



UN Peacekeeping Missions in the Middle East: A Twenty-First Century Review

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ABSTRACT

While new ‘multidimensional’ peacekeeping missions emerged at the end of the Cold War, more ‘traditional’ monitoring missions continue to operate. This work reviews the three current peacekeeping missions in the Middle East, with mandates to monitor buffer lines or zones between Israel and its previously warring neighbours: the UN Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO), the UN Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF), and the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL). We provide an overview of these three missions, their mandates, the circumstances from which they emerged and evolved. We then consider causal factors that have contributed to their effectiveness over the years and examine how such factors apply in the current state of these missions. Finally, noting that the region evolves and so must the missions, we offer recommendations for how they could remain effective into the future by investing in new technological capabilities and maintaining the integration between their analysis units.

KEYWORDS Israel; mandates; peace operations; peacekeeping principles; regional review; technology; UN

Introduction

A peacekeeping operation is not an army, or a counter-terrorist force, or a humanitarian agency. It is a tool to create the space for a nationally-owned political solution.¹

– Antonio Guterres, United Nations Secretary General

Over the past decades UN peacekeeping has evolved substantially. Beginning with original observer missions, whose comparatively simple mandates involved monitoring ceasefire lines between states. Then after the Cold war, peacekeeping missions shifted primarily from interstate to intrastate conflicts, with a different *modus operandi* which necessitated more complex, multidimensional mandates.² Through the decades, this need to

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¹Guterres, “Remarks to Security Council”.

²See Dorn “The Evolution of Peacekeeping” for an overview.

evolve is how these UN peacekeeping missions have maintained their utility. While there is still debate about the extent of peacekeeping missions' effectiveness,³ there is substantial literature attesting to their positive effects, both in the interstate monitoring missions as well as the more complex intrastate operations.⁴ Many studies offer consistent findings that peacekeeping missions prevent the spread of violence, reduce civilian and military deaths, and help the warring parties achieve post-conflict peace and maintain it.⁵ Yet, despite this, there is still no real consensus on *why* peacekeeping works.⁶ It does beg the question of how unarmed or relatively lightly armed international personnel, dependent on the consent of the warring parties, effectively reduce the chances of war as much as they have. It can be difficult to determine the common underlying factors given the unique and evolving circumstances of each mission. Over the years various causal factors, related to key peacekeeping functions have been suggested, both for interstate and intrastate missions.⁷

Fortna (2004) posits the key functions of interstate (traditional) peacekeeping to be: (i) serve as investigators to document and prevent unwanted escalations and resummptions of war, (ii) serve as impartial referees to relay the intentions of parties to the other side, and (iii) serve as an interposed physical barrier that can raise the cost of invasive activities. This work will examine how these functions apply to the three current monitoring peacekeeping missions in the Middle East: the UN Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO), the UN Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF), and the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL).⁸

Such functions must be considered within the context of a dynamic and *evolving* environment. These interstate peacekeeping missions, which have been in place for decades have had to evolve along with their environments, i.e. with the state parties in their Area of Operations (AO).

In these missions, two main drivers of change will be considered: (i) technological developments, and (ii) human factors. New technological capabilities and specific human factors, such as political tensions, economic stressors, or other security concerns, can have significant impacts on the host nations

³Boot, "Paving the Road to Hell: The failure of UN Peacekeeping," 143 and Autesserre "The Crisis of Peacekeeping: Why the UN Can't End Wars," 101.

⁴See Walter, Howard, and Fortna, "The Astonishing Success of Peacekeeping: The UN Program Deserves More Support—and Less Scorn—From America." See also Dorn and Collins, "Peacekeeping Works: The UN Can Help End Civil Wars."

⁵Dorussen, "Peacekeeping works, or does it?" 527–537, Gizelis, Dorussen, and Petrova "Research Findings on the Evolution of Peacekeeping," and Fortna "Does Peacekeeping Work? Shaping Belligerents' Choices After Civil War."

⁶Walter, Howard, and Fortna, "The Extraordinary Relationship between Peacekeeping and Peace," 1–18.

⁷Fortna, "Interstate peacekeeping: causal mechanisms and empirical effects," 481–519.

⁸United Nations, "UNMOGIP Fact Sheet". While these monitoring missions are not all situated in the Middle East most of them are; with UNMOGIP in the Kashmir region between Pakistan and India being a notable exception.

and conflicting parties. These factors can disrupt and destabilize the status quo, escalate already tense situations, or even establish new equilibria. Such change-drivers are always present in the AO and affect the functioning of peacekeeping. As regions and missions evolve, periodic reviews of these key functions are necessary to assess their relevance and effectiveness in the current context. This causal framework of functions within an evolving environment is how the missions' effectiveness will be evaluated.

The central questions of this work will be: how effective have these functions been in these missions? Within an evolving environment, do the functions and factors that have influenced these missions in the past still hold in the present, and will they continue to hold into the future? And how must missions evolve to remain effective?

Dorussen (2014) and Howard (2021) speak about the importance of methodology in peacekeeping analysis. In this case, a longitudinal approach is most suitable. Given the longevity and evolution of these missions and environments, the missions are well suited for such an analysis to evaluate how the functions have changed in different time periods, and how they have contributed to mission success.

Measures of Success: Causal Factors

The causal success factors (stemming from the key functions) proposed in the literature most fitting for this analysis of interstate missions effectiveness are: (i) through diligent observing and reporting, peacekeepers can provide 'safety-valves,' preventing accidents and small skirmishes from escalating to war by allowing parties to lodge complaints about violations of the ceasefire agreement, with the United Nations following up with an investigation; (ii) peacekeepers can serve as an intermediary for parties to signal their intentions, especially towards de-escalation, and mediating where required; (iii) the presence of peacekeepers can make deliberate aggression more difficult between the parties, e.g. a surprise attack without alerting the interposing force and opposing party.⁹ As we will see, these factors have been relevant in limiting the number of escalations over the decades. Conversely, the development of new state capabilities and swelling tensions between the state parties have been the key contributors to the periodic escalations and resumptions of war.¹⁰

Precursory to these causal factors, arguably the fundamental basis for the effectiveness of all missions, is the principles of peacekeeping themselves, i.e.

⁹For a comprehensive overview of the proposed causal mechanisms for interstate missions' effectiveness, see Fortna "Interstate peacekeeping: causal mechanisms and empirical effects," 481–519.

¹⁰Werner notes that changes in relative capabilities are the most important cause for resuming conflict, "The Precarious Nature of Peace: Resolving the Issues, Enforcing the Settlement and Renegotiating the Terms."

consent of the main parties to the conflict, impartiality, and non-use of force except in self-defence and defence of the mandate. Yet, how peacekeeping missions implement these principles has also evolved over the years, as we will see in the following sections.

Principles of Peacekeeping

All peacekeeping missions begin with consent of the host nations. Traditional interstate missions arise when two or more states agree to a ceasefire and the presence of peacekeepers. The written agreement among the parties enables the ceasefire to remain in place. Like a contract, the arrangement ceases to function if one party withdraws its consent. As mission mandates evolved for more multidimensional missions, dealing with intrastate conflict, there is typically only one host nation to grant consent, so the reciprocity formula does not apply in the same way. Yet should the host nation withdraw consent, it could cause the internally fighting factions to question government intent and cause a resumption of conflict.¹¹

The difference between interstate and intrastate conflicts has caused a shift in the interpretation of impartiality as well. While the United Nations remains ever concerned with a sustained perception of impartiality as the basis of its credibility, it has struggled with this when violent instances occur. By intervening between party skirmishes there is a perceived risk of jeopardizing that impartiality if it seems to show favour to one side over the other. That is why, at least in the earlier monitoring missions, remaining as an impartial observer and avoiding any actions that could ‘rock the boat’, including the use of force, tends to be a default mode, even at the expense of allowing aggressive and potentially escalatory events to unfold within the AO (as will be discussed in the context of UNIFIL below). In the more integrated missions, the principle of impartiality seems to have undergone a shift in meaning, tied closely to its approach to the use of force principle. For instance, Laurence (2020) speaks to this point in detail,¹² claiming that ‘Impartiality is a core legitimating norm for United Nations peace operations. Yet beliefs about what that norm requires of UN personnel have shifted dramatically’.¹³ Laurence cites the shifting security conditions for UN Mission in Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO, UNSCR

¹¹Revoking consent is much more significant on multidimensional missions as they do much more than keeping the peace in the traditional sense but also provide humanitarian assistance. The more complex the mandate, the more entrenched the UN becomes, the less likely the host nation is to revoke its consent.

¹²Laurence, “An ‘Impartial’ Force?”

¹³Ibid. Laurence has argued that new practices emerge “through two distinct processes: innovation and improvisation. The former involves conscious reflection, while the latter occurs when practitioners make a series of unconscious, incremental adjustments to existing practices. New practices then spread ... as communities of peacekeepers embrace new standards for judging competence.”

1925). This led to the 2013 creation of an intervention brigade for UN Mission in Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO, UNSCR 1925) – composed of infantry battalions, special forces, and an artillery company – to ‘neutralize’ certain illegal non-state armed groups in the DRC. This was deemed a necessary step to maintain mission effectiveness, despite critics being quick to note how such a development would violate the core principle of impartiality. The United Nations offers a modified sense of impartiality. Under an adjusted sense of impartiality – within an evolving environment where force must be used at least somewhat regularly – the mission executes its mandate in an impartial fashion, as a police officer should impartially implement national laws, i.e. without favour to one group or another. This entwined connection between impartiality and the use of force was a necessary evolution from the original unarmed observers of monitoring missions functioning as impartial referees between armed groups. Let us now review these monitoring missions and mandates in further detail, including the circumstances that caused them to evolve.

Evolving Missions

The United Nations recognizes UNTSO as the oldest peacekeeping mission, created in 1948 amid the first Arab-Israeli War.¹⁴ In May 1948, the UN Security Council passed a resolution (UNSCR) calling for a cessation of hostilities among the parties. The mandate (UNSCR 50) called for a truce that was to be supervised by a UN Mediator for Palestine, and supported by a military mission (UNTSO), with the UN Mediator as its effective Head of Mission (HoM). Generally, these mandates provide the overall framework of what is to be done, and the HoM then decides how to implement the framework by creating various tasks. In this case, the UN Mediator created tasks for a group of unarmed UN Military Observers (UNMOs).¹⁵ The UNMO component, which still operates to this day, was tasked to monitor ceasefires, supervise armistice agreements and boundary lines between Israel and its neighbours (Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, and Egypt), mediate disputes, prevent isolated incidents from escalating and, later, to assist other UN peacekeeping operations. By design and intent, it was a limited mission with no further objectives.¹⁶ One notable limitation is that the mission originally had no

¹⁴The United Nations now considers UNTSO as its first peacekeeping operation, though there were earlier operations established for Greece, the Balkans, Korea and Kashmir.

¹⁵Because the UN Mediator for Palestine, Count Folke Bernadotte, was head of UNTSO, when he was assassinated, the leadership of UNTSO was to be handed over the Chief of Staff, a position that carries the title of head of mission to this day.

¹⁶The following year, UNMOs arrived at the UN Military Observer Group India and Pakistan (UNMOGIP) with a similar mandate to supervise a ceasefire between India and Pakistan (UNSCR) 47(1948). Following renewed hostilities of 1971, UNMOGIP has remained in the area to observe developments pertaining to the strict observance of the ceasefire and reports thereon to the Secretary-General.

clear mandate for *interposing* troops (third function) between the state parties, i.e. stationed along the ceasefire lines. This only came when UNTSO began contributing to the later interposed missions UNIFIL and UNDOF.

UNTSO was quite effective in mediating, and generally kept tense situations under control for several years.¹⁷ However, as tensions mounted, unarmed monitors were unable to prevent the resumption of war. Given UNTSO's observation mandate, it was powerless to prevent the Suez crisis of 1956, though it did provide a stream of information to UN headquarters and opened up new possibilities for UN action.

Amid the crisis, the United Nations established its first peacekeeping *force*, the United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF, General Assembly Resolution 1001, 7 November) with the mandate to secure and supervise the cessation of hostilities.¹⁸ The most notable shift compared to previous UN mandates was that its peacekeepers were *armed*, but only for use in self-defence and with the utmost restraint. This adaptation based on environmental factors, simultaneously established the third principle of peacekeeping (restricted use of force) and introduced the new (third) causal factor of interposed troops to support peacekeeping effectiveness. Its main functions were to supervise the withdrawal of the three occupying forces (UK, France, and Israel). After the withdrawal, they were to act as an interposed buffer force between the Egyptian and Israeli forces and to provide impartial supervision of the ceasefire, which they did successfully for several years.

The mission was asked to withdraw shortly before the Six-Day War (1967). Egypt's President Nasser, noting that UNEF troops were deployed only on the Egyptian side of the dividing line, revoked his consent amid the growing tension with Israel. Noting this break in reciprocity, Israel, concerned with Egypt's possible intentions, launched a pre-emptive attack that started the war. This interstate mission, through the mutual consent of the host nations, had produced a decade-long truce, but Nasser's decision and Israel's actions are a reminder that agreements can be quickly undone by the parties, despite the best efforts of the peacekeepers.¹⁹ Furthermore, the three causal factors in question can have little effect if the fundamental principles of peacekeeping (e.g. host nation consent) are not in place.

The Six-Day War resulted in Israel capturing and holding sizeable territories of its neighbours, which kept the tensions high for the years following. In October 1973, Egypt and Syria launched another war with Israel. Factors contributing to this October War (known as the 'Yom Kippur' War for Israel), aside from the ongoing tension and mistrust, were the lack of

¹⁷Fortna, "Interstate peacekeeping: causal mechanisms and empirical effects," 481–519.

¹⁸United Nations, "UNEF Background". The first mission sanctioned in accordance with Chapter 7 of the UN Charter.

¹⁹Fortna, "Interstate peacekeeping: causal mechanisms and empirical effects," 511.

interposed peacekeepers post UNEF between Israel and Egypt, and between Israel and Syria, as well as new national technological and military capabilities. Newly developed fighter jets and anti-aircraft defences played critical roles in the war.

In the aftermath of the October War of 1973, a second mission was established (UNEF II). That mission ended successfully in 1979 with the signing of the Camp David Accords that were verified by a non-UN mission, the Multilateral Force and Observers (MFO) in the Sinai. From the 1973 war, Israel also held a considerable amount of Syrian land in the Golan. Another peacekeeping mission was created, the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF; UNSCR 350, 1974) with a mandate to: maintain the ceasefire between Israel and Syria; supervise the disengagement of Israeli and Syrian forces; and supervise the Areas of Separation (AOS) and Area of Limitation (AOL), as per the Disengagement Agreement. To this day, peacekeepers have been tasked with conducting static operations from observation posts, mobile operations, and regular armament inspections on both sides of the AOS.²⁰

In 1978, to deal with security concerns about Palestinian militants in Southern Lebanon, Israel launched an invasion. The lack of interposing troops between Israel and Lebanon may have contributed to Israel's decision. In its aftermath, UNIFIL was established (UNSCRs 425 and 426) to confirm the withdrawal of Israeli forces, restore international peace and security, and assist the Government of Lebanon in ensuring the return of its effective authority in the area. Yet, in the subsequent decades, its mandate has expanded, especially in the aftermath of the 2006 war with Israel. Although this war may indicate a failure in peacekeeping, revealing limitations in the mission mandate, UNIFIL's interposed troops had successfully kept relative calm between these adversaries for decades prior. The 2006 war likely occurred from a confluence of factors despite the peacekeepers' presence, such as: persistent tensions, Israeli reactions to a Hezbollah raid that escalated too rapidly for the peacekeepers to mitigate, Hezbollah's large stockpile of rockets, and Israel's newly acquired smart bombs. Since the passing of UNSCR 1701 (2006), UNIFIL remains mandated to monitor the Blue Line (the line beyond which Israeli forces were required to withdraw), coordinate its activities between the Lebanese Armed Forces and the Israeli Defence Force, i.e. Tripartite talks (with the UN as the third participant and mediator if need be), extend assistance to ensure humanitarian access to civilian populations, and assist with the voluntary and safe return of displaced persons. Additionally, it is to assist the Lebanese Armed Forces in the south of the

²⁰Inspections have been limited by security conditions on the Syrian side during its internal conflict in recent years.

country (between the Blue Line and the Litani river).²¹ As a result, tensions remain, but no war has erupted.

The scopes of these missions are summarized and compared to other early traditional missions in [Table 1](#) below.

One way to see the shift in mandates from the earlier monitoring missions to the later integrated multidimensional missions is to consider what actions are permissible within their respective mandates. The traditional mission mandate task verbs — such as ‘maintain’, ‘supervise’, monitor, etc., pertaining to a disputed line or zone — are notably different (and simpler) than those of later multilateral, integrated peacekeeping missions. For instance, consider the Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA, 2014, UNSCR 2127), which is ‘concerned with the security, humanitarian, human rights and political crisis in the Central African Republic and its regional implications.’²² Its founding mandate authorized MINUSCA with the protection of civilians (POC) as its utmost priority. Its other initial tasks included ‘support for the transition process; facilitating humanitarian assistance; promotion and protection of human rights; support for justice and the rule of law; and disarmament, demobilization, reintegration and repatriation processes.’²³ Other multidimensional missions have similarly developed mandates.^{24,25,26,27} While these latter ‘Chapter VII’ integrated missions have more involved mandates, extending beyond the traditional requirements to supervise, observe, and report, they still perform those functions.²⁸ The Chapter VII is included in Security Council mandates to also allow the mission to overcome the restrictions of the UN Charter prohibiting interventions into the internal affairs of Member States (Article 2, para. 7).²⁹ As such, these multidimensional

²¹The United Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP) is similar in its primary task of monitoring a disputed line (Green Line) but is mandated to undertake humanitarian activities as well.

²²MINUSMA, “MINUSMA Fact Sheet”. MINUSCA subsumed the UN Integrated Peacebuilding Office in the Central African Republic (BINUCA) on the date of the establishment. On 15 September 2014, the African-led International Support Mission in the Central African Republic (MISCA) transferred its authority over to MINUSCA, in accordance with resolution 2149 (2014).

²³Ibid.

²⁴UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA, 2013, UNSCR 2100)

²⁵MINUSMA, “MINUSMA Fact Sheet”. It has since been expanded by UNSCR 2164, 25 June 2014.

²⁶The UN Mission in Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO, UNSCR 1925, 1 July 2010).

²⁷MONUSCO, “MONUSCO Fact Sheet”. MONUSCO took over from an earlier UN peacekeeping operation — the United Nations Organization Mission in Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC).

²⁸United Nations, “Mandates and the Legal Basis for Peacekeeping”. Chapter VII of the UN Charter contains provisions related to “Action with Respect to the Peace, Breaches of the Peace and Acts of Aggression”. In recent years, the Council has adopted the practice of invoking Chapter VII of the Charter when authorizing the deployment of UN peace operations into volatile post-conflict settings where the State is unable to maintain security and public order. This is in contrast to traditional Chapter VI missions that focus on “Pacific Settlement of Disputes” and rarely apply force.

²⁹Article 2, paragraph 7 states: “Nothing contained in the present Charter shall authorize the United Nations to intervene in matters which are essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any state or shall require the Members to submit such matters to settlement under the present Charter; but this principle shall not prejudice the application of enforcement measures under Chapter VII.”

Table 1. Existing monitoring missions by year of establishment.³⁰

Mission	Full Name	Established	Number of Peacekeepers	Fatalities	Fatality rate (annual av)	Budget (\$US mil)
UNMOGIP	UN Observer Mission in India and Pakistan	1948	117	12	0.16	10
UNTSO	UN Truce Supervision Organization	1948	153	50	0.7	36
UNFICYP	UN Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus	1964	1,028	183	3.2	55
UNDOF	UN Disengagement Observer Force	1974	1,224	56	1.2	68
UNIFIL	UN Interim Force in Lebanon	1978	9,614	323	7.3	480

missions require a completely different approach to peacekeeping, and a different measure of mission success, compared to their more traditional counterparts. We will now look at the current structure of these Middle East missions and how they lend themselves to integration and interdependence.

Current Mission Relationships

UNTSO's history, mandate, and structure play a key role in linking the three regional missions together. Some scholars have considered UNTSO to have become largely inactive over the years, especially amid the wars of 1967 and 1973; afterall, its UNMOs were not present to the point of being able to tell which side started the October War.³¹ Yet since the establishment of UNDOF and UNIFIL, UNTSO has evolved accordingly. It still recruits UNMOs from member states, trains and deploys them to their respective observer groups: Observer Group Golan (OGG) and Observer Group Lebanon (OGL) that are attached via an operational control relationship to the UNDOF and UNIFIL missions, respectively. UNTSO remains connected with each of these observer groups from its headquarters in Jerusalem. These interposed observer groups continue to carry out their peacekeeping functions of observing, reporting violations, and any other relevant developments in their AO, as well as conducting inspections and investigations.

³⁰UNTSO, "United Nations Truce Supervision Organization"; UNDOF, "UNDOF Facts and Figures"; UNIFIL, "United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon"; UNFICYP, "UNFICYP Fact Sheet"; UNMOGIP, "UNMOGIP Fact Sheet"; MINUSCA, "MINUSCA Fact Sheet"; MINUSMA, "MINUSMA Fact Sheet"; and MONUSCO, "MONUSCO Fact Sheet".

³¹See Fortna "Interstate peacekeeping: causal mechanisms and empirical effects," 481–519, (fn. 53); Ma'oz, "Syria and Israel: From War to Peacemaking".

UNTSO's OGG comprises two groups, one on each side of the AOS between Israel and Syria on the Israel-occupied Golan. OGG is responsible for observing and reporting any violations of the 1974 Disengagement Agreement.³² On each side of the AOS, there are observation posts (OPs) from which UNMOs conduct their observations into the AOS and the contiguous AOL, i.e. the 25 km strips of land on either side of the AOS, where the parties are required to increasingly limit military forces in successive zones. The UNMOs balance these static observations with mobile patrols within the AOS and AOL, setting up temporary OPs atop regional high ground when able or necessary.

Meanwhile, OGL maintains a presence along the Blue Line to keep the peace with Israel while the Government of Lebanon restores its effective authority in the area.³³ OGL UNMOs operate solely on the Lebanese side of the Blue Line, unlike OGG with UNMOs on each side. There are no longer any OPs along the Blue Line; the UNMOs conduct only mobile operations. A contributing factor to this decision was the Israel-Lebanon War (2006) where an OP was struck by Israeli fire, causing the deaths of four UNMOs (from Austria, Canada, China, and Finland). The circumstances surrounding this strike are still debated.³⁴ After this, OGL adapted accordingly, and relegated their monitoring efforts to strictly mobile patrols; not only for security reasons, but also because more area could be covered, and it provided the benefit of greater engagement with the local population through more face-to-face peacekeeping. The Israel-Lebanon war of 2006 is the latest reminder that UN missions have not always been able to prevent the resumption of war. Still, UNIFIL's history shows that by evolving with the circumstances and operating in accordance with the key peacekeeping functions (mitigating conflict by reporting and investigating violations, functioning as impartial referees or mediators, and maintaining an interposed presence) its peacekeepers have kept the conflict to a manageable level most of the time. But how do these functions work under the current conditions?

Causal Factors in the Current Era

Shortly after the 2006 war with Lebanon, Israel adjusted its national security strategy to include its 'Campaign Between Wars' (CBW).³⁵ A covert campaign conducted by Israel's military and intelligence services to limit its

³²United Nations Security Council, Document 11302-Add.1.

³³*United Nations Codification Division, "Extracts relating to Article 98"*.

³⁴Molloy, "A Reflection of 2006 War"; Wheeler, "Canadian killed at UN post in Lebanon"; and Department of Public Information, "Attacks against UN Personnel go Unpunished".

³⁵Yossef "Israel's Campaign Between Wars: Lessons for the United States?" and Yaldin and Orion "The Campaign Between Wars: Faster, Higher, Fiercer?"

perceived enemies from developing capabilities that could disrupt the balance of deterrence. By destroying key targets with low profile airstrikes, such efforts have proven disruptive enough to slow the build-up of capabilities on the other side, but not disruptive enough to warrant an escalation. The intent is to address security concerns by operating *below* the threshold of war. Yet how does this ongoing campaign within the AOs of UNTSO, UNDOF and UNIFIL impact the missions' peacekeeping functions?

First, the interposed presence of troops making surprise attacks more difficult, still holds for *ground-based* invasions. UNDOF, and the post-2006 UNIFIL have prevented just that. However, this ground-based UN presence does not preclude the possibility of airstrikes and counterstrikes, or even serve as much of a deterrent. Airstrikes afford an element of surprise and, since often occurring under the cover of darkness, may occur without allowing the interposed troops to respond, though the peacekeepers do have some aerial surveillance capabilities using UN radars on vehicles and ships. The peacekeepers' presence provides enough of a barrier to keep the aggressive action (including periodic cross-boundary volleys) to a manageable level, affirming that neither side is seeking to remove this barrier.

Secondly, serving as an impartial signaller to convey each party's intentions also holds in the CBW era. Observed violation reports are still submitted to the respective parties (Israel, Lebanon, or Syria). The UN presence deters the parties, by affirming that violations by the other side will be detected, documented, and communicated. UNTSO also conducts regional liaison visits every quarter, meeting with key authorities in each of its mandate countries where messages, intentions, and concerns are relayed.

Thirdly, peacekeepers can prevent accidents and small skirmishes from leading to war, by serving in a mediating and investigating capacity. UNIFIL maintains its ongoing Tripartite talks between Israel and Lebanon in its impartial, and if need be, mediating role. The observer groups also lead investigations for unique violation cases. Given these airstrikes and counterstrikes are covert in nature, their effects on the ground may be clear, but the circumstances are not. Thus, turning to an impartial investigative body can be a viable alternative to jumping to rapid conclusions.

The ongoing concern is that violations could set off a vicious cycle of retaliation.³⁶ This may be, but at present, the states have seemingly developed their own calculus for determining appropriate levels of aggression to achieve their aims and avoid escalation. So, while the peacekeepers' presence is effective and contributes to peace, for the reasons stated, the parties themselves seem to have found a suitable mode of operating below the threshold of war.

³⁶Jervis, "Perception and Misperception in International Politics."

As long as security concerns, political tensions, and general mistrust persist between the state parties, and each side continues to invest in developing its capabilities to either obtain or prevent a technological overmatch, these ongoing strikes are likely to continue. The missions must continue to evolve accordingly. For the peacekeepers to remain effective in keeping up with these developments (technological or political), we suggest investing in their own technological development and further integrating their analytic capabilities.

An Adaptive Approach to Technology

In general, adopting new technology within a mission must be considered in the context of its mandate and core functions. In this case, it involves not just keeping the peace and mitigating conflict by reporting and investigating violations, but other mission functions as well, such as: command and control, sensing, observing, defence and security, and sustainment for an extended period.³⁷ If charged with a task that can be completed with current means then new technology may not be necessary. Budgetary constraints are also a factor, especially given the comparatively small budgets of these monitoring missions. Yet there seems to be something askew about a situation involving two sides investing in their own capability development, and the interposing force between them that is not. The more advanced the parties' capabilities become, the less effective the interposed troops will be in preventing resumption of conflict unless they evolve accordingly. Over the years, these missions have adopted the technology necessary to remain effective to this point, but it must be an ongoing process. Let us consider the role of technology in these core functions.

Command and Control

For command and control to function effectively some basic technologies are required, mostly pertaining to communications. Presently, these missions are equipped with all modern technologies necessary to maintain satisfactory command and control,³⁸ such as internet, landlines, video teleconference (VTC) capabilities, as well as satellite phones in each of the OPs. In recent years, patrol vehicles have been equipped with handheld GPS, radios for communications back to each outstation HQ, and a 'trafrak' system that can determine the location of each vehicle when radio communications are lost. All these technologies allow for regular reporting, however, the

³⁷See Canadian Armed Forces, "The Canadian Forces Operational Planning Process". A common breakdown of operational functions according to Canadian doctrine.

³⁸Katsos, "The United Nations and Intergovernmental Organization Command Relationships: Part III of III," 97-99.

level of security of these communication channels is limited as no ‘highly secure’ network exists for these missions to transmit sensitive information and may be subject to hacking. Investing in ever more robust information technology, including secure networks for transmitting and storing sensitive information is highly recommended.

Sensing – Maintaining Situational Awareness

Sensing is what allows mission personnel to maintain situational awareness and a broad operating picture, including the presence of threats. The UNMOs are equipped with traditional binoculars that can be employed from the OPs and on their patrols. Over the years, each of the OPs have been equipped with high-power mounted binoculars that can substantially magnify imagery and have procured basic yet helpful night vision capability of an older generation. Each of the OPs also has CCTV security cameras, which are fed into the mission’s Department of Safety and Security (DSS) for broader integrated awareness. All useful developments.

Given the importance of observation, these missions would benefit from a technological upgrade here. However, this becomes particularly sensitive because the adoption of new technologies would have to align with the host nations’ conditions for the peacekeepers to operate there. For instance, one could easily imagine how much the incorporation of reconnaissance drones could enhance the UNMOs’ ability to observe violations across the Blue Line or within the AOS. Yet, this is not likely to be sanctioned by Israel, Lebanon, or Syria. However, a whole suite of other grounded sensing technologies could, in principle, be employed in the proximity of these disputed areas. For instance, mounting cameras on non-operational OPs that were damaged and/or evacuated during the Syria’s internal conflict. If these locations were once sanctioned as acceptable for UNMOs to operate as ‘human sensors’, then placing an electronic sensor/camera there could be acceptable. Various commanders have considered the need for technological upgrades in this area.³⁹ Another example of simple upgrades would be adopting a camera interface onto the eyepiece of the OP mounted binoculars. Presently, no such feature exists, thereby making the actual recording of an observed violation within the AOS rather challenging, especially transitory ones, such as an unauthorized moving vehicle that may only be momentarily visible. The current process in UNDOF involves the less-than-ideal manual placement of one’s camera or mobile phone against the rubber eyepiece of high-power binoculars and taking a series of quick shots in the hopes that one will be sufficient to add to the report. By contrast, radars are used in UNIFIL, both counter-battery radars

³⁹UNDOF, *Golan* January – March 2008.

(COBRA) provided by France and ship-borne radars in the Maritime Task Force. The COBRA radar has been used both to pinpoint the origins of mortar fire into Israel and to track Israeli incursions into Lebanese airspace.⁴⁰ This is a notable technological upgrade that enhances sensing capability, good for tracking ceasefire violations, gathering relevant information that can be used in security assessments, which could further allow the peacekeepers to proactively mitigate escalatory situations.

The general stance among the missions is a preference to avoid any such technologies that could be seen as controversial, or invasive. Yet, given the current capabilities of the parties, and their ability to conduct covert strikes, often in the darkness of night, the UNMOs' abilities to sense, act, and react are limited. The UNMOs' interposed presence remains effective, but their mandated tasks of mitigating conflict by reporting and investigating violations could always be enhanced through ongoing technological investment.

Shield – Maintaining Defence and Security

The shield function is less controversial. Upon consenting to the entry of peacekeepers, host nations understand the risks and must be accepting of the intent to protect themselves. Over the years, the missions have adopted several shielding technologies for their OPs and vehicles.⁴¹ Notable examples being, the procurement of light-armoured vehicles that can withstand basic gunfire for protection long enough to exfiltrate the situation. Also, on the OPs, each has the basic protective infrastructure such as fencing and security cameras, as well as shelters that can protect the UNMOs against artillery attacks. The shelters are also equipped with a chemical filtration system in the event of a chemical attack.

There is always room for new technologies to enhance force protection, which in turn enhances mission effectiveness. For instance, despite the shelters' chemical filtration systems, the OPs lack chemical agent sensors around their perimeters, which could warn the UNMOs of a chemical attack and provide them the precious minutes of lead time to run inside and activate the filtration system as well as when it is safe to step out. In the UNDOF AO, chemical attacks remain a viable threat. Since Syria signed the Chemical Weapons Convention and allegedly removed its chemical weapons (September 2013), dozens of chemical attacks have still occurred.⁴² Upgrading

⁴⁰UNIFIL, "UNIFIL Statement on Firing Incidents".

⁴¹UNDOF also retains robotic capabilities to conduct explosive ordnance disposal, but this is brought by a particular national contingent, rather than part of the mission's assets.

⁴²US Department of State, "Press Statement: Syria: Eighth Anniversary of Ghouta Chemical Weapon Attacks."

the chemical sensing posture on the OPs would allow the peacekeepers to remain effective amid such an attack.⁴³

Sustainment

The sustain function, like defense is less controversial. Presently, the missions retain a support staff and the basic resources necessary to sustain daily operations involved in fulfilling their respective mandates. In recent years, solar panels have been implemented onto various OPs to offset the energy costs associated with maintaining them. The easier it is to sustain the troops in their peacekeeping capacity, the more time they can spend focusing on their mandated tasks. If other new technologies could similarly offset sustainment costs, they would contribute to mission effectiveness and likely be adopted.

The technologies on the mission have allowed them to remain effective, but all these operational functions could be enhanced through the adoption of new technologies while balancing what would be acceptable by the host nations. Even if the CBW suggests a tacit restraint by the states to keep aggressive outbursts to a manageable level, UN missions have a role to play in assisting with that carefully managed balance of aggression and cessation. The wider the technological gap between the parties and the peacekeepers, the less effective the latter will be in sustaining the calm between the former. Effective sensing technologies could not only provide the mission staff with the information necessary to protect themselves, but also to detect or identify other critical factors in the AO that could affect political stability, which could be useful to the missions' analytic function.

Mission Analysis Function

Staying informed of all technical and non-technical developments within the AO, especially on the changing 'human terrain', is a prerequisite for mission effectiveness. For decades, 'intelligence' was considered an inappropriate term for use in peacekeeping.⁴⁴ Even as the UN adopted new policies and doctrines on peacekeeping-intelligence (PKI), missions continued to avoid the term. The current PKI policy, along with the policy on Joint Mission Analysis Centres (JMACs), is now used in the Middle East missions to outline their analytic function.⁴⁵ The policy states how peacekeeping

⁴³UNDOF also included a budget for an "early-warning missile system for the safety and security of the Force" in the FY17/18 budget. However, this plan was shelved as the security situation in the AO improved. United Nations Secretary-General, *Budget Performance of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force*, para. 38.

⁴⁴Dorn, "The Cloak and the Blue Beret"; and Dorn and Bell, "Intelligence and UN Peacekeeping".

⁴⁵United Nations Department of Peace Operations, "2020.06 policy on JMAC".

operations ‘acquire, collate, analyze, disseminate, use, protect and manage peacekeeping-intelligence in support of United Nations peacekeeping operations in the field.’⁴⁶ This policy tends to be implemented differently in each mission. Not every mission has the resources for a formalized JMAC nor may need one, but an analysis unit provides value for every mission as it offers contextual meaning to events within the AO. UNTSO, UNDOF, and UNIFIL each have their own analysis units.

These units maintain close working relations but operate differently, based on their unique needs and constraints. They are unified in their intent to provide effective analysis of relevant events within their contiguous AOs and the wider region to determine potential threats to mandate implementation, e.g. triggers for political destabilization, shifting economic or security conditions, and governance reform. Over time, these analysis units have enhanced their integration and engage in regular calls and monthly teleconferences to provide perspectives from their base countries: Israel (UNTSO), Syria (UNDOF), and Lebanon (UNIFIL). This integration allows them to provide analysis to mission leadership for its strategic liaison function as well as a guide for operations. As the oldest, we will begin with UNTSO.

UNTSO

Over a decade ago, UNTSO realized the need for having its own Analysis Team (AT) but it is different from a standard JMAC in many respects. JMACs are typically led and filled predominantly by civilian political affairs officers. In contrast, the AT is comprised primarily of military officers.⁴⁷ Since UNTSO is a small mission, it does not have its own political affairs office, so the AT function as one. The analysts work closely with their respective country’s liaison officer, based in Beirut, Damascus, Cairo, or Amman/Tel Aviv⁴⁸ and regularly participate in formal visits with interlocutors. The analysts also retain regular ties with the two observer groups on the mission’s DSS who provide details at the operational/tactical levels, local community information, and can identify potential escalation triggers.

Collectively, this input allows the analysts to form a holistic picture of the AO for the HoM’s benefit. The AT also supports the UNTSO Joint Operations Center (JOC) when required, but its real value is provided to the HoM in preparation for strategic liaison visits with regional authorities (e.g. senior military or political figures). These high-level meetings provide

⁴⁶United Nations Department of Peace Operations, *Policy on Peacekeeping-Intelligence*.

⁴⁷Each of the desk officers is tasked with covering one of the UNTSO countries (Israel, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, and Syria) and goes through a selection process to determine their capacity for this type of analysis.

⁴⁸The liaison office for Amman/Tel Aviv is co-located in the UNTSO Headquarters in Jerusalem.

the opportunity for UNTSO to be an information conduit for the state parties in its AO, relay the others' intentions, and mitigate concerns. To this end, UNTSO has had some notable successes. UNTSO's HoM has played a principal role in conveying messages, concerns, and intentions between the countries of its AO. For instance, according to mission sources, special requests for liaisons meetings were made by Jordan in recent years for UNTSO to convey its security concerns regarding the refugee influx coming from South Syria amid its ongoing conflict. They believed that UNTSO was well-positioned to convey this kind of message to the international community. This is a testament to the kind of impact a mission can have by maintaining a steady awareness and connection with the host nations, tracking developments, and relaying concerns accordingly.

UNDOF

Like UNTSO, UNDOF has no formalized JMAC, but in recent years has also developed its own analysis function as part of its Planning Cell. Similar in size to the AT, it is comprised of a small number of military officers. Based on the Syrian side of the AO, it focuses its efforts on providing analyses of events within its proximity. The planning cell is focused more on operations and less on liaising, relying on UNMOs in the AOS as its primary ground 'sensors'. Its principal method of analysis involves scanning daily UNMO reports and carefully noting which details align with open sources and which do not.⁴⁹ These analyses feed into UNDOF's operational planning process. When substantial events occur within the AO, representatives from the Planning Cell are brought into the JOC to provide analytic input for ongoing operations.

As Syria struggles to contain hostile regions in its simmering internal conflict, violent events persist; either in the northern part of the country in the vicinity of Idlib or the Southwestern provinces of Daraa and Suwayda. The latter regions, being much closer to the AO, bear greater relevance to UNDOF, especially as militias vie for local dominance, which can cause instability to ripple outward. Also, as Israel proceeds with its CBW, the AOS and the areas within south-west Syria are subject to periodic airstrikes, as it seeks to contain its perceived threat of Iranian proxy forces.⁵⁰ Such strikes are frequently observed and noted by UNDOF personnel. Through the Planning Cell's sustained connection with the other missions' analysis units, it can gain contextual information about recent airstrikes. This

⁴⁹A high degree of state regulation in Syrian media outlets has been noted to shape the narrative of specific events pertaining to national stability and security. This can make the confirmation and corroboration of such events difficult.

⁵⁰UNDOF, "March 2021 Monthly Forecast". 2020 alone saw several Israeli airstrikes within the AOS.

information can then be incorporated into UNDOF's larger operational planning process. By having the mission's analytic function well-integrated with its operations and planning function, it enhances the mission's effectiveness both in terms of security for the UNMOs on the ground as well as for the mission leadership's high-level engagements. Collectively, the UNMOs on the ground remain interposed, observing and reporting daily events, while the mission leadership interprets the intentions of the state parties and mitigates tensions where possible.

UNIFIL

Among the three missions, UNIFIL is the only one with a formalized JMAC. Compared to UNTSO's AT and UNDOF's Planning Cell, UNIFIL's JMAC has the most robust analysis capability, some excellent Situational Awareness Tool (SAT) software, and the most staff, predominantly experienced civilians. As UNIFIL is substantially larger than the other regional missions, with a more complex mandate, a larger analysis unit is required. The JMAC personnel are engaged in covering their respective sectors of the AO, analyzing the impact of current events on the country and the mission.⁵¹ In this arrangement, the JMAC ensures 'continuity in its analytical support and increase the quantity and quality of its analytics'⁵² in support of the Force Commander, Specifically: 'early warning and information to assist the [Head of Mission/Force Commander] in its understanding of events, developments and trends that might interfere with the implementation of the UNIFIL mandate.'⁵³

Despite this stated intent, sources within the JMAC have mentioned that it is unclear how much of an impact such reports have on the operational planning process, especially when tracking potentially escalatory events affecting troops on the ground. For instance, during a notable CBW 'flare-up' between Israel and Hezbollah in September 2019 there was a short series of kinetic exchanges lasting 2–3 days.⁵⁴ The JMAC closely tracked the events leading up to the initial strike (Israel neutralizing two Hezbollah targets in a drone strike). Despite noting these precursor events and providing assessments of the following kinetic exchanges, UNIFIL remained unreactive throughout, maintaining its role as an impartial observer. Meanwhile, the parties (Israel and Hezbollah) managed to find the right balance of kinetic activity for a show of force while enabling the situation to settle down in a matter of days.

⁵¹The country of Lebanon remains in turmoil due to many factors: a fledgling governmental apparatus and economy; large scale infrastructural damage from the Beirut Port blast (4 August 2020); limited support from the international community, primarily due to Hezbollah's involvement in state affairs.

⁵²United Nations Secretary-General, *Budget for the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon*.

⁵³*Ibid.*

⁵⁴Kiley, "Israel is making the case for War against Lebanon".

According to one source on the mission, UNIFIL's unwillingness to take any kind of bold action within its AO, whether to quell potential escalatory events, or advance into sensitive areas to conduct inspections (according to its most renewed mandate, UNSCR 3373), is rooted in the intention to remain 'impartial' at all costs. To act otherwise could be seen as unfavourable from the Lebanese point of view and negatively impact UNIFIL's standing in the country.⁵⁵ Thus, by erring on the side of caution, the mission holds its stature as the impartial observer as paramount, even at the expense of seeming inactive. However, given the substantial size of UNIFIL, its interposed presence is an important mitigating factor. Even if it may prefer an impartial presence amid kinetic flare-ups, this is balanced by the Tripartite engagements, where it takes on a more active role mediating between the state parties.

The analysis units of these missions vary in size, capability, and integration with the JOC. Despite this, through close integration with each other, they do remain effective in their respective missions by closely tracking ongoing developments, potential triggers of instability, and threats to mandate implementation. While expectations must be managed regarding the impact that they have on daily mission operations, the real value of the analysis units is in their ability to provide the HoMs with situational awareness as they conduct their liaison visits with local authorities in their respective AOs, and relay intentions between the parties where appropriate. Such situational awareness can help support missions in their mediating and investigating functions as well, which in turn, help greatly in managing conflict.

Summary & Conclusion

This paper has sought to provide insight into the question of why peacekeeping works in the Middle East interstate missions of UNTSO, UNDOF, and UNIFIL. Specifically, the paper asked whether the causal factors for the missions' effectiveness in the past still hold in the present and will continue to hold into the future. It also provided recommendations for maintaining effectiveness moving forward.

Given the longevity of these missions, a longitudinal approach was taken to evaluate the key functions, i.e. mitigating conflict by reporting and investigating violations, functioning as impartial referees or mediators, and maintaining an interposed presence. These roles were evaluated with consideration for the ever-present change-drivers in the respective mission environments, both technological and political. Because of these environmental shifts, successful peacekeeping is not a future guarantee. For that,

⁵⁵UNIFIL is already seen as partial to Israel given that its UNMOs conduct their observation patrols solely on the Lebanon side.

further investment in technology and ongoing analytic rigour of the developments that could affect mandate implementation are necessary for the peacekeepers' work to remain effective.

Several technological upgrades, acceptable by the host nations, could enhance the missions' core operational functions, such as more secure networks, placing remote cameras to observe in key areas, including in locations where there is already an OP, and upgrading the OP defenses for chemical attacks. Enhancing sensing capabilities would be beneficial for tracking ceasefire violations, gathering relevant information that could be used in security assessments, which could further allow the peacekeepers to proactively mitigate escalatory situations. Additionally, well integrated analysis units provide the HoMs with situational awareness as they conduct their liaison visits with local authorities in their respective AOs, and relay intentions between the parties where appropriate.

These missions have remained in place, but some may disagree with this approach to peacekeeping that has developed over the decades in the Middle East, claiming that the missions are not effective. Certainly the United Nations could do more to mitigate conflict and promote peace and security, but the current missions have had success. The long-term view shows how war and conflict have *not* emerged for the majority of the time; that the mere presence of these peacekeepers, with their ability to observe, report, inspect, mediate, and investigate, has served as a deterrent to many forms of spontaneous escalation. The parties themselves want the missions to continue, which is a testament to the missions' effectiveness and suggests that keeping these missions in place, and allowing them to evolve, is arguably the less costly option in terms of both dollars and lives.

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