Recent studies on Western Balkans³³, Libya³⁴, Syria³⁵, and Afghanistan³⁶ provide examples of liberal peacebuilding lack of success and highlight how ‘the problems to be solved (war and violence) mismatch the measures [democracy and market economy, ndr] designed to solve them’³⁷.

²⁴ United Nations, “In Larger Freedom.”

²⁵ Hall, “Policy Paradigms, Social Learning, and the State,” 279.

²⁶ Coticchia and Catanzaro, “The Fog of Words.”

²⁷ Chandler, “The Uncritical Critique of ‘Liberal Peace.’”

²⁸ Selby, “The Myth of Liberal Peace-Building.”

²⁹ Tardy, “The European Union and UN Peace Operations.”

³⁰ Council of the European Union, *European Security Strategy*, 12.

³¹ Richmond and Mac Ginty, “Where Now for the Critique of the Liberal Peace?”

³² Peacebuilding Support Office, “UN Peacebuilding: An Orientation.”

³³ Belloni, *The Rise and Fall of Peacebuilding in the Balkans*.

³⁴ Raineri, *La crisi libica e l'ordine internazionale*.

³⁵ Paffenholz, “Perpetual Peacebuilding.”

³⁶ Amin, “Peace Agreement Between the United States and the Taliban.”

³⁷ Öjendal et al., “Peacebuilding Admist Violence,” 270.

A critical self-reflection was especially prompted by the attempted state and societal (re)construction in Afghanistan and Iraq, whose failure was deemed too obvious to be ignored³⁸. The most important IROs involved in peace missions, the UN and the EU, have (partly) recognized the shortcomings of the liberal model and initiated a comprehensive reform of the sector, and invoked in their strategic documents ‘essential shifts’³⁹, ‘significant changes’⁴⁰, and a ‘step change’⁴¹ in the delivery of peacebuilding policies⁴². In *The Future of United Nations Peace Operations*, former UNSG Ban Ki-Moon wrote that ‘the limits of our engagement are reflected in peace operations’⁴³, an assertion reiterated by current UNSG Antonio Guterres in *Our Common Agenda*, according to which ‘traditional forms of conflict prevention, management and resolution are ill-suited’⁴⁴ to address emerging risks, and fully endorsed by the EU’s call for couple idealistic aspirations with realistic assessment and ‘translate commitments [...] into action’⁴⁵. Thus, UN and EU strategic documents were seemingly aimed at embracing some of the recommendations provided by scholars and practitioners as a possible solution to the insufficiencies of the liberal paradigm, and thus at adopting a new approach.

Research on peacebuilding since the end of the 2010s pointed toward a greater centrality of indigenous knowledge⁴⁶, a more meaningful degree of local involvement⁴⁷, a relational and culturally sensitive approach⁴⁸, and a (re)politicization of peacebuilding efforts⁴⁹.

MacGinty and Richmond⁵⁰ coined the term *local turn* to describe the renaissance of this interest in ‘the local’ in the study and practice of peacebuilding. They did so by

³⁸ de Coning, “Adaptive Peacebuilding.”

³⁹ United Nations, “Uniting Our Strengths for Peace: Politics, Partnership and People,” 8.

⁴⁰ United Nations, 12.

⁴¹ High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, “EU’s Global Strategy,” 19.

⁴² Henceforth by strategic documents we refer to the written outcome of the decision-makers’ deliberation, which by matching means to ends also sets broader parameters for action, see Doyle and Sambanis, “International Peacebuilding.”

⁴³ United Nations, “The Future of United Nations Peace Operations,” 2.

⁴⁴ United Nations, “Our Common Agenda,” 59.

⁴⁵ High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, “EU’s Global Strategy,” 8.

⁴⁶ Mac Ginty, “Indigenous Peace-Making Versus the Liberal Peace.”

⁴⁷ Donais, *Peacebuilding and Local Ownership*.

⁴⁸ Chadwick, Debiel, and Gadinger, “Relational Sensibility and the ‘Turn to the Local.’”

⁴⁹ Autesserre, *Peaceland*.

⁵⁰ Mac Ginty and Richmond, “The Local Turn in Peace Building.”

recalling the seminal work of Lederach⁵¹, whose focus on reconstructing relationships and strengthening social bonds was seen as alternative to the attention posed by the traditional liberal model on rebuilding institutions and state infrastructures.

Thus, although the concept of *local turn* does not properly qualify as an alternative paradigm to liberal peace, as it does not offer opposing assumptions and theories of change, it does present some important discontinuities with it. It rejects the thesis that ‘external intervention can set in motion and control a causal sequence of events that will lead to sustainable peace’, and brings attention back to power relations and related injustices in the international system⁵². The UN sought to incorporate this approach by assuming ‘a new understanding of peacebuilding, namely that it is essentially about *sustaining peace*’⁵³. The concept was introduced in 2015 in *The Challenge of Sustaining Peace*⁵⁴ and then further clarified in the UNSG report *Peacebuilding and sustaining peace*⁵⁵. It is understood as a process ‘of building a common vision of a society, ensuring that the needs of all segments of the population are taken into account’⁵⁶. The EU adopted a similar perspective stating in its *Global Strategy*⁵⁷ that it will ‘engage the world manifesting responsibility towards others and sensitivity to contingency’, and emphasizing ‘the need to build back better and promotes solutions that focus on building sustainable and resilient systems’⁵⁸.

The local turn, as it appears in the two Organizations' strategic documents, particularly revolves around the principle of *local ownership*, intended as the process of ‘ensuring a meaningful connection between the reconstruction process and the will of the people’⁵⁹, and the building of *resilience* as the ability of communities to withstand, adapt, and quickly recover from stresses and shocks⁶⁰.

⁵¹ Lederach, *Preparing for Peace*; Lederach, *Building Peace*.

⁵² Richmond, “The Evolution of the International Peace Architecture.”

⁵³ de Coning, “Adaptive Peacebuilding,” 304.

⁵⁴ United Nations, “The Challenge of Sustaining Peace.”

⁵⁵ United Nations, “Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace”.

⁵⁶ United Nations, 1.

⁵⁷ High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, “EU’s Global Strategy,” 16.

⁵⁸ European Commission and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, “EU’s Contribution to Rules-Based Multilateralism,” 4.

⁵⁹ Saul, “Local Ownership of Post-Conflict Reconstruction in International Law.”

⁶⁰ European Commission, “The EU Approach to Resilience.”

Leaving aside the inherent vagueness of the two concepts (the cross-use of the term resilience has contributed to disagreement regarding its meaning⁶¹; as well as a substantial ambiguity characterizes the concept of local ownership: e.g., who is local? ⁶²), scholars and practitioners generally agree in recognising that the novelties proposed by IROs' strategic documents reflect an actual change. Nevertheless, they also agree in stating that this has not taken place outside preexisting parameters ⁶³, and therefore does not constitute a substantial departure from the liberal paradigm ⁶⁴. While Mahmoud⁶⁵, Richmond⁶⁶, and De Coning ⁶⁷ argue that, although it is not enough at this stage, the new approach has the potential to serve as an overarching, transdisciplinary framework for adaptive and emancipatory peacebuilding; other authors suggest that local turn approach is rather assimilable to an additional tool to relocate peacebuilding within politically acceptable frameworks⁶⁸. Autesserre, for instance, affirmed that IROs are 'only paying lip service' to the ideas proposed in the reform documents ⁶⁹. Paffenholz ⁷⁰ argues that 'it is insufficient to acknowledge that peace processes are complex and difficult'. For Torrent, 'efforts made by decision-makers towards centring the peacebuilding process on the locals' have not led to a substantive change ⁷¹ as international actors still 'decide when, how, and to what end they intervene' ⁷². Hence, for these scholars, what we are witnessing is rather a 'pragmatic turn'⁷³. Accordingly, the new strategic narrative proposed by the IROs, centred on enabling local actors to take charge, would have provided a 'noble' justification for international actors to abandon overly ambitious transformative goals in favour of more politically feasible ones, and to replace costly and risky post-conflict reconstruction operations with capacity-building and train & assist

⁶¹ Baldaro and Costantini, "Fragility and Resilience in the European Union's Security Strategy."

⁶² Hellmüller, "The Ambiguities of Local Ownership."

⁶³ Daugbjerg and Kay, "Policy Feedback and Pathways."

⁶⁴ For a review of (foreign) policy change theories, see Brummer et al., *Foreign Policy as Public Policy?*

⁶⁵ Mahmoud, "How Can the UN Sustaining Peace Agenda Live Up to Its Potential?"

⁶⁶ Richmond, "The Evolution of the International Peace Architecture."

⁶⁷ de Coning, "Adaptive Peacebuilding."

⁶⁸ Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*.

⁶⁹ Autesserre, "The Crisis of Peacekeeping: Why the UN Can't End Wars."

⁷⁰ Paffenholz, "Perpetual Peacebuilding," 377.

⁷¹ Torrent, "Scrutinising UN Peacebuilding," 212.

⁷² Ejodus, "Local Ownership as International Governmentality," 38.

⁷³ de Coning, "Adaptive Peacebuilding."

programmes. In this regard, authors such as Muggah⁷⁴, Belloni and Costantini⁷⁵, Tholens⁷⁶, and Karlsrud⁷⁷ speak of a transition from democratisation to *stabilisation* understood as the combination of practices that seek to ‘bring stability to countries beset by fragility’⁷⁸ through a limited direct involvement of international actors.

Although this interpretation is more than plausible, its scope is still limited as current research focuses either on the analysis of general policy orientations⁷⁹ (*macro level*), or on the comparison between the narrative and the implementation stage on the ground⁸⁰ (*micro level*).

We therefore still know little about how the *local turn* approach has been translated into goals and programmes within mission mandates (*meso level*). The aim of this study is not to come up with an alternative view to the one presented in the literature, but rather to verify, and eventually strengthen, its central argument, namely that the local turn is an adaptation of peacebuilding strategies instrumental to international disengagement from highly complex scenarios, by systematically focusing on a rather unexplored type of primary source: mission mandates. To be more specific, references to mandates are not unusual in the critical peacebuilding literature, but they are usually analysed for one or more case studies, or categorized on the basis of their general goals⁸¹. On the contrary, we examine how and to what extent the characteristics of the liberal paradigm and the local turn approach appear in the mission mandates of the two most important international organisations engaged in peacebuilding over the long term (2001-2021). This will not only allow us to verify how local turn characteristics have been translated into mission goals and instruments, and if and how they have challenged the liberal paradigm, but also to check whether the local turn approach is indeed a novelty brought by the recent wave of reforms. The analysis of all mission mandates will also allow us to understand whether and how single missions adapted over the years (in

⁷⁴ Muggah, *Stabilization Operations, Security and Development*.

⁷⁵ Belloni and Costantini, “From Liberal Statebuilding to Counterinsurgency and Stabilization.”

⁷⁶ Tholens, “Practices of Intervention.”

⁷⁷ Karlsrud, “From Liberal Peacebuilding to Stabilization and Counterterrorism.”

⁷⁸ Muggah, *Stabilization Operations, Security and Development*, 244.

⁷⁹ de Coning, “Adaptive Peacebuilding”; Randazzo, “The Limits of Rethinking Peacebuilding.”

⁸⁰ Autesserre, *Peaceland*; Ejodus, “Local Ownership as International Governmentality”; Paffenholz, “Perpetual Peacebuilding”; Karlsrud, “From Liberal Peacebuilding to Stabilization and Counterterrorism.”

⁸¹ Hellmüller, Tan, and Bara, “What Is in a Mandate?”

response to crisis and urgency situations), and if this adaptation is ascribable to the uniqueness of the cases presented in the literature or exhibits aspects of systematicity.

Given the state of the art and the research gap, the following section details the method used in attaining the aim of the study.

3. Data and methods

Given that ‘text is [...] the most direct indicator of what people are thinking in any given time and place’⁸², we provide a quantitative content analysis of UN and EU peacebuilding missions’ mandates. These organizations are the main agents of international peacebuilding. Given their centrality in terms of prestige and resources, which makes them able to impose their paradigm on practitioners and other IROs, they share the accusation of imposing liberal peace⁸³. The mandates are the documental product of an IRO’s decision-making process, containing binding provisions concerning the actions determined to reach a set of objectives for a mission⁸⁴. Besides being ‘the legal and political basis for the deployment of peace operations’, they ‘can be an instrument for coordinating regional and international presences, a de facto contract with the host government, and a powerful messaging tool’⁸⁵. Nevertheless, it must be considered that ‘mandates provide the broad guidelines for a given mission’, since ‘they are the product of negotiations among countries with divergent values and interests, and representatives can reach a consensus only when using language open to multiple interpretations’⁸⁶. The implementation process, along the chain from the local leaders of operations to the operators in the field, requires further operationalization, such that ‘differences between peace interventions in theory (the mandate, or the instructions from headquarters and capitals) and in practice (what actually happens on the ground)’⁸⁷. Mandates are part of an analytically and practically separate phase from the implementation process, the boundaries and direction of which, however, they define⁸⁸, to the extent that the

⁸² Hanania, “The Humanitarian Turn at the UNSC,” 667.

⁸³ Autesserre, “International Peacebuilding and Local Success.”

⁸⁴ Boulden, “Mandates Matter,” 150.

⁸⁵ Security Council Report, “Is Christmas Really Over?,” 2.

⁸⁶ Autesserre, *Peaceland*, 25.

⁸⁷ Autesserre, 278.

⁸⁸ Boulden, “Mandates Matter”; Sharland, “How Peacekeeping Policy Gets Made.”

structuring of mandates can also influence their successful implementation⁸⁹. Consequently, we can use mandates as documentary evidence of policy positions, reflecting the principles of reform documents, and influenced by different actors involved in the decision-making process⁹⁰. The analysis of mandates is useful for understanding the content of the policy tools established in the policymaking process, that is, what lies upstream. This has to be done by recognizing the limitation that the implementation process, as well as the related practices on the ground, and its connections with the policy design phase, are left out of our analysis, which focuses on discourses (i.e., the content of mission mandates). The choice of mandates is also practical, as it allows the creation of a homogenous and comprehensive corpus of texts for analysis.

To ensure the highest degree of coherence within each corpus, only UN peacebuilding missions under the coordination of the *Department of Political Affairs and Peacebuilding* (DPPA) and EU civilian missions under the operational command of the *Civilian Planning and Conduct Capability Directorate* (CPCC-EEAS) were included. From the UN corpus, we excluded mandates concerning representative offices at other IROs and missions with peacemaking tasks (e.g., Special or Personal envoy and Special Coordinators). For the EU corpus, we excluded military operations' mandates. Extending the analysis to missions based on military personnel would have meant including peacekeeping mandates, opening up a broader and more complex discourse that is beyond the scope of this study⁹¹.

The period examined ranges from January 1, 2001, to December 31, 2021. While on the one hand, the terrorist attacks of 9/11 marked the rise of a new political narrative centred on the war on terror and top-down state-building strategies⁹², on the other hand, 2021 reasonably represents the conclusion of the last reform process that placed *local ownership* and *resilience* at the centre of peacebuilding strategies. A new reform wave began between 2021 and 2022, with the publication of the UNSG's report *Our Common*

⁸⁹ Blair, Di Salvatore, and Smidt, “When Do UN Peacekeeping Operations Implement Their Mandates?”

⁹⁰ Sharland, “How Peacekeeping Policy Gets Made,” 19.

⁹¹ Di Salvatore and Ruggeri, “Effectiveness of Peacekeeping Operations.”

⁹² Baldaro and Costantini, “Fragility and Resilience in the European Union’s Security Strategy.”

Agenda⁹³, the adoption of the new *NATO Strategic Concept*⁹⁴, and the latest *European Security Strategy*⁹⁵, all marked by the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

As a result of the selection process, we obtained a UN dataset consisting of 160 mandates, regarding 25 missions (Figure 1), and an EU dataset consisting of 205 mandates, regarding 25 missions (Figure 2)⁹⁶.

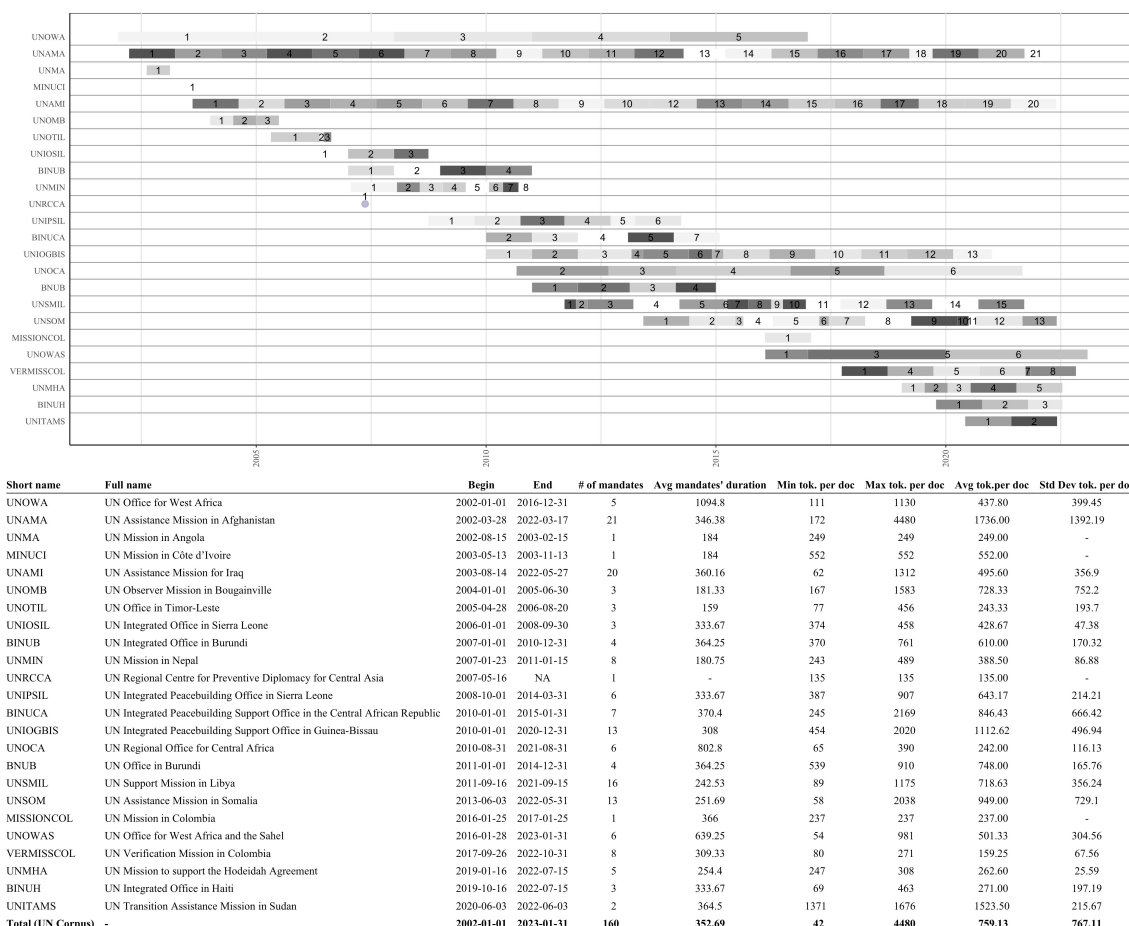


Figure 1. UN Missions Gantt Chart and synthesis of the dataset

⁹³ United Nations, “Our Common Agenda.”

⁹⁴ NATO, “NATO 2022 Strategic Concept.”

⁹⁵ Council of the European Union, “Strategic Compass.”

⁹⁶ The complete list of mandates is available in Table 5 (for UN), and Table 8 (for EU) in Appendix.

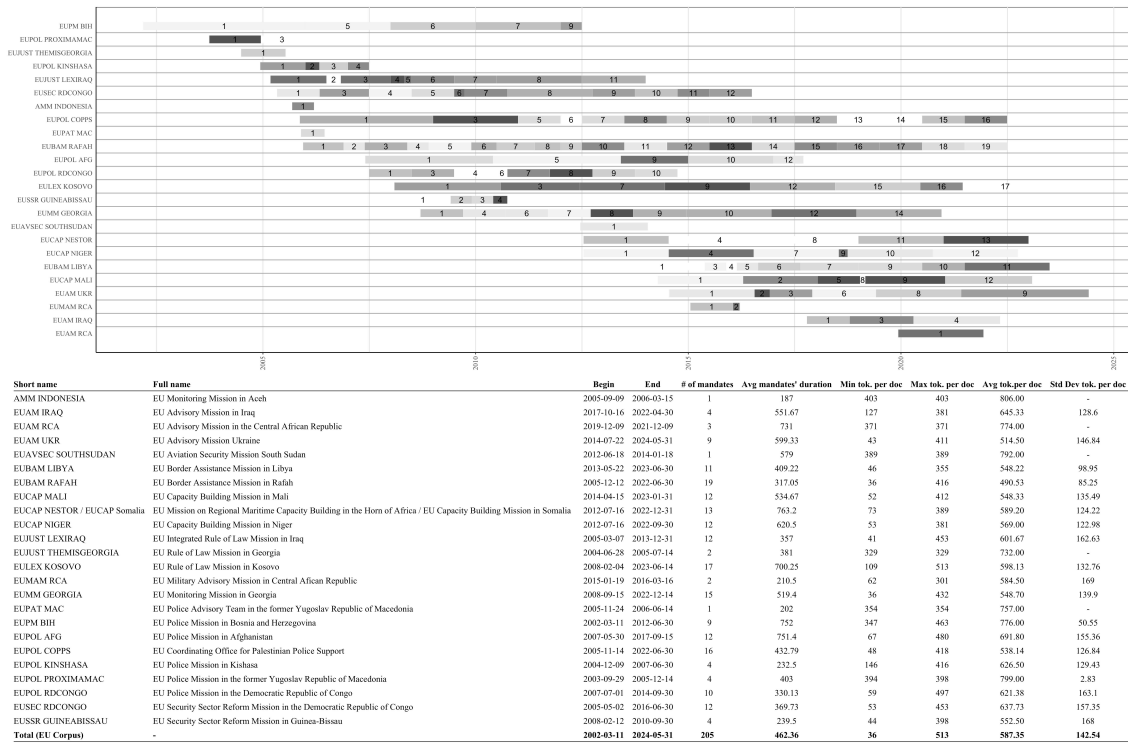


Figure 2. EU Missions Gantt Chart and synthesis of the dataset

To date, content analysis on primary sources has focused on a limited number of documents for the analysis of the strategic goals of European institutions⁹⁷ or particular case studies for the analysis of the postures adopted by single countries in foreign policy⁹⁸. Large *corpora* have been analysed to study trends, patterns, and policy changes in the positions of member countries within the UN General Assembly⁹⁹, the issues dealt with by the Security Council¹⁰⁰, and the types, objectives, and specific tasks of UN Peace Mission Mandates¹⁰¹.

The choice of content analysis is compatible with this study's objective of examining the frequency and consistency of liberal peace and local turn features in peacebuilding mission mandates over the last two decades. We decided to analyse the content of mandates through a semi-supervised topic model based on an automated text analysis method to minimize possible bias and provide a fully replicable method.

⁹⁷ Biscop, "The EU Global Strategy."

⁹⁸ Coticchia and Davidson, "The Limits of Radical Parties in Coalition Foreign Policy."

⁹⁹ Baturu, Dasandi, and Mikhaylov, "Understanding State Preferences with Text as Data."

¹⁰⁰ Hanania, "The Humanitarian Turn at the UNSC."

¹⁰¹ Hellmüller, Tan, and Bara, "What Is in a Mandate?"

This way of treating text as data¹⁰² in political science and IR can be defined as ‘the use of automated methods to measure policy positions using political texts’¹⁰³. Defining topics as sets of words ‘referring to a distinct concept’¹⁰⁴, topic models provide a ‘parametric model describing the relationship between clusters of co-occurring words representing “topics” and their relationship to documents which contain them in relative proportions’¹⁰⁵. Latent Dirichlet allocation (LDA), the most used topic model, ‘assumes that each document is a mixture of topics’¹⁰⁶. The tracing of the degree of correspondence of a topic within a document, and the identification of topics present in the corpus, is done ‘by estimating the parameters’ of the LDA model¹⁰⁷.

The use of LDA-based topic models in this research is justified by the need to trace the consistency (or lack thereof) of topics over time using the theta distribution of topics per document¹⁰⁸. Furthermore, this operation is performed within *corpora* of documents that are internally homogeneous in terms of expository style (a criterion ensured by choosing acts produced by specific institutions) and end goals (peacebuilding). Specifically, we employed seeded LDA both to avoid problems that may be caused using dictionary analysis or unsupervised topic models¹⁰⁹, and because this paper aims to test the consistency of partially pre-determined topics in *corpora* of documents¹¹⁰. This semi-supervised model ‘exploits a limited number of words, defined as “seed words”, to weigh the prior distribution of topics (identified *ex-ante* by the researcher according to theoretical considerations) before fitting the model’¹¹¹.

The operationalization of concepts based on liberal peace (LP) and local turn (LT) topics considers the parallel and intertwined evolution of the categories between the UN

¹⁰² Vignoli, “Text as Data.”

¹⁰³ Laver, “Measuring Policy Positions in Political Space,” 218.

¹⁰⁴ Curini and Vignoli, “Committed Moderates and Uncommitted Extremists,” 8.

¹⁰⁵ Benoit, “Text as Data: An Overview,” 475–76.

¹⁰⁶ Grimmer and Stewart, “Text as Data,” 284.

¹⁰⁷ Benoit, “Text as Data: An Overview,” 476.

¹⁰⁸ Hanania, “The Humanitarian Turn at the UNSC.”

¹⁰⁹ Watanabe and Zhou, “Theory-Driven Analysis of Large Corpora.”

¹¹⁰ We use the package “seededlda” for the software R, by Watanabe and Zhou, based on the package by Benoit et al., “Quanteda.” and the library by Xuan-Hieu and Cam-Tu, “GibbsLDA++: A C/C++ Implementation of Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA).”, for semi-supervised topic modeling.

¹¹¹ Curini and Vignoli, “Committed Moderates and Uncommitted Extremists,” 8.

and the EU ¹¹². Despite keeping the UN and EU *corpora* analytically and empirically distinct, the lists of seed words for the generation of the two topics are the same¹¹³.

The set of seed-words used to create the final topic lists is the result of a three-layer selection process (Table 1).

Table 1. Summary of seed words' list composition¹¹⁴

		Liberal Peace	Local Turn
knowledge-based	<i>literature</i>	democr*, develop*, human*, judic*, legislativ*, protect*, sovereign*, stabil*	collabor*, leader*, populat*, stakeholder*, victim*
	<i>strategic documents</i>	capabl*, increas*, terror*, keep*, agenda*, establish*	cooper*, promot*, gender*
	<i>common to both literature and s.d.</i>	elect*	societ*, shar*, resil*, sustain*
frequency-based	<i>top 100 UN</i>	order*	partner*, wom*, group*, communiti*, child*
	<i>top 100 EU</i>	polic*, rule*, develop*, reform*	local*, particip*
	<i>common to both top 100</i>	institut*, forc*, law*	support*

The first set of seed-words was derived from existing theories on the subject, selecting the most representative terms of the concepts of *LP* and *LT* as they appear in the literature (*knowledge-based set*). We complemented the ordinary knowledge-based set with a contextual knowledge-based set, built on strategic documents, that identify the two

¹¹² Tardy, “The European Union and UN Peace Operations.”

¹¹³ Pre-processing of the corpora, including seed words’ selection, is described in depth in Appendix.

¹¹⁴ The seed words are presented and has been used stemmed to address word variation in text data and to enhance the analysis and interpretation of the topics generated.

topics for the two organizations. For the topic LP in the UN, we identified: *An agenda for peace*¹¹⁵ and *In larger freedom*¹¹⁶. For the EU, we identified the *European Security Strategy*, as updated in 2009¹¹⁷. Concerning the topic LT, for the UN, we identified *The challenge of sustaining peace*¹¹⁸, and the first *Peacebuilding and sustaining peace* report¹¹⁹. For the EU, we selected the *Global Strategy*¹²⁰.

Finally, we created the frequency-based set, identifying the first 100 occurring words per corpus, and selecting those that reflected the theoretical assumptions or offered synonyms for words already defined in the knowledge-based set.

Thus, the second and third layers of the selection process contribute to nourishing the first one derived from the literature while also dismissing potential allegations of a biased outlook. As an instance, the term gender may be associated to a liberal topic following a common-sense driven logic. Nevertheless, it is part of the local turn list of seed words, as, according to the second level of selection (contextual knowledge-based set), it appears exclusively in the top 50 words of the strategic documents identified as characterising the local turn. This could easily be attributed to the renewed prominence given to gender issues in peacebuilding after 2015 with the High-Level Review on the implementation of resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security.

Starting from the short lists of seed words, seeded LDA generated two larger sets of words for each topic, and a residual one – named ‘other’ – including other terms co-occurring with a similar pattern, but not in accordance with the pre-determined lists.

Using the topic model set in this manner, we analyzed the occurrence of LP and LT topics in each document¹²¹.

Furthermore, following a path similar to the deductive cycle of cross-validation (Maerz and Puschmann, 2020), we verified the quantitative findings with a qualitative check through an in-depth reading of mandates, also looking for possible theoretical refinement.

¹¹⁵ United Nations, “An Agenda for Peace.”

¹¹⁶ United Nations, “In Larger Freedom.”

¹¹⁷ Council of the European Union, *European Security Strategy*.

¹¹⁸ United Nations, “The Challenge of Sustaining Peace.”

¹¹⁹ United Nations, “Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace.”

¹²⁰ High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, “EU’s Global Strategy.”

¹²¹ The lists of topic words for both corpora, see Table 1 and Table 2 in Appendix.

Having presented the functioning of the LDA semi-supervised topic model as the selected research method, as well as the logic behind the selection of seed words as the core element of it, in the next section we report and critically discuss the obtained results.

4. Results and discussion

Figure 3 shows that liberal topic remains consistently prevalent over the years in UN mandates¹²². The highest points of LP dominance have been registered in 2006 and 2015. It can reasonably be assumed that the first peak coincides with the emergence of the R2P doctrine, first theorized in 2001 and then officially sanctioned by the UNSG report *In larger freedom* (2005), which constituted the legal basis for almost a decade of heavy interventionism in places like Afghanistan, Iraq, the Western Balkans, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), and Timor-Leste, raising growing criticism and local resistance¹²³. Thus, while the former is no surprise, the second peak in 2015 is rather puzzling, as it precedes the adoption of the *sustaining peace* approach in response to the failed state-building attempts of the previous decade. As the period following the adoption of the new peacebuilding guidelines did not correspond to a significant decrease in liberal topic, nor a meaningful rise of the local one, it is possible to deduce from the general trend a detachment between policy orientations and goals and instruments as they appear in the mandates.

¹²² For mission-level detail data, see Table 7 and Figures from 1 to 24 in Appendix.

¹²³ Mac Ginty, *International Peacebuilding and Local Resistance*.

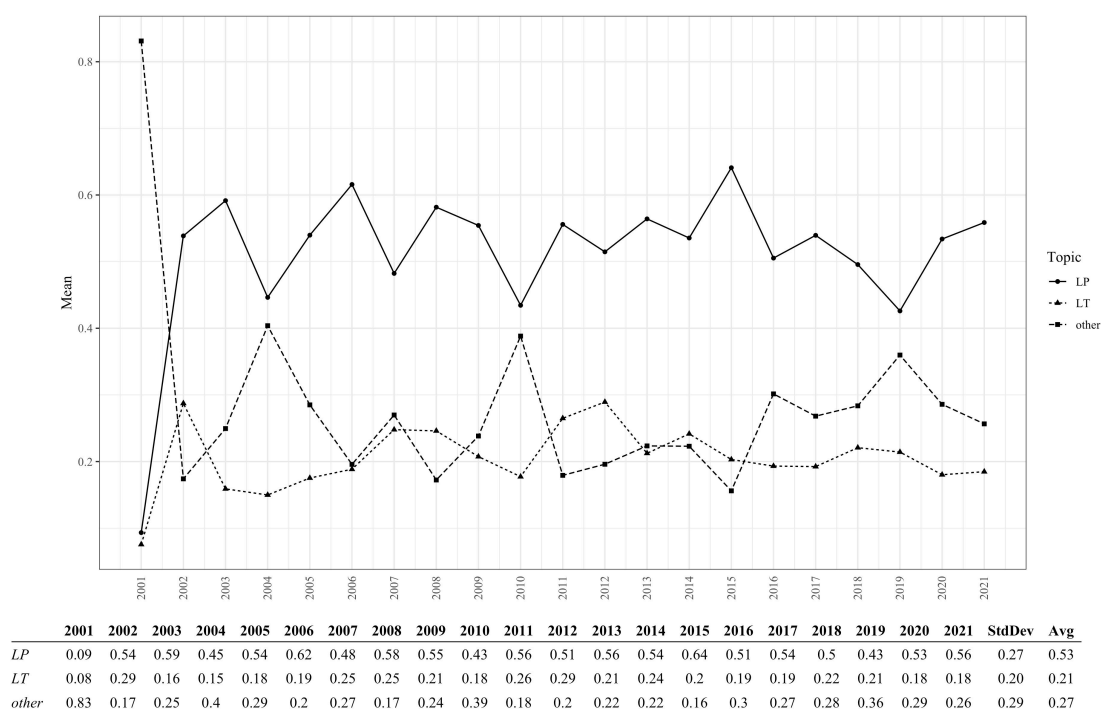


Figure 3. Topics variation cross-time in UN mandates

As discussed in the methodology section, a qualitative check of the UN mandates has been conducted to validate the quantitative findings. Thus, we grouped mandates falling into the liberal topic into two categories: *state-building mandates* consisting of a maximalist model of post-conflict reconstruction, and *democratization mandates*, centred on assisting and supporting transitions towards democratic governance¹²⁴.

State-building mandates are mostly comprehensive of missions launched in the first decade of the 2000s, such as the UN missions in Afghanistan (UNAMA), Iraq (UNAMI), and Timor-Leste (UNOTIL). As an instance, the 2002 Afghan mandate stated that ‘the overall objective of UNAMA [is to] provide support for the implementation of the Bonn Agreement’¹²⁵, which sought to establish a new constitution, an independent judiciary, free and fair elections, a centralized security sector, and the protection human rights. This model for state-building in Afghanistan was based on a top-down and intrusive approach that surfaced in the 1990s, following interventions in the Balkans and

¹²⁴ Such distinction is in part assimilable to the one proposed by Hellmüller, Tan, and Bara, “What Is in a Mandate?” between *maximalist* and *moderate* missions.

¹²⁵ See SG Report S/278 (2002), art.98 on the situation in Afghanistan, as recalled by S/RES/1401 (2002).

Sub-Saharan Africa. Similarly, the UN mission in Iraq was authorized to ‘reform institutions and rebuild the country’, as well as ‘to contribute to stability and security’¹²⁶.

Democratization mandates embrace those kinds of missions that are strongly framed within a liberal narrative, sharing the same objective of the former group of missions while avoiding direct engagement by international actors whose roles have been narrowed down to assist and support. These mandates became prevalent in the second decade of the 2000s after the Organization acknowledged that expectations around UN peace missions exceeded the capacity to deliver¹²⁷. Thus, missions in Somalia (UNSOM), Sierra Leone (UNIOSIL, UNIPSIL), Nepal (UNMIN), Burundi (BINUB, BNUB), and South Sudan (UNITAMS) are primarily aimed at ‘providing strategic policy advice on statebuilding’¹²⁸, ‘assisting progress towards democratic governance’¹²⁹, ‘monitoring and promoting human rights, and the rule of law’¹³⁰, and fostering ‘long-term development’¹³¹.

A further relevant finding is that topics remain largely coherent intra-missions, meaning that if a mission is deployed within a liberal framework, it generally sticks to it over the years, thus displaying seemingly scarce adaptation to specific context dynamics. A substantial deviation from the prevalent topic associated with the initial mandate has only been observed in the case of the UN mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), the Organization’s longest peacebuilding mission, which began as ‘liberal’ and then started to adopt a localist approach from 2005 (see Figure 4). Localist features became dominant in the UNAMA mandates following the end of the first stage of international intervention (2001-2004), which consisted of overthrowing the Taliban, regaining territorial control, and establishing transitional administration. References to Afghan stakeholders increased notably after a new constitution was approved in the country, and the first elected government took office in 2004. The international actors entitled Afghan authorities to implement their strategies, paving the way for a gradual abandonment of the interventionist approach and the overambitious reconstruction plans of the early years,

¹²⁶ See S/RES/1483 (2003), art.1. which set out the role of UN in Iraq, as recalled by S/RES/1500 (2003), authorizing UN mission in Iraq.

¹²⁷ United Nations (2010). The New Horizon Initiative: Progress Report No. 1, 46. Available at http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/documents/newhorizon_update01.pdf.

¹²⁸ S/RES/2102 (2013), art.2.

¹²⁹ S/RES/2524 (2020), art.3.

¹³⁰ S/RES/2005 (2011), art.2.

¹³¹ S/RES/1959 (2010), art.6.

which resulted in a wide range of tensions associated with social change. Thus, in UN mandates ownership of the Afghan people has been operationalized as responsabilization for externally designed objectives allowing for the progressive disengagement of the Organization from a highly complex scenario¹³². In 2006, the UNAMA mandate¹³³, calls for the implementation of the *Afghanistan Compact*¹³⁴, which held the new government of Afghanistan accountable for meeting state-building goals. The 2011 mandate¹³⁵ ‘welcomes the agreement reached at the NATO Lisbon Summit 2010¹³⁶ [...] to gradually transfer lead security responsibility to the Afghan National Security Forces’; whereas in 2014 it pledges ‘the initiation of the Transformation Decade (2015-2024)¹³⁷ [which entailed] the full assumption of Afghan leadership in governance and development’¹³⁸. One last topic change has been recorded in 2021 when the UNAMA mandate (re)emphasized the importance of democratic institutions and liberal values in response to the Taliban takeover¹³⁹.

¹³² Ejdus, “Local Ownership as International Governmentality.”

¹³³ S/RES/1662 (2006), art.8.

¹³⁴ London Conference on Afghanistan, “The Afghanistan Compact.”

¹³⁵ S/RES/1974 (2011), 3.

¹³⁶ A description of the *Transition (Inteqal) Process* is available at: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_87183.htm.

¹³⁷ A description of the *Transformation Decade* is available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/afghanistan/bonn-ii-transition-transformation-afghanistan>.

¹³⁸ S/RES/2145 (2014), 1.

¹³⁹ S/RES/2596 (2021), 1.

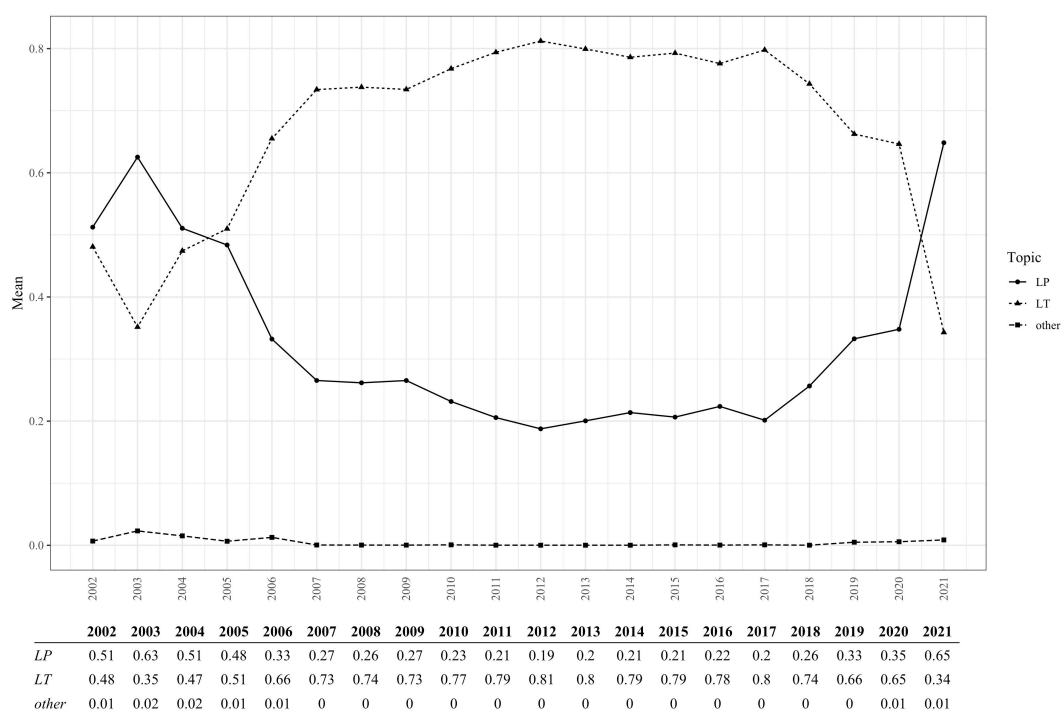


Figure 4. Topics variation cross-time in UNAMA

Going back to the general trend (Figure 3), the residual topic ‘other’ is predominant in follow-on missions, namely regional or national offices with coordination tasks aimed at promoting political dialogue or monitoring the compliance of peace agreements. These missions are mainly characterized by the residual topic, as they do not fully fit either within the liberal or the localist narrative because they have conservative and non-transformative goals, meaning that they are focused on the maintenance of a status of restored normalcy after a peace process or a previous executive mission¹⁴⁰. Examples of this group of missions are UN offices in West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWA, later UNOWAS), in Central Africa (UNOCA), and in Central Asia (UNRCCA), whose mandates are centred on ‘liaising with national and international stakeholders’¹⁴¹, ‘facilitating coordination and information exchange’¹⁴², and ‘enhancing capacities for inclusive conflict prevention and mediation’¹⁴³. According to the qualitative analysis, if the mandates of these missions qualify as *liaison mandates*, those of UN missions in Colombia (Verification Mission in Colombia), Bougainville (UNOMB), and

¹⁴⁰ Lemay-Hébert and Visoka, “Normal Peace”; Maekawa, “Strategic Deployment of UN Political Missions to Replace UN Peacekeeping Operations.”

¹⁴¹ S/279 (2007), par.3.

¹⁴² S/103(2014), par.(d).

¹⁴³ S/1128 (2016), Annex 1.

Yemen (UNMHA) can be described as *monitoring mandates*, as they are dedicated to verifying the fulfilment of the Habana Agreement (between the FARC-EP and the Colombian government), the Lincoln Agreement (between the government of Papua New Guinea and the Bougainville groups), and the Hudaydah Agreement (between the government of Yemen and the Houtis), respectively¹⁴⁴.

In conclusion, UN mandates remain largely consistent with the traditional liberal paradigm¹⁴⁵, focusing on the creation of reliable (democratic) regimes and the promotion of individual rights and the market economy.

The detachment between the principles brought about by the reforms and the goals and instruments stated in the mandates can be interpreted as a survival strategy through which the Organization apparently seeks to manage irreconcilable pressures coming from the policy field and the institutional environment, namely the cultural and normative dimension of the organizational domain¹⁴⁶. According to Simangan, the UN ‘is a self-preserving system that is slow to change’¹⁴⁷. When faced with a major contingency, the Organization assumes a different (instrumental) behaviour to preserve a ‘logic of appropriateness’¹⁴⁸, namely by adopting incremental changes to maintain its legitimacy¹⁴⁹. Therefore, LT features became dominant in the unique case of Afghanistan, configuring a crisis situation in which the Organization recognized the insufficiency of its institutional routines. As embraced in UN mandates, the LT approach does not configure a *heretical break* with the past, since it has rather been translated into a burden-sharing strategy, where governance targets have been invested by ‘responsibility without power’¹⁵⁰. Thus, local turn in UN peacebuilding mandates configured a within-path change, a by-product of the Organization's ability to reproduce a structure with high fidelity¹⁵¹.

On the EU side, Figure 5 shows how the liberal peace has been quite prevalent in EU mandates during the first decade of its action (2003-2013), while the period after 2014 displays a consistent growth of both ‘local turn’ and the residual topic ‘other’. This shift

¹⁴⁴ See *minimalist* missions in Hellmüller, Tan, and Bara, “What Is in a Mandate?”

¹⁴⁵ See also Table 11 and Figure 49 in Appendix.

¹⁴⁶ Lipson, “Peacekeeping.”

¹⁴⁷ “Reflexive Peacebuilding,” 487.

¹⁴⁸ March and Olsen, “The Logic of Appropriateness,” 3.

¹⁴⁹ Lipson, “Peacekeeping.”

¹⁵⁰ Joseph, “Resilience as Embedded Neoliberalism.”

¹⁵¹ Hannan and Freeman, “Structural Inertia and Organizational Change,” 149.

is coherent with a period of substantive change in the European external environment punctuated by the aftermath of the Arab Spring, the migrant crisis, wars in Libya and Syria, and the resurgence of international terrorism, which led the Organization to adopt a new security strategy in 2016. By outlining the concept of *principled pragmatism*, the *Global Strategy* sanctioned a retreat from democratization ambitions. As noted by Biscop, the EU became aware of its limits, thus reframing the notion of success around more feasible objectives of stabilization¹⁵².

This point is made clear by Figure 2, which shows the transition from the first group of missions with state-building and democratization tasks (EUPOL, EUJUST, EULEX) to the second group of missions with advisory and capacity-building goals (EUAM, EUBAM, EUCAP), from 2012.

Therefore, European efforts during the first decade of the 2000s centred on the creation of stable democratic institutions abroad through the promotion of the rule of law and security sector reforms. During this period, the Western Balkans have seen the greatest involvement by the Union¹⁵³. The European Police Mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina (EUPM BiH) and the Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX) exercised unprecedented executive tasks, including enforcing the law on local citizens and removing non-compliant officers from their duties. At the same time, the EU's promise of enlargement in the region¹⁵⁴ further prompted its liberal agenda. Outside the European continent, EU missions in Afghanistan, Iraq (EUJUST-LEX), Guinea Bissau, Indonesia, and the DRC were aimed at contributing 'to the reconstruction and the emergence of a stable, secure and democratic state'¹⁵⁵, 'improving local civil police and law enforcement capacity'¹⁵⁶, and 'promoting policies compatible with [...] democratic standards and the principles of good governance'¹⁵⁷.

¹⁵² Biscop, "The EU Global Strategy."

¹⁵³ Belloni, *The Rise and Fall of Peacebuilding in the Balkans*.

¹⁵⁴ The 2003 European Council summit in Thessaloniki set the integration of the Western Balkans as a priority of EU expansion.

¹⁵⁵ 2005/190/CFSP, para.3.

¹⁵⁶ 2007/369/CFSP, para.9.

¹⁵⁷ 2005/355/CFSP, art.1.

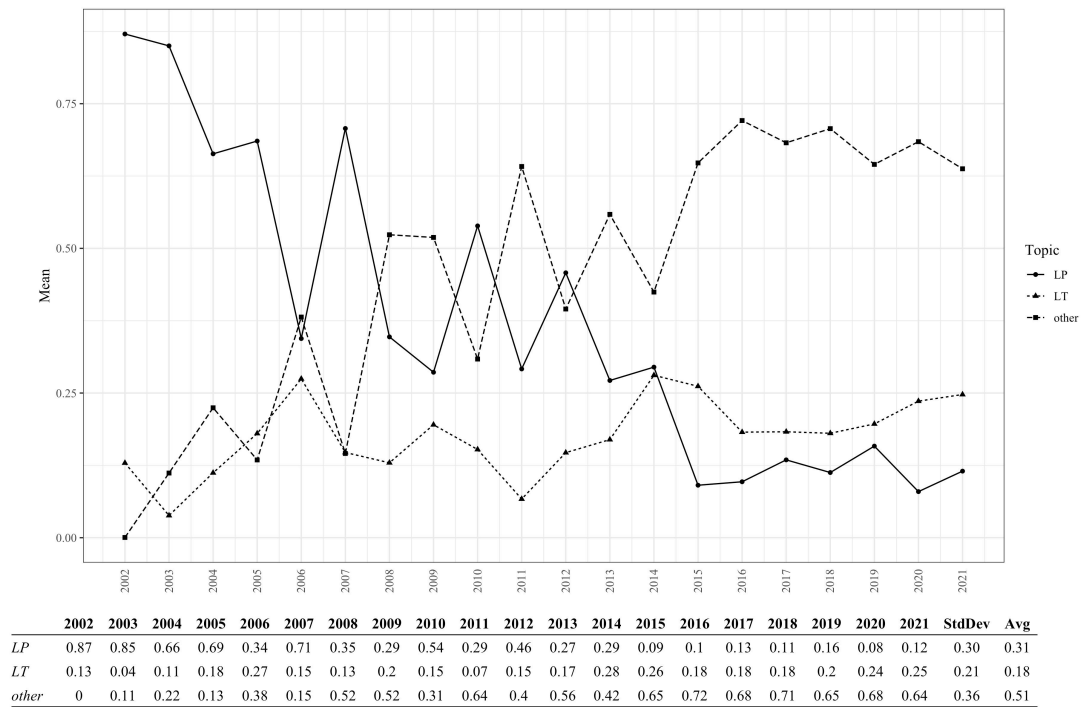


Figure 5. Topics variation cross-time in EU mandates

While LP remained predominant in this phase, missions occasionally deviated from the interventionist path, opting for a less intrusive strategy, as in the case of the DRC. After the first democratic elections in 2006 and the adoption of a new constitution, the EU began a gradual transfer of responsibility to local authorities. For instance, the 2006 EUPOL Kinshasa mission mandate sanctioned the initiation of the last stage in the creation of a Congolese *Integrated Police Unit* (IPU), which consisted of monitoring and mentoring the newly established IPU upon the completion of its training. Similarly, the 2011 EUPOL mission mandate marked a retreat from a more active role in reforming the Congolese Police after the ‘appropriation by the local authorities of the commonly agreed objective’¹⁵⁸ through the approval of a national *Policy Action Plan*.

Thus, among the types of missions authorized during this phase, European police missions (EUPOL) displayed the greatest variation across topics, anticipating a predominant trend of the later period centred on burden sharing and the use of instruments ‘from a distance’^{159 160}.

¹⁵⁸ EU Concept for ESDP Support to Security Sector Reform (SSR), 12566/4/04 (2005); 11.

¹⁵⁹ Joseph, “Resilience as Embedded Neoliberalism.”

¹⁶⁰ Mission-level data is available in Table 10 and Figures from 25 to 48 in Appendix.

The second period mandates (2014 onwards) sanctioned the rejection of liberal utopianism without rejecting the liberal ideals themselves¹⁶¹. The combined, though not parallel, growth of the local turn and residual topic ‘other’ outlined a change of strategy consisting of the abandonment of executive functions in favour of *local ownership* and disengagement from overambitious formulas privileging persuasion instead of imposition.

New missions in the Sahel (EUCAP Niger, EUCAP Mali), the Horn of Africa (EUCAP NESTOR, EUCAP Somalia), Libya (EUBAM), Iraq (EUAM), and Ukraine (EUAM) reiterate the emphasis on human rights, strengthening the rule of law, and the importance of stable institutions, while also avoiding direct reference to democracy and good governance. On the side of this downward adjustment of policy ambitions, the Union adopted a less intrusive style of intervention using a complex array of monitoring and assessment techniques.

On the one hand, mandates falling into the LT topic are usually advisory missions (EUAM Iraq, EUBAM Libya, EUAM Ukraine, EUAM RCA) aimed at ‘assisting the [national] authorities in the building of state security structures’¹⁶², and providing ‘advice and expertise [...] at strategic level’¹⁶³. These missions emphasize the central role of local stakeholders and ‘maximize national ownership [...] so as to secure stability and meet basic needs for populations in the short term, while at the same time strengthening governance, capacity, and economic growth, keeping state-building as a central element’¹⁶⁴. As in the case of the UN, EU mandates assumed a minimalist interpretation of the principle of *local ownership*, understood as burden-sharing, rather than active participation by local actors¹⁶⁵. On the other, the topic ‘other’ here identifies mainly *capacity-building missions* (EUCAP Niger, EUCAP Mali, EUCAP Somalia), focused on enhancing local capacities in specific sectors (e.g., law enforcement, security field, borders management), and supporting related national reforms. Thus, these missions tend to value thematic knowledge over local knowledge and rely on the role of experts as a way to avoid ‘fumbling in the dark’¹⁶⁶.

¹⁶¹ Biscop, “The EU Global Strategy.”

¹⁶² 2013/355/CFSP, art.2

¹⁶³ 2017/1869 (CFSP), art.2-3.

¹⁶⁴ European Commission, “Action Plan for Resilience in Crisis Prone Countries 2013-2020,” 1.

¹⁶⁵ Ejdus, “Local Ownership as International Governmentality,” 38.

¹⁶⁶ Autesserre, *Peaceland*.

Unlike the UN, which emanates a new mandate each time the mission is extended or modified¹⁶⁷, the EU issues only amendments to the original one. These are characterized by highly technical language and are thus usually marked as “other”. The qualitative check allowed for the separation of ‘procedural’ from ‘substantive’ mandates belonging to this topic. While most of the first-period mandates (i.e., policy, security reform, and rule of law missions) fall into the former group, those from the second decade of the 2000s belong to the latter, as we have already observed.

In conclusion, the EU seems more reactive to crises than the UN, having undertaken a more intelligible change of strategy in the retreat from *democratization* objectives. The reception of reforms in EU mandates is also evident in the covariance between topics and time, where the - albeit small - negative correlation of LP stands out, significant and determining more than one-third of the variance¹⁶⁸.

Nevertheless, rather than radically rethinking the most appropriate and efficient approach to accomplish its missions, the EU tailored them to fit the existing well-known rulebook¹⁶⁹, as is evident in the transition from the rule of law and security sector missions to advisory and capacity-building missions. EU disengagement from overambitious state-building goals did not imply a rejection of liberal principles and strategies but signified a return to *realpolitik*, understood as a way to realistically achieve liberal ideals, through measures that work from a distance rather than through aggressive regime change interventions¹⁷⁰. Earlier (calculated) deviations from the established approach, which appeared in the EUPOL mandates, became the rule in the second half of the 2010s because of new environmental developments. Thus, the (new) European strategy configures an instrumental adjustment that, in the use of experts and technical knowledge, as well as in the use of mentoring and training as preferred forms of intervention, has marked a move away from a ‘peace by coercive means’ toward a ‘peace by bureaucratic means’¹⁷¹. These dynamics also fit with Körppen¹⁷²’s argument that the normative underpinnings of liberal peacebuilding programs are not only manifested in the content and goals of the mandates, but also in the way in which these are implemented. For many

¹⁶⁷ UN mandates incorporate changes, even when minimal, to the text of the original mandate, which is therefore always reproduced in its entirety.

¹⁶⁸ See Table 12 and Figure 50 in the Appendix.

¹⁶⁹ Barnett and Finnemore, “The Politics, Power, and Pathologies of International Organizations.”

¹⁷⁰ Biscop, “The EU Global Strategy.”

¹⁷¹ Goetschel and Hagmann, “Civilian Peacebuilding.”

¹⁷² “Theoretical Challenges for Assessing Socio-Cultural Sensitivity.”

authors, IROs' emphasis on procedural aspects and the use of standard procedures and universal templates played a central role in transforming peace operations into uniform interventions insensitive to local contexts¹⁷³. Methods, therefore, far from neutral instruments, also have political implications.

5. Conclusions

In the last decade, several reforms have been implemented in the field of peacebuilding, seeking to provide a new approach in response to growing criticism and a lack of success. In their strategic documents, the UN and EU acknowledged the continuing deterioration in security and socio-economic indicators and the need to further encourage a shift in the mindset of the international community.

While acknowledging some potential in the new approach, scholars also agree in recognizing that the local turn qualifies as an adaptation of the liberal paradigm rather than a break with the past, thus a reform of policy instruments functional and sufficient for the maintenance of policy legitimacy, where deference to local agency has been functional to a pragmatic retreat from (over)ambitious interventionist goals. Such an argument has been proven plausible by extant research in the examination of general policy orientations and in the active confrontation between strategic guidelines and peacebuilding practice on the ground in a limited number of cases.

This study further builds on this literature by providing one of the first quantitative content analyses of the UN and EU peacebuilding mandates. Our conclusions are twofold. First, the evidence gathered shows that the utilitarian use of the local turn approach is already evident at the level of the mandates configuring a composite tool that acts along two lines: by providing a narrative centred on the need to hold local actors accountable, it justifies international disengagement from highly complex scenarios and, by providing a set of tools that operate from a distance, it helps international actors maintain direct influence over the intervened countries. Second, the findings show traits of systematicity in the use of local turn features, which, although more evident since the second half of the 2010s, when both organisations recognized that their expectations exceeded the capacity to deliver, has also been observed earlier in the cases of Afghanistan (UN) and the Democratic Republic of Congo (EU), where local ownership was operationalized in

¹⁷³ Andrews, Pritchett, and Woolcock, *Building State Capability*; Autesserre, *Peaceland*.

the mandates as a responsabilization for externally designed goals, allowing for a progressive international disengagement. This would suggest the existence of a strategic dimension, hence the ‘intention’ to use the principles of the local turn as an exit strategy for crises that threaten missions’ integrity and legitimacy.

The study has two main limitations. Our analysis focuses on discourses within mission mandates, which, although do not merely reproduce the strategic narrative of the IRO, because they contain binding provisions for policy implementation, they belong to the phase of policy adoption; thus, our inferences are circumscribed to this specific stage. On the other side, while the method employed is capable of capturing trends within texts, it is unable to explain the reasons behind them. In light of this, we call for a broader examination of the values, practices, structures and institutions that could prevent a significant revision of current peacebuilding strategies.

This article paves the way for further research on policy change dynamics in peacebuilding, with a specific focus on International Organisations, as key actors in the field, and the impact of organisational path-dependence mechanisms.

Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available for review in figshare at <https://figshare.com/s/bcf4f02bdf623bfa9dee>.

Acknowledgements

A previous version of this paper was presented at the SISP (Italian Political Science Association) annual convention in September 2022. We would like to thank Valerio Vignoli, Fabrizio Coticchia, Marco Di Giulio, Giampiero Cama, Oscar Mateos Martín, Matteo Mazziotti di Celso, Edoardo Corradi, the editor, and the anonymous peer reviewers for their very useful comments and suggestions, which contributed to substantially improving the paper. All errors and omissions remain our own.

Disclosure statement

The authors report there are no competing interests to declare

Notes on contributors

Giulio Levorato is a Ph.D. candidate in Political Science at the University of Genoa, Italy, and visiting research fellow at the Centre on Conflict, Development and Peacebuilding of the Geneva Graduate Institute. His research focuses on the role of bureaucracies in peacebuilding and potential alternatives to liberal peace.

Mattia Sguazzini is a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Genoa, Italy, in the curriculum of Security & Strategic Studies of the PhD Program in Security, Risk and Vulnerability. His research interest is in cybersecurity policy, cyberspace governance, and text as data methods in political science.

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