Karim Makdisi, Vijay Prashad, eds.. *Land of Blue Helmets: The United Nations and the Arab World.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 2016. 552 pp. $65.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-520-28693-1.

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Born after World War II as the institution that would, in the words of its charter, "save succeeding generations from the scourge of war," the United Nations (UN) "cut its teeth" on conflicts in the Arab world (p. 1). Since the end of the Cold War in 1989, most of the UN's actions have centered on sub-Saharan Africa. However, given the recent ignition of violence in many previously stable states across the Middle East, the UN system will most likely once again turn much of its work to this region. Karim Makdisi and Vijay Prashad's *Land of Blue Helmets: The United Nations and the Arab World* therefore offers not only an important scholarly contribution but also one of some political urgency for anyone who seeks to gain a better understanding of the past, and probable future, work of the UN.

There has been a noticeable lack of comprehensive analysis of the role of the UN in the Arab world, and this outstanding volume fulfills an important gap in the literature. The book provides a broad, four-part sweep across the UN's main areas of focus in the Arab world: diplomacy, enforcement and peacekeeping, humanitarianism and refugees, and development. Each part of the book contains five to seven chapters on the area of focus, written by an array of scholars and practitioners. In all, twenty-five contributors drafted twenty-three chapters. This brief review cannot capture the richness, depth of analysis, and breadth of Makdisi and Prashad's anthology. Instead I will highlight several of the chapters that I most appreciated and concentrate on contributions that analyze UN peacekeeping (my area of expertise).

Difficult conflicts consume many parts of the world; however, as former UN secretary-general Kofi Annan remarked to the UN Security Council at the end of his ten-year tenure, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is not "simply one unresolved conflict among many.... No other issue carries such a powerful symbolic and emotional charge affecting people far from the conflict and, indeed, the whole standing of the UN in international affairs" (p. 35). The first part of the book, on diplomacy, begins with Andrew Gilmour's masterful summary of the roles of the UN's eight secretaries-general in conflicts in the Middle East. Gilmour has served at the UN in various posts for over twenty-five years. In writing about the UN's first secretary-general from the Arab world, the Egyptian diplomat Boutros Boutros-Ghali, Gilmour handily sums up the UN's central dilemma: "Boutros-Ghali ... tried to work on what he considered a double crisis of confidence: to Israel, the UN was a 'veritable war machine' made for condemning and undermining the Jewish state; to the Arab world, the UN was an organization 'feudally dependent' on the

United States in which pro-Arab resolutions in support of the Palestinian cause were never implemented" (p. 33). Nevertheless, as many of this book's authors contend, because of its multilateral character, the UN remains the most legitimate international institution for dispute resolution. The section on diplomacy concludes with an eloquent, but devastating, one-two punch in the form of Noura Erakat's chapter on Palestine's bid for statehood through the UN, and Asli Bali and Aziz Rana's piece on the various external interventions in Syria. In both we see, with great precision, how various actors have worked to circumvent or undermine peaceful, multilateral solutions.

The second section of the book is dedicated to the UN's most expensive and consuming current activity—peacekeeping—and the increasing use of enforcement provisions under Chapter VII of the UN charter. Peacekeeping as a tool to end violent conflict was invented in the Middle East in 1948, in the wake of Mahatma Gandhi's nonviolent protests in India and South Africa, and in the midst of the worldwide anti-colonial movement. Although peacekeeping is not mentioned in the UN charter (since the charter predates its creation), it was conceived as part of the Arab-Israeli armistice agreements in 1949, brokered by the Nobel Peace Prize-winning American diplomat and civil rights activist Ralph Bunche. The original peacekeeping operation, the United Nations Troop Supervision Organization (UNTSO), continues to this day with its unarmed, multinational patrols, reporting on activities around Israel's borders.

In 1956, Israel, the United Kingdom, and France made an unsuccessful attempt to wrest control over Egypt's Suez Canal. Again, representatives from the UN brokered an end to the conflict, further institutionalizing the three essential "rules" of peacekeeping—impartiality, consent of the parties, and the non-use of force. These principles remain the governing doctrine of peacekeeping, although they are frequently tested on all

continents, including today in Lebanon, which houses one of the UN's longest-running peacekeeping operations, the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL).

Makdisi's masterful chapter, "Constructing Security Council Resolution 1701 in Lebanon in the Shadow of the 'War on Terror,'" distills the ways in which tensions between Israel and Hizbullah in the mid-2000s became framed within the American-sponsored global "war on terror discourse" (p. 157). The United States, Israel, and other members of the UN sought to wrap Lebanon's tensions into the frame of counter-terrorism, necessitating the solution of Chapter VII peace enforcement as a form of peacekeeping. However, the external pressure to frame the conflict as one requiring peace enforcement abated as regional and internal negotiations served to conclude a "violent phase in which Lebanon's meaning in global war on terror terms receded as it returned, in discursive terms, to its local frame of conflict" (pp. 163-164). I would argue that Makdisi's trenchant insights into the enforcement framing extend well beyond Lebanon. Since the early 2000s, Chapter VII force mandates have become standard for all UN multidimensional mandates in civil wars, even where such mandates are ill suited.[1] In this sense, Lebanon is fortunate and unique in that is has managed to steer the re-localization of conflict management.

While peacekeeping in Lebanon represents a glimmer of hope, unsurprisingly, the general situation of humanitarianism and refugees—the subject of the third part of the collection—is quite devastating. Many of the chapters reveal the deep disconnect between the UN's humanitarian ideals on the one hand, and the actions of powerful states on the other, that simultaneously support and undermine UN humanitarian efforts. Excellent chapters by Poorvi Chitalkar and David M. Malone, Coralie Pison Hindawi, Hans-Christof von Sponkeck, and Arafat Jamal each deal with different aspects of the UN's contradictory efforts in

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Iraq. Filippo Grandi, whose career in the UN system spans over thirty years, is the current UN High Commissioner for Refugees, and previously served as the commissioner general of the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. In his chapter, he describes the incongruities between the UN's historic humanitarian imperative to protect Palestinian refugees and the larger political processes that have prevented Palestine from establishing statehood. Caroline Abu Sa'Da's evocative chapter concludes the section with a call for "a mandatory return to humanitarian action," as the subtitle of her contribution indicates, to reestablish the separation between political and humanitarian tracks, especially in Syria.

The fourth and final part of the collection explores different elements of success and failure in UN development efforts, especially with regard to Palestinians. Susann Kassem's gem of a chapter focuses on UNIFIL and the role of "quick impact projects" (QIPs). Her piece is based on more than two years of ethnographic field research in southern Lebanon, and offers a unique, anthropological perspective on the QIP approach to peace and development. She writes that QIPs are "needed in order to create alliances with local people to facilitate the implementation of [UN peacekeeping resolutions]" (p. 468). She contends that most southern Lebanese view UNIFIL as "pro-Western, pro-Israeli" but tolerate its presence in large part because UNIFIL's budget for development projects "amounts to about US $5 million yearly" (pp. 472, 466); that is a large sum for a territory measuring less than half the size of the tiny US state of Connecticut. She argues that overall UNIFIL is engaged in conflict management, but it is not working toward resolving the underlying problems of the absence of a comprehensive peace settlement between Lebanon and Israel, and between Israelis and Palestinians.

The Palestinian-Israeli conflict permeated the early years of the UN, and continues to pervade its work in the areas of diplomacy, peacekeeping, humanitarianism, and development in the Arab world. The conflict is the subject of approximately half of the chapters in this volume. Although many chapters engage with works by Jewish scholars, none is written by someone who is of (apparent) Jewish/Israeli descent. The absence in no way undermines the legitimacy or integrity of the volume, and I am not suggesting that all views or religions, in essentialist terms, must be represented here or anywhere else. I interpret the absence as illustrative of how difficult it is to bridge the divide, even for those in the academy and the UN. Dialogue, and the peace it might bring, remains elusive but not impossible.[2]

Notes

[1]. Lise Howard and Anjali Dayal, "The Use of Force in UN Peacekeeping," *International Organization* (forthcoming).

[2]. Lucy Kurtzer-Ellenbogen, "What Might Persuade Israelis, Palestinians to Back Peace?" US Institute of Peace, *The Olive Branch* (blog), December 23, 2013, https://www.usip.org/blog/2013/12/what-might-persuade-israelis-palestinians-back-peace.

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