



Book Review: African Peacekeeping.

Review of African Peacekeeping by Jonathan Fisher and Nina Wilén¹²

János Besenyő³

In recent years, an increasing number of books have been published on peace operations on the African continent and the African units involved in them, but from a regional (African) rather than primarily international perspective.⁴ Among these is the volume "African Peacekeeping" by two well-known researchers, Jonathan Fisher⁵ and Nina Wilén,⁶ which sees African peacekeeping as an integral part of African politics, a formative activity carried out primarily by Africans (pp. 3-4).

In addition to the Introduction chapter, the volume consists of seven further chapters

¹ DOI: <https://doi.org/10.12700/jceas.2025.5.1.312>

² African Peacekeeping. By Jonathan Fisher and Nina Wilén. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022. 272p. \$84.99 cloth, \$29.99 paper. doi:10.1017/S1537592722002481.

³ Professor, Head of African Research Institute, Óbuda University, Budapest, Hungary; ORCID: 0000-0001-7198-9328; beseny.janos@bgk.uni-obuda.hu.

⁴ Some of the works include: Döring, K. P. W. 2024. African Military Politics in the Sahel. Regional Organizations and International Politics. Cambridge, United Kingdom, Cambridge University Press; János Besenyő 2021. Darfur Peacekeepers. The African Union Peacekeeping Mission In Darfur (AMIS) From The Perspective Of A Hungarian Military Advisor. Paris, L'Harmattan; Oliver Furley, Roy May 2021. Peacekeeping in Africa. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge; Alan Doss 2020. A Peacekeeper in Africa: Learning from UN Interventions in Other People's Wars. Boulder, USA: Lynne Rienner Publishers; Marco Jowell. 2018. Peacekeeping in Africa: Politics, Security and the Failure of Foreign Military Assistance. London: I.B.Tauris

⁵ Professor Jonathan Fisher joined IDD in 2011 as an ESRC Postdoctoral Research Fellow shortly after completing his doctorate at the University of Oxford and is currently a Professor of Global Security in the Department, University of Birmingham. His research focuses on the relationships between authoritarianism and (in)security across multiple levels – global, regional, domestic, and “the everyday”. He has a particular interest in the role of ideas and legitimacy in authoritarian systems and spaces, and has worked extensively in eastern Africa, where he has focused on the influence of guerrilla heritage on contemporary patterns of governance, conflict and cooperation. Professor Fisher has held a range of leadership positions in the School of Government since 2016 and is currently Head of the International Development Department. He is also an elected Council member of the African Studies Association of the UK and the Development Studies Association.

⁶ Nina Wilén is an Associate Professor in Political Science at Lund University and the Director for the Africa Programme at Egmont Institute for International Relations. She is also a Global Fellow at the Peace Research Institute in Oslo (PRIO). Between January 2020 and December 2023, she was the Editor-in-Chief for the academic journal International Peacekeeping. Professor Wilén make research on two main topics: different types of military interventions and role that the military plays in contemporary society. Her research contributions within these two areas have focused on the politics of Security Sector Reform (SSR) and Security Force Assistance (SFA), the domestic effects of troop contribution to peacekeeping operations, and the role gender structures and stereotypes play in the military institutions, with a specific focus on female peacekeepers. She had published extensively on these topics in a variety of different academic journals, including International Affairs, European Journal of International Security, Third World Quarterly, International Peacekeeping and Gender, Work and Organization among others.

based on each other. In the Introduction section, the reader can learn a great deal about the authors' research, the peace operations on the continent (past, present and possible future) and the people involved. This chapter contains a table (pp. 15-16) of the authors' peace operations in the African Union and other African regional organisations. I would have included in this table the Organization of African Unity (OAU) cease-fire missions in Algeria and Morocco,⁷ which operated briefly after the 1963/1964 Sand War,⁸ and the OAU-led mission in Chad (1981-1982).⁹ Or at least the authors could have dealt with these missions at the level of a mention. I have no idea why the OAU's involvement in Chad (considered by many to be the first independent peace operation in Africa) was not mentioned, but the Algerian-Moroccan ceasefire mission was probably not included in the book, as was one of the continent's oldest operations, MINURSO in Western Sahara,¹⁰ because they were linked to North Africa. However, the OAU/AU, alongside the UN, is still playing an active role in the unresolved Western Sahara issue (Besenyő et al 2023, pp. 21-24, 31-33, 36, 81-82). However, the authors argue that the North African states are more related to the Middle East than to Africa, and therefore they have not wanted to deal with the peace operations there (p. 6). I disagree with this in several respects, as the North African states are located on the African continent, are member states of the AU and, with the exception of Morocco, are members of the North African Regional Capability (NARC), which is the common military organization of the region. It is also important that this mission has a significant number of African peacekeepers and civilian staff, which alone makes MINURSO's activities worth looking into. It should also be remembered that North African countries (Egypt being a prominent one) are also actively involved in UN and AU peace operations, and their experience should have been included in the book, but only tangentially. It should also be remembered that five countries within the African Union (the so-called Big Five) have a significant influence on peace operations in Africa, as the authors point out (pp. 132-133). However, few people know that three of these countries (Algeria, Egypt and Libya) are countries in the North African region. For this reason alone, it would have been worth including this region in the research. This information could have added much more nuance to the authors' findings on African peacekeeping operations.

On page 20 is a map of Colonial Africa, which shows the situation after the First World War, when the territories of Germany, which had also been colonised on the continent, were divided up between the other powers. I would have preferred an earlier map, where the German colonies are still shown. If only because in the first chapter the historical (colonial) antecedents of peacekeeping were also dealt with by the authors,

⁷ There is no mention of the mission on the official OAU or AU websites, but the peace mission, which was established in 1963 with the active participation and support of Ethiopian and Malian soldiers, played an active role in implementing and monitoring the ceasefire (James 1990, 98). On this basis, it seems to me that this short-lived operation can be regarded as the first truly African peace operation, but there are hardly any valuable sources or references.

⁸ The Sand War lasted exactly from 25 September 1963 to 20 February 1964 (Magu 2021, 167).

⁹ Terry M. Mays. 2002. *Africa's First Peacekeeping Operation: The OAU in Chad, 1981-1982*, USA, Westport, Praeger Publishers.

¹⁰ The operation is only just mentioned twice in the volume. (pp. 38, 173).

albeit mostly from a British perspective (pp. 48-65), while the French (p. 49, 54-56), German (p. 55), Portuguese (pp. 49, 56), Italian (pp. 54, 56), Belgian or Spanish historical examples and experiences were less or not discussed. More attention should have been paid to this, since, as the authors rightly point out, the colonial past has an impact on the present period and has had a significant influence on African peacekeeping (pp. 30-31). I experienced this myself in 2005 in Darfur, where I served as a logistical advisor in AMIS II. There I saw in practice the obstacles to cooperation between soldiers from countries formerly under British and French influence. For example, the official language of the mission was English, but many African soldiers and officers from Francophone countries did not speak English at all, only French (Besenyő 2021, pp. 146, 165). They were also socialised in a different military culture, which affected their training and their daily tasks. And I am not talking here about being better or worse, they simply did not have a similar background, which was reflected in the mission's activities.¹¹ It is also in this chapter that the authors have looked at the development of peacekeeping and the specificities of Africa. On the other hand, as a former peacekeeper (I have served in two African peace operations), I was very impressed by the authors' approach of examining African operations and their impact on African/international politics not only in terms of academic/scientific issues (theory) but also on the basis of practical experience (practice). This endeavour can be traced not only here but in the other chapters.

In the second chapter, the reader is mainly introduced to the impact and relationship between politics and peacekeeping. It can be seen that certain regimes (especially authoritarian states) attach particular importance to the development and strengthening of the capacity of the armed forces, for which peacekeeping operations offer a kind of opportunity. This can also be seen from the table of the 10 African countries with the highest number of soldiers and police officers in UN peace operations (pp. 66-67). In this chapter we trace the different stages in the development of African armies. These are illustrated for the reader with different case studies, for example Uganda (pp. 79-87) or Burundi (pp. 87-92). What I miss here is that there is no case study on any of the 10 African countries that send most of their troops and police to UN peace operations. On the other hand, the part on the link between military coups in West African countries and peace operations (pp. 92-95), which will give readers food for thought, is included in this chapter. As the authors explain in the chapter, peace operations provide a good opportunity not only for authoritarian leaders to "cleanse" themselves and their regime, but also for the soldiers themselves, whose training and preparedness can be greatly improved by such operations, and who can even earn more income to provide better living conditions for their families. Moreover, peace operations also provide an opportunity for certain leaders to reward leaders loyal to them with well-paid posts, even if they are unworthy of them. One of the best examples of this is the Ugandan

¹¹ Unfortunately, the authors of the book did not deal with the AMIS I-II operation, they mentioned it only tangentially, although the operation accumulated considerable experience, which would have been worth using and presenting (pp. 15, 119, 155).

general Nakibus Lakara, who was removed from the Ugandan army in 2003 for corruption and other crimes, was reinstated and promoted to general in 2011 by Ugandan President Yoweri Kaguta Museveni and even appointed deputy commander of the AMISOM operation in 2015 (p. 84). However, the authors and other researchers indicate that knowledge acquired in peacekeeping operations can also be risky, as many of the planners and executors of military coups have had peacekeeping backgrounds, such as the leader of the military takeover in Niger, General Abdourahmane Tchiani, who participated in several UN and ECOWAS peace operations and who now leads Niger (Levin and Alen, 2023).

In the third chapter, the authors discuss the relationship between African peacekeeping and the international community, with a special focus on "African solutions to African Problems." Although the authors argue that African peacekeeping would be unthinkable without the financial and other support of the international community, the international community has not had nearly the impact on African peacekeeping that many would think (p. 99). On the contrary, as mentioned earlier, African states have on several occasions used/used their experiences/results from African peacekeeping in their international relations to influence certain political processes and in several cases have led to additional financial resources/support, mainly from Western countries (p. 118). In addition to Western powers (USA and European countries) and traditional peacekeeping states (Russia, India), new actors (Turkey, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, China) have emerged in African peacekeeping and are playing an increasingly important role, such as China, whose activities are described in detail in the chapter (pp. 119-126).

The fourth chapter traces the impact of peacekeeping on the identity of African organisations and states at continental and regional level. It can be seen that there are often conflicting interests of the different organisations (UN, AU) and African countries, which are able to assert their interests to the detriment of each other (pp. 133-134). Of particular interest are the sections on Nigeria as the leading country and regional power in ECOWAS (pp. 143-148), Tanzania (pp. 149-153), Rwanda (pp. 153-156) and South Africa (pp. 156-161). In the fifth chapter, the authors present African states which, after a long period of conflict, have participated in various educational programmes (training at foreign military institutes, courses, training, exercises) with the help of peacekeepers and the international community, or have been stabilised through other programmes (Security Sector Reform/SSR) and have themselves become actively involved in other peace operations. In doing so, they were able to rebuild, equip and train their new 'national' armies, which were "forged together in the course of peacekeeping" (pp. 172-178). In addition, participation in peacekeeping brought other economic opportunities for many African countries, which were thus able to rebuild their destroyed infrastructure and societies more easily. Positive examples are the cases of Burundi, Rwanda, Sierra Leone and the DRC (pp.184-192). In the next chapter, chapter six, other information on African peace operations, their functioning, background, governance and management structure, financial situation, the issue of African Ownership (pp. 208-



2015) and how the AU cooperates with other international and regional organisations in peacekeeping are presented. The seventh and final chapter concludes.

Despite the shortcomings I have mentioned, the book is definitely a niche book, and I recommend it to all those who are interested, either as researchers or as individuals, in the history of Africa today, international politics, military science, diplomacy and peacekeeping, and how political and military processes work, what are their drivers and how they affect not only the African continent but also other parts of the world. I particularly like the fact that a considerable amount of research has gone into the preparation of this book, as evidenced not only by the bibliography but also by the suggested reading at the end of each chapter. Thus, anyone who, in reading the book, feels like delving deeper into the subject will have access to further valuable publications.

Conflict of Interest

The author is a member of the Editorial Board. The manuscript was handled independently to avoid any conflict of interest.

References

- Alan, D. (2020). *A Peacekeeper in Africa: Learning from UN Interventions in Other People's Wars*. Lynne Rienner Publishers.
- Döring, K. P. W. (2024). *African Military Politics in the Sahel. Regional Organizations and International Politics*. Cambridge University Press.
- Fisher, J., & Wilén, N. (2022). *African Peacekeeping*. Cambridge University Press.
- Furley, O., & May, R. (2021). *Peacekeeping in Africa*. Routledge.
- James, A. (1990). *Peacekeeping in International Politics*. Macmillan in association with the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS).
- Jamie, L., & Nathan, A. (2023). *How U.N. Peacekeeping Accidentally Fuels Africa's Coups*. Foreign Policy. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/08/30/united-nations-peacekeeping-africa-coup-niger/>
- János, B. (2021). *Darfur Peacekeepers. The African Union Peacekeeping Mission in Darfur (AMIS) from the Perspective of a Hungarian Military Advisor*. L'Harmattan.
- Janos, B., Huddleston, R. J., & Zoubir, Y. A. (2023). *Conflict and Peace in Western Sahara. The Role of the UN's Peacekeeping Mission (MINURSO)*. Routledge.
- Jowell, M. (2018). *Peacekeeping in Africa: Politics, Security and the Failure of Foreign Military Assistance*. I. B. Tauris.
- Magu, S. M. (2021). *Explaining Foreign Policy in Post-Colonial Africa*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Mays, T. M. (2002). *Africa's First Peacekeeping Operation: The OAU in Chad, 1981-1982*. Praeger Publishers.

This article is open access and licensed under Creative Commons 4.0 BY standards. Upon publication, articles are immediately accessible for free reading, downloading, copying, and distribution. This license is permanent and irrevocable.