



Africa's First Peacekeeping Operation: The OAU in Chad, 1981-1982

Terry M. Mays

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In 1981 the Organization of African Unity (OAU) mandated and fielded the first regional peacekeeping operation since the Arab League's mission in Kuwait 20 years earlier. Battalion-sized contingents from Nigeria, Senegal, and Zaire were joined by smaller observer contingents from other OAU members in an effort to provide a buffer zone between the two main factions in the Chadian civil war.

Mays opens his analysis by providing an overview of the concept of peacekeeping. Several definitions are offered to help distinguish between the various types of peace operations. After examining the concept hegemon, he looks at the ways regional and subregional hegemons utilize peacekeeping operations as foreign policy tools as they protect their interests. Mays argues that Nigeria, as a West African hegemon, served as the moving force behind the mandating and fielding of the OAU peacekeeping mission in Chad. Rather than being purely humanitarian in nature, Nigeria's motivation included the removal of French and later Libyan soldiers from a weak state on its border. However, Nigeria could not perform the task alone. France and the United States were instrumental as well in the mandating and fielding process. French and American interests stemmed from concern over Libyan motives in Chad. Nigeria kept the effort to mandate the peacekeeping operation alive for two years; France proved to be the stimulus behind persuading the Chadian government to accept the deployment of OAU peacekeepers and prompting the Senegalese to contribute a battalion to the mission; the United States contributed by keeping France and Nigeria focused on a peacekeeping solution and helping persuade Zaire to join the mission.

Mays offers the first comprehensive examination of the OAU peacekeeping mission and reviews the political and military organization of the force as well as its deployment, redeployment plans, logistics, and operations between the Chadian factions. Utilizing an extensive collection of resources, including interviews with participants, diplomats, and government documents, he provides a detailed examination of every meeting/conference between 1979 and 1981 that discussed a peacekeeping option for Chad. Factors of success in traditional peacekeeping operations are applied to the OAU mission, and he concludes by reviewing the impact of the 1981-1982 OAU operation on current African peacekeeping trends. An invaluable analysis for scholars, students, and other researchers involved with peacekeeping, international relations, and African studies.

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