

UNIFIL peace keeping operation successful, but presence in Lebanon still needed to maintain stability

The absence of a major conflict since 2006 between Lebanon and Israel can be largely subscribed to the presence and efforts of the UNIFIL peace keeping operation. Although the continued presence and strengthening of UNIFIL is still needed to maintain stability in the region, UNIFIL can be seen as a prime example of a 'satisfactorily successful' UN peace keeping operation. This is mainly because of UNIFIL's effective use of its conflict management measures that are in place. These indicators could be useful for practitioners of UN peace operations to help them to enhance the effectiveness of peace operations. Researchers who undertake research on peace keeping operations could take into consideration that a combined approach of both quantitative data and qualitative research gives the richest insights.

This is apparent from a case study by PhD candidate Tony Bardalai (Tilburg University, Organizational Studies) in which he combined both quantitative and qualitative research in order to get a good view on what aspects can make a UN peace operation successful and on how the people involved feel about this.

Since its inception in 1948, 71 peacekeeping operations have been deployed by the UN with mixed results. Because it failed in places like Rwanda, Somalia or former Yugoslavia, the UN peacekeeping often comes under criticism more for what it has not been able to achieve and less for how it has contributed to the conflict management. To enhance the effectiveness of the operations, the UN has tried to introduce several reforms over the last 30 years. Measuring performance is a key to any successful reforms. But how does one measure the performance of UN peacekeeping operations? Opinions on the methods and evaluation parameters vary, as each operation is different. Since there is no standard assessment criterion for any UN peacekeeping operation, developing such an evaluation framework is the need of the day. Out of many approaches, this can be attempted through a successful ongoing operation as a case study.

As a traditional peacekeeping operation, UNIFIL was selected for this study as a case study because of its uniqueness. There has not been a major conflict between Lebanon and Israel since the last war of 2006 and therefore, the contribution of UNIFIL has been significant.

The study is based on asking key questions to ascertain whether the goals set by the UNIFIL mission have been fulfilled or not. This is further analyzed by a combination of a quantitative and qualitative study to establish its validity and corroboration. Development of key success criterion was effectively used to assess UNIFIL. The major finding of this research is that UNIFIL has fulfilled all the goals set for the mission. This has been significant, thus putting UNIFIL in the category of 'satisfactorily successful' UN peacekeeping operations.

There will always be varying interpretations of the principles of peacekeeping which will influence the outcome of any UN peace operation. Therefore, organised training for peacekeepers in the deployment area in the form of debates and discussion would help to limit the scope of the misinterpretation of the nuances of principles of peacekeeping. The current structure of UNIFIL comprising peacekeepers from a few Western as well as non-Western nations is a good and rare combination. It provides political deterrence to antagonists with a more “human” face of the peacekeepers. Therefore, for the sake of maintaining the current state of stability and the absence of violence, the continued deployment of UNIFIL in its current form is a necessity. It should be further strengthened in its conflict management capabilities. Institutionalisation of a mechanism for periodical collation and analysis of disaggregated data in terms of opinion surveys and operational statistics by the mission HQs, would also help to make continuous improvement and mid-course correction in the operational activities of UNIFIL. This research is based on empirical data, supported with perceptions and practical experiences of practioneers and ‘subject matter experts’ at both operational and tactical levels, and contains valuable takeaways for the UN for future reform and best practices for those who are active on an everyday basis in UN peacekeeping.