

# DO PEACEKEEPERS' SOFT SKILLS MATTER? THE CASE OF EUFOR OPERATION ALTHEA

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*This study aims to determine the role of the soft skills of adaptation, relations with locals, relations with other peacekeepers, stress management and cultural awareness, in accomplishing peacekeeping operations. In accordance with the research method of this study, a survey was conducted in the context of EUFOR Operation Althea, in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The data were collected by means of structured face-to-face interviews, with voluntary participation of thirty-two peacekeepers. The collected data were analyzed according to content analysis method and interpreted. Findings indicate significant roles of each of the above-mentioned soft skills.*

**Key words:** *Peacekeeping, Peacekeeper, Soft Skills, European Union Force (EUFOR), Operation Althea, Bosnia and Herzegovina.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The scope of international interventions began to change in correspondence with the end of Cold War. In this milieu emerging new internal conflicts of states and malfunctioning state orders cause disruption and instability in the international system. Therefore, international interventions are still necessary to appease the rising tensions in conflicting areas [1]. The most salient purposes of international military intervention to another country are humanitarian necessities, areal security considerations and strategic evaluations [2].

Nowadays, due to several contextual factors of peacekeeping operations, such as multi dimensionality, flexibility and cultural diversity, peacekeepers encounter communicational and adaptational problems [3]. These problems may be overcome by peacekeepers who are good at some specific soft skills. Therefore, this study aims to determine the extent to which peacekeepers possess the

soft skills of adaptation, relations with locals, relations with other peacekeepers, stress management and cultural awareness, in order to overcome communicational and adaptational problems and accomplish peacekeeping operations. EUFOR Operation Althea is one of salient examples of new era peacekeeping operations. That is why we chose to conduct our research in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The question this study addresses is to what extent the soft skills of adaptation, relations with locals and other military personnel of coalition, stress management and cultural awareness have a role in accomplishing peacekeeping operations. During this research, between July and October 2012, data were collected by means of face-to-face structured interviews with voluntary participation of thirty-two officers, who were from nine participating countries including; Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Czech Republic, Hungary, Macedonia, Netherlands, Romania, Spain and Turkey. The research topic

is examined from general to specific. Hence, initially a general description of peacekeeping operations and EUFOR Mission were given. Then, characteristics of soft skills and their relations with peacekeeping operations were explained. Following data analysis and interpretation, findings were discussed.

## **2. PEACEKEEPING OPERATIONS**

Subsumed by international interventions, peacekeeping operations are generally undertaken in post-conflict situations, usually by forging a coalition, which embodies military facts from various countries, where efforts head towards sustaining conditions of a peace agreement or a ceasefire. Conducting missions with non-use of combat force was one of the major principles of peacekeeping operations. The primary objectives of peacekeeping forces are patrolling in conflict prone areas, by this means overseeing the area of responsibility to keep ceasefires and peace agreements alive [4]. Hence the ultimate objective of a peace support operation (PSO) can be sited as establishing a just and stable peace. In this respect, it is possible to define peacekeeping operations as operations which are undertaken by multinational coalitions, with or without warring sides' approval, conducted neutrally, in accordance with international legislation in order to keep on predetermined peace process or ceasefire and prevent, moderate and terminate the hostilities between or within states [5].

Throughout history peacekeeping operations evolved three generations. The first generation of peacekeeping operations was limited to separation of conflicting parties with lightly armed and neuter peacekeepers, who observe and monitor the peace process. With the end of Cold War a new kind of peacekeeping generation evolved, which was multidimensional in comparison to the first generation. That is, in addition

to the monitoring mission, the new dimensions of finding solutions to conflicts and removing the reasons for the presence of peacekeepers were added. In the course of time, as peacekeepers were exposed to violence and attacks in cases like Somalia, Former Yugoslavia, Liberia and Haiti, the old doctrine of non use of weapons by peacekeepers became indefensible. In this way, with regard to Chapter VII of UN charter, the third generation of peacekeeping operations emerged, and consisted of robust military forces [6].

## **3. EUFOR OPERATION ALTHEA**

Following Bosnia's declaration of independence from Yugoslavia in March 1992, an ethnic war began between Bosnia's Croats, Serbs and Bosniaks and continued brutally until 1995. The war ended with NATO's military intervention, which was followed by the Dayton peace process. A new constitution for Bosnia was created in Dayton, by which two new ethnic entities were emerged within one state, causing instability in the country. These entities are the Serb Republic and the Bosniak-Croat Federation, tied to the weak central government of Bosnia and Herzegovina. In this way, beginning with the robust Implementation Force (IFOR) of 60.000 troops, which was subsequently replaced by the Stabilization Force (SFOR) of 30.000 troops, NATO had operated in Bosnia since 1995. However at NATO's Istanbul Summit in June 2004 the replacement of SFOR in Bosnia by a EU force by the end of same year was announced [7]. With regard to Istanbul announcement and resolution 1575 of the UN Security Council, European Union Force (EUFOR) Operation Althea was launched on 2 December 2004. At the beginning, the operation comprised three components. The first component was three Multi National Task Forces of 1.600 to 1.800 troops each, comprising Task Force Northwest in Banja Luka,

Task Force North in Tuzla and Task Force Southeast in Mostar under command of the headquarters in Sarajevo, which was subsequently downsized to a Multinational Manoeuvre Battalion in 2007. The second component of EUFOR Althea was the Integrated Police Unit, whose duty was crowd and riot control, investigation and assistance against organized crime, border security and weapon collection. The third component of EUFOR Althea consisted of 44 Liaison and Observation Teams, which were later on downsized to 29 teams, and performed their duties as the eyes and the ears of the entire operation. In 2010 a new component, the Mobile Training Teams, was added to the structure of EUFOR Althea, whose duty was to provide training and capacity building support for the newly founded Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina [8]. In this context the main tasks of EUFOR personnel can be summarized as disarmament of warring parties and civilians, sustainment of deterrence, provision of safe and secure environment, provision of support to local administrations, local military and local police units, suppression of all kinds of illegal activities [9].

#### **4. DESCRIPTION OF SOFT SKILLS**

Soft skills are a mixture of social skills and interpersonal skills, which are strongly related with emotional intelligence. They are the courteous way of presenting, interacting, negotiating, problem solving and managing, which are essential at every level of an organization, including most prominently peacekeeping forces [10]. Self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, stress management, empathy and social interaction skills are prominent soft skills generally speaking [11]. In today's fast changing and reshaping world, with rapid improvement in communication technology, and as a consequence of a shift from an industrial society to information

society [12], many field missions and headquarters' work emphasize integrity, communication and flexibility [13]. However the problem is the undervalued importance of soft skills. In the last few years all of the surveys, which were conducted in order to find out how important soft skills are, revealed that the collected results remain consistent. The soft skills are inevitably in demand [14].

#### **5. PEACEKEEPING OPERATIONS AND SOFT SKILLS**

In a typical peacekeeping operation there are several tasks, which must be performed properly, such as relief activities, disarmament of armed groups, reintegration of warring sides, conducting fair elections, implementing justice and reconciliations [15]. Peacekeeping operations incorporate multidimensional, troublesome and blended missions, which need physical stamina, as well as mental dexterity. Therefore, accomplishments of these tasks necessitate possession of soft skills [16]. When military personnel are trained solely for combat missions and assigned to peacekeeping operations, they may encounter problems due to the lack of soft skills [17]. Additionally, personnel, who lack adaptation skills and are not enough motivated for the mission, would show unwillingness and after a while question their role as peacekeepers [18]. Therefore, peacekeepers should be equipped with necessary soft skills in accordance with their tasks. Some of these skills are having patience, the confidence to delegate authority, ability to engage with people outside the military, cultural awareness, interpersonal skills, communication skills and stress management [19].

If implementations of peacekeeping operations are planned to be perennial, soft skills play an important roles because forced implementations are prone to be short lived [20]. Successful

peacekeeping operations are products of typical team works. That's why peacekeepers' ability to build relations with locals and allies positively has crucial importance. Especially, in a team communicating clearly, listening and comprehending each other effectively have strong effects on the success of the mission [21]. Moreover, in correspondence with the environment of peacekeeping operations rapid adaptation skills, cultural awareness skills, negotiation skills and stress management skills of peacekeepers play an important role in the accomplishment of peacekeeping missions [22].

These evaluations clarify the importance of soft skills as part of multinational and multidimensional recent peacekeeping operations. In accordance with these necessities, in this study, the soft skills of adaptation, relations with locals and other military personnel of coalition, stress management and cultural awareness were analyzed in terms of their roles in accomplishing peacekeeping operations.

## **6. METHOD**

### **6.1. PARTICIPANTS**

The participants to this survey comprised thirty two officers, who performed their duty at EUFOR headquarters at that time, between July and October 2012, and were from nine participating countries including; Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Czech Republic, Hungary, Macedonia, The Netherlands, Romania, Spain and Turkey. All of the participants took part in our survey voluntarily. The sample carries unified characteristics. The age profile of the sample is between 26 and 48, all participants are male, 25 of them are from the Army, 5 of them are from the Air Force and 2 of them are from the Navy, their ranks vary from Captain to Lt. Colonel. Participants' tenure of military service ranges from 6 to 28 years, with an average of 17.2 years. The majority of the respondents (86%) had previous experience in

peacekeeping operations, while a small group (24%) of the respondents had a history within the same EUFOR mission previously. In terms of educational level, the sample includes a relatively high number of people who have completed their graduate studies (%68), while all the others have their bachelors.

### **6.2. MATERIALS**

Structured face-to-face interviews [23] were used as data collection technique. The interview structure comprises two sections. The first consists questions directed toward the demographic characteristics of participants such as nationality, rank, number of years in military service, age, force, educational qualifications, previous participations in peace operations, attended trainings prior to operation and duration of training. The second section consists of questions directed toward the peacekeeping mission, emphasizing first impressions, relations with locals, relations with other peacekeepers, motivations to attend the peacekeeping mission, stress and cultural differences.

### **6.3. PROCEDURE**

The question this study addresses is to what extent the soft skills of adaptation, relations with locals and other military personnel of coalition, stress management and cultural awareness have a role in accomplishing peacekeeping operations. To that end the case study method [24] was used as qualitative research methodology. Therefore, the EUFOR Operation Althea was determined as case of our research and a survey was conducted in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina between July and October 2012. The data were collected by means of structured interviews by the head of training and capacity building division of the mission at that time, who is also a co-writer of this study. Before the survey all permissions needed were taken from EUFOR staff. Prior to commencement of

interviews a brief explanation about the general purpose of the study was provided by the interviewer to the interviewees. The participation to the study was voluntary and all responses were kept anonymously. The interviewees answered predefined interview questions. The interviewer took notes below every question according to interviewees' answers. The interviews were designed and conducted in English, considering the high level of English competence of the EUFOR personnel. EUFOR is clearly focused on creating self-sufficient multinational units within headquarters for ensuring a comprehensive approach and to create a collective mind against the complicated issues and situations. So, this blended structure of the organization is believed to reinforce the reliability and validity of the research.

**7. DATA ANALYSIS & INTERPRETATION**

The data analysis was conducted according to content analysis method [25]. To that end, the analysis process followed three steps: collating all the data for each skill, developing themes among collated data for each skill and interpreting data by deriving meaning from themes.

**7.1. COLLATING ALL THE DATA FOR EACH SKILL**

The purpose of this step was to organize messy data and compare answers of participants for each question. By this means, the researchers generated threads of information sets for each skill and prepared the raw data for developing themes among them. To that end, initially all answers of the participants were read carefully and collated within the scope of each question, by designating numbers for each answer. The collated answers were examined in terms of possible relations, similarities, interactions and ties among them. By this means threads of answer sets were generated. These threads formed the basis for deriving themes for each skill,

which later on will help to explain the role of soft skills.

**7.2. DEVELOPING THEMES AMONG COLLATED DATA**

The purpose of this step was deriving themes for each skill among data threads. To that end, each thread was read and examined a couple of times in terms of importance and relevance with studied skills. Subsequently, specific themes were derived among threads due to their number of repetitions and relevance with the topic. While deriving themes, answers were looked for to the question: How do these data explain the roles of the peacekeepers' soft skills in peacekeeping operations? Derived themes for each category of soft skills are presented in **Table 1** below.

**Table no. 1.** Themes for Each Soft Skill

Soft Skills (Categories)	Themes in Terms of Roles of Soft Skills
Adaptation	Enables and eases communication
	Enables accommodation to multinational environment
	Enables working with new military concept
	Enables being part of EUFOR troops
	Enables self improvement
	Enables contributions to operation
	Enables teamwork
	Enables cooperation among peacekeepers
	Enables learning new things
	Enables overcoming communication obstacles
Building relations with local military personnel	Enables provision of needed assistance
	Enables solutions to problems
	Enables and eases promotion of peace, stability and security
	Enables joint activities
	Causes mutual respect and politeness
	Enables execution around common goals

Soft Skills (Categories)	Themes in Terms of Roles of Soft Skills
Building relations with local military personnel	Enables cooperation and coordination
	Enables creation of ties for friendships
	Enables confidence
Building relations with military personnel of EUFOR	Enables patience
	Enables tolerance for inexperience
	Enables friendships
	Enables socializing among peacekeepers
	Enables mutual respect among peacekeepers
	Enables collaboration and coordination
	Enables teamwork
	Enables courtesy
	Enables gathering around common goals
	Enables trust and confidence
Enables dealing with multinational context	
Stress management	Enables dealing with inexperience
	Enables dealing with different ways of doing work
	Enables dealing with multinational context
	Enables and eases building communication
	Enables and eases public speaking
	Enables accommodation to new environment
	Enables dealing with work overloads
Cultural awareness	Enables comprehension of different ways of doing job
	Enables overcoming religion specific differences
	Enables cognition of different type of behaviors
	Enables and eases building communication
	Enables and eases collaboration
	Enables realization of attitudes and body languages

## 8. INTERPRETATION

Participants' opinions indicate that soft skills matter significantly in the process of executing peacekeeping operations. Namely, peacekeepers' adaptation skills enable overcoming many obstacles. The statements of peacekeepers indicate that they encounter several problems, when they settle and begin their duties. They cannot communicate with other people easily or accommodate new environment initially, because everything around them is different from home, as one of the participants' statement indicates: "Coordination and communication between different departments within HQ EUFOR was bad and the different levels of knowledge and skills of the people coming to the mission were obvious, resulting in situations where some personnel was very experienced, knowledgeable and competent, and others could not even speak the official language of the ALTHEA mission, much less make any other contribution to the mission. However, in time things have gotten better.' Their adaptation skills play an important role here by enabling comprehension of circumstances around them and developing stable relations with people. Besides that, adaptation skills clear away the drawbacks experienced when working with new military concepts and being part of EUFOR troops by enabling peacekeepers' contributions, teamwork and cooperation. Moreover, adaptation skills induce peacekeepers to learn new things and sustain self-improvement.

According to participants' statements, building relations with local military personnel helped solving many problems, which were encountered by some peacekeepers such as avoiding any behavior that could be misunderstood as superiority or related to achievements of tasks, preventing religious conflicts and nation specific debates. Moreover, building relations with local military

enables peacekeepers to transmit the assistance that people needed on time, direct every effort around common goals, create friendships and confidence. One of participants' statement emphasizes this issue: "As EUFOR members here we are supporting this country. They should respect and help us and I should respect and take into account their past experience of war too.' In this way peace, stability and security were provided properly. Besides that, as a result of an atmosphere of mutual respect, cooperation and coordination yielded by relationship building, joint activities like training sessions and visits were successfully done.

Relationship building amongst the military personnel of EUFOR plays an important role in the implementation of peacekeeping operations and bears resemblance to building relations with local military personnel. That is, it enables peacekeepers to be patient and show required tolerance when others make mistakes due to inexperience. For all of the participants, it was observed that peacekeepers knew the importance of team spirit as one of participants' statement designates: "Meeting people coming from different cultures and civilizations and, in doing so, learning and understanding that we are all the same: we have same dreams, same goals, same fears, and same concerns. Trying to appreciate those who are different than me'. That's why they act in accordance with interpersonal relations principles within their organization, irrespective of their nationality. Besides that, building relations with military personnel of EUFOR results in creation of friendships, courtesy, mutual respect and confidence among peacekeepers of different countries, which later on causes gathering around common goals and collaboration.

The discourse on the soft skill of stress management here depends on peacekeepers' ability to overcome stressors. Although The EUFOR

Operation Althea lacks some specific stressors of any battlefield or counterinsurgency operations, such as involving in firefights, running into improvised explosive devices (IEDs) or being subject to rocket attacks, as one of the participants' experience indicates: "As in any mission or any new experience in life, the beginning is always a bit stressing since you have to get used to a new working and living environment', participants mentioned stressors like inexperience, different ways of doing work, multinational context, building communication, public speaking, accommodation to new environment and work overload. Stress management skills enable peacekeepers to deal with all above-mentioned stressors. Although some participants stated that they did not feel under stress, several of them mentioned the existence of stressors and how they dealt with them with stress management techniques.

In a multinational environment and on a foreign land, the soft skill of cultural awareness admittedly should be crucial for every peacekeeper who interacts either with each other or with local people. Thus, participants' statements indicate that cultural awareness enables dealing with religion specific differences and showing required mutual respect, understanding culture or nation specific behaviors or speeches, realizing attitudes and different body languages. As one of the participants emphasizes: "I saw the different practices of comprehensive approach. I think it is useful for me to learn about it." Cultural awareness enables peacekeepers' comprehension of different styles and hence doing job due to their habits as well. In this way cultural awareness eases collaboration and communication processes among peacekeepers.

## 9. CONCLUSION

According to our findings, soft skills matter both in military and

civilian contexts, in connection with the evolving concept of international military interventions. Therefore, soft skills have become one of the essential issues to which attention should be paid, in addition to peacekeepers' technical skills, because, peacekeepers act in almost peaceful but stressful environments which are prone to change toward conflicts easily.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the international intervention consists of peacekeeping and stabilizing attempts made in the aftermath of serious conflicts, which caused bloodshed between different sects, who live on the same land. The Bosnia and Herzegovina case is recent and the effects of the peacekeeping operation process are available to be observed: if anyone travels through the region, they can observe the traces of conflicts, as well as the outcomes of peacekeeping operations. Authors' military experiences and fluctuations about the EUFOR operation played an important role in deciding to conduct a research about soft skills because it was thought that soft skills may be the cure of some problems, which are still waiting for solutions in Bosnia.

The question this study addresses is to what extent soft skills of adaptation, relations with locals and other military personnel of coalition, stress management and cultural awareness have a role in accomplishing peacekeeping operations. During this research, data were collected by means of face-to-face structured interviews with voluntary participation of thirty-two officers, who were from nine participating countries including; Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Czech Republic, Hungary, Macedonia, Netherlands, Romania, Spain and Turkey. The research topic is examined from general to specific. Hence, initially, a general description of peacekeeping operations and EUFOR Mission were given. Then, the characteristics of soft skills and their relations with peacekeeping

operations were explained. Following data analysis and interpretation, findings were discussed.

As distinct from other studies, this study examined the soft skills of adaptation, relations with locals and other military personnel of coalition, stress management and cultural awareness, which were not elaborated before by any other studies in the field. Additionally, face-to-face interviews provided exact data from first hand sources. The findings of the study emphasize the important roles of the above-mentioned soft skills in the execution process of peacekeeping operations. In addition to the findings about the important roles of soft skills, it was determined that the training programs of the participating countries might have been insufficient to meet mission specific needs. The success of peacekeepers in soft skills might have derived from their previous military experiences and long tenure in military service. Aside from that, it was realized that some peacekeepers lack sufficient English language. Hence, they had difficulty when interacting with locals and other colleagues. Therefore, it is only the personnel who were proficient in English who should have been chosen to participate in peacekeeping missions. Moreover, in addition to English, local languages might have been taught to peacekeepers in advance to mission deployment. Participating countries must plan training programs, which provide information about the operation and the culture of the local people.

Despite its remarkable findings, our study has several limitations, one of which is the sample size, which may cause biases while determining the roles of soft skills. The absence of prior studies about our research question is another limitation. If there had been prior studies, we could have compared our findings with theirs. Additionally, the oneness of our sample is another limitation. That is, if we collected data from another sample too, for example

from peacekeepers of Afghanistan, we could compare the findings of both surveys. Lastly, our research was limited to the above-mentioned soft skills. However, the types of soft skills could have comprised other soft skills, as well.

In conclusion, it may be stated that, soft skills have a crucial value in accomplishing peacekeeping operations. In this way our study may shed light on future studies, in terms of researching other soft skills or improving measurement instruments in order to analyze the effects of soft skills on mission specific objectives. In future researches data can be collected from other samples and findings can be compared. On the other hand, armed forces of countries may pay attention to soft skills and improve training programs and doctrines to ensure their troops are equipped with those skills.

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