

Status Seeking through Peacekeeping: Ukraine's Quest for a Positive Social Identity in the International System

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When do states pursue status enhancement through peacekeeping and how do they go about it? This article argues that states' contributions to peace operations can be related to attempts at acquiring a positive identity in the international arena through membership in highly ranked groups. Drawing on insights from social identity theory and peacekeeping and burden-sharing research, the article elaborates on how states choose an identity management strategy that involves peacekeeping practices, the factors influencing states' ability to pursue status through peacekeeping, and the conditions for succeeding in acquiring the desired social identity. Ukraine's significant peacekeeping engagement in the first two decades following independence represents an intriguing case of an emerging state positioning itself in the international and regional systems, which makes it a relevant case study to explore. Therefore, the article discusses how two of Ukraine's formative peacekeeping experiences have fostered, or alternatively undermined, the pursuit of a positive social identity, first as a sovereign state and member of the broader international community and second as an aspiring member of the Western community of states.

¿Cuándo buscan los Estados la mejora de su estatus a través del mantenimiento de la paz?, ¿de qué modo lo hacen? Este artículo argumenta que las contribuciones de los Estados a las operaciones de paz pueden estar relacionadas con sus intentos de adquirir una identidad positiva en el ámbito internacional a través de la afiliación a grupos que gozan de una alta consideración. Usando las ideas de la Teoría de la Identidad Social (TIS), así como las investigaciones sobre el mantenimiento de la paz y el reparto de las responsabilidades, este artículo explica: cómo los Estados eligen una estrategia de gestión de la identidad que implica prácticas de mantenimiento de la paz, los factores que influyen en la capacidad de los Estados para buscar ese estatus mediante el mantenimiento de la paz, así como las condiciones para lograr adquirir la identidad social deseada. El importante compromiso de Ucrania con el mantenimiento de la paz durante las dos primeras décadas posteriores a su independencia representa un caso curioso de un Estado emergente que se posiciona en los sistemas internacionales y regionales, lo que lo convierte en un estudio de caso relevante para analizar. Por lo tanto, el artículo debate cómo dos de las experiencias formativas de mantenimiento de la paz por parte de Ucrania han

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fomentado, o por el contrario socavado, su búsqueda de una identidad social positiva, primero como Estado soberano y miembro de la comunidad internacional en general, y segundo, como aspirante a ser miembro de la comunidad occidental de Estados.

Quand les États cherchent-ils à renforcer leur statut grâce au maintien de la paix et comment s'y prennent-ils ? Cet article affirme qu'il est possible de relier les contributions de chaque État aux opérations de maintien de la paix à des tentatives d'acquisition d'une identité positive sur la scène internationale en rejoignant des groupes au statut élevé. En se fondant sur les idées de la Théorie de l'identité sociale (TIS) et de la recherche sur le maintien de la paix et le partage du fardeau, l'article s'intéresse plus avant au choix étatique d'une stratégie de gestion identitaire qui implique le maintien de la paix, aux facteurs qui déterminent la capacité d'un État à acquérir un statut par le biais du maintien de la paix, mais aussi aux conditions de réussite de l'obtention de l'identité sociale souhaitée. Le cas de l'Ukraine intrigue : l'importance de son engagement dans le maintien de la paix durant les deux décennies qui ont suivi son indépendance a permis à cet État émergent de se positionner dans les systèmes internationaux et régionaux. Sa singularité rend cette étude de cas pertinente. L'article s'intéresse donc à deux expériences de maintien de la paix formatrices pour l'Ukraine : comment ont-elles encouragé, ou nui, à la recherche d'une identité sociale positive ? D'abord, en tant qu'État souverain et membre d'une communauté internationale plus large. Ensuite, comme pays souhaitant rejoindre la communauté occidentale d'États.

Introduction

Status concerns are pervasive in international politics and always have been. As [Neumann and de Carvalho \(2015, 2\)](#) point out, “status seeking amongst polities is a perennial and (almost) system-wide preoccupation.” Oftentimes, such pursuits result in conflict; indeed, the status scholarship in international relations (IR) has been faulted for its overarching focus on great powers and conflict, and has more recently considered more benign status-seeking pathways by small states and other non-great powers ([Paul et al. 2014](#); [Neumann and de Carvalho 2015](#); [Wohlforth et al. 2018](#)), including through foreign policy behaviors associated with a “good international citizen” role. In this context, peacekeeping contributions have emerged as significant strategies in the pursuit of “middle power” status ([Hayes 1997](#)), as policies directed at overcoming “small state” status ([do Céu Pinto 2014](#); [Haugevik and Rieker 2017](#)), and even as avenues for non-Western states to claim “great power” recognition ([Krishnasamy 2001](#); [Suzuki 2008](#)). Although the link between peacekeeping contributions and status enhancement has been probed in numerous empirical studies, the theoretical ramifications of this foreign policy behavior remain largely unexplored. When do states pursue status improvement through peacekeeping and how do they go about it? And what determines a successful status-seeking strategy?

As a system-preserving policy that enjoys widespread legitimacy, peacekeeping understandably exerts a strong appeal on status-seeking actors in international politics, given the significant reputational gains traditionally derived from such involvement. This is particularly the case for United Nations peacekeeping operations (UNPKOs), which are widely regarded as manifestations of good global citizenship. Although the literature attempting to explain why states contribute to UN peace operations would naturally be a prime candidate for engaging with the issue of status and peacekeeping, its coverage of the topic has largely been superficial and

unsystematic. Achieving or enhancing “status” in international politics features as one of the most pervasive self-interested motivations for contributing troops to peacekeeping missions (Neack 1995; Kammler 1997; Krishnasamy 2001), but this is more or less everything we know on the topic. These contributions do little more than act as an echo chamber to the well-known mantra according to which “status matters,” leaving unanswered important questions regarding when and how states pursue status improvement through peacekeeping and when they are likely to succeed in their strategy.

This article seeks to address these limitations by bringing in insights from the status literature in IR, and particularly Larson and Shevchenko’s (2003, 2010, 2014) seminal work on status-seeking behavior. Taking inspiration from social identity theory (SIT), the authors translate this social psychological theory into an IR framework aiming to show how states dissatisfied with their status act in order to achieve a positive social identity. Even though SIT’s central tenet according to which “people derive part of their identity from membership in various social groups” (Larson and Shevchenko 2010, 68) is widely accepted by IR status research, the peacekeeping and burden-sharing literatures have, by and large, not engaged with these insights. This article argues that an important—though not exclusive—reason why states contribute to peace operations is related to attempts at acquiring or affirming a positive identity in the international arena through membership in highly ranked groups. While this argument emphasizes the conceptualization of status as identity (an actor’s membership in a group), this can hardly be dissociated from an understanding of status as position in a hierarchy (an actor’s relative standing in a status community) (Renshon 2017, 4). Importantly, the article is underpinned by “a rich/bold ontology” of foreign policy behavior (Eun 2012) that acknowledges multicausality as a useful mode of explanation for the complex reality of foreign policy decisions.

Do states engage in peacekeeping with a view to acquiring elite club membership and emulate the values of dominant powers? (a *social mobility* strategy). Are they competing with another state that is recognized for its peacekeeping role in order to change the social hierarchy? (a *social competition* strategy). Or, are they trying to frame an already strong peacekeeping record as high status worthy and thus redefine the social hierarchy away from traditional material criteria? (a *social creativity* strategy). Obviously, these are ideal types of identity management strategies, as states can choose a combination (Larson and Shevchenko 2014, 46). Peacekeeping activities have typically been employed by states to achieve social mobility and creativity objectives and have rarely been explored from a social competition, potentially system-disruptive, perspective. However, competitive status-seeking strategies through peacekeeping are not unheard of, and their exploration would certainly enrich our understanding of the spectrum of implications of peacekeeping policies.

Drawing on insights from both SIT and peacekeeping and burden-sharing research, the article elaborates on how states choose an identity management strategy that involves peacekeeping practices, the factors influencing states’ ability to pursue status through peacekeeping, and the conditions for succeeding in acquiring the desired social identity. Whether a strategy of mobility, competition, or creativity is opted for largely depends on perceptions regarding the permeability of group boundaries and the legitimacy of the status hierarchy (Larson and Shevchenko 2019, 1190). Peacekeeping contributions will be deemed appropriate foreign policy behaviors if they can facilitate the underlining goals of the chosen strategy: membership in a higher-status group, gaining competitive edge over dominant groups, or achieving superiority in a “soft power” domain. Moreover, states’ ability to pursue any of these strategies (or a combination) further depends on domestic structure constraints, as suggested both by SIT and by peacekeeping and burden-sharing studies (Bennett et al. 1994; Clunan 2014). Finally, SIT offers important clues as to when we can expect these strategies to succeed. Given that status is perceptual

(Renshon 2017, 4), its accomplishment rests on recognition that can be granted either at declaratory level or more substantively through accommodation. Importantly, from an SIT perspective, recognition must come from relevant reference groups, i.e., those groups that the status-seeking actor compares itself with.

In seeking to expand current scholarly understandings of when and how states seek to achieve a positive social identity through peacekeeping and when they are likely to succeed, this article brings into focus a case study that is not the usual suspect of status, peacekeeping, or burden-sharing research and yet has a strong record of contributing to multilateral peace operations within the UN, NATO, EU, OSCE, and US-led coalitions, notably Ukraine. In 2001, Ukraine was the seventh-largest UN troop and police contributor and by the mid-2000s it had become the largest European contributor (United Nations Peacekeeping 2001, 2005), in addition to being the only country to have participated in every NATO operation (Mission of Ukraine to NATO 2020). Ukraine's significant peacekeeping engagement in the years following independence represents an intriguing case of an emerging state positioning itself in the international and regional systems. Although Kyiv continues to be a contributor to peace operations to this day, the timeframe covered by this article mainly concerns the period 1992–2012, in an attempt to link the country's pursuit of a positive social identity with the experience of early statehood and the search for a unifying national identity. Therefore, the focus is on discussing how two of Ukraine's formative peacekeeping experiences have fostered, or undermined, the pursuit of a positive social identity, first as a sovereign state and member of the international community, and second as a regional leader and an aspiring member of the Western community of states. Ukraine's UN peacekeeping contributions and its attempts to establish a peacekeeping role in the former Soviet Union, illustrate social mobility and, respectively, social competition strategies, which have had important effects on the country's status internationally and regionally.

The article proceeds as follows. First, it explores the role of "status" within the peacekeeping and burden-sharing literatures to show the inadequacy of current debates. Second, it provides an overview of status-seeking strategies identified by the SIT-inspired status research and discusses conditions for their choice (permeability of group boundaries and the legitimacy of the status hierarchy), pursuit (absence of domestic structure constraints), and success (recognition by relevant referent groups). The subsequent two sections discuss Ukraine's peacekeeping policy within the UN and regionally in the former Soviet Union from the perspective of identity management strategies and reflect on their impact on the country's international and regional status.

Understanding Peacekeeping and Multilateral Operations Contributions: A Status Perspective

Despite the abundance of studies seeking to explain states' UN troop contributions, a general theory of UN peacekeeping contributions remains an "illusory" pursuit, which has been attributed as much to the pervasive incentive in IR to "claim generalizable conclusions" (Bellamy and Williams 2013, 5) as to the highly idiosyncratic nature of peacekeeping foreign-policy decisions (Koops and Tercovich 2016, 604). IR-inspired works have tapped into the interests versus values debate in an attempt to ascertain whether troop contributors are driven by national interests or normative/ethical concerns and found that, along with territorial and economic security, and financial gain, status enhancement is an important self-regarding motivation for contributing troops to UN peacekeeping missions (Neack 1995). In fact, it has been claimed that the establishment of UN peacekeeping itself originated in "an aggressive campaign to establish a special status for Canada and other 'middle power' states in the new United Nations" (Neack 1995, 183) in the aftermath of World War

II. Despite the peacekeeping literature's moral undertones, it is widely acknowledged that participation of middle powers in peace operations has attracted international recognition of their position in the international system (Bellamy and Williams 2013, 6). Although subject to more constraints than middle powers as far as foreign policy choices are concerned, small states are also believed to share the former's preference for international cooperation through multilateral institutions, with participation in peacekeeping operations being perceived as a "smart" strategy to maximise influence (do Céu Pinto 2014, 392; Haugevik and Rieker 2017, 216).

In addition to enabling middle powers to forge a distinctive international role, and supporting small states' pursuit of international relevance, peacekeeping has served as a fruitful strategy for non-Western states to improve their international standing. For Krishnasamy (2001, 56–57) "there is no doubt that India's growing aspirations for 'great' power recognition has led it to attach great importance to its participation in global affairs, including UN peace missions," a view endorsed by studies of Indian contributions to UN peacekeeping (Bullion 1997; Choedon 2017). Moreover, Suzuki (2008) finds that China and Japan—from a position of "frustrated great powers"—have used participation in UN peacekeeping to garner recognition of "legitimate great power" status. While maintaining the theoretical link between peacekeeping contributions and status improvement, other sources variously point to China's UN peacekeeping policy as part of a "rising power" strategy (He 2019) and a "responsible power" approach to international crises (Richardson 2011). At the same time, non-Western states for whom great powerhood is not an option, have used participation in peacekeeping operations to end international isolation and become recognized members of the international community (Krishnasamy 2001), and forge a positive international image to oppose negative perceptions of domestic politics (Zaman and Biswas 2013). More specifically, when it comes to achieving "status" via institutional roles, countries who aspire to a permanent UN Security Council seat tend to actively participate in peace operations in the hope that their candidature would be cast in a favorable light (Bullion 1997; Adebajo 2013). A similar strategy is followed by states who seek a non-permanent seat on the UN Security Council, particularly as the UN Charter notes that the foremost important factor to be considered is member states' contribution to the maintenance of peace and security (Malone 2000, 17; Gilady 2018, 91).

Although there is little disagreement that "status ambitions were, and remain, powerful motives of governmental behaviour" (Kammler 1997, 3), particularly in foreign policy areas such as peacekeeping and foreign assistance (Khanna and Sandler 1997), the scholarship so far referenced does little to further our theoretical understanding of the concept of "status" and its role in foreign-policy decision making. To the extent that status is identified as an important motivation for states' UN peacekeeping contributors, it has so far not been the subject of a systematic, theoretically informed analysis, but rather has emerged as an ad-hoc factor on a typically long shopping list of explanatory variables. Invariably, the conclusion is that "status matters" in peacekeeping participation decisions, but it is not clear when and how it is likely to influence policy making.

Research on alliance and coalition burden-sharing has more recently focused on the role of "status" and "prestige" concepts in explaining participation in multilateral military operations. A range of findings across this literature confirms that the pursuit of status was a decisive factor driving contributions by Nordic countries to US-led operations (Jakobsen et al. 2018; Pedersen 2018), Canada's engagement in the war in Afghanistan (Massie 2013), Sweden's involvement in NATO operations (Pedersen 2020), and Belgium's participation in the coalition against ISIL (Pedersen and Reykers 2020). Focusing predominantly on "small states," these studies make important theoretical contributions both to the "small state" and to the "status" literatures in IR: By underscoring the distinct status-seeking behavior of these actors, they elucidate the puzzle of significant military contributions by small

powers who could otherwise easily free ride, and highlight the relevance of reputational gains. However, theoretical gaps remain here too, notably with respect to illuminating how states go about improving their international status (for an exception, see Wohlforth et al. 2018). It is to this blind spot that the article now turns by discussing states' status-seeking strategies as they have been conceptualized by IR scholarship drawing on SIT.

Identity Management Strategies in International Politics

Following from the previously mentioned conceptualization of status as both identity and position, three key characteristics are typically discussed by recent status research. The first one is *positionality* (Renshon 2017, 4), which derives from actors' embeddedness in a broader community that gives meaning to their perceived standing within the group. Simply put, "status is measured *relative* to others" (Larson and Shevchenko 2014, 9). Second, status is *subjective* (Larson and Shevchenko 2014, 9), meaning that it hinges on beliefs, rather than material capabilities. These two aspects lead Wohlforth et al. (2018) to argue that "status is thus the result of an intersubjective process" (528). Thirdly, status is *social* (Renshon 2017, 4), in that it reflects *collective*, higher-order beliefs about an actor's relative position in a hierarchy. Thus, status is dependent on broad (although not necessarily absolute) agreement among members of a given status community, at which point the actor's rank or identity becomes a social fact (Dafoe et al. 2014, 374).

From an IR perspective, states can achieve a positive social identity by "joining elite clubs, trying to best the dominant states, or achieving pre-eminence outside the arena of geopolitical competition" (Larson and Shevchenko 2010, 67), in other words through strategies of; (1) social mobility (imitative behavior of a higher-status group); (2) social competition (challenging a higher-status state on those dimensions that define its superior status); and (3) social creativity (attempting to modify the meaning of status-conferring characteristics to match those in which the self is superior). When group boundaries are believed to be permeable, *social mobility* can be the strategy of choice for members of lower-status groups. While it can take many forms, it will most likely entail an endorsement of those values and institutions propagated by dominant powers. *Social creativity* is likely to come into play when the status hierarchy is perceived as legitimate and stable, thus incentivizing dissatisfied group members to reinterpret their relative position rather than attempt to change the status quo. This is typically done by reframing a negative feature as positive or identifying new benchmarks for status superiority (Larson and Shevchenko 2014, 39–40). Finally, if group boundaries are believed to be impervious to new members and the status hierarchy is viewed as illegitimate and unstable, then groups who seek to improve their position may engage in *social competition*. The target of this identity management strategy is the higher referent group in the system and the areas subject to competitive behavior are those in which the latter is superior (Larson and Shevchenko 2010, 72).

If the choice of strategy depends on the perceived permeability of group boundaries and the legitimacy of the status hierarchy, the actual ability of foreign policy decision-makers to pursue any given strategy hinges on the absence of domestic structure constraints. From an SIT perspective, elite consensus is of paramount importance. According to Clunan (2014, 282), decision-makers can only advance certain national self-images and pursue corresponding identity management strategies to fulfil them, if these are deemed by other elites to possess historical validity and a potential to be successfully implemented under current conditions. When perceptions vary among domestic political stakeholders, any changes in leadership can result in the abandonment of previously selected identity management strategies and the selection of new ones (Larson and Shevchenko 2019, 14).

Finally, the success of status-seeking strategies is largely a function of recognition from relevant reference groups. As Wohlforth et al. (2018, 528) emphasize, “there will be no status without recognition.” From an SIT perspective, actors’ pursuit of a positive social identity means that they will engage in social comparisons with similar or higher-status reference groups (Larson and Shevchenko 2003, 89).

Before proceeding to the empirical analysis of the case study, it is pertinent to make explicit the methodological underpinnings of this work. To the extent that it revolves around the perceptual and social nature of status, the article adopts a constructivist approach espousing an interpretive epistemology. Relying on narrative process-tracing, it draws on primary sources such as Ukrainian strategic documents, Ukrainian policy-makers’ speeches and public statements, as well as ten in-depth semi-structured interviews with relevant Ukrainian officials, to probe their views on Ukraine’s status-seeking strategies and the role of peacekeeping therein. This approach has the benefit of providing a rich, in-depth understanding of key actors’ perspectives. At the same time, while the flexibility afforded by semi-structured interviews has generated valuable findings, it has also suffered from the difficulty of producing comparable information. To the extent possible, data from interviews has been triangulated with other sources in order to ensure the validity and reliability of findings; however, where this was not possible, the author endeavored to include only findings which were broadly consistent with insights from other interviews.

Entering the International Community: Ukraine, UN Peacekeeping, and Social Mobility

Ukraine became independent in an international system that initially discouraged its emergence as a new state and subsequently questioned its permanence as a new international actor (Kuzio 2002, 211). Therefore, the main preoccupation of Ukraine’s foreign policy in the years following independence was “to define the contours of sovereignty and to assert and test that sovereignty at every turn” (Karatmycky 1992, 91). Specifically, Ukraine sought to pursue this goal through a two-fold strategy: gaining recognition for its newly acquired independent status and achieving separateness from Russia (D’Anieri et al. 1999, 2). While Kyiv pursued these goals through various avenues, including embedding Ukraine within European organizations such as the Council of Europe and fostering friendly bilateral relations with neighbouring countries, in the early post-Cold War era participation in UN peacekeeping “acquired a certain cachet as enhancing national prestige and independence, especially as far as the newly independent states of the former Soviet Union were concerned” (Findlay 1996, 4–5). From an SIT perspective, Ukraine’s troop contributions to UN missions were part of an identity management strategy of social mobility meant to facilitate Kyiv’s “passing” (Ward 2017, 823) into the “sovereign states” and “international community of states” groups. Admittedly, as this section will show, Ukraine’s motivations for committing troops to UNPKOs were multi-layered, with status gains part of a broader range of benefits expected from peacekeeping activities. Nonetheless, the link between establishing Ukraine as a newly sovereign, independent country and UN peacekeeping contributions is strongly substantiated both by official doctrine in the years following independence and policy-makers’ accounts. Thus, Ukraine’s first foreign policy doctrine stated that the young country attached “primary importance to the peacekeeping activities of UN bodies,” which it regarded as “increasing the role and influence of the Ukrainian state in the world” (Parliament Decree 1993a). Equally, there is consensus among Ukrainian decision-makers that in the early 1990s UN peacekeeping contributions were seen as boosting Ukraine’s “self-confidence internationally” (Interview 7) and as a way for the newly independent states to “prove itself” (Interview 8).

The fluid dynamics of the post-Cold War period were particularly favorable to social mobility strategies, with boundaries between social groups at a historic level of permeability, thus enabling some of the leaders of former Soviet republics to seek independence and subsequent membership into the international and/or Western communities of states. While this was done primarily by pursuing liberal market and democratic reforms, participation in UN peacekeeping represented an alternative pathway of identification with dominant international norms, as in the early 1990s this practice “had gained nearly universal acceptance as a standard behavior for responsible states,” and peacekeeping “came to reflect the essence of international norms” (Hatakeyama 2014, 630).

UN peacekeeping was initially seen as a way to achieve recognition of Ukrainian statehood and made “independence a reality in practical terms” (D’Anieri et al. 1999, 213; Interview 3).¹ These contributions, in turn, were supported in the years following independence by the broad consensus among Ukrainian political elites who viewed them as sources of international “authority” (Foreign Minister Zlenko at UN General Assembly 1993) and “strengthening [. . .] the international prestige of the state and its armed forces” (President Kuchma cited in Kolomayets 1996). This was certainly the case as far as Ukraine’s first ever contribution to the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) in the former Yugoslavia was concerned. Ukraine’s representative to the UN claimed that the country’s participation in UNPROFOR was “gaining recognition for the young Ukrainian state through the life-periling dangers it faces daily” (The Ukrainian Weekly 1992). At the same time, Ukrainian leaders linked peacekeeping activities in the former Yugoslavia to “a serious, pragmatic and results-oriented policy” (Foreign Minister Zlenko at UN General Assembly 1992) and to “practical actions” underscoring Kyiv’s commitment to “carry the burden of responsibility of a member of the international community” (President Kuchma at UN General Assembly 1994). Ukrainian participation in UNPROFOR was also facilitated by a domestic consensus between the executive and the legislative branches on Ukraine’s policy toward the former Yugoslavia prior to the 1994 elections (Kuzio 1997, 589).

Moreover, the potential of UN peacekeeping contributions to act as markers of independent foreign policy by promoting a distinct Ukrainian national identity has been emphasized by Ukrainian decision-makers who point to the importance of participation in UNPKOs for the establishment and expansion of bilateral relations with host countries (Interview 7). Thus, Ukraine’s UN peacekeeping contributions have effectively put the young state on the map for countries as varied and distant as Guatemala, Angola or East Timor.

By the mid-1990s, Kyiv’s policy of asserting sovereignty had plateaued (D’Anieri et al. 1999, 206) and President Kuchma’s administration started progressively working toward embedding Ukraine’s foreign policy within European structures such as NATO and the EU, with the overall goal of setting the country on a pro-Western course. As far as the country’s peacekeeping policy is concerned, this was reflected in Ukraine’s shift toward participation in NATO operations in the former Yugoslavia (despite strong opposition from Russia, parliamentary opposition, and public opinion), Iraq, and Afghanistan, and in the US-led multinational force in Iraq. This shift was also notable in Ukraine’s strategic documents: if the 1993 Military Doctrine of Ukraine specifically highlighted the country’s “willingness to allocate appropriate military contingents to the UN forces” (Parliament Decree 1993b), then the follow-up Presidential Decree (2004) prioritises “military-political partnership and cooperation with NATO and the EU and participation in international peacekeeping activities.”

¹This is all the more relevant as Ukraine lacks a history of independent statehood and the institutional coherence and territorial continuity that characterizes Western historical narratives of nation-states.

That Ukraine's participation in NATO's Partnership for Peace (PfP) was driven by an attempt to assert a positive—European, as opposed to Eurasian—identity, has long been inferred by area studies scholarship (Molchanov 2002, 251; Bukkvoll 2011, 83). At the same time, it is precisely the reference to Ukraine's national identity and its unsettled nature, oscillating between—and trying to reconcile—east and west, that has rendered NATO and US-led multinational operations highly controversial among domestic elites and the public. And while UN peacekeeping has seldom raised the same degree of skepticism, it has occasionally suffered from the fallout from non-UN operations, exposing the limits of domestic consensus. One such instance is illustrated by the Ukrainian parliament rejecting for the first time—and twice—in Ukraine's history the president's proposal to send a contingent to the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) in November 2003 (BBC Monitoring 2003b). Despite President Kuchma enjoying a solid parliamentary majority, a string of deaths of Ukrainian soldiers in Iraq in the weeks preceding the vote prompted a rare alliance between opposition legislators (from Our Ukraine, Communist Party, Socialist Party, and Yuliya Tymoshenko bloc) leading to the rejection of the President's request (Byrne 2003; BBC Monitoring 2003b). A subsequent vote in early December 2003, possibly following some degree of favor exchange between governing and opposition forces, eventually approved the dispatch of Ukrainian peacekeepers in support of UNMIL (BBC Monitoring 2003c).

Interestingly, national identity conceptions played a significant role in the political (and sometimes public) opposition to UN peacekeeping contributions, mainly because of the association of the latter to Western interests. As long as UN peacekeeping served the widely shared goal of asserting Ukraine's independence and consolidating its membership of the international community, it enjoyed broad domestic consensus. But as soon as opportunistic policy-makers who opposed Ukraine's engagement with NATO and the United States framed UN peacekeeping contributions as "bowing to US pressure" (Oksamytna 2016), they shifted the previously unproblematic debate on UN peacekeeping as buttressing sovereignty and conferring a positive—and visible—international presence onto the controversial terrain of east versus west foreign policy orientation. This was a highly contentious issue in a country where, given the lack of national statehood, identity was shaped along ethnocultural and linguistic, rather than civic, lines. It has been argued that the pervasive political debates in Ukraine around the country's non-aligned status and the lobby of the political forces supporting this foreign policy direction have contributed to a gradual scaling down of Ukraine's contributions to UNPKOs (Interview 8). The amended and updated Military Doctrine of 2012 refers prominently to non-alignment and mentions "participation in international operations" only in brief and general terms (Presidential Decree 2012). In line with SIT expectations, as perceptions among domestic political stakeholders started to vary more widely, previous identity management strategies were gradually abandoned. This process was eased by the fact that the initial goal of Ukraine's social mobility strategy through peacekeeping—consolidating its place in the international community as a recognized sovereign and independent state—was perceived as having been achieved (Interviews 5 and 9).

It is difficult to accurately assess the impact of Ukraine's UN peacekeeping contributions on its status claims, given that status recognition by peers and significant others tends to be patchy, and the effect of peacekeeping on status is often difficult to disentangle from that of other factors. From the perspective of Ukrainian policy-makers, the "status seeking through peacekeeping" strategy was successful in not only facilitating Ukraine's recognition as a fully sovereign state and its acceptance within the folds of the international community, but also enhancing its standing at the UN (Interview 1). In the years following independence, at a time when Kyiv was in the spotlight as a reluctant disarming nuclear state, UN contributions allowed Ukraine to be acknowledged by relevant reference groups in a positive way—as

Table 1. Ukraine's troop and police contributions to UN peacekeeping, 1992–2021

UN mission	Location	Deployment period
UNPROFOR	Former Yugoslavia	07/92–12/95
UNCRO	Croatia	04/95–12/95
UNMOT	Tajikistan	04/95–04/00
UNPREDEP	FYROM	05/95–03/99
UNTAES	Croatia	01/96–02/98
UNMOP	Croatia	01/96–11/02
UNAVEM	Angola	01/96–06/97
UNMBIH	Bosnia and Herzegovina	06/96–11/02
MINUGUA	Guatemala	02/97–05/97
MONUA	Angola	07/97–01/99
UNPSG	Croatia	03/98–09/98
UNMIK	Kosovo	07/99–ongoing
MONUC	Democratic Republic of Congo	03/00–06/10
UNIFIL	Lebanon	06/00–08/06
UNSMA	Afghanistan	04/00–05/01
UNMEE	Ethiopia & Eritrea	08/00–07/08
UNAMSIL	Sierra Leone	12/00–12/05
UNTAET	East Timor	01/01–05/02
UNOMIG	Georgia	08/01–06/09
UNMIS/ET	East Timor	05/02–05/05
UNMIL	Liberia	01/04–02/18
UNMIS	Sudan	12/05–07/11
UNMIT	East Timor	01/07–10/12
UNOCI	Côte d'Ivoire	10/09–02/17
UNFICYP	Cyprus	10/09–ongoing
MONUSCO	DRC	07/10–ongoing
UNMISS	South Sudan	08/11–ongoing
UNISFA	Abyei Region	08/12–ongoing
MINUSMA	Mali	07/19–ongoing

Source: Author's own compilation based on data from <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/troop-and-police-contributor>.

an important participant in peacekeeping efforts, being as it was the largest European contributor to UNPKOs (United Nations Peacekeeping 2005; also, see table 1). There is some evidence to this effect coming from within the UN itself. Statements such as: “It would be important for a major country such as Ukraine to project a positive image all over the world, and peacekeeping is a way to do this” (Kolomayets 1993a) by UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Gali, point to the potential of peacekeeping to bestow status recognition upon active contributors. Over the years, Ukraine's participation in UNPKOs has gained the country rhetorical recognition from the UN (BBC Monitoring 1997; Woronowycz 2002) and significant others such as the United States (White House Situation Room 1992; BBC Monitoring 2003a). UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in 2012 commended Kyiv's indispensable role in stabilizing the situation in Côte d'Ivoire: “we might not have prevailed without the contribution of one country: Ukraine, which lent us three combat military helicopters at the critical moment” (Kyiv Post 2012), while another high-ranking UN official praised Ukraine's vital and significant contributions which have had “an impact from Afghanistan to Kosovo, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sudan, Ivory Coast and other countries” (UNMIL 2012). In addition to rhetorical recognition, Ukraine was also able to obtain a degree of substantive accommodation of its status claims, including the approval and endorsement of several Ukrainian initiatives within the UN, including the Convention on the Safety of UN and Associated Personnel; the resolution proclaiming May 29 the International

Day of Peacekeeping; the Declaration on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of UN peacekeeping, as well as representation in numerous U.N. bodies, specialised agencies and committees and key units of the UN Secretariat (the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Department of Field Support) (Polischuk 2012, 97–98). Notably, Ukraine has twice been elected as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council since becoming independent (2000–2001 and 2016–2017). Ultimately, it is plausible to assume that Ukraine’s “active and full-scale entry into the world community,” as well as its forging of an international image “as a reliable and predictable partner in the world” were facilitated by multiple strategies, including the “development of bilateral interstate relations” and “expanding participation in European regional cooperation” (Parliament Decree 1993a). UN peacekeeping contributions, while certainly not the only, or even the main, status-seeking strategy, were an important element of what Kyiv identified as one of its four main foreign policy directions related to its role within the UN and other universal international organizations, in addition to the development of bilateral relations, expanding participation in European regional cooperation, and cooperation within the framework of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS; (Parliament Decree 1993a).

While acknowledgement of its sovereign status and acceptance into the international community, in addition to the achievement of a level of prestige, were important reasons that informed Ukraine’s prolific engagement in UN peacekeeping in the two decades under review here, there were additional factors at play that motivated Kyiv’s troop contributions. This is consistent with the findings of much of the literature exploring states’ motivations for peacekeeping contributions, which typically identifies a combination of political, economic, and normative factors (Bellamy and Williams 2013). First of all, the financial argument was undoubtedly a relevant one. Between 1992 and 1999, the compensation received by Ukraine from the UN amounted to \$72.5 million, considerably exceeding Kyiv’s expectations (Woronowycz 1999). It has been argued, in the particular case of Ukraine’s participation in UNPROFOR, that these financial benefits explain why “Kyiv’s attitude was always one of readiness, rather than reluctance, to send more troops” and why public criticism over casualties has remained subdued (Kuzio 1997, 592). By November 1993, five Ukrainians had died and twenty-one had been injured in Yugoslavia; still, in response to a new request from the UN, the Ukrainian authorities decided to treble its contribution, which was now to reach approximately 1,200 troops (Kolomayets 1993b). The demand within the ranks of Ukrainian volunteers remained high, with four applicants for each position (Kuzio 1997, 592).

A related argument revolving around the potential for economic benefit entails the issue of post-conflict reconstruction contracts and trade with and investment in conflict regions more broadly. As Ukraine’s foreign minister pointed out, “Ukraine is determined to make a practical contribution to United Nations peace efforts aimed at resolving conflicts in Africa. This determination is reinforced by our aspiration to expand trade and economic cooperation with our African partners” (Foreign Minister Tarasyuk at the UN General Assembly 2000). Kyiv had also allegedly expressed hope that Ukrainian companies would be awarded tenders for reconstructing infrastructure in Kosovo (Woronowycz 2001).

Second, peacekeeping contributions provided good opportunities for training, which a cash-strapped country like Ukraine could simply not afford otherwise (Kuzio 1997, 592; Woronowycz 2001). As a result, by 1993, while the conventional combat readiness of Ukrainian armed forces declined steadily, the only area of improvement involved the battalion deployed as part of UNPROFOR (Krawciw 1995, 149).

These additional motivating factors for peacekeeping contributions do not invalidate the article’s central claim that participation in peacekeeping operations was at the same time a useful status-seeking strategy. While SIT posits that “status concerns

may overwhelm material calculations” (Larson and Shevchenko 2003, 96), when the two reinforce rather than contradict each other, the pursuit of status is facilitated. Ukraine could, therefore, enjoy the material profits brought by UN remuneration and training of peacekeepers and at the same time reap the status-related benefits of its peacekeeping efforts.

Competing For Regional Leadership: Ukraine, Russia, and Peacekeeping in the Post-Soviet Space

In a speech to the Civic Union coalition on February 28, 1993, then Russian president Yeltsin invoked Russia’s “special responsibility” toward the former Soviet Union and demanded that the UN grant it “special powers as guarantor of peace and stability in this region” (Crow 1993, 28). As Moscow attempted to recast itself in a “regional leader” role by establishing the CIS, peacekeeping in the post-Soviet area emerged as an important instrument through which it laid claim to a special “sphere of influence.” Throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, Ukraine’s rejection of Russia’s prerogative to regional leadership was an important element of its foreign policy approach in the post-Soviet space (Interview 4). However, it was neither a consistent approach, which manifested itself across all foreign policy areas, nor did it benefit from elite consensus. Rather, it was an “idea that grew within some circles in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs” (Interview 5) advocating for a more prominent Ukrainian role in the region. This was underpinned not only by an attitude typical of a “former colonial dependency” vis-à-vis its old imperial coloniser (Kuzio 2002, 211), but, more poignantly, by Moscow’s rejection of Kyiv’s sovereign status and its attempts to socialise the emerging state into a “protectee” role (Holsti 1970, 270). Ukraine’s dissatisfaction with this subordinate position represents a key—though insufficient—factor in explaining its attempt at improving its regional standing. Nonetheless, the choice of a social competition strategy vis-à-vis Russia is more directly related to what SIT identifies as the perceived illegitimate position of a higher-status actor (Larson and Shevchenko 2010, 72). As stipulated in the country’s 1993 foreign policy doctrine “Ukraine considers itself, along with all other former Soviet republics, to be the legal successor of the Union of the SSR and does not recognize any advantages or exceptions to this principle” (Parliament Decree 1993a). Russia’s leadership was also far from being unanimously accepted by all the other former Soviet republics, rendering the social hierarchy unstable and thus creating the right mix of circumstances for a lower-status group (Ukraine) to pursue status through competition. That this should take place in the areas of regional conflict resolution and institution-building—both of which with an important peacekeeping element—is also consistent with SIT expectations that dissatisfied groups will compete with superior groups in areas that define their higher status. Against this backdrop, this section discusses Ukraine’s cautious attempts at challenging Russia’s self-ascribed regional leader role in peacekeeping and explains the quick unravelling of this tentative social competition strategy. While the strategy admittedly was not confined to peacekeeping activities and had a much broader political scope, the peacekeeping element was believed to be promising in attracting Western support (Interview 1). The two instances where Kyiv sought to carve a leading regional role for itself—with a peacekeeping component—were the settlement of the Transnistrian conflict and the GUAM Organization for Democracy and Economic Development (Interview 6).

In the early stages of the Transnistrian conflict, Ukraine’s role was marginal, as would be expected from an emerging state preoccupied with asserting its sovereignty. From the very beginning of discussions over the deployment of peacekeepers in Transnistria, Kyiv supported the creation of a genuinely multilateral force, as opposed to a Russian-dominated operation. It opposed (together with Moldova and Romania) Russia’s initial suggestion of using its highly politicised

14th Army as a peacekeeping or “separation” force (Crow 1992a, 34) and instead supported the idea of a multilateral “peacemaking” force sanctioned by the CIS, which, however, never materialized due to Russian concerns regarding the presence of foreign troops on former Soviet Union territory (Allison 1994). Ultimately, Moldova was left with few options and eventually agreed to the presence of a peacekeeping force formed of Russian, Moldovan and Transnistrian battalions (Shashenkov 1994, 53). Despite this suboptimal outcome, Ukraine was able to advance Moldova’s interests during negotiations for the Moscow Memorandum signed on May 8, 1997, mainly by downgrading the role of the CIS in the process (Garnett and Levenson 1998, 29). The Memorandum granted Ukraine the roles of guarantor state alongside Russia, as well as mediator together with Russia and the OSCE. Although these were characterized as “decisive” and as challenging “Russia’s hitherto unique status,” not least by opening the way for a Ukrainian peacekeeping presence in the region (Wolczuk 2003, 95), they remained inconsequential with respect to advancing Kyiv’s regional peacekeeping objectives.

In what at the time was considered a sign of Ukraine’s growing importance as a regional player and a significant indicator of peer recognition—just as important for small states as higher-status group recognition (Wohlforth et al. 2018, 530)—both the Moldovan and the Transnistrian authorities called on Kyiv to deploy a peacekeeping contingent, something which was, however, opposed by Moscow (Wolczuk 2003, 96). Already in early 1997 Moldovan President Lucinschi asked for a more active Ukrainian role in conflict resolution, a request agreed to by Ukrainian President Kuchma who envisaged a “larger role” for Kyiv in the Transnistrian issue, including a potential Ukrainian peacekeeping presence (Garnett and Levenson 1998, 28). Subsequent discussions between de facto Transnistrian leader Smirnov and President Kuchma went as far as to agree on precise locations for Ukrainian deployments (Garnett and Levenson 1998, 29). However, a peacekeeping role for Ukraine in Transnistria continued to remain elusive. In 1998 Kyiv deployed 10 military observers (RFE/RL Newline 1998) and four vehicles in the security zone of the Transnistrian region as a symbolic presence (Kuzio 2000, 91) but a contribution to the actual peacekeeping force remained off the table from Russia’s perspective (Interview 2).

Having failed to make much headway in establishing a relevant peacekeeping footprint in Transnistria, Ukraine pursued parallel efforts through GUAM. The organization, bringing together Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, and Moldova,² aimed to intensify trade and economic links, as well as cooperation on transport and energy infrastructure projects and strengthening regional security. It championed the idea of establishing a peacekeeping battalion, which was hoped would contribute to the group’s institutionalization and provide it with a security role (Wolczuk 2003, 150), as well as add substance to counter-prevailing conflict settlement formats in the region (Bailes et al. 2007, 181). However, there has never been consistent support from GUAM member states for involvement in regional peacekeeping and Ukraine’s own commitment to the idea vacillated as domestic structure constraints worsened. As one interviewee acknowledges, GUAM initiatives that went beyond economic and functional cooperation were opposed both within Ukraine and in the other GUAM members as a fragile balance between counterbalancing but not antagonizing Russia was sought (Interview 7). For instance, Kyiv’s perceived backpedalling on the key GUUAM Summit scheduled for March 2001 was attributed to President Kuchma’s domestic political weakness (Moroney and Konoptyov 2002, 182–83). Later on, under more favorable domestic conditions following the Rose and Orange Revolutions in Georgia and Ukraine respectively, the notion of a peacekeeping battalion and special police forces gained the approval of GUAM defence ministers in August 2006. Still, the proposal did not lead to any

² Between 1999 and 2005 Uzbekistan was also a member, with the organization known as GUUAM during that time.

concrete results and instead gradually disappeared from the agenda, with Moldova in 2007 stating that it was not prepared to enter discussions on the issue, and GUAM Secretary General Valeriy Chechelashvili declaring in 2009 that “currently, establishing a peacekeeping battalion is not a priority of organization’s activities” (Ostapenko 2009).

President Yushchenko’s coming to power in 2005 signaled a renewed assertiveness on the part of Ukraine in its attempts to gain regional standing as part of a vocally asserted pro-Western foreign policy orientation. According to the newly elected president, “in the nearest future, Ukraine has to become a real regional leader—from Warsaw to Tbilisi, be full of initiative, form regional and international initiatives” (cited in Zhminko 2009, 72), an ambition that would be fleshed out through a number of small-scale but nevertheless significant policy actions. The year 2005 would be marked by the internationalization of the Transnistrian conflict settlement format to include the EU and the United States as observers; the deployment of the EU Border Assistance Mission to Moldova and Ukraine; the launch of the so-called Yushchenko Plan for the resolution of the Transnistrian conflict; and the revitalisation of GUAM. In particular, the Yushchenko Plan was widely touted as an opportunity for Ukraine to achieve a regional leadership position, though the fine print of the proposals eventually “set back Ukraine’s stated goal to become a ‘regional leader’ in the Black Sea region” and hurt its international credibility (Socor 2005a,b,c). Ukraine’s presentation of the proposals (the “Seven Steps”) underpinning the Yushchenko Plan at the Chisinau summit (April 21–22, 2005) revealed domestic divisions over the handling of the Transnistrian issue and a worrying slide toward Russia’s preferences. The main cleavage was between Ukrainian Foreign Minister Borys Tarasyuk and National Security and Defence Council (NSDC) Secretary Petro Poroshenko, with the latter taking over the handling of the Transnistrian issue from Tarasyuk, sidelining him and shifting to an approach that risked endangering Moldova’s sovereignty at the expense of Russia’s endorsement (Socor 2005c). In breaking with Ukraine’s past demands for the internationalization of the peacekeeping format, the final Yushchenko Plan dropped the point on changing the format of the Russian-led peacekeeping operation which had been included in the “Seven Steps” presented in Chisinau (Socor 2005d). An early proposal for the deployment of 600 Ukrainian troops as part of the multinational force (Socor 2005b) did not even make it on the “Seven steps” list. In allowing for changes to the initial proposals, President Yushchenko likely attempted to boost the chances of his Plan being accepted by all parties (Interview 1). Unsurprisingly, the approach backfired, antagonizing Ukraine’s GUAM partners and other stakeholders such as Romania.

Ultimately, Ukraine failed to “outdo or equal” Russia as far as regional peacekeeping was concerned. As SIT would predict, the lack of consensus among ruling elites on how to best deal with the Transnistrian issue undermined the pursuit of a status competition strategy meant to challenge Moscow’s regional pre-eminence. By early 2006, Ukraine had fallen into line with Russia’s Transnistria policy and abandoned any regional peacekeeping aspirations. Moscow’s pre-existing peacekeeping presence on the ground in Moldova’s breakaway region made any change in the status quo improbable, and the disinclination of other security providers to become involved (Interview 10) and offer an institutional umbrella for Ukraine’s engagement, both in Transnistria and within GUAM, rendered Kyiv’s competitive moves wholly ineffective.

It should be acknowledged that Ukraine’s approach toward the Transnistrian issue and its championship of GUAM more broadly were to some extent instances of balance-of-power behavior. In Transnistria, Ukraine acted as the result of a complex web of factors, including “what appears to be a deeper-seated competition between Russia and Ukraine” (Lamont cited in Wolczuk 2003, 91) and an attempt to counterbalance Moscow’s influence (Interview 7). The conflict has thus been occasionally

used as an opportunity for Ukraine to assert a regional power status. In a similar vein, it is widely acknowledged that for Ukraine, GUAM represented an attempt to replace Russia as a regional leader (Wolczuk 2003, 152). As the “catalyst” behind the development of this pro-Western regional organization, Kyiv “has played a key role in nurturing the emergence of GUAM as a regional counterweight within the CIS” (Kuzio 2000, 85–6). In addition to underlining its members’ independence, sovereignty, and separateness from Russia, GUAM also served to legitimise European identity claims in the absence of formal membership in Euro-Atlantic institutions. Indeed, one of GUAM’s key objectives was to establish closer ties with the EU and NATO and promote political and military integration with these structures, while maintaining economic relations with Russia. Ultimately, what distinguishes status-seeking social competition from traditional balancing is the purpose behind the behavior: to influence others’ perceptions in the former’s case and attain security or power as far as the latter is concerned (Larson and Shevchenko 2010, 73). Yet, these two motivations often overlap and Ukraine’s foreign policy behavior in the post-Soviet space is an example of such strategic complexity (Interview 6).

The power imbalance between Moscow and Kyiv meant that the latter’s claim to regional leadership through peacekeeping could have only been credible if embedded in a wider, Western-oriented framework. This was the underlining rationale for Ukraine’s offer to send peacekeepers to Abkhazia under NATO’s PfP (Wolczuk 2003, 153) and the more general proposals of creating a GUAM Ukrainian-led peacekeeping battalion that would operate under NATO’s umbrella (Wolczuk 2003, 163) or GUAM peacekeeping units for UN- or OSCE-mandated operations (Socor 2005a), none of which eventually materialized. Kyiv hoped that Western partners would lend their support to some of these proposals but was dismayed at the overall lack of interest and disengaged approach (Interview 10). In order for Ukraine’s social competition strategy to be successful, its status claims should have been accommodated by Western powers through support for multilateral peacekeeping formats and, more broadly, regional organizations such as GUAM. As the UN, NATO, and the EU were altogether reluctant to take on a peacekeeping role in the former Soviet Union and thus challenge Russia’s regional pre-eminence, Ukraine’s status-seeking strategy was bound to fail. This was compounded by the wavering commitment of GUAM members, who one by one withdrew their support for this arrangement, confirming the EU and NATO’s initial skepticism vis-à-vis the organization and discouraging actors such as the United States, which had originally provided cautious support (Moroney and Konoplyov 2002, 188–89).

Conclusion

This article has sought to bridge the peacekeeping and burden-sharing literatures that question why states participate in peace operations, on one hand, and IR status research, on the other, in order to advance our understanding of states’ attempts at achieving positive social identities via peacekeeping. In doing so, it has drawn on an SIT-inspired approach to status-seeking behavior (Larson and Shevchenko 2003, 2010, 2014), which was able to illuminate questions related to when, how, and with what effect peacekeeping activities are used to promote the quest for positive social identities in the international arena. The case study explored here—Ukraine’s peacekeeping efforts within the UN and at the regional level during the first two decades following independence—illustrates the diverse ways in which peacekeeping can help states affirm distinctive and progressive identities as international and regional actors. While identifying peacekeeping contributions as a valuable element of a broader status-seeking strategy for Ukraine in the years following independence, the findings acknowledge that neither was participation in UNPKOs Ukraine’s only—or even main—method of status building, nor was achieving status the exclusive motivation for engaging in peacekeeping.

The article has argued that it was in part the quest for a distinctive identity (both as a newly independent country and one separate from Russia) that underpinned Ukraine's strategy of social mobility through peacekeeping, which in the immediate post-Cold War era was viewed as a universal norm and enjoyed widespread legitimacy. The extraordinary circumstances at the end of the Cold War, which bestowed unprecedented legitimacy on the emerging US-led world order and welcomed new acolytes into the system, in addition to Ukraine's perception of unfair treatment, represented important conditions for the choice of a social mobility strategy. Even though the identification of peacekeeping as an instrument of social mobility was initially driven by a select group of Ukrainian policymakers (Interview 8), its pursuit was facilitated by broad domestic consensus in favor of UN contributions, which were largely seen as fostering a national self-image that everyone could rally around: an independent, self-reliant state and a responsible member of the international community. However, as non-alignment became more entrenched as a foreign policy direction among some Ukrainian elites, UN participation was occasionally opposed by domestic political elites. In conjunction with the perception that Ukraine had accomplished its initial sovereignty-related objectives, this led to a scaling down of UNPKO contributions, as well as a general diminishing of political importance of UN peacekeeping from a status perspective.

The second instance of status seeking through peacekeeping by Ukraine analyzed in this article depicts a different strategy in so far as it zooms in on Kyiv's regional leadership aspirations in the former Soviet Union. These must be viewed in the broader context of Russia's assertive moves to become a regional gendarme through peacekeeping deployments in Georgia, Moldova, and Tajikistan, which Ukraine regarded as threats to its newly gained independence. Its inability to persuade Moscow to treat it as an equal (impermeability of group boundaries), together with a perception of the social hierarchy as illegitimate, opened the door to a social competition strategy that would see Kyiv try to carve a peacekeeping role for itself in the post-Soviet space, in conjunction with a broader strategy to balance Russia. Ukraine attempted to obtain a mediating and peacekeeping role in the Transnistrian conflict and to establish a regional alliance that excluded Russia (GUAM). The strategy was pursued with caution and, most of all, sought the patronage of the West. In line with SIT assumptions, in order for the strategy to succeed in establishing Ukraine as a regional leader by virtue of its peacekeeping presence, this status claim should have been recognized and granted through accommodation by relevant others. Security providers such as the UN, NATO, and the EU had always been reluctant to engage themselves in the region for fear of antagonizing Russia, and even peer states such as Moldova and Azerbaijan dithered in their commitment to a regional arrangement perceived as hostile to Russia, such as GUAM. This was in part a consequence of domestic political changes, and Ukraine itself experienced the limits of its social competition strategy on the grounds of intra-elite divisions. The contents of the Yushchenko Plan marked a shift in policy and illustrated the consequences of rancorous internal power struggles over the Transnistrian issue. By abandoning its peacekeeping ambitions in Transnistria, the Plan also effectively ended the pursuit of a competitive strategy toward Russia in this particular area.

This article has sought to show that states engage in peacekeeping for reputational reasons not merely because "status matters," but in order to achieve a positive social identity in the international system. As a foreign policy activity that enjoyed widespread legitimacy in the early post-Cold War years, UN peacekeeping attracted many newly independent states as an avenue for affirming their recently gained sovereignty and gaining the acceptance and recognition of the broader international community. This social mobility strategy among novice states is likely to persist, as evidenced by Timor-Leste's UN peacekeeping contributions following independence. At the same time, UN peacekeeping has long been employed by Nordic states in order to play a "moral" role in international security, an approach

rooted in social creativity (Wohlforth et al. 2018, 538). The idea that peacekeeping is essentially a “do good” foreign policy behavior has occasionally made it attractive as cover for states pursuing power politics objectives, as is the case for Russia in the former Soviet space, triggering states like Ukraine to engage in social competition strategies revolving around peacekeeping. The potential for peacekeeping activities to be variously mobilized in the service of social mobility, creativity, and competition strategies highlights the myriad ways in which this foreign policy behavior can bring about status in IR. In particular, the potential for peacekeeping policies to disrupt the international order and change the status hierarchy is an important finding and should be explored further, as it goes against the common understanding of peacekeeping as supporting the status quo.

Interviews

1. Interview former Advisor to the Secretary of the National Security and Defence Council of Ukraine, May 1, 2022 (phone) (Interview 1)
2. Interview former Foreign Policy Advisor to the Chairman of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, May 10, 2022 (phone) (Interview 2)
3. Interview former Deputy Minister of Defence, June 8, 2022 (phone) (Interview 3)
4. Interview former Military Advisor to the President of Ukraine, June 12, 2022 (phone) (Interview 4)
5. Interview former UN Military Observer MONUSCO (Democratic Republic of Congo), June 12, 2022 (phone) (Interview 5)
6. Interview member of Verkhovna Rada (Parliament) of Ukraine, June 30, 2022 (Zoom) (Interview 6)
7. Interview former Permanent Representative of Ukraine at the UN, July 6, 2022 (phone) (Interview 7)
8. Interview former Deputy Foreign Minister, July 8, 2022 (Zoom) (Interview 8)
9. Interview former Advisor to the Head of the Committee on Foreign Affairs in the Ukrainian Parliament, July 13, 2022 (phone) (Interview 9)
10. Interview former Minister of Foreign Affairs, July 15, 2022 (phone) (Interview 10)

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