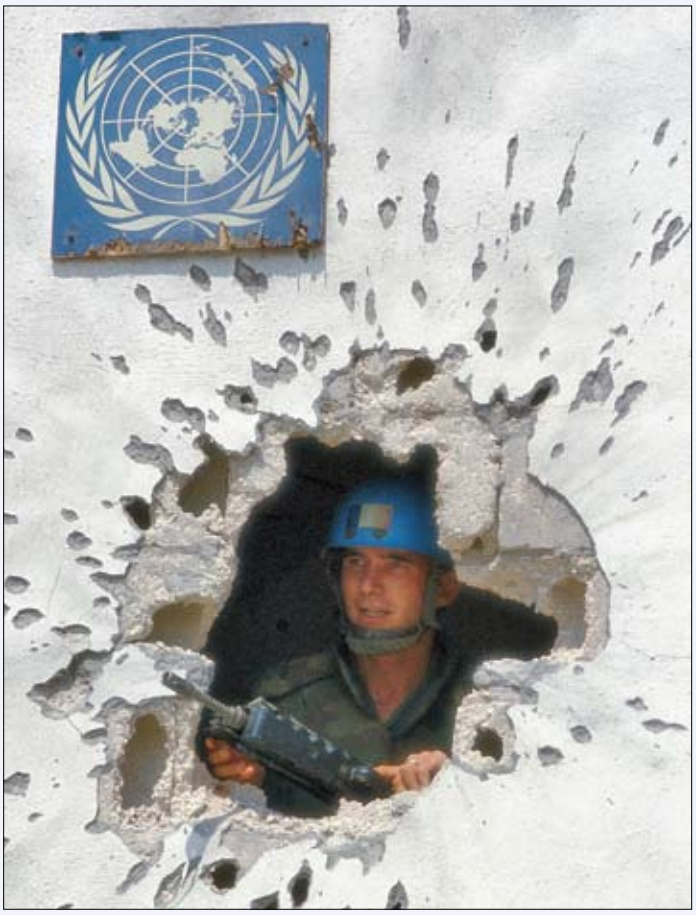
IPI Histories of UN Peace Operations

A project of the International Peace Institute in cooperation with the UN Departments of Political Affairs (DPA) and Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO)

At a time when the United Nations faces considerable criticism, its peace operations are still viewed as one of its more widely acknowledged "successes." The Report of the High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change pointed out that growth in the scale and scope of UN operations has coincided with a sharp decline in the number of civil wars; a roughly 40 percent drop between 1992 and 2003.[1] Seasoned analysts have also made a persuasive case that, for all of its limitations, the UN is relatively efficient and effective at peacekeeping and peacebuilding.[2] It is thus vital that the "story" of each UN peace operation be told in full; indeed, each contains specific lessons about the challenges and possibilities of UN peace efforts. Yet, for all the academic literature about UN peace operations, there are no reliable or consistent accounts of their "inside stories," nor even a consistent source of key reference materials that have shaped the policymaker and practitioner environments.



UN Peacekeeper in UNIFIL, Marrakeh, Lebanon, UN Photo/Maher Attar.

In the early 1990s, the United Nations *Blue Book* series provided brief summaries of operations alongside comprehensive compilations of documentary material relevant to each case. But the series was dry, inaccessible, and not uncommonly criticized for the usual weaknesses of official, sanitized versions of events. The series was discontinued in 1996.

The proliferation of academic research on peacekeeping over the last decade has begun to fill the gap, but insufficiently. Few analyses aim to capture the whole UN perspective, and most have lacked comprehensive access to internal UN sources. Similarly, academic texts tend to focus on particular analytical questions rather than telling the overall story.

The IPI Histories of UN Peace Operations project was initiated by DPA and DPKO in recognition of this critical gap in institutional knowledge about peace operations. These histories are highly readable accounts focused on the key strategic decisions of each operation. Although the histories are fully independent, they tell the "inside" story and benefit from an agreement by DPA and DPKO to open their files and facilitate interviews.

The histories are written as historical narratives and cover the entire UN operation, from the beginning of the organization's involvement in the area to the final days of the mission. Three features of the histories distinguish them from other studies of peace operations:

- First, they are explicitly organized around the key strategic decisions relevant to the mission in question. In each case, the narrative details the choices that had to be made by the UN, the reasons for particular decisions, and the subsequent implications. The aim of this approach is to promote a detailed understanding of the context of decision-making and an awareness of the problems confronted, so as to provide lessons that have real potential to impact future operations.

- Second, the histories tell the "inside" story. In the interests of impartiality, the authors are not taken from the current or past staff of the operation in question, but they do benefit from full access to the internal files of the UN. In this way, they bring to the literature awareness of the real and imperfect environments in which the UN operates and provide insights applicable to UN staff.

- Third, the texts share the quality of "readability," written in a style that is both engaging and accessible compared to other academic monographs.

The series will especially be of benefit to two major audiences: for future senior staff of the United Nations, it will provide a vital learning tool, imparting a realistic sense of what the UN can do and the forces that condition decision-making; for a wider readership interested in the nature and constraints of peacekeeping, the series will provide a highly readable first point of reference, enhancing UN studies as a whole by facilitating further research.

We are pleased to present the first three volumes in the series:

Peacekeeping in Sierra Leone: The Story of UNAMSIL, by 'Funmi Olonisakin (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2008) 203 pp.

Enabling Peace in Guatemala: The Story of MINUGUA, by William Stanley (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, forthcoming 2009).

Pioneers of Peacekeeping: The Story of the UN Operation in the Congo, by Tatiana Carayannis (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, forthcoming 2009).

These three volumes represent the pilot stage of this project. IPI hopes to commission additional histories in the coming year. In what follows, the authors have been asked to provide brief introductions, bringing to light the distinctive color, drama, and historical significance of each UN mission.

Finally, we are deeply grateful to the UN Secretariat for its ongoing partnership in this endeavor and to the project's donors—the governments of France, Ireland, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom—for their generous support.

1 *A More Secure World: Our Shared Responsibility*, Report of the Secretary-General's High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change (United Nations, 2004), p.33.

2 James Dobbins et al., *The UN's Role in Nation-Building: From the Congo to Iraq* (RAND, 2005).

Peacekeeping in Sierra Leone: The Story of UNAMSIL

by 'Funmi Olonisakin (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2008) 203 pp.

UN Deputy Force Commander Martin Luther Agwai talks to Kamajor combatants about disarmament, May 2001. Tyler Hicks/Getty images.

As the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) prepared to exit the country in December 2005, few could deny it had achieved a tangible measure of success. The sense of fulfillment experienced by its staff and leadership was palpable.

Then Secretary-General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan, was like a proud father on his child's graduation day. On the last official day of the mission, he described how it had overcome "serious political and military challenges" to leave Sierra Leone "much better off today than it was five years ago."[1] Against formidable odds, UNAMSIL had delivered on the key component of its mandate—the establishment of security—paving the way for the consolidation of peace and a return to normalcy.

The UN's pride in UNAMSIL derived not from its belief that the job was entirely done, but more that UNAMSIL had overcome major obstacles to achieve results. It had become a model mission, credited with several innovations, but only after an extremely difficult start. Just five years before, UNAMSIL's name had been synonymous with humiliation and failure.

On May 2, 2000, as the last remaining Nigerian battalion departed from Lungi Airport, completing the handover from the West African force known as ECOMOG (the Economic Community of West African States Ceasefire Monitoring Group) to UNAMSIL, feelings among Sierra Leoneans were mixed.[2] In private conversations, ordinary Sierra Leoneans and government officials welcomed the United Nations presence but expressed concern about the ability of the UN to do what it would take to ensure security and stability in the country.

Sierra Leoneans' worst fears were realized within two weeks of ECOMOG's withdrawal. During this period, nearly 500 UNAMSIL personnel were

taken hostage by the Revolutionary United Front, or "RUF", the much-dreaded rebel group. The people of Sierra Leone rapidly lost confidence in UNAMSIL as the security situation deteriorated. This lack of confidence produced strange bedfellows, bringing together renegade soldiers, bandits, armed civilians, and professional soldiers as Sierra Leoneans scrambled to defend their country against another RUF onslaught.

Beyond UNAMSIL and Sierra Leone, this series of events was a severe blow to the United Nations as a whole. The organization, which was largely looked upon as a guarantor of international peace and security and a protector of people facing humanitarian tragedy, was being publicly humiliated by a small, relatively insignificant force. As once again Sierra Leone became destabilized, the UN seemed unable to respond.

Yet, those who worked at the center of this mission and endured the events of May 2000 maintain that the May crisis was the single most important story at the heart of UNAMSIL's success. They argue it was a necessary evil, which not only shook UNAMSIL but humiliated the UN as a whole, forcing its member-states to scale-up the organization's response. There were other factors at work in 2000, including a revival of UN peacekeeping, exemplified by missions for East Timor and Kosovo established the previous year, and pressure to avoid a "double standard" between responses to the "rich man's war" in Kosovo and the "poor man's war" in Sierra Leone. Yet it was the need to "save" the UN that was the decisive factor, a powerful reminder that the UN's potential as an instrument of peace and security depends on the membership's desire to exercise it.

This book tells the "inside" story of the UN experience in Sierra Leone and seeks to answer central questions raised by the events of May 2000. In the lead-up to the crisis few would have predicted it in light of the Lomé Peace Accord of 1999 and the semblance of security that existed in the country. What accounted for this disastrous and rapid deterioration? Then, in the aftermath, the UN was able to turn this situation around and five years later UNAMSIL was ranked with missions in Namibia, Mozambique, and Cambodia as a UN "success." What was responsible for this dramatic turnaround in UNAMSIL's fortunes?

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This book is not a complete account of UNAMSIL and does not attempt a comprehensive account of the conflict in Sierra Leone, on which there is already a wealth of literature.[3] The aim is instead to tell the story of the UN in Sierra Leone; why certain decisions were taken; what the opportunities and constraints were; and what it was like to be part of the mission on the ground. As part of the International Peace Institute's series of histories of UN peace operations, the intention is to ensure that the complex history of UNAMSIL—with all its personalities, political dynamics, and problems—is preserved for the benefit of future UN decision-makers and brought alive for the benefit of all those who seek to better understand the UN.

1 http://allAfrica.com, accessed January 5, 2006.

2 Troops commonly referred to as ECOMOG—the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Ceasefire Monitoring Group—had been deployed to Sierra Leone since 1997.

3 See, for example, Ibrahim Abdullah, ed., *Between Democracy and Terror: The Sierra Leone Civil War* (Dakar: CODESRIA Books, 2003); Lansana Gberie, *A Dirty War in West Africa: The RUF and the Destruction of Sierra Leone* (London: Hurst and Company, 2005); John L. Hirsch, *Sierra Leone: Diamonds and the Struggle for Democracy* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2001); David Keen, *Conflict and Collusion in Sierra Leone* (Oxford: James Currey, 2005); and J. Peter Pham, *The Sierra Leonean Tragedy: History and Global Dimensions* (Hauppauge, NY: Nova Science, 2006).

Enabling Peace in Guatemala: The Story of MINUGUA

by William Stanley (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, forthcoming 2009).

Members of the Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca (URNG) completing the process of "demobilization." UN Photo, 2007.

At a time when United Nations peace operations were growing in frequency, confidence, and multidimensionality, the UN mission in Guatemala was handicapped out of the starting gate. In contrast to the fortuitous conditions that fed the UN's successes in El Salvador, the domestic and international circumstances surrounding the Guatemalan peace accords and the establishment of MINUGUA constrained the mission's room for maneuver. The result was a partial success in which political liberalization and successful demobilization of the insurgency were offset by persistent state corruption, organized crime, and social inequality.

The crux of the challenge for the UN was that the Guatemalan government and the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (URNG), the former rebel movement, were politically weak and—until the final months of the negotiations—ambivalent about settling. The inherent weakness of the parties contributed to what were very broad but vague peace accords. The agreement provided for a cessation of hostilities, the demobilization of the URNG, and a wide range of institutional and policy changes. However, it lacked specific provisions for reform—the much-needed "big bang" that would radically alter the institutional landscape that led to conflict in the first place. In other words, the parties missed the postconflict opportunity that could have set the country on a new path of stabilization and reform, instead locking themselves and their successors into a slow, incremental, and uncertain trajectory.

Determined to help, but faced with uncertain prospects, the UN moved cautiously in Guatemala. It ran an effective but low-profile mediation effort and deployed first a human rights verification mission, followed later by a comprehensive peace verification mission (both called MINUGUA). Both of these missions were deployed under comparatively weak mandates from the General Assembly, rather than the Security Council, condemning them to dependence on limited and unreliable

funding and leaving them without priority support from a major power.

The central dilemma for MINUGUA was how to maximize institutional change given that the accords did not spell out in operational detail what that change would entail. This was made more difficult by the fact that three consecutive Guatemalan governments were too weak to define, let alone deliver on, the necessary reforms against resistance from social elites who were opposed to change. The UN tried to resolve this dilemma by reaching out to civil society to build a constituency for democratic reform and greater equity. Despite the fact that civil society had shaped the broad agenda of the peace accords, it was too disparate and lacked the leverage to organize compelling and consistent political pressure to actually implement them. At a defining moment, the May 1999 referendum on constitutional reforms failed to pass. Neither the political parties nor civil society could mobilize the votes against a well-funded and manipulative media campaign by reform opponents. Moreover, by continually turning to civil society, MINUGUA dispersed its own efforts across a diffuse set of issues on which the political parties would never be able to deliver.

"MINUGUA was both a success and a disappointment ... it exemplifies the limitations of weak parties, a vague peace agreement, and a weak mandate."

MINUGUA's high point came early on, during its initial human rights phase. The United Nations Mission for the Verification of Human Rights and of Compliance with the Comprehensive Agreement on Human Rights in Guatemala (as it was called at the time) began in November 1994, two years before the final accords were signed. The early MINUGUA had a General Assembly mandate to investigate human rights conditions and improve the performance of related state institutions. It quickly deployed thirteen offices around the country, depending heavily on UN Volunteers to take testimony from human rights victims and investigate cases. Despite harassment from individuals opposed to its work, MINUGUA developed a reputation for unflinching assessments of the military forces, police, prosecutors, and courts. MINUGUA enhanced its political leverage during this period by criticizing the URNG's failure to fulfill its commitment to reduce the suffering of the civilian population. This gave the mission credibility with skeptical conservative sectors and helped balance its criticisms of government performance.

With the signing of the final accords, the mission's name changed to the United Nations Verification Mission in Guatemala and it took on a much broader mandate to verify the implementation of the accords in all their aspects. Despite its breadth, the mandate's foundations were weak, grounded as they were in the General Assembly, which lacked the Security Council's leverage and the automatic link to assessed contributions that comes with a Security Council mandate. Core funding came from the UN general budget, requiring cuts elsewhere in UN operations and constant questioning of the mission's budget and scope of operations. Voluntary contributions to a trust fund enabled the mission to carry out projects, but couldn't eliminate annual uncertainty about the mission's future. The vagueness of the accords gave the mission few specific points to verify, while its institution-building focus thrust it into a partnership role that was sometimes difficult to navigate and to distinguish from that of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). MINUGUA ultimately found itself doing important but routine development work with a political overlay.

On balance, MINUGUA was both a success and a disappointment for the world body. It facilitated incremental change through human rights verification, demobilization of former rebels, political liberalization, and institution-building. But, it also exemplifies the limitations of weak parties, a weak peace agreement, and a vague mandate.

This book tells the story of MINUGUA from the UN's point of view, based on the UN's records as well as interviews with key players. By focusing on how UN decision makers perceived their options, the strategies they chose, and the thinking behind these decisions, it sheds light on the connections among mediation, verification, and institution-building, and provides a cautionary tale about the limits of international benevolence.

Pioneers of Peacekeeping: The Story of the UN Operation in the Congo

by Tatiana Carayannis (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, forthcoming 2009).

UN Force in the Congo under fire in Leopoldville, January 12, 1961. UN Photo.

The Congo first appeared on the international radar screen in 1960, a watershed year for Africa with seventeen countries celebrating their independence from colonial rule. Civil war in the Congo came immediately on the heels of independence after eighty years of Belgian occupation. The ensuing post-independence struggle, compounded by a secession movement—first in the Katanga and later in the Kasai provinces—was quickly drawn into the politics of the Cold War. Contesting groups had to contend with both the fight to fill the power vacuum left by the Belgians and the struggle against residual colonial interests.

While ONUC was the UN's second armed peace operation (the UN Emergency Force in Gaza being the first), it was, and remains, one of the organization's largest and most complex peace missions. This operation—which was run initially out of a hotel room and, later, out of modest quarters in a residential apartment building in downtown Leopoldville—was also remarkable in other respects. There was little precedent for the architecture of UN peacekeeping, let alone one as ambitious as this. Constrained by minimal transport and communication facilities, mission staff became masters of improvisation, working out of restaurants and post offices while turning communities of local businessmen and missionaries into early humanitarian aid partners.

While much more is known about the military activities of ONUC, its lesser known, yet similarly ambitious, Civilian Operation deserves equal attention, as it is the UN's real "success" story in the Congo. Most significantly, this was the first time that a unified military and administrative structure under civilian central command had been attempted.

UN Under-Secretary-General Ralph Bunche arrived in the colonial capital of Leopoldville on June 25, 1960, the eve of Congo's independence ceremonies. Accompanied by F.T. Liu, a Chinese colleague who also served as Bunche's de facto French translator, Bunche's instructions were to represent Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld at the ceremonies, stay a few weeks to advise the new government on its application for UN membership, and explore areas for possible UN technical assistance. Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba's fiery speech five days later on June 30th introduced the world to the new Congolese leader. Bunche's reaction presaged a difficult relationship: "Lumumba seems to have more than one face. At times he impresses as God's angry young man, but he can also laugh heartily and be excitable or otherworldly."[1]

Four days later, on July 4th, a violent mutiny of the *Armée Nationale Congolaise* (ANC) spread rapidly across the country. This was met with the almost immediate deployment of Belgian troops in major cities under the guise of protecting Belgian citizens and property. Congolese calls for international support to quash civil unrest and remove the Belgian occupying forces were swift though fragmented, reflecting the rapidly deteriorating situation on the ground and deep cleavages within the new government. On July 10th, Lumumba sent a cable to Hammarskjöld through Bunche requesting "that the UN provide…general technical assistance…substantial enough to help my government to form and consolidate a national army in order to ensure national security, maintain public order, and respect for law."[2]

The following day, Moise Tshombe, head of the mineral-rich Katanga province and heavily backed by Belgium and Belgian mining interests, upped the ante by declaring that Katanga would secede from the Congo. Prime Minister Lumumba and President Joseph Kasavubu immediately requested a UN military force for the purpose of "protecting national territory against aggression of metropolitan Belgian troops," but stressed that this force ought to consist of neutral troops.[3] Within forty-eight hours of Tshombe's declaration, Hammarskjöld invoked Article 99 of the UN Charter—its first use ever—to call for an emergency meeting of the Security Council, where he proposed three courses of action: deploy UN forces, provide technical assistance, and supply emergency food aid. It was this context of rapidly escalating violence into which the United Nations operation in the Congo was thrust.

On July 14th, exactly two weeks after Congo's independence and after daily requests for assistance, UN Security Council Resolution 143 authorized the deployment of a UN force. Within forty-eight hours, the first UN peacekeeping troops were on the ground in Leopoldville. Hammarskjöld and his staff had moved the world to unprecedented action in just fourteen days.

This book tells the remarkable story of the birth of UN peacekeeping through the experiences of its early pioneers in the Congo. This volume does not seek to capture or revisit the vast literature of the last forty years that has sought to analyze this immediate post-independence conflict and the UN's role in it. Instead, it seeks to fill a gap in the institutional and intellectual history of the world organization by telling the "inside" story of the UN in the Congo. These are the stories of UN international civil servants who cut their teeth on the Congo—the "Congo mafia," as junior field personnel affectionately called themselves, and the "Congo Club" of senior decision-makers in New York.

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It explores the massive logistical challenges they faced, how and why key decisions were made, and how they interpreted and debated their mandate particularly with regard to the organization's neutrality and use of force—a debate that plagued the operation, beginning with its name, and which continues to haunt peacekeeping missions today. Initially called FONUCO (Forces des Nations Unis au Congo), Dag Hammarskjöld removed the word

"force," arguing for the more "general title" of ONUC (Organisation des Nations Unis au Congo) "in order to cover as well [the] technical assistance programme."[4] What they built out of the mission's successes and failures in the early 1960s was the foundation of conflict management that we know today as second-generation, multidimensional peacekeeping.

In the end, ONUC achieved its mandate of ending the war and preserving the unity of the Congo. But it did so at enormous cost, as potently embodied by the tragic deaths of Hammarskjöld and Lumumba, two archetypal figures who have come to represent, respectively, the ideal of an independent international civil service and the aspirations of African nationalism.

1 Personal note, June 30, 1960, cited in Brian Urquhart, *Ralph Bunche: An American Odyssey* (New York: Norton, 1993), p. 306.

2 Cable from Lumumba to Hammarskjöld, July 10, 1960, cited in Thomas R. Kanza, *The Rise and Fall of Patrice Lumumba* (London: Africa Book Centre, 1978), p. 203.

3 Cable from Lumumba to Hammarskjöld, July 13, 1960, cited in Thomas R. Kanza, *The Rise and Fall of Patrice Lumumba* (London: Africa Book Centre, 1978), p. 206.

4 UN cable from Andrew W. Cordier (New York) to Ralph Bunche (Leopoldville), July 18, 1960 (Dag Hammarskjöld archives, Royal Stockholm Library).

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