

# The Academy of Political Science

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**Does Peacekeeping Work? Shaping Belligerents' Choices after Civil War** by Virginia Page Fortna. Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 2008. 232 pp. \$60.00.

**UN Peacekeeping in Civil Wars** by Lise Morjé Howard. New York, Cambridge University Press, 2008. 416 pp. \$90.00.

A UN official once joked that there are two ways to think about peacekeepers: as Jedi or Jell-O. The Jell-O thesis is that the routines of a large-scale peace operation in a country emerging from war—daily patrols, human rights monitoring and so on—form a gelatinous mass that stifles the urge for violence. Advocates of the Jedi approach have a higher estimate of peacekeepers' virtues, emphasizing their ability to influence local political actors' decisions and shape otherwise-impossible deals between old enemies.

Although it is utterly unfair to caricature two detailed and thought-provoking analyses, Virginia Page Fortna's new study makes the case for Jell-O while Lise Morjé Howard is on the side of the Jedi. Combined, they provide a framework for urgent debate about the future of peace operations after major setbacks for the UN in Darfur and the Democratic Republic of Congo—not to mention NATO's agonies over Afghanistan.

Peacekeeping's fans also face an intellectual challenge from skeptics who argue that there is no hard evidence of a causal relationship between peacekeeping and the creation of lasting stability (see William Easterly, "Foreign Aid Goes Military!" *New York Review of Books*, 55/19, December 2008). Fortna offers a "causal theory of peacekeeping" to fill this gap (p. 76). She starts from some very Hobbesian assumptions about life in post-conflict environments: former combatants view each other with fear and mistrust, remain prone to aggression, and may renew violence by accident or design (pp. 82–86).

This is where the Jell-O comes in. Fortna hypothesizes that a peacekeeping mission can reduce mistrust and deter aggression—sometimes by force of arms, but more often by monitoring various factions' activities, helping them signal their intentions to one another and preventing abuse of political agreements (pp. 89–103). Even in isolation, this is an important riposte to those scholars and generals who emphasize force projection, rather than assisting communication, as essential to the credibility of peace operations.

Whether it works as a "causal theory" is less certain. Fortna musters statistical evidence to show that "having a peacekeeping mission present reduces the estimated risk of another war by about 70%-75%," calling this "the best evidence that peacekeeping works" (pp. 113, 119). Having discussed this book with diplomats and UN staff, I can assert that this headline conclusion is filtering into policy debates. But Fortna does not pretend that such a macro-level conclusion can do more than suggest that her specific ideas about causation may be correct.

To prove her thesis, Fortna needs history rather than statistics. She addresses this through two case studies of places where UN peacekeeping "worked" (Mozambique and Sierra Leone), comparing these with an instance

where a peace deal was implemented without an accompanying peace operation (the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh). These cases are well-researched, and provide evidence of Fortna's causal mechanisms at work. One Mozambican interviewee assures Fortna that without peacekeepers, "we wouldn't have had confidence in each other" as "the minimum difficulty or quarrel would have been enough to grow to a big difficulty" (p. 155). He doesn't say, "The UN saved us from a nasty, brutal, and short life in a Hobbesian war of all against all," but it comes close.

Nonetheless, the evidence from the case studies does not quite add up to a decisive validation of Fortna's hypotheses. The sample of cases reviewed is too small, and it is odd that there is no detailed study of the causal mechanisms failing: why did the Jell-O fail to stick in Bosnia or Somalia? Fortna's presentation of her research is absolutely sound, but could go deeper—hefty chunks of interviews are reproduced rather uncritically. She has produced a significant theory of how peacekeeping works, but it will take further, analytically tenacious historical study to show if it is consistently valid.

The benefits of such analysis are shown by Howard's fine study of six cases in which UN peacekeeping was successful, mainly in the 1990s (Namibia, El Salvador, Cambodia, Mozambique, Eastern Slavonia, and East Timor). The author has a sure grasp of the historical dynamics in each. Her primary interest is in how UN personnel learned to recognize those dynamics and so "alter the goals of the warring parties, and change the UN operations on the ground in light of new understandings of problems" (p. 19).

This focus privileges the role of the UN's civilian staff who handle political and civil affairs—the peacekeeping Jedi—over the troops and police that make up the bulk of the missions involved. In the case of Namibia, Howard notes that the UN's "military component was more isolated from Namibian society than its components, which meant that the military division was less visible and less noted, even though eleven of its members were killed in the line of duty" (p. 73). By contrast, nearly all the cases show the importance of politically sensitive leaders in making operations work—these include future Nobel laureate Marti Ahtisaari in Namibia and Sergio Vieira de Mello in Timor.

While Howard couches her findings in (occasionally slightly dry) language about organizational learning, the importance of these Jedi raises over-arching questions about how the communication-enabling role of peacekeeping identified by Fortna works. There is an obvious distinction between reducing mistrust through objective monitoring of post-conflict situations—as through patrolling disengagement zones—and developing trust through political mediation. This distinction is relevant to how we judge cause and effect in peace operations. It may be debatable whether the presence of military observers really affects the troop movements they observe, but it is perfectly possible to show whether mediation processes result in cooperation or failure.

To understand if and how peacekeeping works, we have to think politically. That may seem self-evident, but it is overlooked by many policymakers (who

think in terms of troop numbers rather than political processes) and peace-keeping experts (who produce stunningly dull reports on technical aspects of operations with no sense of political context). Virginia Page Fortna and Lise Morjé Howard have done a considerable service by providing a theoretical framework and historical lessons to help address this deficit.

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**Ending Wars** by *Feargal Cochrane*. Oxford, Polity Press, 2008. 176 pp. \$49.95.

This book focuses on the less-examined side of war—not why people fight, but why they stop fighting. In six relatively self-contained chapters, Feargal Cochrane examines a number of problems associated with the shift from war to peace, including third-party intervention, negotiation, spoilers, and reconciliation and rebuilding, focusing in particular on the challenges associated with contemporary conflicts. While the book is broadly held together by overarching arguments that war has changed dramatically over the past several decades and that war is rational in the Clausewitzian sense that it serves policy, in practice, the individual chapters stand alone as coherent discussions of related topics.

The first chapter argues that the nature of war has changed along a number of axes in the past few decades, ranging from developments in international law to changes in the actors who prosecute violent conflict. Chapter 2 deals with third-party intervention—both diplomatic and forceful—from the perspective of William Zartman’s concept of the mutually hurting stalemate. In chapter 3, Cochrane examines the practical challenges that exist in getting disputants to the bargaining table and in forging an agreement. Chapter 4 builds on Stephen Stedman’s work on spoilers in peace processes, observing that spoilers are often motivated by sincere policy concerns. Chapter 5 turns to the question of how one might end the “Global War on Terror.” Cochrane’s political views come through most clearly in this chapter, and perhaps as a result, the arguments in this chapter fit less neatly into the overall scheme of the book and often do not receive the support that they need. The final substantive chapter deals with reconciliation and rebuilding after conflict, including an interesting discussion of truth commissions and war crimes tribunals, as well as an analysis of the challenges associated with rebuilding war-torn societies.

Each of the topics dealt with in the individual chapters could easily have been the subject of an entire book. Unsurprisingly, the broad scope of this inquiry is a source of both strengths and weaknesses. The book does a good job of consolidating relevant literature from both Europe and the United States, although the complete neglect of recent theoretical work on war termination associated with the literature on the bargaining model of war is puzzling.