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Abstract

A review of:

UN Peacekeeping in Lebanon, Somalia and Kosovo: Operational and Legal Issues in Practice by Ray Murphy. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007. 392 pp.

Keywords

Human rights, United Nations, Peacekeeping, Conflict

UN Peacekeeping in Lebanon, Somalia and Kosovo: Operational and Legal Issues in Practice by Ray Murphy. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007. 392 pp.

At the time of writing, more than 100,000 personnel are deployed in United Nations peace operations. This does not include the operation that the U.N. is currently mounting in Darfur, with the African Union. The publication of Ray Murphy's UN Peacekeeping in Lebanon, Somalia and Kosovo is therefore timely. Murphy is particularly well placed to write on the topic; his academic research has focused on peacekeeping for a number of years, and he served as an infantry officer with the Irish Contingent in the U.N. operation in Lebanon in the 1980s.

The preface describes the book as an interdisciplinary study that examines a number of operational and legal issues associated with contemporary multi-national peace operations, and seeks to provide insights into the problems that arise in establishing and deploying such forces to meet the challenges of current conflicts. Operations in Lebanon, Somalia and Kosovo are used as case studies to illustrate the issues described.

The book is divided into six chapters. Chapter 1 discusses the concept of peacekeeping, the distinction between peacekeeping and peace enforcement, and the place of peacekeeping in collective security. Chapter 2 focuses on the establishment and deployment of the U.N. forces in Lebanon, Somalia and Kosovo. The question of command and control of U.N. and other multinational operations is examined in chapter 3. Chapter 4 deals with the use of force and experience of the U.N. Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), the U.N. Operation in Somalia II (UNOSOM II) and Kosovo Force (KFOR). The applicability and relevance of international humanitarian law and international human rights law to all types of military action undertaken by or on behalf of the U.N. is the subject of Chapter 5. Chapter 6 draws a number of conclusions, including: the conclusion that a revision of the legal framework of peacekeeping is long overdue; that a peacekeeping or peace enforcement operation alone cannot end a war but must be part of an overall political strategy; that there is a need for more accountability in peacekeeping; and that there is a need for unity of command. The book also contains maps of Lebanon, Somalia and Kosovo, the text of the most important U.N. resolutions concerning the operations in these areas as well as a bibliography and an index.

A glance at the detailed table of contents reveals that the book covers a lot of ground within the area of peacekeeping. This makes the book a very useful introduction to the field, since it discusses both basic principles of peacekeeping and a number of contemporary issues related to peacekeeping. Unfortunately, the book's breadth also means that many issues do not receive the detailed treatment that they deserve. One example of this lack is the cooperation between the U.N. and regional organizations in peacekeeping, an issue that is touched upon only briefly. In addition, Murphy sometimes appears to skip from one subject to another, which for this reviewer, made it difficult, at times, to follow the line of reasoning.

Murphy draws conclusions relating to a number of different aspects of U.N. peacekeeping. Some of these, such as the need for continued support from the members of the Security Council for peacekeeping operations once they have been established, as well as the need for unity of command, are well-known. Others are innovative, if not always likely to be implemented in practice. The recommendation to formulate a "Bill of Rights" in order to remove uncertainty surrounding applicable human rights obligations to peacekeepers falls into this category, as does

the proposal to append a detailed definition of the mandate and the conditions for its execution to Status of Forces Agreements between the U.N. and the host state.

Murphy's first-hand experience as a peacekeeper in UNIFIL is clearly an added value for the book. In a number of places he is able to draw on his personal experience as a peacekeeper. There are few if any books that combine this with a legal analysis of peacekeeping. This lends not only credibility but also some interesting anecdotes.

The book's overall assessment of U.N. peacekeeping is critical but hopeful: U.N. peacekeeping has serious operational and legal limitations, but it remains one of the more successful multilateral attempts to maintain peace and security. In view of the statistics cited at the beginning of this review, this optimism appears to be shared by the member states of the U.N.

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