

# H-Net Reviews

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**Chiara Ruffa.** *Military Cultures in Peace and Stability Operations: Afghanistan and Lebanon.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018. 204 pp. \$65.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8122-5018-3.

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Over the period 2007-14, author Chiara Ruffa was embedded with French and Italian forces in the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNFIL II) and in the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) NATO mission in Afghanistan. During that time she conducted 164 interviews in seeking to explain differences in behavior between units deployed in peacekeeping missions. Ruffa found that French personnel prioritized patrolling and displays of force. Italian personnel, in contrast, emphasized the importance of delivering humanitarian aid. In investigating the question as to why such different practices emerged, Ruffa argues in *Military Cultures in Peace and Stability Operations* that it is the nature of civil-military relations and widely held societal beliefs about the use of force within home jurisdictions that shapes how military units will behave in mission. The main argument of the book is that military culture is key in shaping peacekeeping practices.

This is a well-written and engaging book. There are some clear claims made from the very start of the text. Early on in the book, Ruffa asserts that “no previous study has systematically examined the differences in peacekeeping practices in multinational missions and what might explain them” (p. 2), with existing works overly focused on structural issues at play in peace missions. This new text, she suggests, will help to fill that gap. In answering that question about what explains differences in practice, Ruffa points to military culture. Shaped by “a specific domestic configuration” that emerges from “policies about the armed forces and the military’s relations with civilian decision-making processes and society” (p. 5), military culture is comprised

of “a core set of beliefs, attitudes, norms and values” (p. 32) and is represented in material and ideational ways.

Ruffa selected a traditional peacekeeping mission in Lebanon to contrast with the more robust stability operation in Afghanistan. The units she embedded with were similar in terms of the size of deployment, had identical rules of engagement (RoE) and mandates, and were deployed in areas deemed to have similar threat levels (see summary tables pp. 69 and 95). These units also had similar ranking and command structures, doctrine, training programs, equipment, and weapons (p. 65). Ruffa utilized a range of methods when interacting with personnel—surveys, field observation, and in-depth interviews—both in mission sites and in the home bases of the units in Rome and Paris. She sought a balance of interviewees across different corps (such as logistics, force protection, and civil-military interaction units) and roles (officers, noncommissioned officers, and soldiers). Ruffa also pursued interviews with nongovernmental organization (NGO) representatives and UN officials as well as with parties involved in the conflict itself. In addition to this, Ruffa analyzed primary and secondary documents, going beyond the usual suspects, such as military doctrine and mission mandates, to consider diaries and memoirs as well as the creation of unit-relevant symbols and hymns. The breadth of material complements the depth of engagement.

The key arguments of the book are clearly rendered and are also, due to the methods employed, quite compelling. In considering differences in behavior, Ruffa argues that the French personnel viewed their mission as

more combative than their Italian counterparts did. From here she suggests this was in part due to French military culture being based on “controlled assertiveness,” versus an Italian emphasis on “good humanitarian soldiers” (p. 9). In making this argument, Ruffa traces historical developments as well as the impact of contemporary societal beliefs on military culture in each case. She notes the traditions and histories that shape different units within the same national institution (such as the Italian Alpini versus Ariete in Italy) as well as the importance of historical junctures (such as French president Charles De Gaulle’s “reprofessionalization” of the French forces).

Notably, Ruffa suggests that individual perceptions of operations constitute a “plausible causal mechanism” by which military culture influences military behavior (p. 10). Chapters 3 and 4 outline how, despite these units being deployed in very similar contexts, French and Italian personnel “exhibited strong differences” (p. 64) in their perceptions of context. This is where the research demonstrates its value. Ruffa reveals highly divergent perceptions between Italian and French contingents in both case study sites.

In the UNFIL case Ruffa notes that, on a scale of 1 (low) to 10 (high), 80 percent of Italian respondents to a questionnaire rated the threat level as being between 2 and 4, while 67 percent of the French respondents ranked the mission as being between 8 and 10 (p. 70). Other interesting findings are that 13 percent of Italian respondents defined peace as the absence of war, versus 53 percent of French respondents; and 27 percent of French respondents defined peace as building trust among the local population, compared with 60 percent of Italian respondents (p. 71). Military training was identified as being most the most important value of the mission for French respondents versus the Italian emphasis on being good humanitarian soldiers (p. 72).

Similarly striking findings emerged in the case of Afghanistan. Here, despite all personnel carrying long arms, the Italians still perceived the mission to be a peacekeeping one, in contrast to the French insistence that this was a counterinsurgency operation. In this case there was also a difference in which reference documents were considered most important—with the French emphasizing their national military doctrine and the Italians pointing to UN resolutions (Ruffa suggests this indicates that international norms were more important to the Italian contingent). These findings emerged despite the fact that the French contingents suffered slightly fewer attacks than the Italians when in-country.

In each of these chapters Ruffa consciously addresses other possible explanatory factors for the differences in behavior. In the Afghanistan chapter, for example, she looks to doctrine, standard operating procedure training, leadership, and so on. But, as she notes, many of these are part of, or complementary to, the broader phenomenon of military culture.

This text makes a number of contributions to the scholarly understanding of peacekeeping practices and the nature of military forces. Responding to the call from Severine Autesserre and others for more empirically oriented studies in peacekeeping research, Ruffa also contributes to the more conceptual debate by proposing a new concept called Unit Peace Operations Effectiveness (UPOE). She argues that measurable indicators for UPOE include: responsiveness, integration, military and non-military skills, quality, and interoperability and that high levels of these indicate better chances for successful deployment. This is a useful contribution to thinking about effectiveness in peace operations, as is the evidence that military institutions are not monolithic.

In terms of similar contemporary research, although Ruffa suggests that there is no systematic study of explanations for differences in peacekeeping practices, there are a number of recent publications which suggest this is a growing field of inquiry across a range of disciplines. Cornelius Freisendorf’s *How Western Soldiers Fight* (2018), for example, seeks to answer similar questions such as “what do foreign soldiers do when facing unconventional problems, how can we explain their behavior?”[1] His answers to these questions is that “organizational routines” are key. These routines, Friesendorf asserts, emerge from historical experience and the domestic political environment, and they are institutionalized through rules, training, education, and artifacts. These themes speak to those raised by Ruffa—that is, he also suggests that domestic conditions and cultures demarcate how military forces are likely to behave and what it is they are likely to prioritize.

Peace research is also increasingly demonstrating interest in and around this topic of explaining the variability of national contingent behavior. Some focus on the impacts of levels of diversity in peacekeeping operations.[2] Others consider the relationship between troop “quality” and peacekeeping outcomes. In an example of the latter, in an article in *Journal of Peace Research*, the authors argue that “operational advantages translate into better capabilities to protect civilians.”[3] Ruffa’s work consciously seeks to bridge some of the security/peace

studies divide, and these additional works suggest that others see value in this too.

This is also a growing area of interest in the field of International Relations (IR). The field is concerned with meta-questions such as considerations of the relationships between structure and agent, between international norms and variations in implementing those norms. However, this can also be relevant to Ruffa's work. In a recent article in the *European Journal of International Relations*, Ingvild Bode and John Karlsrud suggest that there are varying ways in which the international norm of the protection of civilians (PoC) is implemented in practice. Surveying military advisors at the UN, the authors emphasize that there are some regional generalizations about a willingness to use force in a "robust" manner but that, overall, these advisers displayed "widely differing understandings of the role that the use of force plays and should play in implementing the PoC norm." [4] Though this is not a piece that seeks to explain such behavior, it demonstrates that IR scholars are also concerned to understand the nature of differences in peacekeeping practices. Ruffa's book is also of relevance to IR debates. As she herself notes in the conclusion, the book necessarily engages with the debates between rationalists and constructivists.

In terms of criticism, the laying out of existing work in the introduction is at first a little misleading. Elizabeth Kier's classic *Imagining War* (1997), for example, is simply endnoted when Ruffa states that there is little research in the field of military studies or elsewhere that seeks to discuss "where military culture comes from" (p. 4, emphasis added). It is not until later in this same introduction that more recognition is given to the importance of this and other works in the field. A discussion of some of the works cited in the endnotes would also have been helpful for academic audiences, though some of the relevant literature is discussed in chapter 2 to better effect. Similarly, there is mention of the importance of direct observation and mention of this being "ethnographic," but there could have been more discussion about the relevance of anthropological works. A recent notable addition is Tone Danielson's *Making Warriors in a Global Era: An Ethnographic Study of the Norwegian Special Operations Commando* (2018), and it is clear that anthropolog-

ical studies of military forces are becoming more acceptable (Nina Harding's 2016 Phd thesis, "You Bring it, We'll Bring it Out: Becoming a Soldier in the New Zealand Army," is an excellent example). Admittedly, though, engaging this literature in the body of the text would have run the risk of increasing the burden on a less specialist audience.

Finally, there are a few slippages in the text. For example, Ruffa conflates "societal beliefs about the use of force" with "whether the public tend to be supportive about the armed forces" (p. 5) as well as conflating "military" with "army," as noted in the quote about military culture becoming "deeply embedded in a military unit and the national army to which it belongs" (p. 32). These are small fish to fry, however, and do not diminish the book's contribution.

The text is highly readable and very interesting. The breadth of material collated, the effort to attain rigor, and the depth of analysis make this book a very important contribution to the field. This is a timely piece of work, as others are waking to the need to explain why and how national security forces operate differently in peace, stability, and conflict situations in an era of the "protection of civilians" and a return to robust peacekeeping.

#### Notes

[1]. Cornelius Friesendorf, *How Western Soldiers Fight: Organizational Routines in Multinational Missions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 239.

[2]. Vincenzo Bove and Andrea Ruggeri, "Kinds of Blue: Diversity in UN Peacekeeping Missions and Civilian Protection," *British Journal of Political Science* 46, no. 3 (2016): 681–700.

[3]. Felix Haas and Nadine Ansorg, "Better Peacekeepers, Better Protection? Troop Quality of United Nations Peace Operations and Violence against Civilians," *The Journal of Peace Research* 55, no. 6 (2018): 742–58; 756.

[4]. Ingvild Bode and Jon Karlsrud, "Implementation in Practice: The Use of Force to Protect Civilians in United Nations Peacekeeping," *European Journal of International Relations* (2018): 1-28; 13, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066118796540>.

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