



מכון ירושלים לאסטרטגיה ולביטחון

The Jerusalem Institute
for Strategy and Security

The Evolution of Terrorism in Areas Under the Mandate of Peacekeeping Forces

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1. Introduction

United Nations peacekeeping is designed to help countries engaged in conflict create conditions for sustainable peace. These multinational forces, deployed to conflict zones under UN authority and usually pursuant to Security Council resolutions, may include soldiers, police officers, and civilian personnel. Their mandates differ from one mission to another, but typically cover ceasefire monitoring, establishing buffer zones between the parties, protection of civilians, and humanitarian assistance. Some missions also support elections and the rebuilding of governing institutions after a war.

The UN distinguishes between peacekeeping and peace enforcement. Peacekeeping is intended for situations in which a fragile peace already exists and must be maintained, usually under Chapter VI of the UN Charter. Peace enforcement, by contrast, is a more active use of military force to halt aggression and may be undertaken without the consent of the parties. It falls under Chapter VII of the Charter.

Force may be authorized for self-defense, ceasefire enforcement, disarmament, securing humanitarian assistance and transportation routes, or implementing UN Security Council resolutions. In practice, however, peacekeeping missions rarely remain within those narrow limits. The reasons vary from case to case. Every conflict has its own defining features, whether geographic, religious, political, ethnic, separatist, or some combination of these and other elements.

At the same time, UN peacekeeping forces are structured to avoid direct combat, which may compromise their neutrality, undermine their mission, and endanger personnel. The problem is compounded because peacekeepers are often weaker than the local forces they may have to confront, whether those forces are regular armies or terrorist and guerrilla organizations.

The parties to a conflict often use peacekeeping forces to advance their own objectives, and the presence of such a force can itself draw fire and make it a target. The rise of irregular warfare has forced the UN to update its peacekeeping doctrine and adopt a more proactive approach to cross-border threats that were once primarily local or regional. As the geographic and operational scope of international conflicts expands, peacekeeping doctrines and methods of operation must adapt as well.

2. The Evolution of Terrorism in Peacekeeping Areas of Operation

Terrorism can develop in areas where peacekeeping forces operate. It generally emerges in spaces shaped by war or prolonged conflict, where international forces are deployed to preserve temporary stability and help move the area toward sustainable peace. The presence of international forces, however, often creates an operational and strategic vacuum in which terrorist organizations can regroup, adapt, and expand.

These areas often suffer from weak or partially collapsed governing institutions, a fragile economy, unstable borders, and a population still burdened by the psychological, social, and economic strains of conflict. Terrorist actors exploit the disconnect between international forces and local conditions. They understand that peacekeeping missions are built primarily around neutrality, civilian protection, and ceasefire monitoring—not direct confrontation.

Terrorist elements rapidly learn the peacekeepers' rules of engagement and constraints, and tailor their methods accordingly. Hit-and-run attacks, sophisticated improvised explosive devices, and targeted attacks on authority figures are designed to make both the foreign forces, and the local population feel powerless. Recruitment and incitement networks compound the effect by exploiting frustration, longstanding tensions, unmet promises, local corruption, and inequalities intensified by the arrival of foreign resources that are distributed unevenly. Terrorism thus becomes more than a destructive force. It also acquires ideological appeal by offering belonging, power, and resistance to those who feel excluded from the peace process.

Terrorism can also converge with organized crime. Trafficking in arms, drugs, and people provides steady financing and allows organizations to survive even under international monitoring. Over time, these groups become more sophisticated operationally and technologically. Digital communications help them disseminate messages, transmit operational instructions, and recruit remotely, enabling the threat to extend beyond the immediate conflict zone and create global support networks.

The phenomenon poses a challenge that is both multidimensional and fundamental. Forces that are not built as combat formations risk losing both legitimacy and effectiveness when they face terrorist threats. International forces are therefore caught between two imperatives: preserving neutrality so that they are not seen as parties to the conflict and responding to threats that endanger them and the local population. Their freedom of action is constrained by the concern that a military response could escalate violence, expand terrorist recruitment, and damage trust that is already fragile.

Operationally, the problem lies in inadequate training and motivation to confront terrorism, the absence of reliable local intelligence, and logistical constraints that impede a rapid and effective response. At the strategic level, this requires changes to peacekeeping doctrine itself, including the integration of counterterrorism elements. That, in turn, creates an internal tension between the original peacekeeping mission and the need for self-defense and for preventing threats from spreading.

The emergence of terrorism in these settings exposes the limits of international intervention and raises questions about the international community's ability to maintain stability when threats come from nonstate actors embedded in local populations. The result is a vicious cycle in which efforts to suppress terrorism can be portrayed as repression of the local population, thereby reinforcing the terrorist narrative of resistance to foreign occupation.

The consequences for regional stability can be long-lasting. Terrorism that takes root in a peacekeeping area may spill into neighboring areas, turning the wider region into a center of chronic instability and producing refugee flows, arms trafficking, and broader security threats. The response cannot be limited to treating symptoms; it requires rethinking the peacekeeping model itself and pursuing an integrated diplomatic, economic, social, and operational effort that addresses the roots of terrorism.

This phenomenon is likely to remain a persistent challenge. It can turn peace missions into prolonged failures and erode confidence in the international community's ability to intervene successfully in complex conflicts. Because the process is continuous rather than episodic, it adapts to every change in the operational environment and uses every weakness to grow stronger, making the cycle of conflict harder to break.

The development of terrorism in peacekeeping areas is therefore not only a local security threat. It has become a global phenomenon that exposes the vulnerability of the international order and forces all actors involved to confront the limits of peacekeeping in conflict environments. The challenge is not merely to confront terrorism, but to change how peacekeeping interventions are conceived and planned so that they can better withstand the destructive forces emerging in their areas of operation.

6 Spektor, Matias. 2018. "The United States and the 1964 Brazilian Military Coup." In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Latin American History*. April 26. <https://oxfordre.com/latinamericanhistory/display/10.1093/acrefore/9780199366439.001.0001/acrefore-9780199366439-e-551>. Also, in Latinometrics. 2024. "Every Latin American Country Has Gone through at Least One Coup." Latinometrics, May 9. <https://latinometrics.substack.com/p/a-history-of-coups>

7 Latinometrics. 2024. "Every Latin American Country Has Gone through at Least One Coup." Latinometrics, May 9. <https://latinometrics.substack.com/p/a-history-of-coups>. Also, in John R. Bawden. 2016. *The Pinochet Generation: The Chilean Military in the Twentieth Century*. University of Alabama Press. https://books.google.bg/books?id=ELScDAAQBAJ&redir_esc=y

8 Latinometrics. 2024. "Every Latin American Country Has Gone through at Least One Coup." Latinometrics, May 9. <https://latinometrics.substack.com/p/a-history-of-coups>. Also, in Duncan Campbell. 2003. "Kissinger Approved Argentinian 'Dirty War.'" *The Guardian*, December 6. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2003/dec/06/argentina.usa>

9 Story Of Pakistan. 2003. "Ouster of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto." Story Of Pakistan, June 1. <https://storyofpakistan.com/ouster-of-zulfikar-ali-bhutto/>

10 Nowa Omoigui. n.d. "History of Civil-Military Relations in Nigeria: The Second Transition (1979-83)."

3. Case Studies

UN peacekeeping operations have frequently come under direct attack from hostile actors, most often non-state forces such as foreign mercenaries, militias led by local warlords, and guerrilla groups in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Somalia, and Mozambique. Traditional Chapter VI peacekeeping—neutral and independent monitoring, with force used only in self-defense—has proved insufficient and at times ineffective. This led to a shift to Chapter VII mandates authorizing “all necessary means” for policing and enforcement, including protective patrols, intelligence collection, oversight of disarmament programs, targeted military operations, dispersal of armed groups and organizations, and enforcement of ceasefires and peacekeeping arrangements. At that stage, narco-terrorist groups and criminal gangs engaged in drug cultivation, production, and trafficking were almost absent from UN peacekeeping areas; such threats were often handled by national forces, for example in Latin America. The focus in peacekeeping missions was on armed militias and guerrilla forces with criminal, separatist, or insurgent elements.¹

The following case studies examine attacks in UN peacekeeping areas that either constituted terrorism or were carried out by groups widely classified as terrorist organizations. Tactics employed included ambushes, bombings, and targeted assassinations. These incidents occurred in areas where UN peacekeeping forces operated, and in many cases were directed against the peacekeepers themselves or intended to disrupt their missions. Although the definition of terrorism remains contested, the groups relevant here include non-state armed organizations such as PLO factions, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, Hezbollah, the Khmer Rouge, and others.²

3.1 ONUC in the Congo

The secession of Katanga Province during the Congo Crisis of the early 1960s is a classic example of how terrorism can develop in areas where a peacekeeping force is deployed under a limited mandate yet must contend with non-state actors exploiting a political and security vacuum.³

Belgian political and logistical support, together with the leadership of Moïse Tshombe, President of the secessionist state, enabled the formation of a new insurgent structure

1 United Nations, “Republic of the Congo,” 2001, <https://peacekeeping.un.org/mission/past/onucB.htm>; Ramesh Thakur, “From Peacekeeping to Peace Enforcement: The UN Operation in Somalia,” *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 33, no. 3 (1995): 387–410, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/161981>.

2 United Nations Peacekeeping, “Historical Timeline of UN Peacekeeping,” n.d., accessed March 21, 2026, <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/historical-timeline-of-un-peacekeeping>.

3 United Nations, “Republic of the Congo,” 2001, <https://peacekeeping.un.org/mission/past/onucB.htm>.

combining local separatist ambitions, foreign mercenary forces, and paramilitary organizations such as the Katangese Gendarmerie.⁴

These forces included hundreds of European mercenaries who served as officers, tactical advisers, and logistics specialists. They did not function as the regular army of a sovereign state, but as a flexible, profit-driven network that engaged in organized crime, assassinated rival leaders, and stoked local conflicts that harmed the civilian population. This produced a form of “decentralized terrorism”—not necessarily in the modern ideological-religious sense, but as the systematic use of violence to undermine the legitimacy of the UN presence, disrupt the transition to peace, and preserve economic control over the region’s rich mineral resources. These forces exploited the limitations of ONUC’s initial peacekeeping mandate, which centered on neutrality and ceasefire monitoring, while directly confronting UN forces. In doing so, they turned the area into a strategic trap in which any peacekeeper response could be portrayed as one-sided intervention.

The situation posed a fundamental question: how could an international force designed as a “peace force,” rather than an occupying army, deal with non-state actors that blended into the local environment, used the population as a human shield, and exploited intelligence and logistical weaknesses? UN Security Council Resolutions 161 and 169 marked a dramatic shift in policy, authorizing the use of force “as a last resort” not only for self-defense but also to prevent civil war and expel mercenaries and foreign military elements.

The change forced UN forces to move from operational passivity to proactive operations, including direct military attacks, air operations, and coordinated ground operations. Conducted in 1961, Operations Rumpunch and Morthor were preventive actions intended to drive the mercenaries toward the Elizabethville region, now Lubumbashi, disrupt their chain of command through rapid maneuver, and prevent them from reestablishing their positions. The campaign reached its decisive point with Operation Grand Slam, from December 1962 to January 1963. The operation combined a coordinated ground advance by UN troops with heavy artillery and extensive air support, marking what was then the first systematic use of airstrikes in UN peacekeeping operations. The operations sought to neutralize key Katangese Gendarmerie positions, secure freedom of movement for the international forces, and prevent any renewed attempt at political secession. Direct clashes with forces led by European mercenaries exposed the insurgency’s basic vulnerability: it depended on a combination of local loyalty and foreign expertise. The fighting led to Tshombe’s flight and the collapse of the Katangese bid for independence.⁵

4 Peter Abbott, *Modern African Wars (4): The Congo 1960–2002* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2014), https://books.google.co.il/books?id=j6ajCwAAQBAJ&redir_esc=y.

5 Peter Abbott, *Modern African Wars (4): The Congo 1960–2002* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2014), https://books.google.co.il/books?id=j6ajCwAAQBAJ&redir_esc=y; A. Walter Dorn and David J. H. Bell, “Intelligence and Peacekeeping: The UN Operation in the Congo 1960–64,” *International Peacekeeping* 2, no. 1 (1995): 11–33, <https://www.walterdorn.net/40-intelligence-and-peacekeeping-the-un-operation-in-the-congo-1960-64>.

Firepower was only part of the success. Intelligence and legal tools were also central. Intercepts of Katangese military radio communications provided high-quality, real-time intelligence, enabling precise targeting, identification of separatist headquarters, and disruption of operational control. At the same time, the arrest and expulsion, under international legal authority, of mercenaries and military and political advisers, including Europeans, disrupted the insurgency, cutting off external flows of funding and expertise and making the non-state force more vulnerable. By early 1963, these actions had ended both the rebellion and the independence movement. The price, however, was heavy: substantial UN casualties, damage to local and international trust, and accusations of unnecessary escalation. The Katanga experience marked a paradigm shift in UN peace enforcement—from passive “peacekeeping” missions to “active enforcement” against armed non-state actors—and laid the foundation for later counterterrorism doctrines in post-conflict environments.

Several key insights from this analysis remain relevant today to the development of terrorism in peacekeeping zones. First, insurgencies that involve local leadership, foreign support, and non-state actors such as mercenaries show that peacekeeping can create a vacuum in which such organizations can organize, arm themselves, and recruit support by exploiting the neutrality constraints imposed on international forces. Mandates that are limited from the outset may therefore leave a peacekeeping force weak and without a credible deterrent.

Second, success is possible only when policy changes quickly, shifting missions from passive to active operations and integrating the use of military force, intelligence, technology such as intercepts, and legal and diplomatic tools such as deportations. This underscores the importance of operational flexibility and full international coordination.

Third, the high cost in casualties and legitimacy shows that such operations, even when there is no choice but to conduct them, can feed a narrative of “foreign occupation” and create a cycle of renewed recruitment, resistance and violence. They should therefore always be combined with parallel efforts to build local institutions, advance economic development, and support social rehabilitation programs in order to address the roots of frustration.

A further lesson from Katanga concerns the international order’s vulnerability to non-state actors. Mercenary and paramilitary forces can become a global threat if they are not severed early from their sources of support. Yet these forces are also more fragile than regular armies if their command structures are disrupted.

The conclusion is that neutrality alone is not sufficient for effective peacekeeping. Missions must include preventive capabilities against threats while preserving the

delicate balance between the use of force and the trust on which its legitimacy depends. Without that balance, terrorism will continue to develop in these kinds of environments and may turn peace missions into prolonged failures. Katanga is therefore not merely a historical episode; it is a lesson that remains relevant today when it comes to rethinking peacekeeping doctrine in the face of evolving threats.

3.2 UNIFIL in Lebanon

Southern Lebanon is a classic, ongoing example of how terrorism can develop in peacekeeping zones where international forces operate under a limited mandate focused on ceasefire monitoring and the separation of opposing forces, rendering them ineffective. Terrorist actors were able to exploit the political and security vacuum created by the Lebanese Civil War and by cross-border violence to build up their capabilities and establish themselves as the dominant power in the area monitored by UNIFIL.

After UNIFIL was established in 1978 in the wake of Operation Litani, southern Lebanon became an operating arena for Palestinian terrorist groups such as the PLO and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, alongside emerging Shi'a groups that were not all immediately classified as terrorist organizations. These actors treated UNIFIL not only as an obstacle but also as an opportunity: a target through which they could demonstrate strength, generate political escalation, and deter forces operating within its zone of responsibility, including the IDF and the South Lebanon Army. The violence included repeated ambushes, roadside and car bombings, and direct attacks. Some were directed at UNIFIL soldiers themselves, with the aim of undermining the mission's legitimacy, weakening the morale of states contributing troops to the force, and turning southern Lebanon into a regional strategic trap.

The pattern was visible in a series of attacks. In 1979, an ambush killed three Fijian soldiers. On June 25, 1981, PLO gunmen ambushed Fijian soldiers, killing two and wounding another, whom they took captive; he was later tortured and executed. The attack combined guerrilla methods with terrorism.⁶ In 1986, the attacks widened further. A roadside bomb attributed to Hezbollah killed three French soldiers on September 28, and a car bomb struck a UNIFIL checkpoint on November 20, killing three Fijian soldiers and three Lebanese civilians and wounding many others.

The attacks were not isolated incidents. Together with shootings, exchanges of fire, bombings and additional attacks in the 1980s and 1990s against Nepalese, Irish, and Fijian soldiers, they were often part of a broader terrorist and guerrilla campaigns against

6 Ronald Hatto, "From Peacekeeping to Peacebuilding: The Evolution of the Role of the United Nations in Peace Operations," *International Review of the Red Cross* 95 (2013): 495–515, <https://international-review.icrc.org/sites/default/files/irrc-891-892-hatto.pdf>.

the peacekeeping presence. The result was to expose UNIFIL's vulnerability despite the international mandate under which it operated.

Southern Lebanon followed a pattern seen in other theaters. Terrorist actors, some of which embedded in the local population, used roadside bombs and hit-and-run ambushes. They exploited the constraints of UNIFIL's mandate, which focused on observation, monitoring, and separation rather than direct combat to create a sense of helplessness among the international forces.

Operating under strict rules of engagement, UNIFIL found itself caught between two requirements: preserving neutrality, so it would not be seen as a party to the conflict and responding to threats that endangered its personnel as well as stability in the area. This dynamic contributed to the gradual escalation of violence and eroded trust both locally and internationally. The attacks disrupted UNIFIL's ability to monitor the border and turned southern Lebanon into a persistent arena of combat. In that environment, terrorism not only targeted peacekeeping forces; it also fed a cycle of local recruitment through the narrative of "resistance to a foreign force." The ethical and political challenge was no less severe. Any UNIFIL response was perceived as escalation, while failure to respond exposed weakness and encouraged further attacks. The cost was heavy. Dead and wounded peacekeeping soldiers damaged the force's morale and raised doubts about its ability to carry out the mission effectively. Ultimately, the force chose not to confront the growing strength of terrorist actors in the area and failed to fulfill its mission.

Analysis of the Lebanese case sharpens and deepens the broader understanding of how terrorism develops in peacekeeping areas. First, it illustrates that the presence of a limited international force, even one operating under a legitimate mandate, can create space for nonstate organizations—Palestinian, Shiite, or otherwise—to grow, organize, and conduct terrorist activities by exploiting structural weaknesses such as the absence of reliable local intelligence, restrictive rules of engagement, and the lack of direct enforcement authority. In this way, the peacekeeping force itself becomes a catalyst for the emergence of threats. A weak international force draws aggression on itself. In this context, 'weak' does not mean insufficient equipment, arms, or personnel, but also weak mandate and freedom of action.

A second implication is that distinctions among groups can quickly blur in such environments. Different organizations may use similar tactics (ambushes, explosive devices, and suicide attacks) to serve shared political goals such as destabilization and deterrence. This points to the need for a broader mandate that allows a rapid shift from passive monitoring to active confrontation with threats. Yet peacekeeping forces are structurally inclined to avoid active combat and concentrate on self-defense.

UNIFIL's vulnerability also deepened the reluctance of the force and its commanders to act against threats. Effective action would have required operational flexibility together with intelligence and technological tools such as intercepts, aerial patrols, and information sharing with local forces. Without these capabilities, a peacekeeping force can become a symbol of weakness, inviting further attacks and prolonging instability.

A further point is that the absence of any response addressing the root causes of southern Lebanon's problems turned UNIFIL into a continuing failure. The south Lebanese case should therefore not be read only as history. It remains relevant today as a lesson in the need to rethink peacekeeping doctrine so that missions can withstand the destructive forces that develop within their areas of responsibility.

Finally, in Lebanon, as in other peacekeeping theaters, the very need for a foreign force reflected the inability of the state's own military to impose order. When that weakness is inherent and difficult to overcome, the international mission becomes open-ended, and its already limited motivation erodes further. Terrorist actors exploit this dynamic, using it to entrench themselves.

3.3 UNTAC in Cambodia

The United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) mission of 1992–1993 is a classic example of the emergence of terrorism in a peacekeeping area. A large international force was deployed after decades of brutal conflict to oversee disarmament, a political transition, and the country's first democratic elections. It included thousands of soldiers, police officers, civilians, and specialized teams. Yet the very force sent to supervise the transition became a central target for non-state groups that refused to join the process and systematically employed terrorism to disrupt it.

The Khmer Rouge, the movement responsible for the genocide of the 1970s, had already used terrorism during that period. In 1993, it boycotted the referendum and electoral process and launched a broad, deliberate terrorist campaign to derail them. Its campaign included ambushes, attacks, targeted shootings, and assaults on UN sites, peacekeeping forces, and local civilians, with the aim of intimidating voters, sabotaging the democratic process, and undermining the legitimacy of the UN presence.⁷

On May 4, 1993, Khmer Rouge forces ambushed and shot dead the Japanese UN commander Hiroyuki Takata despite the fact that he had an escort of Dutch peacekeepers. The killing became one of the campaign's most prominent and symbolic incidents, demonstrating

7 Ronald Hatto, "From Peacekeeping to Peacebuilding: The Evolution of the Role of the United Nations in Peace Operations," *International Review of the Red Cross* 95 (2013): 495–515, <https://international-review.icrc.org/sites/default/files/irrc-891-892-hatto.pdf>.

the terrorists' ability to breach the protection provided by international forces and strike symbols of authority.

Other Khmer Rouge ambushes and attacks on peacekeeping forces, including Chinese soldiers, took place around the time of the elections in areas such as Kampong Thom. These incidents were explicitly defined as a deliberate terrorist campaign against the peacekeeping force in the conflict zone. The campaign expanded through familiar mechanisms: a non-state actor with an extremist ideology embedded itself in the remnants of the area's rural social structure, exploited UNTAC's limited mandate, which focused on supervision and support rather than direct combat, exploited hit-and-run attacks and ambushes, and cultivated a narrative of "resistance to a foreign force." These methods helped it recruit local support and foster a sense of helplessness among both the international forces and the population trying to participate in the elections.

At the time, Cambodia hosted one of the largest forces in UN history. The mission was one of the most complex and difficult ever carried out by the organization. The peacekeeping force had to preserve neutrality so that it would not be perceived as a party to the conflict, while also protecting its soldiers, civilian staff, and the election process itself. Any use of force risked escalating the violence and feeding the terrorist narrative. Yet a failure to respond would expose structural weakness, damage morale, contribute to a significant decline in electoral participation, and create a real risk that the entire mission would fail.

From an operational perspective, the attacks exposed the difficulty of obtaining reliable local intelligence, the peacekeepers' rigid rules of engagement, and the gap between the mission's military component and its civilian-police component. The political and ethical challenge was no less serious. The Khmer Rouge used terrorism not merely to cause physical harm but, above all, to undermine the international legitimacy of the process, intimidate the local population, and turn peacekeeping itself into a visible failure that would highlight the international community's inability to deal with non-state threats.

The Khmer Rouge case strengthens the broader understanding of how terrorism develops in areas where peacekeeping forces are stationed. First, it shows that when an international force is deployed to support a "political transition" that includes disarmament and elections, nonstate actors that reject the process, especially those with a history of terrorism and an extremist ideology, can treat its presence as a strategic opportunity. They turn the peacekeeping force into a symbolic target, and attacks against it send a message that is more powerful than attacks on a local force. Terrorism thus becomes a tool for creating an atmosphere of fear that prevents the mission from succeeding.

Second, the Khmer Rouge campaign highlights the acute vulnerability of the civilian and police components of peacekeeping missions, as illustrated by Takata's killing. These

components are less protected than the military force, but they are essential to the success of a democratic process. This requires a doctrinal change that provides active protection for all parts of the mission, not only for the military component.

Third, UNTAC's relative success in holding elections despite the campaign of terrorism shows that a combination of international diplomatic pressure, shared intelligence, and targeted responses can break the cycle of terrorism, but only when applied rapidly and in full coordination. This connects to the lessons of operations such as Grand Slam in Katanga and to the need for flexibility, which UNIFIL lacks in Lebanon.

Finally, the human and political cost of terrorist attacks, including the deaths of soldiers and the damage to trust, shows that terrorism in peacekeeping areas is more than just a local security threat. It exposes the limits of international capacities and forces the UN to move from passive monitoring to active enforcement, even though each such shift endangers the legitimacy granted by neutrality and requires a balance between force and trust.

3.4 UNOSOM II in Somalia

UNOSOM II in Somalia is a classic example of how terrorism can develop in peacekeeping areas. The international force was first deployed to protect humanitarian assistance during the Somali civil war but quickly became a primary target for armed militias and their allies among Islamist factions in the country.

Elements led by Mohamed Farrah Aidid, head of the Somali National Alliance (SNA), combined terrorist tactics with criminal and coercive methods. Improvised explosive devices, urban ambushes, remotely detonated bombs, and night attacks were used alongside the cynical use of civilians as human shields, extortion, the looting of aid convoys, and incitement through Radio Mogadishu. Their purpose was to undermine the legitimacy of the UN presence, disrupt the flow of humanitarian assistance, and preserve economic and political control over the area.

A deadly ambush during a weapons inspection at Radio Mogadishu showed the scale of the threat. Twenty-four Pakistani peacekeepers were killed, and their bodies were publicly mutilated. The attack demonstrated the scale of the threat and the ability of non-state actors to breach international security arrangements and strike symbols of authority.⁸ The escalation culminated on October 3, 1993, in the Battle of Mogadishu,

⁸ Mark Bradbury, *The Somali Conflict: Prospects for Peace* (Oxfam GB, 1994), <https://policy-practice.oxfam.org/resources/the-somali-conflict-prospects-for-peace-122751>.

known as “Black Hawk Down.” SNA militias and Islamist organizations such as Al-Ittihad al-Islami used grenades, mortars, small arms, and urban ambushes to bring down American helicopters, killing 18 American soldiers who were part of the UN force, and disrupt the mission.⁹

UNOSOM II faced a major challenge. Operating under a Chapter VII mandate—Security Council Resolutions 814 and 837—that authorized “all necessary means,” including arrests and forcible disarmament, the mission had to move beyond its original humanitarian-policing role to aggressive enforcement. That meant active patrols, targeted raids, the seizure of heavy and light weapons, the destruction of hidden stockpiles, the neutralization of Radio Mogadishu, and active protection of aid routes. Yet rapid rearmament continued through smuggling routes and arms-trafficking channels, while logistical and intelligence difficulties prevented the mission from achieving its objectives.¹⁰

The mission did achieve temporary gains in reducing militia control in Mogadishu. But the high cost, the erosion of international resolve, and political complications led to its termination in 1995. Somalia became a symbol of the relative failure of peacekeeping when confronted with non-state threats.¹¹

Looking at Somalia alongside Katanga (ONUC), southern Lebanon (UNIFIL), and Cambodia (UNTAC), several insights emerge. Together, these cases deepen the broader understanding of how terrorism develops in peacekeeping zones and point to recurring patterns with long-term implications.

First, the Somali case demonstrated once again that the humanitarian-political vacuum created by civil conflict allows irregular actors such as ethnic and tribal militias and Islamist factions to develop quickly into terrorist networks. In Somalia, these actors exploited the limits of a peacekeeping mandate focused on protecting aid rather than direct combat to turn the peacekeepers into a target, feeding both the violence itself and the narrative of “resistance to a foreign force.” The same dynamic took place with the mercenaries in Katanga, the PLO and Hezbollah in Lebanon, and the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia.

Secondly, UNOSOM II’s rapid move to a Chapter VII enforcement mandate, including authorization to use “all necessary means,” highlights the need for dynamic doctrinal flexibility. Partial success came only when military force, intelligence, communications operations such as the neutralization of local radio, and active protection were combined.

9 Ronald Hatto, “From Peacekeeping to Peacebuilding: The Evolution of the Role of the United Nations in Peace Operations,” *International Review of the Red Cross* 95 (2013): 495–515, <https://international-review.icrc.org/sites/default/files/irrc-891-892-hatto.pdf>.

10 Ramesh Thakur, “From Peacekeeping to Peace Enforcement: The UN Operation in Somalia,” *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 33, no. 3 (1995): 387–410, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/161981>; United Nations, “Somalia UNOSOM II,” 1993, <https://peacekeeping.un.org/mission/past/unosom2backgr2.html>.

11 United Nations, “Somalia UNOSOM II,” 1993, <https://peacekeeping.un.org/mission/past/unosom2backgr2.html>.

At the same time, the mission's difficulty in dealing with human shields, rearmament, and complex urban terrain showed that peacekeeping remains vulnerable without fully integrated military, intelligence, social, and economic efforts.

Events in Somalia (the downing of the Black Hawk helicopters, in particular) also exposed the vulnerability of peacekeeping forces to targeted attacks, ambushes, and operations designed to not only inflict casualties, but to erode international legitimacy and deter states from contributing peacekeeping forces. This phenomenon has become more common in the twenty-first century, including in Iraq and Mali, and requires peacekeeping forces to receive specialized training, including on rules of engagement, and the coordinated use of intelligence.

The high casualty toll and political impact of the Somalia operation made it a turning point in the planning of later UN missions. The experience also showed that an aggressive response, even when required, can erode trust if it is not accompanied by local institution-building and efforts to cut off the roots of recruitment of fighters from local society through economic frustration, tribalism, and ideology. This reinforces the lesson from earlier cases: peacekeeping must move from passive monitoring to "active peace," combining force with rehabilitation. Moreover, it must pay attention to the roots of conflict, whether ethnic, national, or religious, rather than assuming they all come from the same cause such as economic underdevelopment. Otherwise, terrorism develops and takes control of ungoverned spaces.

The Somalia mission proved to be one of the UN's most aggressive, but it exposed the limits of force and reinforced the need for comprehensive adaptation, including flexible mandates, early technological-intelligence integration, a balance between force and legitimacy, and the separation of terrorist actors from the population. Without these measures, the phenomenon will continue to develop, peace missions will become chronic failures, and the international community's ability to intervene successfully in complex conflicts will be endangered.

3.5 ONUMOZ in Mozambique

ONUMOZ, established after the 1992 Rome General Peace Accords, stands out as a rare case of relative success in dealing with guerrilla and terrorist activity in a peacekeeping area. The international force was sent to monitor the implementation of a peace agreement after decades of brutal civil war.¹² The Mozambican National Resistance (RENAMO), a non-state guerrilla organization that had fought the Mozambique

12 United Nations, "ONUMOZ Mozambique," 1995, <https://peacekeeping.un.org/mission/past/onumozFT.htm>.

Liberation Front (FRELIMO) government since the 1970s, carried out hit-and-run attacks that disrupted transportation corridors and critical infrastructure, severely damaged the local economy, and created a space of persistent instability.

In contrast to the cases discussed above, the Rome General Peace Accords created a clear peacekeeping framework that enabled targeted, integrated countermeasures, including patrols, policing, inspection, and identification procedures that incorporated elements of law enforcement and security. Forces from both sides were dispersed into forty-nine designated areas under the supervision of UN military observers, including areas where RENAMO fighters were deployed. Between January and May 1994, roughly 100,000 fighters were disarmed, released, and reintegrated into local security forces. About 30,000 joined the new national defense force, the Armed Forces for the Defense of Mozambique (FADM), while others received vocational assistance through a civilian reintegration commission.

The UN-supervised weapons effort collected more than 155,000 weapons from guerrilla, paramilitary, and irregular forces, which were then stored and destroyed under UN supervision.¹³ The mission also combined cease-fire monitoring with protection of humanitarian corridors. Military observers verified the separation of forces, the withdrawal of foreign troops, including forces from Zimbabwe and Malawi, and the demilitarization of irregular groups. UN escort patrols secured key transportation routes, limited guerrilla mobility, and reduced attacks on aid. Full implementation of DDR—disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration—helped prevent RENAMO from reemerging as an armed threat and made the 1994 elections possible. It was viewed as a United Nations operation that successfully neutralized guerrilla threats through tighter control and verification of the peacekeeping framework and prevented a resumption of war.¹⁴

Analysis of the ONUMOZ case yields several insights. First, where a clear peace agreement and an accepted political framework exist, non-state actors such as RENAMO can be neutralized more effectively through a comprehensive DDR approach combining the disarmament and dispersal of armed organizations with their reintegration into legitimate security forces, rather than relying on military force alone.

Second, the relative success of ONUMOZ also underscores the importance of sustained enforcement and verification, along with tight control over transportation and humanitarian corridors that limit the mobility of guerrilla groups and reduce their ability to carry out hit-and-run attacks.

13 United Nations, "ONUMOZ Mozambique," 1995, <https://peacekeeping.un.org/mission/past/onumozFT.htm>.

14 United Nations, "ONUMOZ Mozambique," 1995, <https://peacekeeping.un.org/mission/past/onumozFT.htm>.

Third, vocational assistance and reintegration into local security forces can, in some cases, weaken the drivers and stimuli for terrorist recruitment. By giving former fighters an economic and social alternative, such programs avoid leaving them without a livelihood and thus vulnerable to renewed recruitment.

Fourth, peacekeeping missions are more likely to succeed when they move beyond passive monitoring and take on proactive reconstruction. Such an approach includes collecting weapons, dismantling terrorist infrastructure, and verifying the withdrawal of foreign forces. The gains in Mozambique, however, were temporary. RENAMO resumed subversive activity in 2013, and in recent years Mozambique has again faced terrorism by extremist Islamist actors, mainly in the northern provinces.

4. Analysis

The UN's concept for employing peacekeeping forces evolved through an institutional learning process driven largely by the failures of the late 1990s, including the genocide in Rwanda, Srebrenica in Bosnia, and UNOSOM II in Somalia. These cases exposed the weaknesses of traditional peacekeeping missions based on strict neutrality, passive observation, and cease-fire monitoring, which proved inadequate when the threat came from nonstate actors such as tribal militias, criminal organizations, guerrilla groups, or terrorist organizations.

Earlier missions had already pointed in the same direction. ONUC in Katanga used limited military force to expel mercenaries. UNIFIL in Southern Lebanon faced ambushes and IEDs planted by the PLO and Hezbollah. UNTAC in Cambodia confronted Khmer Rouge ambushes during the elections. In Somalia, ambushes by the Somali National Alliance (SNA) led to escalation under UNOSOM II. Taken together, these threats became a central driver of change.

As complex intrastate conflicts involving nonstate armed groups, extremist movements, and terrorist organizations became more common, peacekeeping forces could no longer rely on a reactive model. The need to protect civilians more effectively in tense environments pushed them toward a proactive, multidimensional approach.

An early milestone in this change was the Brahimi Report in 2000, a review prepared by a panel chaired by the former Algerian Foreign Minister Lakhdar Brahimi. The report identified flaws in the peacekeeping missions of the 1990s, including resource shortages, mismatches between resources and objectives, insufficiently clear mandates, and

incomplete planning.¹⁵ It called for practical mandates, rapid deployment of better-equipped forces, and a shift toward stronger and more effective peacekeeping. This included the use of force beyond self-defense to protect the mandate, including the doctrine of Protection of Civilians (PoC).¹⁶

This doctrine created the basis for more assertive operations. The 2008 Capstone Doctrine broadened the formal principles and allowed more flexible use of force at the tactical level, while preserving consent and impartiality. It also introduced the concept of “assertive impartiality,” which gave priority to human rights over neutrality toward insurgents, rioters, and “anarchic noncompliance.” The New Horizon initiative of 2009–2010, which focused on partnerships with local actors, further developed rapid-deployment capabilities, clearer standards for PoC missions, and responses to planning and logistics gaps.¹⁷

These developments made peacekeeping more multidimensional. Military, police, and civilian components were integrated to support the rule of law, elections, disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR), human rights protection, and related tasks. Civilian protection became the highest priority. The first explicit PoC mandate was implemented in Sierra Leone in 1999, and the concept has since been incorporated into most missions. Tactics also shifted. Passive presence gave way to a three-tiered approach: dialogue and engagement, physical protection through patrols and quick-reaction forces, and the creation of a protective environment through support for the rule of law.

By 2020, sixteen peacekeeping missions had received civilian-protection mandates, alongside efforts to collect intelligence and establish temporary operating bases near vulnerable population centers. Later efforts moved toward enforcement under Chapter VII, authorizing “all necessary means” against threatening local actors. The creation of the Force Intervention Brigade (FIB) within MONUSCO in the Congo in 2013 marked a breakthrough. Unlike traditional operations, this offensive unit used force proactively to neutralize armed groups such as M23.¹⁸

Adaptation to terrorism and other threats was also evident in missions such as the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), established in 2013, and the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization

15 Katelyn Cassin and Benjamin Zyla, “UN Reforms for an Era of Pragmatic Peacekeeping,” *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding* 17, no. 3 (2023): 294–312, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17502977.2022.2158427>, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/17502977.2022.2158427#abstract>.

16 Xiaojing Wang et al., “Evolution of the United Nations Peacekeeping Research: A Visualized Bibliometrics Study,” *Complexity* 2025 (2025): 3438043, <https://doi.org/10.1155/cplx/3438043>; Mark Bradbury, *The Somali Conflict: Prospects for Peace* (Oxfam GB, 1994), <https://policy-practice.oxfam.org/resources/the-somali-conflict-prospects-for-peace-122751>.

17 United Nations, *The New Horizon Initiative* (New York: United Nations, 2010), https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/newhorizon_update01_0.pdf.

18 Leticia Carvalho, Geraldine Rosas Duarte, and Matheus de Abreu Costa Souza, *After the Brahimi Report: Doctrinal Culture, Practical Developments and the New and Remaining Challenges of UN Peace Operations*, 2022, <https://umu.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1863302/FULLTEXT01.pdf>

Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA). In these missions, peacekeeping forces faced jihadist groups using improvised explosive devices, hit-and-run attacks, and ambushes. Tactics employed by these forces included improved intelligence through mission analysis and cooperation with local forces, together with the use of unarmed unmanned aerial vehicles and drones, mobile forces, active patrols, and direct action against threats. Operations were coordinated with local and regional forces, including Operation Barkhane conducted by the French in Mali. Surveillance drones were used to improve monitoring and medical evacuation. The missions also deployed special forces and conducted training adapted to the operational environment.¹⁹

5. Challenges Facing an International Force in the Gaza Strip

The U.S.-formulated 20-point plan for Gaza provides for the deployment of an international force in the Gaza Strip. The force would not operate under a UN mandate, but rather under agreements signed between the participating states and the United States. Its deployment is premised on the prior disarmament of Hamas and the demilitarization of Gaza through the dismantling of terrorist infrastructure above and below ground. Demilitarization would require all weapons, including light arms such as rifles and pistols, to be handed over to the relevant authorities. Even after that, however, actors motivated to carry out terrorist attacks are likely to remain in Gaza against Israel and IDF forces, against the international force, and possibly against different groups within the Gazan population.

This section analyzes the operational challenges an international force in Gaza would likely face given the assumptions discussed above. Traditional UN peacekeeping rests on three core principles: consent of the parties, impartiality, and the non-use of force except in self-defense or in defense of the mandate. All three will be difficult to implement in Gaza.²⁰

An international peacekeeping force in Gaza would face challenges unlike those encountered in any previous theater in which UN forces or multinational coalitions have operated. The main obstacle is not merely technical or logistical. It lies in the depth of the Palestinian terrorist ethos, which views an international force not as a supporting actor, but as an obstacle or a target. It is therefore highly doubtful that such a force could deploy anywhere in Gaza, including in the area currently under IDF control, unless Hamas and the other Palestinian organizations agreed to its presence. Deployment would also require the Palestinian terrorist organizations to agree to disarm and then actually carry out that step.

19 Shannon Zimmerman, "A Crisis in UN Peacekeeping," ICDI International Center for Dialogue Initiative, February 20, 2024, <https://dialogueinitiatives.org/a-crisis-in-un-peacekeeping>

20 Dennis Jett, *Why Peacekeeping Fails* (2019), <https://afsa.org/why-peacekeeping-fails>.

The complexities and risks of such an operation are set out below:

At the core of the problem is the fact that, in Gaza, terrorism is not merely a political instrument. It is a central element of the national and religious narrative. Decades of education under Hamas and other radical organizations have produced a culture that places armed struggle above civilian development. That worldview denies legitimacy to “foreigners” and treats any armed force that is not Palestinian as an occupying force, even if it arrives under a UN mandate or some other form of international authority.

The Palestinian ethos sanctifies absolute sovereignty achieved through armed force, and thus any attempt by an international force to impose order or demilitarize the Strip could be cast as an assault on the “right of resistance.” The Palestinian sanctification of death for the cause is another factor that weakens deterrence. Traditional peacekeeping rests on the assumption that rational parties will seek to avoid military confrontation. That assumption breaks down when the force faces an ideology that treats violent confrontation as a supreme value, leaving the UN’s standard deterrent tools ineffective.

Peacekeeping missions fail when one party remains determined to continue fighting. In Gaza, terrorist organizations could continue operating under the cover of an international presence and continue its resistance using force and its local population as a “human shield.” Proximity to international-force headquarters could allow terrorist actors to conduct or plan attacks against a range of targets, including Israel, on the assumption that the IDF would hesitate to respond forcefully if this were to put soldiers from foreign countries at risk. Moreover, as UNIFIL’s experience in Lebanon showed, peacekeeping forces have great difficulty searching private homes, mosques, hospitals or schools. The terrorist ethos exploits the civilian space, leaving peacekeeping forces as bystanders in a theater of resistance .

For troop-contributing states, the greatest concern is that their soldiers become targets. The Middle East offers many examples of multinational forces becoming targets for terrorism. Groups such as Palestinian Islamic Jihad, ISIS-linked cells, and radical Shiite elements could view Western soldiers as “crusaders” and Muslim or Arab soldiers as “traitors.” A bombing of a base hosting peacekeeping forces, similar to the 1983 attack on the Marine barracks in Beirut, is a possible scenario. Kidnapping is also a realistic threat; a terrorist organization may regard a member of the international force as a strategic asset. The abduction of a soldier as a bargaining chip for the release of prisoners and captured terrorists would paralyze the contributing state’s freedom of action and could lead to the withdrawal of the entire force. Finally, Gaza-based actors excel in the cognitive domain: any friction between an international soldier and a Gazan civilian would immediately be presented as a “war crime,” placing the participating states under heavy public pressure at home.

5.1 The Mandate Paradox: The Basic Challenge Facing Any International Force in Gaza

A peacekeeping mission cannot operate without a clear and precise mandate. In postwar Gaza, however, the mandate itself creates the central paradox. It would have to be strong enough to deal with Hamas, but not so strong that the international force becomes a combatant in the conflict. This is the classic paradox that recurs in every attempt to bring “peace” to an area where a terrorist organization such as Hamas effectively controls both the population and the territory.

A mandate limited to “maintaining order” or “monitoring peace” would leave the force powerless against terrorism. International forces could, at most, man observation posts, report violations, and escort aid convoys. They would not, however, be able to enter the alleys of Jabalia, Rafah, or Khan Yunis, dismantle weapons depots, destroy tunnels, or arrest Hamas operatives hiding among civilians. Under such conditions, the force would become largely irrelevant—or worse, a conduit for humanitarian aid funds, a significant share of which, as happened for many years, would ultimately reach Hamas or other terrorist actors in the Strip because of Hamas’s effective control over the foreign contribution money flow, population, aid-distribution mechanisms, and the “popular committees.”

A “peace-enforcement” mission, on the other hand, would create the opposite problem. If the international force were authorized to fight terrorist cells, disarm them, destroy military infrastructure, and carry out targeted operations, it would immediately become a combatant in the conflict. It would have to operate deep inside Gaza’s dense terrain, move from house to house, contend with ambushes, explosive devices, and tunnels, and absorb heavy casualties. Hamas, which would still have thousands of armed fighters even after the war, would view any force deployed without its consent as a foreign occupying force and could attack it as it attacks the IDF.

The same paradox is inherent in the International Stabilization Force (ISF) for Gaza, discussed under the Trump plan and UN Security Council Resolution 2803 (2025). The United States is seeking a strong mandate that includes demilitarization and disarmament, while potential troop-contributing states—Indonesia, Morocco, Jordan, Egypt, and others—stress that they are prepared to send forces for monitoring missions, not enforcement. No state is prepared to send troops that would be required to fight in Gaza’s densely built-up areas. The outcome will be a weak force that remains stationed along the borders or in quiet areas of the Strip, escort aid, and report violations, while allowing Hamas, or what remains of it, to retain substantial military power and continue exercising de facto control.

This is not a theoretical paradox. It reflects Gaza's political and military reality: a terrorist organization that fuses governance, a civilian population, and dense military infrastructure. A mandate that is too weak will fail; a mandate strong enough to be effective will carry a human cost that no one is prepared to bear. Many therefore argue that the real answer lies not in a neutral international force, which almost always becomes ineffective or biased, but in long-term Israeli security control alongside deep civilian and educational efforts to bring about cognitive change. Such an approach would require time, determination, and political courage.²¹

5.2 Demilitarizing Gaza: Obstacles and Challenges

The U.S.-mediated October 2025 cease-fire, part of President Trump's 20-point peace plan for Gaza, has stalled in Phase 2 over three linked issues: Hamas's demilitarization, the role of the International Stabilization Force (ISF), and the operation of a transitional administration in Gaza.²² Hamas sees its arsenal as inseparable from the "resistance" against Israel and as a tool for preserving its rule. It has therefore repeatedly rejected full disarmament, insisting that any such step must come as part of a broader political settlement that includes an independent Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital and an end to the "occupation."

Hamas has hinted that it might accept the storage of heavy weapons or some form of partial disarmament, but it continues to insist on retaining light weapons, roughly 60,000 rifles, as well as political influence in Gaza. Its conduct after the ceasefire – reasserting control in parts of the Strip, clashing with rival clans, and continuing to dig tunnels, has reinforced Israel's assessment²³ that the organization does not intend to relinquish either its weapons or its governing role.

Hamas and other armed Palestinian organizations have also repeatedly rejected any foreign military presence on Palestinian soil, particularly one that would affect their internal control, governance, or ability to arm themselves. Hamas may be prepared to accept "ceasefire monitors" with limited mandates or buffer-zone functions, but it rejects disarmament and external governance over Gaza.²⁴

Without broad consent, any peacekeeping force could be portrayed as an occupying army, inviting attacks and undermining its legitimacy.

21 Farnoush Amiri, "Gaza Stabilization Force Proposal by U.S. Gets Pushback from Russia, China and Arabs," *PBS News*, October 13, 2025, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/world/gaza-stabilization-force-proposal-by-u-s-gets-pushback-from-russia-china-and-arabs>.

22 Aaron Goren, "Phase Two of the Gaza Ceasefire Announced Despite Core Obstacles Still To Overcome," *Foundation for Defense of Democracies*, January 16, 2026, <https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2026/01/16/phase-two-of-the-gaza-ceasefire-announced-despite-core-obstacles-still-to-overcome>.

23 Thomas Mackintosh, "Hamas Refuses to Disarm until Palestinian State Established," *BBC*, August 2, 2025, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/ce35nx49reko>; Mariel Ferragamo, "A Guide to the Gaza Peace Deal," *Council on Foreign Relations*, February 24, 2026, <https://www.cfr.org/articles/guide-trumps-twenty-point-gaza-peace-deal>.

24 Jacob Magid, "Hamas Says Open to Gaza Peacekeeping Force, but Rejects Foreign Role in 'Internal Affairs,'" *Times of Israel*, February 21, 2029, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/hamas-says-open-to-gaza-peacekeeping-force-but-rejects-foreign-role-in-internal-affairs>.

Israel, for its part, conditions any meaningful withdrawal or reconstruction on a complete disarmament of Hamas and other factions and on the destruction of Hamas' military infrastructure, including tunnels and rocket-production capabilities. From Israel's perspective, the danger of rearmament is clear, and international mechanisms that have not proved to be effective cannot be relied upon.²⁵

Even a handover of weapons would not resolve the question of who governs Gaza and enforces security there. The Trump plan proposes a new technocratic body, the National Committee for the Administration of Gaza (NCAG), as an alternative, but it lacks broad legitimacy. Without a stable and broadly accepted governing authority, Gaza could slide into chaos or once again become a base for Hamas activity against Israel.²⁶ The absence of a disarmament agreement has also stalled the UN effort to clear explosive materials.²⁷

Gaza's underground tunnel network, large parts of which remain intact, and its smuggling routes, especially along the Egypt-Gaza border, known as the Philadelphi Corridor, mean that it remains possible, for weapons to be brought into the Strip by drone and possibly through cross-border tunnels, despite the continued deployment of IDF forces along the border.

Disarmament is not merely a technical exercise in weapons collection. It requires dismantling Hamas's terrorist network and infrastructure and dual military and governing role and creating a sustainable post-Hamas authority. Without breakthroughs on these fronts, the process remains frozen, as the slow implementation of Phase 2 of the Trump Plan demonstrates. Previous cease-fires and withdrawals show that partial or unenforced measures tend to fail and lead to recurring cycles of recruit of new militants and rearmament.

Restrictions on freedom of movement would create a separate and significant operational obstacle. Israel controls access to Gaza, while any force would require unrestricted access—a demand with clear military and political sensitivity. Humanitarian aid distribution would add another layer of risk. Peacekeeping forces could become entangled in disputes over aid delivery, accusations of bias, or civilian-protection missions amid continuing hostilities, any of which could draw an international force into combat and result in casualties.

25 David Makovsky and Shira Efron, "Demilitarization in Gaza: Could the Palestinian Authority Be Part of the Solution?," RAND, November 3, 2025, <https://www.rand.org/pubs/commentary/2025/11/demilitarization-in-gaza-could-the-palestinian-authority.html>.

26 Seth J. Frantzman, "US-Backed Gaza Plan Moves to Second Phase as NCAG and Board of Peace Unveiled," Foundation for Defense of Democracies, January 17, 2026, <https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2026/01/17/us-backed-gaza-plan-moves-to-second-phase-as-ncag-and-board-of-peace-unveiled>; David Makovsky and Shira Efron, "Demilitarization in Gaza: Could the Palestinian Authority Be Part of the Solution?," RAND, November 3, 2025, <https://www.rand.org/pubs/commentary/2025/11/demilitarization-in-gaza-could-the-palestinian-authority.html>.

27 Yousef Munayyer, "Phase Two's Baked-In Failure: Why the Chances for Trump's Gaza Plan Are Dim," Arab Center Washington DC, February 20, 2026, <https://arabcenterdc.org/resource/phase-twos-baked-in-failure-why-the-chances-for-trumps-gaza-plan-are-dim>; Daniel Estrin, "With No Gaza Disarmament Deal, UN Group Hasn't Begun Major Work to Clear Explosives," NPR, February 16, 2026, <https://www.npr.org/2026/02/16/nx-s1-5715114/with-no-gaza-disarmament-deal-un-group-hasnt-begun-major-work-to-clear-explosives>.

These Gaza-specific difficulties would be compounded by the broader challenges that already affect UN operations: growing disinformation, the amplified impact of international opinion and criticism in the digital age, the complexity of operating in modern conflict zones with non-state actors, and persistent capability gaps, including poorly equipped troops, equipment ill-suited to the mission, and procurement decisions that may depend on the judgment of the contributing state.²⁸

Gaza is not yet in a phase of “post-agreement stabilization.” It remains an active and deeply rooted political and ideological struggle. Effective deployment would require the terrorist organizations either to disarm voluntarily or be forcibly disarmed by the IDF. It would also require an early political breakthrough on the underlying issues: the Palestinian commitment to the narrative of struggle against Israel until its disappearance, governance in Gaza, Israeli security concerns, and aspirations for a Palestinian state as a step toward realizing the broader Palestinian vision. No real progress toward such a breakthrough has been achieved for decades. Without it, any foreign force risks becoming part of the problem rather than part of the solution.

5.3 Recommendations for Gaza

The analysis above, and the distinctive challenges of the Gaza Strip, point to a clear-cut conclusion: an international force would struggle to effectively prevent terrorism in Gaza. Several operational recommendations follow:

1. Long-term Israeli security control – Israel must retain operational freedom of action to prevent and thwart terrorism. That requires a continuous and substantial security posture inside the Strip and on the Gazan side of the border, while preserving Israel’s right and ability to act militarily at any moment against emerging threats anywhere in Gaza, without depending on approval from or action by an international force.
2. Tight control of supply routes and resources – Hamas continues to find ways to bring weapons into the Strip. Israel must be able to disrupt these smuggling channels by controlling all routes through which weapons may enter, including humanitarian aid channels, the Rafah crossing, and any renewed attempts to smuggle arms through the Philadelphi Corridor, despite Israeli control of the area. This, too, requires an IDF presence on the Gazan side of the border, including along the border with Egypt.
3. Full demilitarization and prevention of rearmament – Gaza cannot be demilitarized through monitoring alone; it requires active enforcement. The central obstacle is – Hamas’s refusal to give up light weapons, tunnels, and terrorist infrastructure. Israel must ensure a systematic and sustained demilitarization process. This includes the

28 Shannon Zimmerman, “A Crisis in UN Peacekeeping,” ICDI International Center for Dialogue Initiative, February 20, 2024, <https://dialogueinitiatives.org/a-crisis-in-un-peacekeeping>.

physical destruction of the entire underground tunnel system, including tunnels that have been only partially destroyed; the collection of all light and heavy weapons and their destruction or storage under Israeli control, without reliance on international actors; and full Israeli control of the Philadelphi Corridor and all smuggling routes, including sea, underwater, land, and air routes.

4. Intelligence and technological superiority – Israel must maintain independent intelligence-collection capabilities inside the Strip, including UAVs, sensors, and cyber capabilities, and it must retain full freedom of action in the air. International forces are often deficient in these areas. Israel should also build and preserve local and human intelligence alongside technological intelligence, rapid-response forces, and preventive operations against reemerging cells.
5. Removal of Hamas from every center of governance – Israel should support the technocratic administration while insisting that Hamas personnel be removed from positions of authority, including those who attempt to obscure their roles and ties to Hamas. Israel must maintain close security oversight of the technocratic administration.
6. Clear boundaries vis-à-vis foreign forces – Israel must define clear operational boundaries in relation to international forces. This is necessary both to ensure the full disarmament of terrorist organizations and to prevent terrorist actors from reorganizing and rearming. Such actors could operate against Israel and against the international force to wear down troop-contributing states and cause them to withdraw. Israel should make clear that it bears ultimate responsibility for security and will not allow foreign forces to restrict its defensive and responsive operations.
7. The international force's main mission should be internal security in the Strip; in other words – combating crime. Counterterrorism should remain Israel's responsibility, although in specific cases Israel could cooperate with the international force in this area. The model would broadly resemble Israel's cooperation with the Palestinian security forces in Judea and Samaria.

6. Summary and Conclusions

There are serious doubts about the effectiveness of peacekeeping. Yet despite the absence of an effective alternative, the international system cannot avoid the challenge of resolving bloody regional conflicts. It must continue to deepen its understanding of peacekeeping mechanisms and make sustained efforts to improve their effectiveness.

The expanding range of challenges requires a reassessment of both operational tools and policy responses. Peacekeeping forces now operate in a multidimensional environment shaped by new kinds of threats: complex hybrid warfare, adversaries' extensive use of advanced technologies, complex political issues, budget constraints, Security Council disputes over the scope of mandates, and additional technological and political pressures.

Perhaps the central challenge for peacekeeping forces is avoiding entanglement in combat while maintaining strict neutrality. A further challenge is the growing reliance on local or regional assistance. Such assistance is intended to help missions implement their mandates quickly while reducing costs and casualties, but it also raises serious concerns about the reliability and impartiality of the local bodies on which they depend. In any mission, whether the task is to secure peace, maintain a ceasefire, or distribute humanitarian aid, the local parties have clear advantages in intelligence, familiarity with the terrain, proximity to the population, and a combat doctrine adapted to the local arena. International forces usually lack those assets.

A further challenge is that peacekeeping forces are gradually becoming military forces in all but name to confront terrorist and guerrilla threats. Meeting those threats requires a move from passive to proactive operations, but UN forces have very limited freedom of action. As multinational forces, they are bound by their mandate, usually issued by the UN, and by international norms and intense scrutiny. At times, that constraint is the most significant one they face.

The UN's reluctance to define the problem compounds the difficulties faced by peacekeeping forces. It generally avoids formally designating rebel or separatist groups as terrorist organizations, and it is reluctant to define itself as a counterterrorism actor. That definitional gap becomes a serious obstacle when missions need international support, funding, and authorization to use force.

Gaza presents an especially acute version of this problem. As long as Hamas remains armed, the mission cannot be treated as "post-agreement stabilization." It would still be operating inside an active, deeply rooted political and ideological struggle. An effective peacekeeping deployment would therefore require, first, a major political breakthrough on the root issues: the Palestinian narrative of struggle, governance in Gaza, and Israel's security concerns. Without such a breakthrough, any international force could become part of the problem rather than part of the solution. That is why it is so difficult to secure firm commitments from international actors to contribute troops to such a force.

7. Appendix

The following table lists 71 peacekeeping missions from 1948 to the present, including active missions. The table is organized by region.

Mission Name	Acronym	Location	Years
Africa (31 missions)			
United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara	MINURSO	Western Sahara	1991–present (active)
United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic	MINUSCA	Central African Republic	2014–present (active)
United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo	MONUSCO	Democratic Republic of the Congo	2010–present (active)
United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei	UNISFA	Abyei (Sudan)	2011–present (active)
United Nations Mission in South Sudan	UNMISS	South Sudan	2011–present (active)
United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali	MINUSMA	Mali	2013–2023
United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire	UNOCI	Côte d'Ivoire	2004–2017
United Nations Mission in Liberia	UNMIL	Liberia	2003–2018
African Union–United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur	UNAMID	Sudan	2007–2020
United Nations Mission in the Sudan	UNMIS	Sudan	2005–2011
United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea	UNMEE	Ethiopia/Eritrea	2000–2008
United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone	UNAMSIL	Sierra Leone	1999–2005
United Nations Mission in the Central African Republic	MINURCA	Central African Republic	1998–2000
United Nations Observer Mission in Angola	MONUA	Angola	1997–1999
United Nations Observer Mission in Liberia	UNOMIL	Liberia	1993–1997
United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda	UNAMIR	Rwanda	1993–1996

United Nations Observer Mission Uganda–Rwanda	UNOMUR	Uganda/Rwanda border	1993–1994
United Nations Operation in Mozambique	ONUMOZ	Mozambique	1992–1994
United Nations Operation in Somalia II	UNOSOM II	Somalia	1993–1995
United Nations Operation in Somalia I	UNOSOM I	Somalia	1992–1993
United Nations Angola Verification Mission II	UNAVEM II	Angola	1991–1995
United Nations Transition Assistance Group	UNTAG	Namibia	1989–1990
United Nations Angola Verification Mission I	UNAVEM I	Angola	1989–1991
United Nations Operation in the Congo	ONUC	Congo	1960–1964
Middle East (10 missions)			
United Nations Truce Supervision Organization	UNTSO	Middle East	1948–present (active)
United Nations Disengagement Observer Force	UNDOF	Golan Heights	1974–present (active)
United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon	UNIFIL	Lebanon	1978–present (active)
United Nations Mission to Support the Hudeidah Agreement	UNMHA	Yemen	2019–present (active)
United Nations Supervision Mission in Syria	UNSMIS	Syria	2012–2012
United Nations Iraq–Kuwait Observation Mission	UNIKOM	Iraq–Kuwait border	1991–2003
United Nations Iran–Iraq Military Observer Group	UNIIMOG	Iran/Iraq	1988–1991
United Nations Emergency Force II	UNEF II	Sinai	1973–1979
United Nations Yemen Observation Mission	UNYOM	Yemen	1963–1964
United Nations Emergency Force I	UNEF I	Sinai/Gaza	1956–1967
Europe (10 missions)			
United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus	UNFICYP	Cyprus	1964–present (active)
United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo	UNMIK	Kosovo	1999–present (active)
United Nations Mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina	UNMIBH	Bosnia and Herzegovina	1995–2002

United Nations Mission of Observers in Prevlaka	UNMOP	Croatia	1996–2002
United Nations Transitional Administration for Eastern Slavonia, Baranja and Western Sirmium	UNTAES	Croatia	1996–1998
United Nations Preventive Deployment Force	UNPREDEP	Macedonia	1995–1999
United Nations Confidence Restoration Operation in Croatia	UNCRO	Croatia	1995–1996
United Nations Protection Force	UNPROFOR	Former Yugoslavia	1992–1995
Asia and Oceania (12 missions)			
United Nations Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan	UNMOGIP	Kashmir	1949–present (active)
United Nations Integrated Mission in Timor-Leste	UNMIT	East Timor	2006–2012
United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor	UNTAET	East Timor	1999–2002
United Nations Mission of Observers in Tajikistan	UNMOT	Tajikistan	1994–2000
United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia	UNTAC	Cambodia	1992–1993
United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan	UNAMA	Afghanistan	2002–present
Americas (8 missions)			
United Nations Mission for Justice Support in Haiti	MINUJUSTH	Haiti	2017–2019
United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti	MINUSTAH	Haiti	2004–2017
United Nations Observer Mission in El Salvador	ONUSAL	El Salvador	1991–1995
United Nations Observer Group in Central America	ONUCA	Central America	1989–1992

Note: The list includes the main and best-known missions. There are a few additional very small observer missions or political missions, such as in Nepal or Colombia, that are sometimes counted separately from classic military peacekeeping missions.

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