Introduction: Peace Operations and Their Evaluation

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Fifty years ago, a book by Arthur Lee Burns and Nina Heathcote entitled Peace-keeping by U.N. Forces: From Suez to the Congo was published as part of the series Princeton Studies in World Politics.1 The volume for the most part offered a blow-by-blow account of recent United Nations experiences in conflict zones. Nonetheless, the cover notes for the book recorded that the authors devoted “particular attention to military command, political control and, above all, political authority, and the roles of the Security Council, the General Assembly and the Secretariat”, and concluded that “These are the factors that determine the ultimate success or failure of the efforts made by the United Nations to keep the peace”. Neither Professor Burns nor Dr Heathcote published much thereafter on the topic of peacekeeping, but it is notable that the notion that the success or failure of peacekeeping efforts could be appraised from a scholarly point of view was already present in their approach to the subject.

Yet evaluating the success of peace operations is a far from straightforward undertaking. Any endeavours in this area are complicated by a range of intellectual challenges that flow from the complexity of the subject matter. One area of complexity relates to the very meaning of the word “peace”. Another relates to the overlapping terminologies that have been employed to refer to important aspects of the activities of states, international organisations, civil society actors, and private individuals committed to the promotion of peace.

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A third relates to changes over time in the kinds of activities in which the United Nations, its specialised and humanitarian agencies, and its member states have undertaken with a view to promoting peace. These complexities have not only generated vast literatures from the pens and word processors of scholars and practitioners alike, but have prompted the replacement of the familiar term “peacekeeping” with the broader term “peace operations”, which increases the breadth of our focus, but at some potential cost in terms of connotative precision.

“Classical peacekeeping” is an activity which has long been associated with the United Nations, although it is important to note that the threat of veto in the United Nations Security Council, as well as other political complications, have from time to time prompted the emergence of non-UN peacekeeping, such as that found in the Multinational Force and Observers (MFO) in Sinai, and the Regional Assistance Mission in the Solomon Islands (RAMSI). The United Nations in 1998 marked the 50th anniversary of peacekeeping, which implied that peacekeeping had begun when Security Council Resolution 50 of 29 May 1948 provided for a group of military observers to assist the supervision of the cessation of hostilities in Palestine for which the same resolution called. This mission, the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO), remains in operation to this day. Yet this mission undertook and undertakes only a small portion of the activities that came to be associated with classical peacekeeping, and for this reason, scholars often date the emergence of peacekeeping from the deployment of the first United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF I) in November 1956 following the botched Anglo-French intervention in the Suez Canal region. This force, the withdrawal of which contributed to the outbreak of the Six Day War in 1967, was concerned not simply to monitor a ceasefire, but also to insert a neutral force between potential enemies, and hopefully to build sufficient confidence that a more permanent solution could be secured for the problem that had generated the needs for peacekeepers in the first place. These objectives accounted for some of the notable structural and functional dimensions of classical

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