

UNIVERSITY OF BELGRADE

Faculty of Political Science

Belgrade, September 2026

At the meeting of the Department of International Studies, held on August 29, 2024, the Master Thesis Defense Commission (hereby the Commission) for the candidate Andrijana Ristić was formed with the following members: prof. dr Ivana Damnjanović, prof. dr Goran Tepšić and prof. dr Nemanja Džuverović. The Council for the Second and Third Cycle of Studies has accepted the proposal made by the Department.

After reading the master thesis, the Commission is submitting the following report.

R E P O R T

The master thesis of Andrijana Ristić entitled "Leveraging PeaceTech: The Role of Technology in UN Peace Operations" is 64 pages long and comprised of seven chapters, along with the Introduction, the Conclusion and accompanying list of references. The master thesis is checked with the plagiarism software Turnitin with the result of 10% of match. After further inquiry it was established, this match was not result of plagiarism but inclusion of names of numerous UN bodies and peacekeeping missions throughout the master thesis and that the thesis is written taking into consideration all relevant academic procedures.

The thesis examines the deployment of surveillance technology in United Nations peace operations and asks whether such technology produces effectiveness that is genuinely sustained over time or whether its gains are short-term and ultimately undermined by structural problems within the organization itself. The thesis situates this question within a broader context of declining UN legitimacy and traces the digital transformation of UN peacekeeping through a series of policy documents. Rather than treating technology as either a straightforward solution or an inherent danger, the candidate frames surveillance tools as artifacts that carry political and structural consequences of their own, drawing this framing from Winner's theory of technology as political artifact and from Wyatt's account of technological determinism as a persistent rhetorical force even after its intellectual foundations have been widely rejected. The candidate explains that the initial approach to the research leaned toward technological optimism, and that the research process and subsequent professional experience in digital rights

led to a reframing of the central question toward the consequences of implementation for effectiveness, accountability and human rights.

In the literature review chapter, the candidate positions the thesis between technological optimism, which sees PeaceTech as a means of improving situational awareness and decision-making, and critical counter literature drawing primarily on Madianou's concept of technocolonialism, which identifies six interlocking logics, among them solutionism and securitization, that explain why digital technology has been so readily adopted across humanitarian settings despite its capacity to cause harm. The candidate also draws on the UN effectiveness and accountability literature associated with Autesserre, Karlsrud and Legaz, the last of whom is credited with the concept of the "intelligence paradox," in which the operational success of a mission can itself erode local consent, and states that the thesis builds on this paradox by adding a human rights dimension.

In the theoretical framework, the candidate draws further on Dafoe's account of the conditions under which technological adoption is driven by competitive pressure rather than genuine choice, and Zuboff's concept of instrumentarian power, in which populations subject to surveillance have limited capacity to consent to or refuse the collection of data concerning them.

In the methodology chapter, the candidate argues that the thesis adopts a qualitative comparative case study design and examines MONUSCO, the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo, alongside MINUSMA, the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali, on the grounds that both were among the first missions to see systematic deployment of surveillance drones. Three hypotheses are advanced. The first holds that surveillance technologies produce real short-term operational benefits that do not translate into durable mission success. The second holds that this deployment occurs within a structural accountability vacuum that leaves local populations without meaningful protection from resulting human rights harms. The third holds that there is an identifiable gap between the UN's stated human rights commitments and its actual practice regarding surveillance governance in the field.

In the MONUSCO case study, the candidate traces the mission's evolution through its renaming and the introduction of the Force Intervention Brigade in 2013, alongside the deployment of surveillance drones. The candidate documents concrete operational benefits, while also setting out a sustained pattern of criticism. The chapter closes with the Security Council's 2025 decision to renew MONUSCO's mandate with a focus on withdrawal, treated

as evidence that technological deployment did not resolve the mission's underlying political and structural problems.

In the MINUSMA case study, the candidate begins with the escalation of conflict in northern Mali in 2012 and the establishment of the mission in 2013. The candidate emphasizes MINUSMA's distinctive All Source Information Fusion Unit, staffed exclusively by European troops, and situates the resulting division between those with access to intelligence and those without within Madianou's argument that technology is deployed into environments already structured by existing power relations. The chapter documents the sharing of MINUSMA intelligence with the French-led Opération Barkhane for the purposes of targeting, identified as a violation of the UN's own legal framework, and the Malian government's use of no-fly zones to obstruct the mission's investigation into the Moura massacre. MINUSMA formally ceased operations in December 2023 following the Malian transitional government's request for its termination.

In the discussion chapter, the candidate draws the two cases together and argues that both missions exhibit a similar pattern in which surveillance technology delivered genuine but narrow operational benefits without addressing the deeper problems of political will, weak governance and the risk-averse posture of peacekeepers that the candidate identifies as the primary drivers of mission failure. The chapter returns to the question of consent, arguing that affected populations in both missions had limited practical ability to know when they were being surveilled or how their data was used, an asymmetry the candidate treats as more severe than in surveillance debates familiar from Western democratic contexts because of weaker local legal protections.

Finally, in the conclusion, the candidate restates the three hypotheses and argues that the evidence from both case studies supports each of them. Surveillance technology produced concrete short-term benefits without resolving the deeper causes of mission failure, its deployment took place within an accountability vacuum reflected in the UN's own 2018 Personal Data Protection and Privacy Principles, which are stated not to override the organization's institutional privileges and immunities, and a persistent gap remained between the UN's stated human rights commitments and its conduct on the ground. The candidate acknowledges that reliance on two case studies limits how far the findings can be generalized, and closes by suggesting that the use of technology in peacekeeping is likely to continue without becoming better aligned with existing human rights standards.

Based on this report, the Commission concludes that the master thesis "Leveraging PeaceTech: The Role of Technology in UN Peace Operations" by Andrijana Ristić fulfils all the formal criteria for the public defence.

The Commission:

prof. dr Ivana Damnjanović

prof. dr Goran Tepšić

prof. dr Nemanja Džuverović