

Allan, James H. *Peacekeeping: Outspoken Observations by a Field Officer*. Westport, CT: Praeger, 1996.

James Kiras

Volume 17, numéro 2, fall 1997

URI : https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/jcs17_02br03

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

The University of New Brunswick

ISSN

1198-8614 (imprimé)

1715-5673 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce compte rendu

Kiras, J. (1997). Compte rendu de [Allan, James H. *Peacekeeping: Outspoken Observations by a Field Officer*. Westport, CT: Praeger, 1996.] *Journal of Conflict Studies*, 17(2), 180–182.

Allan, James H. *Peacekeeping: Outspoken Observations by a Field Officer*. Westport, CT: Praeger, 1996.

A number of books and articles have been written by military officers with peacekeeping experience, but most have concentrated on either reform issues in support of further UN peacekeeping missions or are autobiographical in nature. James Allan, who retired from the Canadian Forces after 37 years of service, reflects on his experiences during four peacekeeping deployments and uses them as the basis for drastic recommendations for reform. Some readers will ultimately question the value of those recommendations due to the author's flippant style and caustic remarks.

Peacekeeping: Outspoken Observations by a Field Officer is divided into five chapters, three of which are devoted to his comments on the peacekeeping missions in which he served. These include: two tours to Cyprus in the late 1960s and early 1970s; a unique tour with both the UN Truce Supervision Organization and the UN Disengagement Force on the Golan Heights in the early 1980s; and as the military assistant (chief of staff) to the chief military observer in the mission monitoring the border between Iran and Iraq in the late 1980s. The remaining chapters are an introduction, in which taxonomic and historical matters are addressed, and the conclusion in which a number of courses of action are outlined to improve the UN and peacekeeping writ large. The appendix to the book is a reproduction of the Report of the UN Technical Team's Visit to Iran-Iraq from July to August 1988.

The strength of this work lies in the ability of the author to weave lucidly his personal recollections with pertinent historical background material that informs the reader without bogging down in a mire of excessive dates, statistics, acronyms or UN resolutions. Allan's comments about the individual peacekeeping missions, from the operational level, are both interesting and insightful and include training, deployment, administrative and logistics matters. Readers will be interested to learn, for example, that the most effective peacekeeping tool used on the Golan Heights is a large placard, written in both Arabic and Hebrew, which states that action taken by one of the parties is in violation of the ceasefire agreement. It is these personal observations and recollections, drawn from first-hand accounts, and practical, yet informed commentary on the command and staff issues in the missions which will appeal to those seeking to learn more about these aspects of peacekeeping. Allan makes noteworthy observations on standard operating procedures and the problems of dual chains of command. At the national level, he recounts the difficulties created by peacekeepers reporting first to their own national headquarters before carrying out UN orders or their refusal to submit to the UN's operational authority. Within the headquarters staff overseeing the mission, he bitterly comments on the lack of unity of command, which has instead a dual system of authority between the military force commander and the civilian chief administrative officer (CAO). Such useful insights are occasionally colored by the author's frequent diatribes. In the case of the CAOs, he elaborates at length on what he perceives to be the rampant careerism and political maneuverings endemic to the civilian headquarters and its immediate staff. Other invectives are reserved for those who envision a more activist

role for the UN as well as those academics, politicians and military officers who seek to expand the definition of peacekeeping beyond interpostionary monitoring of a ceasefire.

Useful to the general reader is Allan's overview on the past and future role of peacekeeping, including the need to define clearly what the term means. There is an excellent discussion on the proliferation of terminology to describe peacekeeping and its related activities, as well as the bastardization of the term "peacemaking." Before we send the personnel of our armed forces overseas into harm's way, there should be a clear understanding of what it is we are asking them to do, as there is a great divide between the classical use of the term "peacemaking" and its more robust meaning.

It is in the foreword that the author lays the polemic undercurrent of the work: "If I appear to harp on the dysfunctions of the UN bureaucracy . . . it is because the UN is truly so bad. It's not so much the machinery but the people operating it." The solution posited in both the foreword and the conclusion is to fire all who work for the UN, especially those who work in the former Department of Public Information, and create in its stead a meritocracy untainted by equitable geographic representation and patronage appointments. This solution and many others regarding the reform of both the UN and peacekeeping may be pragmatic but are too simplistic. In the example of the command problems between the force commander and the CAO, Allan's solution is simple: place the CAO under the command of the force commander to achieve unity. While a streamlined chain of command would be useful, it ignores the reality of the rotation of personnel: a CAO and his staff are deployed to the mission for several years or even decades and they provide political and administrative continuity, while the force commander and the bulk of military peacekeepers are rotated through the mission every six months to a year. Another pragmatic suggestion is to "Make war crimes tribunals effective or drop them." How the members of the Security Council are to complete this daunting task and the definition of what is meant by "effective" is left up to the reader. There are also a number of apparent contradictions in the book: on one page, Allan suggests that the Member States make available imagery and surveillance technology to the UN, while on the next he criticizes a proposal to create a UN intelligence agency on the grounds that the organization has difficulty managing even the smallest peacekeeping deployments.

Given the outcome of the UN missions to Rwanda and Somalia and the uncertainty surrounding the success of missions in the former Yugoslavia and Haiti, many are questioning the role that the UN will play in conflict management and resolution. Many think of peacekeeping as a solution to all conflicts and the author rightly notes that it is "only one of many arrows in the national and international security quiver." Allan's criticisms at the very least provide pause for reflection and stimulus for debate on many of the common assumptions we have about peacekeeping. Should the reader overlook the author's shortcomings, especially his brusque style and oversimplifications, and focus instead on his keen observations of the inner workings of peacekeeping missions, there is much practical knowledge of interest in *Peacekeeping: Outspoken Observations by a Field Officer* for military and civilian peacekeepers and researchers alike.

James Kiras

Pearson Peacekeeping Centre