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BOOK REVIEW

Saleem Ahmad Khan. *United Nations Peace Operations in Africa: Civil-Military Coordination and State-Building*. New York: Routledge, 2023. xx +194 pp. Illustrations. $48.99. Paper. ISBN: 978-1-032-23046-7.

As the author of this study is a senior Bangladeshi army officer with wide field experience in UN service, it is at first a little surprising that his concern is primarily with civilian rather than military dimensions of peace operations. The explanation for this lies in his deep familiarity with post-Cold War "multifunctional" deployments in Africa, where the military and the civilian aspects are closely integrated. As well as key roles in the major operations in Sierra Leone and Sudan, Brigadier-General Khan has had experience in Western Sahara, Liberia, Côte d'Ivoire, the Central African Republic and Mali. In all of these deployments he has grappled to a greater or lesser extent with the fraught question of the UN's role in "state-building" and the intra-operational civil-military relationships that are central to this. This wide practical knowledge led him eventually to PhD research at the University of New Brunswick, of which this book is the outcome.

The first half of the study explores two general themes. One is the background to the UN's engagement with ethnic and transnational conflict in sub-Saharan Africa and the fragility of so many postcolonial states there. The other is the political evolution by which UN operations came to embrace the state-building role. The book then offers two detailed—and well-selected—case studies of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Sudan.

The Congo is particularly important in the long narrative of UN operations in Africa. The UN's peacekeeping efforts there started in 1960, immediately after the abrupt departure of the colonial power, Belgium. *Opération des Nations Unies au Congo* (ONUC) was in place for the following four years, a period marked by widespread communal violence and political chaos. Congolese statehood appeared in many respects to be doomed virtually from its inception. Ethnic and regional separatism, exploited and manipulated by external political and economic interests, sabotaged the country's indigenous efforts at state-building. The task then fell by default to an unprepared and reluctant UN.

The development of the state-building function in peace operations is generally seen as a consequence of the end of the Cold War. Previously, UN operations were essentially restricted to "buffering" and "interposition" between hostile forces along with the monitoring of cease-fire arrangements. The geopolitical focus had initially been the Middle East and south Asia in the first wave of post-1945 decolonization. Any more "political" role for peace

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operations at that time would inevitably have fallen foul of competing international ideologies.

With the end of global bipolarity, the setting changed. The apparent "defeat" of communism brought a consensus around liberal democracy as the standard option for both emerging and established sovereign states. This consensus allowed the UN to embrace a role in state-building, free of ideological recriminations. In fact, the Congo operation in the early 1960s confirmed this narrative by demonstrating the dangers of acting in the absence of such a consensus.

As Khan points out, despite the odds against it, ONUC had some successes. The territorial integrity of the Congo was maintained by the UN's prevention by military force of the secession of Katanga. But the ultimate failure of the state-building role was plain when, thirty-five years later in 1999, the UN Operation in Congo (MONUC) was authorized by the Security Council (renamed the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) in 2010). Khan outlines the frequently far-reaching efforts made in the Congo in careful detail. But the inescapable fact is that the success of those efforts is far from evident.

Superficially, Sudan seems to stand in contrast to the Congo in a number of respects. Emerging as an independent state in 1956 with greater preparation than in the Congo, the Sudanese state seemed to survive moderately well in its first decades. But in the background, unstable military regimes, successive coups and major separatist challenges in the south and west were wearing away the veneer of viable statehood. In 2011 Sudan fragmented fundamentally with the secession of South Sudan, while insurgency and brutal counter-action has plagued Darfur in the west.

As with the DRC, Khan provides a granular account of the UN's efforts in civil-military coordination for state-building in the region. For more than two decades now, Sudan, and later South Sudan, have hosted successive UN operations. The Integrated Mission in Darfur (UNAMID), first deployed in 2003, is a hybrid operation with the African Union. The Mission in Sudan (UNMIS) was in place from 2005 until 2011 and the Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) was created at the foundation of the state there in 2011.

The author's sourcing for Sudan and South Sudan and the intricate civil-military coordination arrangements in place in both is based largely on UN operational material and is impeccable. His account of the so-called Quick Impact Projects (QIPs) is particularly interesting. But again, one is left with a sense of the limitations of the larger state-building effort rather than its successes. Although it is obviously beyond the scope of Khan's book, the implosion of the central government in Khartoum in 2023 and the inauguration of a vicious civil war across Sudan stands in sad testament to this.

Rightly, Khan insists on the primacy of a "bottom-up" rather than "top-down" approach to the state-building venture. Without the support of the social base—and sensitivity to its culture and traditions—efforts at state-building are likely to be futile. But while in a sense this is plain and obvious, its application is often not straightforward. On one side, the UN can be—and has been—accused of acting as a kind of "imperial" power, attempting to impose alien models of democratic governance and "Westphalian" statehood in inappropriate situations. But on the

other, too close an identification with grassroots sensibilities risks compromising the supposedly "universal" values that the UN as an institution is committed to promote. There are no easy answers and many potential pitfalls in this.

Overall, this book is a welcome contribution to the literature on what has been described as the "new peacekeeping." Economic and political development—including, crucially, state-building—are at least as important as the shorter-term concerns with stabilization and the mere "absence of violence" associated with "traditional" peace keeping. Khan's study, while relatively tight in its focus, has clear relevance to the larger developments in UN peace operations.

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