

## Peacekeeping Is Tricky Business

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Calls have begun for an international peacekeeping force to be deployed along the southern Lebanese border, but there is a tendency among politicians and diplomats — not to mention the media and the public — to mischaracterize peacekeeping as a quick fix to conflict. Countries are always reluctant to volunteer their troops and equipment, and no reasonable government would do so without a realistic mission in place and practical rules of engagement in hand. Peacekeeping is tricky business, not a magic bullet to stop the fighting.

In this case, we are not talking about just separating warring parties, monitoring a ceasefire, or providing a buffer between hostile groups. The situation in southern Lebanon is much more complex and will require a sophisticated, long-term approach that goes beyond traditional peacekeeping. Previously, peacekeeping was used as a tool for crisis prevention and management, and it has worked in places as diverse as Cyprus, Angola, and El Salvador, where the international community committed troops and money to help abate interstate conflict through the United Nations process.

What is needed in southern Lebanon is a fully developed set of objectives, referred to as *peace operations*, a method of providing international military and civilian personnel to assist in the management, control, and resolution of violent sociopolitical conflict, including assisting with post-conflict reconstruction and reconciliation. Peace operations combine security, political, and economic objectives, providing a spectrum of components to address the structural disintegration of societies in conflict. The goal of peace operations is a commitment on the part of the international community to stabilize a broken society and provide resources and humanitarian aid under an international umbrella so that the region can eventually recover and thrive. This process takes years, even decades to accomplish, which is why countries rarely — if ever — take on peace operations single handedly. It is expensive and hard to do.

It is critical that any deal to stop the fighting in Lebanon must fit under a credible organizational umbrella. The UN is the likely — really, the only — candidate. With access to the political and humanitarian means to legitimately broker a reasonable outcome, the UN brings world opinion to bear on the warring parties. With Security Council resolutions, unilateral interests are harder to claim and multilateral political will is easier to impose. If the UN configures and manages the operation, all combatants are more likely to take part in the process. Nations with obvious interests in the outcome — such as Syria, Iran, and the United States — are less likely to taint the process. The Security Council has the ability not only to pass resolutions, but debate sanctions, call for the punishment of aggression, mobilize aid, and allocate resources. As much as the UN has been criticized for past failures in peacekeeping, it remains the only body with the legitimacy to shame aggressors and advocate for peace.

It is unrealistic to promote the idea that putting a peacekeeping mission on the ground — either an international force or a regional ad hoc mission — will stop the fighting. Mobilizing troops and placing them around the border will not bring peace. Any lasting compromise must include a range of objectives to stabilize the region: rebuilding the infrastructure in all areas affected by the conflict, bolstering the regional economy, enforcing the rule of law, and advancing political confidence by addressing human rights concerns and bringing former rogue factions into the political process. There is no easy formula for doing this, especially in a region where the history of violence is so bitter and runs so deep. What is needed in this case is a credible process where all sides are brought to the negotiation table. Compromise means there are no winners and losers; using the UN to broker a deal may take longer, but it may have the chance of sustainability where past solutions have failed to take hold.

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