



*Routledge Studies in Middle Eastern Politics*

# **CONFLICT AND PEACE IN WESTERN SAHARA**

**THE ROLE OF THE UN'S PEACEKEEPING  
MISSION (MINURSO)**

Edited by

János Besenyő, R. Joseph Huddleston and  
Yahia H. Zoubir



“This gap-filling book provides comprehensive insight into the MINURSO peacekeeping operation. The authors include well-known figures in the scientific community, international lawyers, archaeologists, human rights activists, and even a peacekeeper who served in the mission. It is useful to all those involved in studying Western Sahara and the Maghreb region.”

**Major General György Száráz**, *Force Commander of the MINURSO from 2002 to 2005*

“This is an important and timely study, not just for those interested in Western Sahara, but for anyone concerned about the future of UN peacekeeping operations and the challenging role of the United Nations in maintaining international peace and security and in upholding international law.”

**Stephen Zunes**, *Professor of Politics, University of San Francisco, USA*

“*Conflict and Peace in Western Sahara* is a deeply researched, comprehensive account of the half-century struggle for the future of Western Sahara, and of the United Nations’ nearly thirty-year peacekeeping mission there. Equally well-grounded in the surrounding region’s social and political history and in global politics, it is a sobering assessment of how distant interests can warp the search for local peace and self-determination.”

**William J. Durch**, *Distinguished Fellow at the Stimson Center, Washington, DC, USA*

“This comprehensive edited volume offers thorough and diverse analysis that seeks to make sense of how we’ve arrived at the present political impasse in Western Sahara. The volume is a rarity in scholarship on the territory, offering depth and breadth from researchers and past-MINURSO peacekeepers around the world. It is both instructive and insightful in its attention to issues of human rights in the context of the MINURSO mandate, offering an analysis of the Mission’s history, the lessons learned, and what we may expect in the future.”

**Randi Irwin**, *Lecturer in the School of Humanities, University of Newcastle, Australia*

“This pioneering and comprehensive work helps illuminate the dilemma of successive Personal Envoys of the UN Secretary-General for Western Sahara as they try to facilitate negotiations for an agreement on the future of this territory that honors the principle of self-determination when one of the parties – Morocco – has abandoned its commitment to the referendum for which MINURSO was created and has instead sought to impose a regime of autonomy under Moroccan sovereignty and when, at the same time, the members of the Security Council remain divided on how to break the resulting stalemate.”

**Christopher Ross**, *Personal Envoy of the UN Secretary-General from 2009 to 2017*



# Conflict and Peace in Western Sahara

This book offers the first comprehensive analysis of MINURSO (the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara), focused on its activities, composition, purpose, and operational future in Western Sahara, the world's last colony.

The book's focus is broad, examining MINURSO from key historical, legal, military, and political angles while assessing the future of UN peacekeeping missions in the Western Sahara. Supported by a diverse, international mix of perspectives and professions—including academics, lawyers, soldiers, and humanitarian aid workers—an in-depth view of MINURSO is provided, rooted in practical Western Saharan field experience. The authors reveal the complexities of the region and of the mission locally, but also analyze MINURSO through a global lens, focusing on relations with the United States, China, Russia, France, and African states. This approach emphasizes the importance of the region as a site of international struggle while remaining conscious of local contexts.

A landmark contribution to peacekeeping studies, this book is vital reading for practitioners and academics focused on the Western Saharan conflict and the MENA region, but will also be of interest to those engaged in international relations, international law, and security studies.

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R. Joseph Huddleston and Yahia H. Zoubir**

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# 17 The Approach of the African States towards MINURSO

*David Vogel*

## **Introduction**

Today, half of the 12 currently running United Nations (UN) peacekeeping operations are based in Africa.<sup>1</sup> We get almost the same ratio—a bit lower—when we look back and review past peacekeeping missions where out of 58 operations, 25 were deployed on the African continent (United Nations 2021g). Due to several complex reasons, the region has been constantly facing various challenges, which resulted in the escalation of the security situation of certain countries, thus requiring outside help and often intervention of the UN. Although there have been many changes since the first UN peacekeeping mission was launched, and today, we can speak about five generations of peacekeeping, the support of regional, local players and their participation, their ownership is vital for a quicker and more sustainable solution (Kenkel 2013).

In this chapter, I will analyze how this support and ownership that I mentioned above is reflected in the example of MINURSO (United Nations 2021a). I will focus on the support from Africa for peacekeeping in general, then more particularly, in the case of Western Sahara, both politically and in the field of defense, by analyzing all the relevant UN Security Council resolutions, UN Secretary-General special reports, and UN press releases.

## **African Participation in Peacekeeping Missions**

Most of the time, especially since the end of the Cold War, most of the cases where the security situation has deteriorated get the attention of the UN Security Council which then examines the case and decides to launch a peacekeeping mission, if needed. This act in itself is only a strong sign, far from enough for a long-lasting, sustainable solution: boots on the ground are needed. Through the process of force generation and pre-deployment planning the mission is about to get in shape. In this procedure, all contributions of UN Member States are encouraged in order to fill up all the positions as soon as possible.

Below, I have shortlisted the contributions of individual states: in the first case, Table 17.1 shows the overall contributions (both all types of military—troops, staff officers, and UN military experts on mission [also known as military observers]—and civilian police positions) of the Top 10 states. According to the official UN database, as of September 30, 2021, four out of the ten countries are African, although the numbers contributed by them decreased compared to last year and their previously held second and third positions are now only enough for the fourth and fifth places as largest contributors. With their more than 15,000 uniformed personnel, the four African states make up 31.93% of the top 10 contributions. If we take a look at the full list, out of 122 contributing countries, 36 are from Africa, thus representing 29.51% of the contributing nations and two-thirds of the states of the continent. When we observe the numbers, out of the grand total of 75,986 active peacekeepers at the end of September 2021, 35,255 persons were deployed by African states, meaning that almost every second person (46.40 per cent) in a peacekeeping mission is from Africa. This is even more impressive if we consider the fact mentioned in the introduction: currently six peacekeeping operations are ongoing on the continent.

*Table 17.1* Top 10 Contributors to Peacekeeping Operations (All Military and Police)

<i>UN rank</i>	<i>Country</i>	<i>Total PAX</i>
1.	Bangladesh	6,447
2.	Nepal	5,536
3.	India	5,481
4.	Rwanda	5,263
5.	Ethiopia	4,856
6.	Pakistan	3,949
7.	Indonesia	2,818
8.	Egypt	2,818
9.	Ghana	2,296
10.	China	2,248
	<b>Contribution of Top 10 states</b>	<b>47,712</b>
	<b>Contribution of Top 10 African states</b>	<b>15,233</b>

Source: United Nations 2021h.  
 Note: African States Highlighted.

The ratio of four out of ten countries in the Top 10 remains to be true when only considering the three types of military personnel, where African states represent 34.72% of the military on the ground.