1 The Role of Credibility in Peacekeeping

The most useful way to conceive of credibility in peacekeeping is to consider an apt comment expressed to me by a UNIFIL officer early on in my research because of the way it captures the case for credibility: “You know the expression ‘You’re only as good as your last game’? That’s here. You’re only as good as your last game.”

The United Nations has three established pillars of peacekeeping: impartiality, consent, and minimal use of force. As the complexity of peace operations increased, the United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) identified three additional or second-order success factors in 2008: legitimacy, credibility, and the promotion of national and local ownership. While literature that has looked at the second-order success factors in UN peacekeeping has focused heavily on legitimacy and local ownership, the concept of credibility has been ignored. To date no studies have examined the part that credibility plays in the success of a peace operation.

In this chapter I unpack the concept of credibility. I discuss how, until now, credibility has most often been invoked to support theories on deterrence and cooperation but up until now has rarely been examined as a stand-alone concept in international relations. I then progress to the question of how credibility functions in peacekeeping operations.

Credibility in International Relations

Credibility in the international relations literature has, until now, most often been used to advance theories on deterrence and cooperation. It
is discussed in the realist literature on threats, deterrence, and military capability and has been used in liberal theories of cooperation, most often in relation to international financial regimes and institutions. Very little effort has gone into deeper examinations of what credibility is.

In realist theories of deterrence, the principle of anarchy, that is, the absence of an overarching government regulating the behavior of states, underpins discussions that utilize the concept of credibility. After the Second World War and the invention of nuclear weapons, the concept of deterrence became the intense focus of literature that weighed the costs of conflict and examined how states could deter each other from going to war. Credibility in this literature rested on a state’s capacity to fight a war and its willingness to do so.

Reputation emerged as a major factor that informed states’ calculations about when and how they believe threats emanating from other states. It is informed, according to one early scholar, by a record of past performance: the statements and behavior of its government and the attitudes of public opinion, both domestic and allied. Schelling used the concept of “face,” or a country’s image, to describe how a state could present itself as a credible actor determined to face up to threats of war. Firmness was regarded as a key attribute that facilitated credibility in these scenarios.

These early theories have been criticized for not taking context into account; rather, they asserted that assumptions of credibility were stable and generalizable. Later works argued that the specific conditions of a threat impact both how a state will act and the perceptions of the other state on how it will act, that is, its credibility in that particular context. Past behavior then was not seen as a key determinant in this literature, and factors other than material capability and willingness to fight were brought into the discussion. These factors included the level of democracy in the state, the actual level of interest a state has in a particular issue, its proximity to the other state, and perception.

In later work, Downs and Jones argued that a state’s reputation is not one size fits all and that a state’s reputation cannot cover all issue areas. Drezner noted that reputation is a fuzzy concept and asks the valid question: “Countries should cultivate a reputation for what, exactly? Can a reputation for toughness in a crisis be reconciled with a reputation for
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compliance with international law? Do countries have reputations, or just leaders? Does a reputation in one issue area—say, aid generosity—spill over into other issue areas?” Press argues that in a crisis of war, reputation has very little effect on credibility and that the global military balance of power matters more. In a somewhat circular turn, Crescenzi reverts to past behavior and argues that when countries have similar capabilities, they will assess the past actions of states to assess credibility.

In the deterrence and reputation literature, then, credibility refers to the idea that to be “credible,” a state has to demonstrate it has the capability and resolve to make good on its threats. The extensive literature on this concept discusses the details of how states make calculations about the costs and benefits of going to war with another state.

Credibility has also been used to advance theories of cooperation, largely in the institutionalist literature. This literature is more concerned with how states cooperate in an anarchical system and has also been subject to heavy use of game theory. Transparency, repeated interaction, and the provision of information are considered key to the success of international cooperation. Here credibility is regarded as important, because otherwise states would have no faith in each other’s commitments to one another. Past behavior too is regarded as an important indicator that states will make good on their commitments. However, the rationale for cooperation provided in the institutionalist literature rests on the idea that social punishment—ostracizing, withholding favors, future cooperation, and friendship—is what keeps states in line rather than the threat of war. The role of credibility in the cooperation literature is based on the idea that institutions foster the conditions that enable states to be seen as credible actors.

Taking a constructivist perspective for a moment, we can see there is a relationship between credibility and ideas. Krasner’s definition of regimes or institutions relies heavily on the concept of shared norms: “as sets of implicit or explicit principles, norms, rules, and decision-making procedures around which actors’ expectations converge in a given area of international relations.” Mearsheimer, a committed realist, uses the phrase “a higher state of norms” when describing institutions as a set of rules. The concept of norms and legitimacy will be discussed later in this chapter,
but what emerges from the literature in international relations that utilizes
the concept of credibility in cooperation is that ideas about the legitimacy
of institutions and accepted norms of state behavior play a role in assess-
ments of credibility. In other words, by cooperating on a given issue, states
accept there is an inherent legitimacy in these actions. Therefore, states
are not just behaving out of purely selfish interests; they are also cooperat-
ing in accordance with shared norms, and that plays a role in assessments
of the willingness of states to make good on their promises. As such, cred-
ibility does not appear to have been fully untangled from the concept of
legitimacy at the international level.

In sum, literature in the international system has used the concept of
credibility extensively to justify theories of deterrence and cooperation. It
has not, as yet, been unpacked to show what credibility means in different
contexts as a stand-alone concept.

Credibility as a Stand-Alone Concept

Credibility has rarely been examined as a stand-alone concept in inter-
national relations, but more recently the relationship between emotion
and credibility has received some attention. If we return for a moment to
the idea of reputation, one state’s belief in the willingness of another state
to make good on its promises, we can see that this belief is underpinned by
some underlying assumptions. Some authors have tapped into this notion
and expanded the concept of credibility to include an emotional aspect.
Stein makes the point that “credibility, a fundamental component to theo-
ries of action in international politics, is emotional as well as cognitive.”
Mercer argues that credibility is not simply a function of rational choices,
such as the cost of the signal or past behavior. It is an emotional belief that
is held by its intended receiver; the belief that another’s commitment is
credible depends on the selection and interpretation of evidence and on
the assessment of risk, both of which rely on emotion.14

A few scholars have attempted to examine credibility more closely
as a stand-alone concept. Sartori discusses how credibility functions in
diplomacy and concludes that honesty is deeply connected to credibility
in deterrence. She argues that countries in general try to speak honestly
because developing a reputation for honest diplomacy is more useful in solving disputes without having to resort to force. From this idea we can deduce that credibility has a relationship with honesty and believability.\(^{15}\)

One author who has examined credibility as a concept is Alvin Tze Tien Tan, who highlights that there are two main components of credibility at the international level. The first is structural, which he states is the ability of a state to fulfill its commitments, and this capacity includes capability and material interests. The second component he terms behavioral credibility, which is the willingness of a state to fulfill a promise. This willingness, in his view, is underwritten by three variables: past behavior, political instability, and the degree of democracy. Tan argues correctly that the structural components of credibility have been utilized a great deal when used in the cooperation and deterrence literature, but behavioral credibility has not. He provides a definition of credibility as “the belief by outside observers of the ability and willingness of a state to fulfil its promises.”\(^{16}\)

What emerges from an examination of the literature on credibility at the international level is the fact that credibility, unlike legitimacy, \textit{needs to be constantly sustained}. It cannot exist without either constant reassurance (repeated interaction, past behavior) or evidence (military intelligence, material capability). If a state stops signaling its intent through the provision of truthful information, or is caught bluffing about its military capabilities, it will lose credibility. By identifying this aspect of credibility, we can see how it functions independently as a construct and attempt to clarify how it differs from legitimacy. If we accept the premise that credibility requires constant maintenance and across different issue areas, is it possible, then, that credibility can take different forms? If so, this insight helps to resolve the issues raised by Drezner about reputation. States may use different types of credibility at different times, depending on the issue. A state might want to be viewed as a credible security deterrent in one case, but in another it may choose to be viewed as a responsible and compliant international citizen. When it does so, it uses a variety of tools to indicate its credibility according to the issue area. So, for example, while China might have a very large army, it may not be interested in presenting itself as a military threat and may be more interested in being viewed as a
responsible global citizen. Instead, it will indicate its credibility by acting as a regional aid provider after natural disasters or as a provider of troops to regional and UN peacekeeping missions.

By conceiving of credibility as multifaceted, we can see how it can be utilized by actors in different ways at different times. But what happens in a scenario where both deterrence and cooperation are required simultaneously in the same context? Peacekeeping operations are such an environment where deterrence and cooperation are required at the same time. This tension exists because, on the one hand, cooperation is extremely important to obtain local acceptance for the mission and, on the other, the mission needs to act as a deterrent to those actors wishing to return to conflict. This environment then exposes how different types of credibility can exist because a peacekeeping force necessarily needs to employ different types in different scenarios.

Furthermore, as I will discuss later in this chapter, the UNIFIL case is useful because the legitimacy of the mission is weak or even absent among some audiences because of a lack of national consensus on the mission’s goals. In this case, it is possible to examine how credibility works as a stand-alone concept and understand its fungibility in practice.

**Credibility: A Reassessment**

Credibility is one of the three newer second-order success factors that the UN has listed as important to the success of a peace operation. As I discuss later in the chapter, unlike local ownership and local legitimacy, credibility has been ignored in the extensive scholarship on peacebuilding and peacekeeping. I attempt to redress this balance by unpacking and redefining the concept of credibility and showing how the UNIFIL mission has won it. Furthermore, in doing so, I discuss the fungibility of credibility, which is not something that has been considered until now. Simply put, what does credibility do for a peacekeeping mission, and how does it work when there is limited or no legitimacy?

Credibility is similar to legitimacy in that it provides an institution with cooperation and some compliance, but it differs in three key ways: it needs to be constantly sustained with evidence, it is context dependent
and can be won in specific areas but not across the board in every area of its work, and it cannot be obtained up front but must be earned over time. The benefits of winning credibility are cooperation and confidence.

Credibility in peacebuilding is defined here as the capacity of an actor to present as an honest and believable provider of knowledge and services in a sustained and highly responsive manner that wins cooperation and confidence. Credibility can be manifested in four main ways—responsiveness, technical, material, and security—but actors may not be able to win all four forms owing to local or national constraints.\(^\text{17}\)

To understand how credibility differs from legitimacy, we first need to understand more deeply what has been said about legitimacy in the international relations literature and specifically the literature on peace operations.

**Institutional Behavior and Legitimacy**

While the UNIFIL mission is part of a larger institution—the mother ship being the United Nations in New York—UNIFIL behaves like an institution in its attempts to legitimize itself and depoliticize its actions as it exercises its mandate. By drawing on sociological institutionalism theory from the international relations literature, I will highlight why this is the case.

Sociological institutionalism focuses on the social aspects of how institutions behave and the way “organizations often adopt a new institutional practice, not because it advances the means-ends efficiency of the organization but because it enhances the social legitimacy of the organization or its participants. In other words, organizations embrace specific institutional forms or practices because the latter are widely valued within a broader cultural environment.”\(^\text{18}\) Sociological institutionalism examines how institutions are affected by culture within and without the institution and “emphasize the highly-interactive and mutually-constitutive character of the relationship between institutions and individual action.”\(^\text{19}\) This scholarship has examined in particular how authority or “persuasion by status or expertise is pervasive in social life.”\(^\text{20}\)

This approach to understanding institutions argues that in order to survive, organizations depend on legitimacy. Dowling and Pfeffer provide useful clarity on the rationale of organizations in this pursuit:
“Organizations seek to establish congruence between the social values associated with or implied by their activities and the norms of acceptable behavior in the larger social system of which they are a part. Insofar as these two value systems are congruent we can speak of organizational legitimacy. When an actual or potential disparity exists between the two value systems, there will exist a threat to organizational legitimacy.”

Organizations or institutions attempt to obtain and maintain legitimacy by responding to “new normative demands or requirements from outside.” The point here is that social norms can change and constitute both a motivation for organizational change and a source of pressure for legitimation. Legitimacy can act as a constraint on an organization, which forces institutions to adapt to changed conditions, and scrutinizing legitimacy can provide “a useful empirical focus for examining organizational behaviors taken with respect to their environments.”

Legitimacy in the international system is listed alongside two other factors believed to motivate actor behavior: coercion and self-interest, which are deeply intertwined with notions of power. Legitimacy is regarded as important in motivating actor behavior even if coercion and self-interest are present. Ian Hurd invokes the Weberian concept of legitimacy, describing it as “the normative belief by an actor that a rule or institution ought to be obeyed.” This belief can come from “the procedure or the source by which it was constituted,” and there is broad agreement that legitimacy is a subjective assessment by the actor. A useful definition of legitimacy is provided by organizational psychologist Mark Suchman, who defines legitimacy as “a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions.”

Scholarship that has focused on legitimacy at the international level argues that legitimacy wins organizations authority. This is described by John Ruggie as “a fusion of power with legitimate social purpose.” Ultimately, once an actor has internalized the legitimacy of an organization, compliance becomes unproblematic and is no longer dependent on coercion. Hurd equates this compliance as being similar to the dynamic of a parent and child, or how government attempts to socialize its people, which is “It is right to do as I say, because I say so.” This dynamic implies
that once obtained, legitimacy releases an organization from scrutiny of its every move and enables it to be forgiven even when it makes the odd mistake. Legitimacy affords the source authority but also efficiency, which is why the powerful often seek to legitimize their actions. The reason is that legitimacy is co-constitutive. Once an individual or community has internalized a source or procedure as legitimate, the actor “reconceives his or her interests” in line with the interests of said source or procedure,\textsuperscript{29} which in turn makes compliance habitual and automatic. It is noncompliance that causes psychological disequilibrium.

In the case of UNIFIL, there is no national consensus on the legitimacy of the goals of the mandate, and at the local level a significant slice of the population does not regard the removal of Hezbollah’s weapons from the area of operations as a legitimate task of the peacekeeping operation. Conversely, at the international level, Israel and the United States in particular perceive UNIFIL’s main role to be the removal of Hezbollah’s weapons from the area of operation. These complex politics mean UNIFIL’s mission goals are contested to the extent that if UNIFIL pleases one audience, it will almost certainly displease another. As such, how does UNIFIL function? How does it avoid being rendered useless and paralyzed? The answer partly lies in the fact that UNIFIL depoliticizes its actions as much as possible to neutralize the political nature of its mandate. According to Michael Barnett and Martha Finnemore, this depoliticization is typical of international organizations (and international institutions) because at times “there is often no neutral stance one could take in many of the situations IOs [international organizations] confront, yet IOs need to find one in order to maintain the claim that they are impartial and are acting in a de-politicized manner.”\textsuperscript{30}

The use of technocracy is one way for an organization to depoliticize its activities. In UNIFIL we can see how the use of technocracy is both regulative and constitutive at the three levels of engagement: the international, the national, and the local. At the international level, UNIFIL has been responsible in part for constituting the Blue Line and then regulating it. At the national level, UNIFIL provides training to local government officials on good governance and acts as a creator of knowledge and provider of “objective” knowledge. One of the main ways, it is argued, that
institutions legitimize themselves is by “transforming information into knowledge by giving it meaning, value, and purpose.”31 In building the capacity of the Lebanese Armed Forces, UNIFIL is also involved in training and development, in this instance behaving as the literature expects an international organization to behave by defining “problems and appropriate solutions in ways that favor more technocratic impartial action, which, of course, they are uniquely able to supply.”32 With civilians, technocracy is found in the quick impact projects that are again constituted and regulated by UNIFIL. The approach to approving the quick impact projects is technocratic—the selection criteria has been standardized and is applied in a manner that enables UNIFIL to avoid being accused of favoritism, hence again avoiding local politics.

At times UNIFIL assists with matters that go beyond its mandate, which shows the dedication of many of its staff, but also highlights how organizational culture has influenced some staff into believing that the mission can be successful with the right amount of effort. This belief can be attributed to bureaucratic culture, whereby members of an institution generate a shared vision of how to achieve the goals of the institution. Despite the efforts of UNIFIL staff, without political engagement from the Israeli and Lebanese governments, nothing will change. But staff continue to go out on a limb in the belief that their actions will make a lasting difference. As Barnett and Finnemore state, “While bureaucratic cultures always draw on cultural elements from the environment . . . all bureaucracies develop cultures that are distinct from the environment in which they are embedded.”33

Hence, we see how sociological institutionalism provides a useful framework by which to explain how UNIFIL, as an institution, behaves. It shows how UNIFIL uses institutional strategies to depoliticize its mandate; specifically, it employs a technocratic approach and acts as a generator of knowledge and a dispenser of “objective” knowledge. This theoretical approach also helps to explain why some UNIFIL staff go above and beyond their mandate in a relentless quest for solutions that ultimately they cannot arbitrate.

Sociological institutionalism also goes a long way toward explaining how international institutions obtain legitimacy at the international level. According to this theory, by exhibiting the above behaviors, institutions
generate legitimacy and therefore authority. But in the case of UNIFIL, we see that while these behaviors help to depoliticize UNIFIL’s mandate, they do not afford UNIFIL legitimacy.

Despite its best efforts at depoliticizing its own role, UNIFIL itself engages in political lobbying. This activity is essential for international organizations, because ultimately they need to sell their message to the audiences from whom they require cooperation. In this way, we can see that legitimacy can, like credibility, also be context dependent. The literature in international relations on this topic highlights how needing to appeal to different audiences for legitimacy can affect the behavior of state leaders and international organizations themselves. Hurd, in a discussion of the symbolism of the UN Security Council’s legitimacy, makes the valuable point that when an institution has legitimacy, there will always be those individuals who resist it precisely by deeming it illegitimate. To an extent this situation is what UNIFIL faces in the form of criticism from a variety of different audiences at the national, subnational, and international levels. It responds to this criticism by reminding everyone that they agreed to the mandate in the first place. But as I show here, this reminder still does not generate sufficient legitimacy from all its audiences; different audiences prioritize different actions. What I find is that while UNIFIL has international legitimacy in some quarters, it does not translate to legitimacy on the ground.

If UNIFIL is unable to win legitimacy for its mandate among varied audiences, what is the impact on the ground and how does UNIFIL exercise its mandate? A reasonable assumption would be that it would be prevented from carrying out its duties owing to a lack of cooperation and compliance at the international, national, and local levels. But my research shows that UNIFIL is still able to fulfill a reasonable portion of its mandate. But how can this be the case if there is contested legitimacy? Simply put, it is not legitimacy that UNIFIL has earned, but credibility.

What Is Local Legitimacy?

As noted previously, legitimacy is a co-constitutive mechanism whereby actors’ interests change because of their belief that a source or procedure
is legitimate. The benefit of obtaining legitimacy for an organization is that compliance with a legitimate source becomes natural and unchallenged. However, as also noted previously, in international interventions at national or local levels, legitimacy may not be obtainable using the mechanisms outlined in the international relations literature on bureaucracy and legitimacy. So what is local legitimacy, and why does it differ from international legitimacy?

If we return to the three UN second-order success factors of legitimacy, credibility, and local ownership described earlier in the chapter, we find that local ownership and local legitimacy are the two factors that have received the most attention in the literature on grassroots peacekeeping. Discussions of local ownership come largely from the critical literature in peacebuilding and argue that there is a need for greater local participation and local ownership of projects in any peacebuilding initiative. Oliver Richmond advocates for more money to be disbursed on welfare as well as social and civic projects, as opposed to purely infrastructural ones, and for a more contextualized approach that uses local knowledge and avoids working from generalized “blueprints.” Roger Mac Ginty argues for a hybrid peace whereby both liberal and critical models of peace can coexist and also for greater agency at the local level. Thania Paffenholz suggests that civil society can contribute to peacebuilding in limited ways: through protection, monitoring, advocacy, socialization, social cohesion, facilitation, and service delivery as an entry point for peacebuilding. Scholars have also asked how the liberal peacebuilding project can better incorporate local cultural traditions. However, there remains contestation over what constitutes “the local” in relation to local ownership, one of the main debates being whether it is the national versus subnational, formal institutions versus informal, or local elites versus ordinary citizens. Approaches to the study of the local have differed; some focus on the subnational arena, others discuss the everyday events in the life of local recipients of peacebuilding or “the everyday peace,” and yet others focus on the everyday activities of the peacebuilders themselves to illustrate how peace operations can improve local relationships. Critiques of this literature fault it for viewing the international and local as binary opposites, which romanticizes local solutions; and the conclusion remains bleak, in
that liberal peacebuilding is regarded as having failed to generate genuine local ownership or even define what it means. This failure is regarded as symptomatic of “the distance between its ‘global’ objectives and the local conditions for their realization.”

Within the literature on local peacebuilding, one of the more recent developments has been a discussion of what are termed hybrid solutions. Hybridity is the idea that the local and international become intertwined to generate new solutions through the agency of both. Mac Ginty and Richmond define hybridity as “a constant process of negotiation as multiple sources of power in a society compete, coalesce, seep into each other and engage in mimicry, domination or accommodation.” Put simply, hybridity in peacebuilding describes how activities are created, operationalized, and experienced by the local and the international. Mac Ginty defines hybridization as “how individuals, groups, structures, and ideas evolve and adapt” as part of the peacebuilding process.

Recent work on hybridity has been critical of the prescriptive nature by which some international actors have employed the concept. This approach has led to a situation whereby local practices are instrumentally employed by peacebuilders to achieve top-down, internationally sanctioned outcomes within the liberal peace framework. Hybrid solutions have also been critiqued for producing unpredictable, or even negative, outcomes; for legitimizing hegemonic power; for producing unintended outcomes that preserve the status quo rather than being “emancipatory”; and for being a problem-solving tool used to advance the “liberal peace.”

Another criticism of the hybrid turn in the literature is that the concept is vague and does not always help clarify what is occurring. Kate Meagher, Tom De Herdt, and Kristof Titeca argue that the value of hybrid governance depends on clarifying the aim of international engagement with the local and call for more empirical studies.

In sum, hybridity in peacebuilding refers to the creation of practices in the peacebuilding environment that have evolved, and continue to evolve, out of the experience of the international and the local coming together. Political, cultural, environmental, and social considerations impact both sides, and these normative expectations help to shape these hybrid practices that act to provide “solutions” to tensions between the objectives of
the local and the international. This book acknowledges the relevance of hybridity because in some areas of UNIFIL’s work, hybrid solutions have become part of how UNIFIL builds credibility with the local population at the international, national, and local levels: for example, by engaging politically with local mayors who are affiliated with Hezbullah (whom the international community largely disapprove of) or by ensuring that the LAF takes the lead in clearing illegal weapons to avoid the risk of being seen to take sides in what is a national debate about Hezbullah’s right to bear arms.

Winning local legitimacy has, until now, been regarded as the holy grail of peacekeeping. The idea is that if a UN peace operation obtains local legitimacy, the mission wins compliance and explicit cooperation from the local population. It is also less susceptible to the effects of peacekeeper mistakes or poor behavior and is able to fulfill the goals of its mandate in a secure environment. Even if peacekeepers cause accidental or deliberate harm to members of the local population, the local legitimacy of the mission should carry sufficient local capital to insulate it from retribution or local rejection. But is this outcome really possible in a foreign intervention? Scholarship on peacebuilding suggests it is possible, yet the concept itself remains unclear.

A great deal of the critical literature argues that peace operations should transcend current liberal norms and that a “postliberal peace” is possible. As noted previously, this literature has tended to focus on local ownership, but those individuals who take what Robert Cox would describe as a “problem-solving” approach as opposed to a critical approach have tried to engage empirically with the concept of local legitimacy and how interventions might obtain it. David Roberts argues for what he calls a “popular peace,” whereby global governance actors collectively work toward the provision of public goods. He bases his theory on the premise that the vast majority of recipients of the peacebuilding project do not have the basic requirements of life, such as potable water. As such, rather than work to install institutions that serve the interests of a narrow few in the metropolitan areas of postconflict states, peacebuilding efforts should be directed at encouraging the provision of services that enable the local population to live. Doing so will contribute to the improvement of the everyday conditions of recipients
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and legitimize the presence of the peacebuilding effort. Roberts’s point is important, and he notes, “Peacebuilding does not cater for the everyday, imminent needs of millions of people. This is central to understanding how and why people may not view prevailing peacebuilding priorities as legitimate.” Roberts’s argument is relevant to this book, which also argues that when the practical everyday needs of the local population are seen as being met by the peacebuilders, there is likely to be more local cooperation. However, Roberts’s argument does not take into account the role of politics in local decisions to accept or reject the peacebuilders. I contend that the actions he describes build credibility but not legitimacy.

Another confusing aspect of scholarship on local legitimacy is that often scholars will not specify a definition of the concept but will present an argument about how it can be obtained. Concepts like custom and culture are referred to as being the most useful local sources for building a positive peace, but the literature fails to directly address what happens when these local sources do not match up with Western human rights norms, in particular around gender.

Roland Paris has argued that those scholars in the critical vein of the peacebuilding literature should be considered “liberals in disguise,” because he notes that they often use liberal terminology to critique liberal peacebuilding ideology. For example, Richmond discusses the importance of making a “social contract” between international interventions and local civilians on the ground. What a social contract would look like in the local context is left to our imagination. Equally, his suggestion of establishing a welfare state is still suggestive of an imposition of Western ideas onto the local. Roberts makes the point that an emancipatory peace is unlikely “as long as neoliberal hegemony endures, and the character and content of the social contract is determined by the extent to which its foundations reflect neoliberal preferences.” In other words, the current system so dominates that we need either to radically reconsider what we mean by peace or to accept that peace initiatives cannot truly be radical. Elisa Randazzo also makes the point that the critical literature is as guilty of cherry-picking acts of local resistance to the liberal peace as the liberal peace is of choosing whom to engage with on the ground. The fact is that there remains a desperate need for scholarship coming from recipients of peacebuilding to help us
establish what the term *local* really means and to help us reframe the concept of what peacebuilding at the local level should look like.

Thus, the literature on local legitimacy is heavy on suggestions about how to obtain local legitimacy but very light on what it is as a concept and the benefits that it affords a peace operation. A great deal of scholarship discusses the need for local legitimacy and still more critiques the UN for not obtaining it in specific case studies. Nonetheless, there remains a mystique around the general rules that can be applied to afford missions local legitimacy and what obtaining it will do for the mission. This confusion exists possibly because trying to design a standardized set of techniques may be another flaw of liberal peacebuilding—its claims to universality informs its perspective that all aspects of the peacebuilding project can be reduced to a one-size-fits-all mentality. Most research on peacebuilding has acknowledged that context matters in assessing strategies for building local legitimacy and asks whether these strategies have been successful.

Within the academic scholarship, there is one author who has attempted to unpack the definition of local legitimacy in peacebuilding, and we will turn to this work next in conjunction with another authority on legitimacy, which is the UN’s definition of the concept.

**The UN’s Definition of Legitimacy**

The UN’s definition of legitimacy is long, somewhat convoluted, and composed of three parts. The first articulates the international legitimacy of a peace operation: “The international legitimacy of a United Nations peacekeeping operation is derived from the fact that it is established after obtaining a mandate from the United Nations Security Council, which has primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security. The uniquely broad representation of Member States who contribute personnel and funding to United Nations operations further strengthens this international legitimacy.”

The second part of the definition articulates the behavioral aspects of UN missions, which, it is argued, affect local perceptions of the legitimacy of the mission: “The firmness and fairness with which a United
Nations peacekeeping operation exercises its mandate, the circumspection with which it uses force, the discipline it imposes upon its personnel, the respect it shows to local customs, institutions and laws, and the decency with which it treats the local people all have a direct effect upon perceptions of its legitimacy. The third part of the definition is particularly interesting because it argues that poor behavior on the ground will erode the legitimacy of the mission: “Experience has shown that the perceived legitimacy of a United Nations peacekeeping operation’s presence may erode over time, if the size of the United Nations ‘footprint’ and the behavior of its staff becomes a source of local resentment; or if the peacekeeping operation is not sufficiently responsive as the situation stabilizes.”

This definition assumes that international and local legitimacy are one and the same thing, or that the mission has what Hurd terms source legitimacy. Furthermore, it is assumed that as long as a peace operation exercises its mandate fairly, it will remain legitimate. Finally, the UN definition argues that poor behavior will erode the overall legitimacy of a mission.

This last part of the definition highlights the challenge in understanding what benefits local legitimacy confers on a peace operation. As noted above, the concept of legitimacy as defined in the literature is that it is co-constitutive and therefore informs actors’ beliefs about how the world should work that are in line with the beliefs of the legitimate source. From this standpoint we can surmise that once won, legitimacy provides the legitimate source with some form of social capital that would in principle enable it to make mistakes and remain legitimate. However, as we have seen at the international level in the case of the United States since the Second World War, legitimacy can be eroded if the behavior of a state wanders too far from the norms or expectations of international society. Equally, the United Nations has made endless errors in peacekeeping missions yet retains significant global legitimacy and authority. Ultimately, then, we can say that international legitimacy probably does have limits, although the literature is not yet clear on what they are, and at the local level it is even less clear.

Jeni Whalan is a rare scholar who has unpacked the UN’s definition of legitimacy in peace operations in an examination of the Solomon Islands peacekeeping operation.
Islands and Cambodian missions. In doing so, she has made two important contributions. First, she has clarified the important point that international legitimacy and local legitimacy are not one and the same thing. This divergence is what she refers to as the local-international legitimacy gap, which can be defined broadly as the space or the difference between the perceptions of the international community and the local community about the legitimacy of an international intervention. Particularly relevant to the UNIFIL mission is that the local-international gap is most difficult to overcome when perceptions not only differ but conflict—that is, when legitimizing an intervention internationally actually delegitimizes it locally, and vice versa. The local-international legitimacy gap can have myriad impacts on the ground, but its main effect is to constrain international actors in the local environment decreasing their ability to build local relationships, maintain security for troops, and therefore fulfill the obligations of the mandate. This gap affects different types of international interventions—peacekeeping, peacebuilding, statebuilding, and counterinsurgency—to a greater or lesser degree. As noted previously (and in more detail in chapter 2), UNIFIL suffers greatly from this phenomenon.

Second, and also important, Whalan has helpfully provided a definition of local legitimacy that is lacking in much of the scholarship purporting to deal with the concept: “Local legitimacy refers to evaluations by local actors about a peace operation’s rightness, fairness, and appropriateness—that is, whether its practices rightfully cohere with the relevant framework of rules and values, are fair, and produce appropriate outcomes.” To further elaborate on the concept, she disaggregates legitimacy into three distinct types: source legitimacy, procedural legitimacy, and substantive legitimacy. Source legitimacy finds its roots in the first definition of legitimacy provided by the UN noted above, that is, international legitimacy, and is described as “the given structures of the peace operation . . . its mandate, design, and conflict setting.” However, Whalan includes a form of credibility in source legitimacy, citing the importance of material factors: “Source legitimacy is also derived from an institution’s ability to signal its credibility to achieve its mandated goals and purposes. . . . [A] peace operation may be legitimimized through its display of material
resources, which justify its presence to local actors by demonstrating that it is adequately equipped to achieve its purposes.”

Procedural legitimacy can be located in the second aspect of the UN’s definition of legitimacy, which refers to how a UN mission exercises its mandate and is described as being derived from “judgements about the fairness of procedures for making decisions and exercising power.” Thus, these two types of legitimacy can be traced back to the UN’s definition of legitimacy that also refers to the “firmness and fairness with which a United Nations peacekeeping operation exercises its mandate.”

Substantive legitimacy is “the process by which an operation’s outcomes justify it in reference to its goals and purposes, based on the desirability of its effects.” This definition refers to the mission’s ability to deliver on goods and services that are part of its overall mandate. Whalan argues that if substantive legitimacy is not backed up by the other two kinds, it will be eroded: “Substantive legitimacy without procedural or source legitimacy can be expected to produce diminishing returns.” Whalan notes that substantive legitimacy has to be built up over time and cannot be won on arrival and that if substantive legitimacy fails to meet local expectations, it can cause a mission to be delegitimized.

In this book I argue that there is a conflation between legitimacy and credibility in Whalan’s definitions of local legitimacy, particularly in her definitions of source legitimacy and substantive legitimacy. Local legitimacy should refer only to the shared view between the local population and the mission that the goals of the mission are legitimate. While this form of legitimacy can be eroded by poor peacekeeper behavior, it should not need to be constantly sustained in the way that credibility does. As Chapman notes, “Although views differ on whether legitimacy stems from perceptions of procedural fairness, policy neutrality, or inclusiveness, once this relational characteristic is established, this perspective suggests that it should be relatively fixed, or at least slow to change.” In my view, the provision of goods and services should not be a key driver of legitimacy because according to the extensive literature on this topic, legitimacy refers to ideas, not material interests.

My work builds on Whalan’s research but argues that legitimacy, once won, should not require constant maintenance in the same way that
credibility does, because unlike credibility, it is not built purely on material gains but rather built on ideas, norms, and expectations. While (as noted above) legitimacy does act as a constraint on an organization, the fact that it is co-constitutive and forms actors’ beliefs about how the world should work means it should not depend regularly on the more unreliable concepts of material or self-interest. Whalan describes the benefits of legitimacy as providing “a reservoir of support” to help withstand shocks, setbacks, and substantive failures in a power relationship and as exacting compliance that is sustained “even when the flow of desired outcomes is disrupted.” From this description of local legitimacy we can deduce two things: first, one of the key differences between legitimacy and credibility is that legitimacy affords an actor the ability to make mistakes and be forgiven for them; second, credibility requires sustaining precisely because it does not provoke a reservoir of support. It is pertinent here to remember that legitimacy can be eroded by a lack of procedural fairness, which has been discussed thoroughly in the criminology literature on policing and by Whalan herself. Worth noting also is that the literature on local legitimacy has thus far been unable to explain the level of elasticity that local legitimacy can afford peace operations. How far does legitimacy provide cover for peace operations to be able to make mistakes? How much stock of goodwill does local legitimacy provide?

I believe local legitimacy as defined here by Whalan in part captures credibility and in part the UN’s definition of legitimacy. There is also an inherent assumption that source legitimacy is present to some degree, which it may or may not be, and especially not when we consider other types of interventions such as the “coalition of the willing.” Whalan herself notes this issue when she speaks of the local-international legitimacy gap. Her definition of legitimacy assumes a level of source legitimacy is present, and in her definition of substantive legitimacy she conflates credibility with legitimacy by including the provision of material resources. This inclusion suggests that legitimacy can be eroded by a lack of material goods and services, which again suggests that her definition is underwritten by both material and ideational factors. But I argue that legitimacy and credibility are two separate concepts underwritten by different factors.
Where there is no legitimacy or weak legitimacy, credibility can still be obtained. This is not to say credibility and legitimacy can’t function alongside each other; if an institution has legitimacy, having the resources to achieve its goals will help to bolster its legitimacy among audiences with whom it is legitimate.

One can see the difference between legitimacy and credibility when one examines how UNIFIL behaves on the ground and the problems it faces. It is the contingent nature of UNIFIL’s relationship with local and international actors that helps to reveal the difference between credibility and legitimacy. My work raises the question of whether the literature on local legitimacy has often been a proxy for what is really a form of credibility. Practitioners need to ask themselves whether they can make mistakes and be forgiven for them. Is the mission under constant pressure to provide evidence that it is delivering on what it has said it will? If not, does it mean legitimacy has been obtained or something else? The UNIFIL mission shows us that if there is a need to continuously provide evidence of good deeds to maintain local confidence in the mission, it indicates the presence of credibility and that the mission is not immune from loss of support because ultimately compliance is born of self-interest and not internalized norms induced by legitimacy.

Unpacking Credibility

Credibility ultimately means delivering on a promise. The dictionary definition of the word *credible* is “the quality or state of being credible; the capacity to be believed or believed in.” I posit that a peace mission is better off attempting to obtain acceptance and support for its presence by building credibility instead of trying to legitimize itself across a diverse range of local interests and local power brokers. As noted earlier, the definition of credibility I provide in this book is “the capacity of an actor to present as an honest and believable provider of knowledge and services in a sustained and highly responsive manner that wins confidence and cooperation.” However, maintaining credibility means that a peace operation must continue to maintain a high level of service so as not to lose
cooperation and sustain its relationships. It is underwritten by the need to provide evidence and material benefits.

Hurd provides insight into how we might conceive of the motivations behind local acceptance for missions with the concept of “self-interest.” He describes self-interest thus:

A society where compliance with rules is based principally on the self-interest of the members will exhibit several characteristic features. First, any loyalty by actors toward the system or its rules is contingent on the system providing a positive stream of benefits. Actors are constantly recalculating the expected payoff to remaining in the system and stand ready to abandon it immediately should some alternative promise greater utility. Such a system can be stable while the payoff structure is in equilibrium, but the actors are constantly assessing the costs and benefits of revisionism. . . . Second, and following from that, long-term relationships among self-interested agents are difficult to maintain because actors do not value the relation itself, only the benefits accruing from it. Such long-term relations may exist, and indeed persist, but only while the instrumental payoff remains positive. . . . As a result, a social system that relies primarily on self-interest will necessarily be thin and tenuously held together and subject to drastic change in response to shifts in the structure of payoffs. 84

This concept goes some way in helping to explain the rationale for cooperation with the UNIFIL mission by groups such as Hezbullah or ordinary citizens who do not regard its goals as legitimate.

Table 2 shows the key differences between credibility and legitimacy. The other key difference between the two is that while legitimacy in principle acts as a political cover for all the activities of a peace operation and should provide the mission with authority across the board, credibility can be built in some areas but not others. As noted previously, I define credibility as having more than one aspect. The distinction between types of credibility is important because it illustrates how it is possible to win or lose credibility on one or more aspects. By disaggregating credibility, I show that UNIFIL has earned some types of credibility but not others (see figure 1).
### Table 2

**Key differences between legitimacy and credibility**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Features</th>
<th>Benefits</th>
<th>Limits</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Credibility</strong></td>
<td>• Underwritten by material interests</td>
<td>• Inability to accomplish all mandate objectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Requires time to build</td>
<td>• Cannot be a disruption to goods and services without risking negative repercussions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Context dependent</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Constant need to provide evidence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Confidence from the named parties in managing security incidents and institution building</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Cooperation from local civilians and therefore security for patrolling troops on the ground</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Legitimacy</strong></td>
<td>• Underwritten by ideas and shared norms</td>
<td>• Poor behavior may eventually degrade overall legitimacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Does not require constant provision of evidence</td>
<td>• May be contextual if legitimate among only some audiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Can be won up front</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Should not be context dependent</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Ability to fulfill the mandate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Ability to make mistakes and be forgiven for them</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Norm internalization can generate trust</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Flow of goods and services may be disrupted without negative repercussions on the ground</td>
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1. Types of credibility
• Responsiveness credibility: a demonstrated ability to respond quickly to military and civilian concerns in a predictable and reliable manner.
• Technical credibility: a demonstrated observable commitment to good governance.
• Material credibility: the provision of funding for local projects and other material benefits such as health care, services, infrastructure, and equipment.
• Security credibility: a demonstrated ability to deter conflict and provide human security.

This expanded definition of credibility illustrates the limitations of the current definition of credibility provided by the UN. According to the UN, “The credibility of a United Nations peacekeeping operation is a direct reflection of the international and local communities’ belief in the mission’s ability to achieve its mandate.”\textsuperscript{85} When a peacekeeping force is unable to fulfill all the tasks of the mandate, it loses credibility:

Credibility is a function of a mission’s capability, effectiveness and ability to manage and meet expectations. Ideally, in order to be credible, a United Nations peacekeeping operation must deploy as rapidly as possible, be properly resourced, and strive to maintain a confident, capable and unified posture. Experience has shown that the early establishment of a credible presence can help to deter spoilers and diminish the likelihood that a mission will need to use force to implement its mandate. To achieve and maintain its credibility, a mission must therefore have a clear and deliverable mandate, with resources and capabilities to match; and a sound mission plan that is understood, communicated and impartially and effectively implemented at every level.\textsuperscript{86}

This definition is underwritten by three assumptions. The first is that it refers to credibility as something that can be established up front. The DPKO guidelines state that a UN mission obtains credibility upon arrival, but my work identifies credibility as being something that occurs after the mission has been present for some time. As noted earlier, a force
can turn up well equipped, but to do what? Local civilians need to learn how the force will use its resources. Indeed, earlier research has pointed out that local reactions are often negative when a highly equipped peace operation comes into town with an overtly confident posture, as there is no assumption on behalf of civilians that these resources will be used for their benefit.87

The second assumption is that a peace operation needs to “strive to maintain a confident, capable and unified posture. Experience has shown that the early establishment of a credible presence can help to deter spoil- ers and diminish the likelihood that a mission will need to use force to implement its mandate.”88 But bottom-up studies have illustrated that while security, and human security in particular, is important in winning local support, it is not the only factor that local populations consider. Often peacekeepers are unable to provide security to local civilians in the way that civilians want them to, and peacekeepers often appear more engaged with their own security than the safety of the local population.89

The danger here for interventions is that they may appear well equipped, and raise expectations, but then suffer more fallout when invariably civilians are disappointed. Furthermore, the role of emotion is important here: a show of military force may be perceived as threatening as opposed to comforting.

In fact, a heavy security presence when the goals of the mission are not supported among many in the local population can do more harm than good. When UNIFIL troops were increased directly after the 2006 war, the European troop component was largely composed of special forces, as they are the military units best able to mobilize in a short period of time. They arrived after the war with tanks and sophisticated equipment, which quickly made them extremely unpopular, not least because their behavior on the ground was aggressive toward all civilians. They were so unfamiliar with their environment, and so enthusiastic about security, that they even intercepted and questioned a very senior UNIFIL officer as he was driving to work!90

After six weeks of war, surely the local population would have wanted to see a show of force by a peacekeeping mission. Yet this approach was
very unpopular, signaling to UNIFIL that it required a different posture. This experience tells us that the UN’s definition of credibility is biased toward security and that ultimately it is not the only type of credibility that a UN mission can or should work toward.

Finally, the third assumption of the UN’s definition of credibility is that the mandate should be clear and deliverable with the necessary resources. This criterion immediately excludes UNIFIL, whose mandate is extremely unclear and contested at the local level. In fact, all UN mandates are known to be unclear; UNIFIL is not the only mission that suffers from this problem. As Severine Autesserre notes, “Mandates provide the broad guidelines for a given mission, but offer little detail.” The UN definition of credibility glosses over this issue, and according to its own definition, if a mission’s mandate is unclear, this ambiguity renders it not credible.

**How Does UNIFIL Demonstrate Credibility?**

As noted previously, this book breaks down the concept of credibility into different types to understand what the term *credibility* means in the field of peacekeeping and to show how it can be won. It identifies how a peace operation can deliver on some but not all elements of credibility. It argues that credibility can be disaggregated and illustrates more directly how and where missions succeed and fail.

**Responsiveness Credibility**

Establishing a reputation for being responsive helps UN troops position themselves as being there to serve the needs of the local population. Therefore, responsiveness credibility is very important to material, security, and technical credibility—for example, when a member of the local population requires medical assistance or when a Blue Line violation has the potential to explode into a major security incident that could trigger renewed conflict. Regular liaison and negotiation play a crucial role in generating responsiveness credibility, and the swift provision of accurate
information provides reassurance to the parties that all acts are being objectively recorded. Within the four types of credibility, responsiveness credibility sits slightly above the other types, as it can ultimately be located in all the other three. Responding to the needs of locals in a timely fashion provides a sense of reliability and predictability that is valued in a highly volatile and insecure environment. In this way, UNIFIL is viewed as a reliable and believable companion that is always there, even if it cannot deter another Israeli invasion.

**Technical Credibility**

Technical credibility lends itself to supporting state institutions—for example, the LAF and the local councils. By providing technical assistance to the LAF, UNIFIL achieves several goals. It patrols alongside the national force, which improves the quality of its relationships with national institutions. It works within the local political system and where requested provides training on government to local councils. It also regularly invites representatives from other national institutions down to the South, to tacitly assist these institutions in reestablishing a presence on issues such as infrastructure, policing, and other state functions. These activities show the local population that UNIFIL is working toward the long-term goal of helping Lebanon function independently of international assistance. It also works to reduce the space for substate actors to legitimate themselves by the provision of services that the state cannot currently provide.

**Material Credibility**

Material credibility affords UNIFIL goodwill when providing goods and services that the state is currently unable to provide and helps UNIFIL carve out a practical role for itself in the area of operations. Material credibility is more easily won because it largely comes down to the provision of resources, although, as chapter 5 reveals, material credibility is connected to responsiveness credibility.
Security Credibility

Simply put, I define security credibility as the demonstrated ability to deter conflict and provide human security. In the case of South Lebanon, security credibility is perhaps the most complex of all the types of credibility to explain because it speaks to the issue of audiences for legitimacy.

As noted previously, deterrence is an important aspect of a peacekeeping operation, but when the nature of that deterrence is contested, how does a peacekeeping operation accomplish this goal? In the case of UNIFIL, many in the local population seek security from Israel, not from Hezbollah, which they regard as a deterrent to Israeli aggression. UNIFIL faces pressure from the local civilian population that asks why the international community (represented by UNIFIL) is unable to prevent an Israeli invasion.

As Israel wants Hezbollah removed from the area, it regards UNIFIL’s deterrence duties as being the removal of Hezbollah, not in providing a strong presence on the border willing to fight Israeli troops should they wish to invade. Furthermore, UNIFIL might be viewed by Israel as protecting Hezbollah’s activities, which would also be unpopular with many in the international community. Not only is this aspect of UNIFIL’s duties contested at the international level and local levels, it is too at the national level, where different political groupings have different views on Hezbollah’s military activities.

This is not to say that security credibility alone has the power to win local legitimacy, because other factors such as aid and responsiveness also affect the credibility of the mission. If the force did not perform on the other three types, they would have no credibility whatsoever and may well have been unable to function in relative safety.

Security credibility includes human security as much as it does traditional deterrence. UNIFIL has earned credibility on some security issues, specifically local requests for assistance with issues relating to minefields, assistance with natural threats (such as wildfires), preventing military confrontations between the parties, and preventing the escalation of everyday incidents between the IDF and local civilians on the Blue Line. However, owing to the contested nature of what security goals UNIFIL should be
focusing on, it has not been able to protect the local population from a succession of Israeli invasions, nor has it been able to prevent Hezbullah-related security incidents from taking place on the Blue Line.

**The Benefits of Earning Credibility**

Credibility wins UNIFIL cooperation and confidence. Why? It is because the local population has confidence that it will deliver on many of the types of credibility discussed in this chapter. The benefits delivered by UNIFIL that build credibility satisfy many of the material interests of the local population to the extent that many are willing to cooperate with the mission and most do not actively seek to prevent it from functioning. As discussed earlier, at the international level, different types of credibility may be used in different contexts. In the case of a peace operation, all four may be used to help win local cooperation because the nature of peacekeeping itself involves deterrence and cooperation. Where there is contested legitimacy for the goals of a mission, the UNIFIL mission has focused on building credibility in areas that will produce cooperation and afford the mission maximum overall effectiveness.

The case of UNIFIL shows that by responding swiftly to local material and technical needs, and attending to security issues where it is able, the force has won sufficient cooperation on the ground to be able to patrol in relative security. By delivering on various types of credibility, UNIFIL is credible in the sense that the named parties and the local population have confidence in UNIFIL to deliver on various aspects of its mandate in a predictable manner.

An unpredictable military force can lead to unpredictable results, especially in the security space. While this situation means that “spoilers” such as Hezbullah can abuse the system by working around UNIFIL, it also means that UNIFIL avoids engaging head-on with Hezbullah in a competition for local legitimacy that Hezbullah would doubtless win. Hence, UNIFIL generates a predictable security environment: it is recognized as being a reliable and responsive partner to the LAF, a responsible and timely purveyor of information to the IDF, and a responsive provider of goods and services to the local population. UNIFIL then reduces the
incidence of hostilities and creates the conditions conducive to everyday peace or the normalization of peace.

**The Relationship between Credibility and Local Legitimacy**

The final question to be asked, then, is if a force could deliver well on all four types of credibility, does it win legitimacy? This question is complex because it engenders the question of whether it is possible for an international interposition to win local legitimacy. What I have established in this chapter is that credibility is context dependent, satisfies material interests, and must be constantly sustained with evidence. Legitimacy, on the other hand, is based on ideas more than it is material factors. In the context of peace operations, I argue that winning legitimacy means that the norms of an organization have been internalized by the local population to the extent that material factors and evidence become less important than the belief that the aims of the mission are legitimate. Therefore, compliance is habitual and automatic, and it is noncompliance that causes psychological disequilibrium. In the case of UNIFIL, the practical benefits local legitimacy would afford the force would be explicit cooperation in the form of information about activities that subvert the goals of the mission, the ability to fulfill all of the mandate, the ability to make some mistakes without blowback, and perhaps a reduction in the provision of material goods and services.

If UNIFIL were able to deliver on all four goals, would it win legitimacy? Well, if the issue of Hezbollah’s weapons were resolved at the national level, there might well be no need for UNIFIL at all, because one way or another, the situation with Israel would have been resolved. I argue that because of the varied demands of peacekeeping, credibility and legitimacy can work in tandem, or in the absence of each other, but they are underwritten by different things and should not be conflated.

Putting UNIFIL aside for a moment, the question still needs to be asked more broadly that if a force delivers well on all four types of credibility, does it then have legitimacy? The answer intuitively is no because, simply put, the values of the receiver are unlikely to uniformly match the values of an intervening force. A UN mission might be able to provide all
the resources necessary to rebuild a state or bring peace, but not necessarily in a way that the local population would regard as legitimate or fair. And as I have already stated, legitimacy is based on shared ideas about the appropriateness of an institution and not just material interests.

The best way perhaps to illustrate this point is to look at the Lebanese Armed Forces, which, despite having poor resources, retain legitimacy at the local level in a way that UNIFIL does not. A great deal of this legitimacy has to do with the fact that UNIFIL is a foreign force, whereas the LAF is part of the Lebanese people and in consequence has their trust. Ultimately, then, we have to ask if in fact it is really possible for a peacekeeping mission to earn local legitimacy at all or whether in fact what most peacekeeping forces have won is credibility on various issues that affords them sufficient cooperation to function.

Ultimately, the main difference between credibility and legitimacy is perhaps best reflected in the key benefit that UNIFIL obtains from winning credibility, which is confidence. Confidence is largely built on experience and requires evidence. Trust, on the other hand, involves more emotion. As Mercer states, “Trust is an emotional belief. Emotional beliefs are generalizations about the internal, enduring properties of an object that involve certainty beyond evidence. Trust requires certainty beyond observable evidence and reliance instead on how one feels about someone.”92 As the UNIFIL officer acknowledged, they are “only as good as their last game,” demonstrating that UNIFIL has won confidence but not trust. In the view of this author, even if the UNIFIL mission could win on all four types of credibility, it would not necessarily mean they are trusted to always do the right thing or to always work in the interests of the local community. Legitimacy, on the other hand, has been found to have a strong relationship with trust, although the precise relationship between the two has been insufficiently explored.93 As such, I surmise that credibility wins confidence, but legitimacy has the capacity to win trust.

It is beyond the scope of this book to examine the relationship between trust and legitimacy in peace operations at the local level. But until now, the literature on the local legitimacy of peace operations has not fully examined this relationship.
In sum, the major difference between credibility and local legitimacy is that establishing credibility has earned UNIFIL confidence but not trust. Confidence, like credibility, requires constant evidence for it to be sustained. Trust, on the other hand, is an emotional response to an actor that does not require evidence to be generated. Like legitimacy, trust can be eroded by poor procedural behavior, but ultimately it is not based on an initial track record or constant maintenance to the extent that an actor is constantly being reevaluated. The literature on police legitimacy and political trust suggests that legitimacy has the potential to engender trust in a way that credibility does not. The limited literature on credibility has not yet made a distinction between trust and confidence.

Conclusion

Credibility is regarded by the UN as one of three second-order success factors in a UN peace operation along with legitimacy and local ownership, yet the concept has been ignored in the academic literature on peace operations or oftentimes conflated with legitimacy.

Credibility affords the UNIFIL mission cooperation, but this is motivated by self-interest, which is largely determined by the benefits that UNIFIL affords the local community. Cooperation and confidence are predicated on the idea that UNIFIL is a credible actor that performs well on certain tasks that benefit the local population, not necessarily because the mandate is considered legitimate. Credibility requires constant maintenance in the form of evidence that the mission is delivering on what it says it will. What credibility does in a practical sense is that it enables the mission to move securely around the area of operation without fear of attack, but it does not extend to the idea that peacekeepers can—albeit accidentally—cause harm to the local population and be forgiven. Perhaps more helpful has been the generation of a predictable security environment that helps create the conditions conducive to the normalization of peace in the area of operations.

Local cooperation with the activities of the mission does not allow UNIFIL license to make mistakes or enact the mandate to its fullest extent. Should UNIFIL be suspected of working against the interests of
the local population, or deliberately causing harm, its presence will be rejected. Furthermore, in the case of actors such as Hezbollah, the UNIFIL presence is currently deemed useful in light of the broader regional strategic environment. Were that to change, UNIFIL’s situation could alter very quickly.