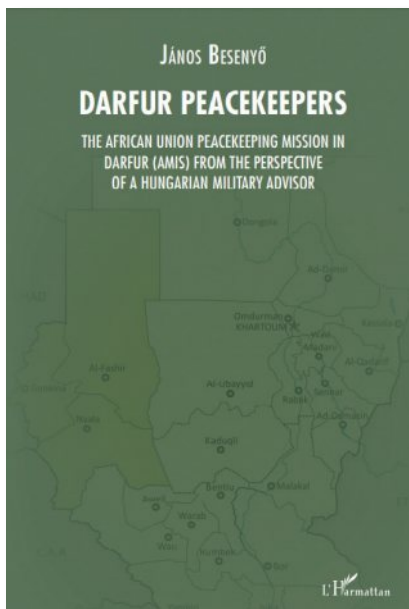




DARFUR PEACEKEEPERS

*The African Union Peacekeeping Mission in Darfur (AMIS)
from the Perspective of a Hungarian Military Advisor
by János Besenyő*



The book provides a comprehensive historical account of a peace support operation amidst the Darfur crisis and genocide complemented by personal experience. Having served in the region, the author can provide a detailed analysis of events from the perspective of a soldier, as well as a researcher. It is not the first time the author writes about Africa as he was previously involved in the publication of many related works regarding the Central African Republic, Egypt, Mali, Morocco, Somalia, Sudan and Western Sahara.¹ A variety of sources is used to underpin his viewpoints, including previously unpublished letters, reports, instructions, regulations, but most importantly his written and oral experience in the form of his diary and conversations with former and present peacekeepers of the mission. Despite not having

had previous experience or significant economic, political and strategic interests in the region, Hungary – probably in the hope of foreign policy increments – delegated personnel and provided humanitarian as well as financial assistance to the operation.

Besides the support of humanitarian and civil society organizations, the collaboration of the African Union (AU), European Union (EU) and NATO must

¹ Andrea Balogh, János Besenyő, Péter Misetics, Dávid Vogel, *Közép-afrikai Köztársaság, Országismertető*, Honvéd Vezérkar, Budapest, 2015; János Besenyő, Péter Misetics, *Országismertető – Marokkó és Nyugat-Szahara, Honvéd, Vezérkar Tudományos Kutatóhely*, Budapest, 2017; János Besenyő, *A nyugat-szaharai válság: egy magyar békefenntartó szemével*, Publikon, Pécs, 2012; János Besenyő, *Dárfúr, a lángoló tartomány: Az Afrikai Unió szudáni missziójának története*, Publikon, Pécs, 2016; János Besenyő, Péter Misetics, *Egyiptom: országismertető*, MH Geoinformációs Szolgálat, Budapest, 2014; János Besenyő, Péter Misetics, *Mali: országismertető*, MH Geoinformációs Szolgálat, Budapest, 2013; Álmos Péter Kiss, János Besenyő, István Resperger, *Szomália: országismertető*, Honvéd Vezérkar, Budapest, 2014.



be emphasized, especially in regards with crisis management and the provision of resources. However, the book does not only elaborate on the works of international organizations, but ethnic, political and regional matters are also discussed. While it is primarily about combating and resolving the Darfur crisis in Africa, political uncertainty coupled with the failure of state building and crisis management may spur migration, entailing security-policy challenges for Europe as well.

Darfur Peacekeepers comprises six chapters that follow partly a thematic and partly a chronological order. The first chapter of the book gives a comprehensive picture of the geography and history of Darfur, touching on a variety of subjects, such as climate, economy, ethnicities, religion, infrastructure, vegetation, wildlife and important cities in the country.

The second chapter deals with the causes and outbreak of the Darfur conflict that paved the way for the creation of AMIS I (African Union Mission in Sudan). Despite the fact that religious, ethnical and lifestyle-related reasons could be named as major causes of the conflict, the author is right to point out that the event, which actually sparked it, was the Sudanese government's military strategy against the Darfurian population.² When the rebels protested for not receiving government protection against the attacks of Arab nomadic Janjaweed troops, military strikes and the ethnic cleansing of innocents – belonging to the rebels' ethnic groups – followed. As a consequence of the insurgency tens of thousands were killed and millions were ousted from their homes. Since the conflict had the potential to spread to neighbouring countries, the AU intended to launch a peace operation. However, lacking organizational, logistics and financial resources, they turned to the UN and EU for help and created AMIS I.

The third chapter of the book revolves around the history, structure and operation of AMIS II. Although I feel certain failures and weaknesses are either repeated or overemphasized (including insufficient resources, logistical financial problems, operational capabilities, etc.), the author is correct to conclude that – despite the expansion of personnel and logistical-financial support received by the AU – AMIS II was still underperforming and, thereby, remained unsuccessful.³ Inability of meeting deadlines, inefficient management and challenges related to lack of human resources constituted some of the most significant problems. As a result of organizational and logistical deficiencies, inadequate number of vehicles and equipment and the soldiers' lack of military experience, qualifications and proper English language knowledge, the mission was practically doomed to failure from the beginning. In the meantime, the number of refugees was growing continuously, and while some of them fled to the neighbouring Chad, most of the people remained in Sudanese refugee camps. Since they enjoyed no government protection, refugees were often harassed and terrorized

² Besenyő János, *Darfur Peacekeepers. The African Union Peacekeeping Mission in Darfur (AMIS) from the Perspective of a Hungarian Military Advisor*, L'Harmattan, France, Paris, 2021, pp. 39-40.

³ Besenyő, *op. cit.*, p. 59.



by the country's army units, Janjaweed militias or other insurgent and armed groups.

The fourth chapter focuses on the creation of AMIS III (or enhanced AMIS II), which primarily intended to increase the safety level in the area of operation by establishing the headquarters and using rapid response forces, armoured vehicles and combat helicopters at the sectoral headquarters.⁴ Despite the fact that the number of camps and staff increased – which affected the humanitarian and security situation positively – the mission struggled with the same problems as its predecessor as well, as there were more recent challenges concerning access to housing, food supply, healthcare and even clean drinking water. What is more, the gradual deterioration of security and bureaucratic obstacles posed by the Sudanese government also foreshadowed the need for change. Since the AU lacked financial, logistical and technical support and the donors grew tired of funding a stagnating operation, discussions have begun about handing over the rather dysfunctional mission to the UN. However preserving the 'African character' of AMIS was also of chief importance,⁵ hence it was decided that – if possible – leading positions will be filled with African soldiers. In the meantime, atrocities had intensified and the rebels proved to be hostile not only to the government and Janjaweed troops, but to peacekeepers as well. With the intent of bringing stability to Darfur/Sudan, UNAMID (African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur) was formed and the UN took full responsibility for the mission starting with January 1st, 2008.

The fifth chapter of the book talks about the support mission of the European Union and I believe its purpose is to connect the previous sections on the history, structure and operation of AMIS to the following one, which concerns the Hungarian experience. It may also have been written with the aim of providing a transition through focusing on the EU at first and putting Hungary in context only after that. It is rightly mentioned that besides the provision of financial, human and material resources, the EU – together with the US and NATO – also took part in the airlift operation. Moreover, the EU sent logistic experts and advisors to Darfur and assisted in the training and equipment of policemen serving in AMIS. At times, however, I feel this section is overly biased (“...The AU was so satisfied with the work of the European advisors”)⁶ and generalizing of Europeans (“...every European soldier tried to carry out quality work for the AMIS”)⁷, which may call the subjectivity of the author into question. The EU itself, though, is judged more harshly for having contributed to the mission's failure by assisting the AU and funding a “bottomless basket”.⁸

⁴ Besenyő, *op. cit.*, p. 73.

⁵ Besenyő, *op. cit.*, p. 90.

⁶ Besenyő, *op. cit.*, p. 139.

⁷ Besenyő, *op. cit.*, p. 141.

⁸ Besenyő, *op. cit.*, pp. 92 and 178.



The last chapter is entitled ‘Hungarian experience’ and it is the section where – through his diary – we can truly gain insights into the author’s life, duties and challenges while he served as deputy head of Field Support Service. He highlights the fact that although Hungary provided moderate financial (which is in contrast with the previously-mentioned “substantial financial assistance”)⁹ and material support (e.g. high value medical equipment) to the mission and Africans recognized the work of serving officers¹⁰, Hungary’s participation – due to logistical, communication and housing problems, lack of resources and vehicles, water shortages among others – “was not so significant”.¹¹

Despite the author’s criticism (however well-founded and realistic they may be) of Africans, potential partiality towards Europeans/Hungary, as well as a number of grammatical, spelling and punctuation mistakes, it is a readable, scientifically accurate and gap filling book. It is complemented by charts, circular diagrams, tables and maps that all facilitate understanding and I believe it is particularly useful to have a timeline at the end of the book providing an overview of the most important events.¹² It is primarily recommended to those who are interested in the modern history of Darfur/Sudan and would like to explore the nexus of peace support operations in Africa and the joint efforts of the AU, EU and NATO for resolving the conflict. It could also be useful and intriguing for students of higher education in the fields of military science, security policy, African studies as well as international relations.

Despite the UN’s best efforts, the situation in Darfur has not really been stabilized. As a result, additional peace operations in the region are to be expected with the possible involvement of Hungary. Thus, I completely agree with the author’s conclusion that, due to economic, political and security reasons, Africa is and will continue to be a strategically important location and it remains critical “to thoroughly process the experience of the African operations so far and to utilize them not only in the military, but also in different levels of government, economics and other areas”.¹³ This book represents an essential addition to studies related to the experiences of peace operations, and similar works combining scientific research and personal experiences are strongly encouraged.

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⁹ Besenyő, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

¹⁰ Besenyő, *op. cit.*, pp. 143-145.

¹¹ Besenyő, *op. cit.*, p. 147.

¹² Besenyő, *op. cit.*, pp. 187-194.

¹³ Besenyő, *op. cit.*, p. 186.