



PROJECT MUSE®

---

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

Charles W. McClellan

The Journal of Military History, Volume 67, Number 1, January 2003, pp.  
311-312 (Review)

Published by Society for Military History

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/jmh.2003.0054>



➔ *For additional information about this article*

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/40480>

*Africa's First Peacekeeping Operation: The OAU in Chad, 1981–1982.* By Terry M. Mays. Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2002. ISBN 0-275-97606-8. Photographs. Appendixes. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Pp. xiv, 192. \$64.95.

Given the Organization of African Unity's (OAU) recent demise and the continuing debate about the efficacy of international peacekeeping, this book is timely and instructive. Mays's set objectives are: (1) examination of the foreign policy goals of Nigeria, the United States, and France as they related to OAU military involvement in Chad; (2) examination of the factors contributing to the mission's success; and (3) a discussion of lessons learned from the experience. Mays understands that his is "the first comprehensive review" of this event; time and additional documentation may shed new light on the matter. Besides interviews with a handful of African officials, Mays uses broadcast transcripts and newspaper accounts extensively to develop his case. While well researched, the work is repetitive in its presentation; surely one hundred pages would have been sufficient.

Chad's civil war began in 1963 and soon featured Libya's Muammar Qaddafi backing northern rebels in support of his own foreign policy interests. Chad's concerned neighbors, particularly Nigeria, did not want instability on their borders or refugees on their soil. Mays documents Nigeria's efforts to broker a peace settlement in the conflict and her willingness to contribute soldiers to a peacekeeping force. Although a settlement was signed, not all parties accepted it, and Nigeria's overly assertive tactics were viewed by some parties as partisan. Former French colonies in West and Central Africa were suspicious of Nigeria's intervention in a sister territory.

The United States also disdained Qaddafi's presence in Chad and his talk of "unifying" Islamic neighbors, but was content to let France handle the situation. President Reagan was more proactive, endeavoring to increase pressure on Qaddafi in Chad while the Americans confronted him in the Gulf of Sidra, but by this time the French under Mitterand were less interventionist than before. The conjunction of these various interests gave rise to an OAU force in which Nigeria was a major participant along with Zaire, financed and supported logistically by the U.S., France, and Great Britain.

The politics that created the OAU force reflected rivalries among various African governments and their heads of state. While most African nations supported the mission, most lacked the resources to be actively involved. Mays asserts clear mission objectives: supporting peacekeeping (a separation of the forces while negotiations continued) rather than peace-enforcement as some Chadian factions desired. The OAU steadfastly refused to be drawn into the conflict, asserting its true neutrality and noninvolvement.

In that context the OAU mission was successful; the foreign policy objectives of Nigeria, the U.S., and France were all basically achieved, and the lessons learned from the mission have been subsequently instructive. On the whole, Mays has done a good job with his materials, laid out his thesis

clearly, and provided strong argument, even if some, I suspect, might disagree with his conclusions.

Charles W. McClellan

Radford University  
Radford, Virginia

*Making War, Thinking History: Munich, Vietnam, and Presidential Uses of Force from Korea to Kosovo.* By Jeffrey Record. Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 2002. ISBN 1-55750-009-6. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Pp. 201. \$28.95.

The “Weinberger-Powell doctrine” continues to exasperate American military thinkers. This is the notion that U.S. armed forces should not be sent into wars without popular support, implying few casualties and confidence in victory. It therefore argues for overwhelming force leading to a decisive conclusion after which the forces can come home leaving any lesser military tasks of a peacekeeping/nation-building nature to lesser allies.

This doctrine is seen to break the essential link between military campaigns and foreign policy by insisting on a restricted set of circumstances in which the use of force can be contemplated, and the equally essential link with strategy, by prescribing forms of warfare that are most likely to allow the forces to survive unscathed even at the risk of putting civilians more at risk and of not accomplishing the set objectives. Record memorably calls this “force protection fetishism.” In addition, the doctrine does not even meet the test of gearing the forces to contemporary conditions, as the sorts of war that meet the criteria, especially with regard to an early exit, bear only a scant relationship to those that contemporary international affairs tend to throw up.

The origins of the doctrine are to be found in Vietnam although its elaboration by Casper Weinberger when he was Secretary of Defense (and Colin Powell was his military aide) came after the débâcle in Beirut in 1983–84. Powell, whose military career concluded as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, thought, as did many officers who had been through the Vietnam trauma, that the U.S. armed forces were too precious to be squandered in ill-judged adventures. This made his advice notoriously cautious.

To attack this way of thinking it is necessary to demonstrate the inappropriateness of the Vietnam analogy, both in terms of its bad history and poor fit to most contemporary situations. Record does not take on just the Vietnam analogy. He widens his analysis to take in Munich, perhaps declining now as a synonym for appeasement and acting too late, but enormously influential for those who lived through the Second World War, as evident in Bush senior’s response to Iraqi aggression against Kuwait.

I am not sure that it was wholly wise to take on this wider objective, as it is hard to avoid completely reasoning by analogy and there is nothing wrong, as Record accepts, in thinking hard about the origins of the Second