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Securing Africa

Local Crises and Foreign Interventions

Edited by

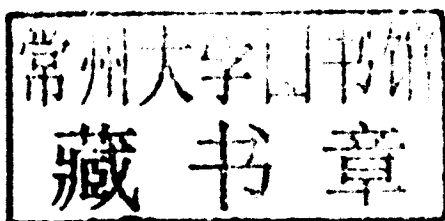
Toyin Falola and Charles Thomas



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Introduction

The Changing Conception of African Security

Charles Thomas

The desire for security is the foundation for human society. The earliest formation of human groups existed to offer safety in numbers, with a larger population more able to protect itself as well as lose members while sustaining the society as a whole. As society became more stratified, this conception broadened, with the idea of security expanding beyond the person to the institutions of society itself. Political structures used to guide the formation and governance of society needed to be secured to insure stability for the population living under them. Economic networks required security to make certain of their continued prosperity in the face of banditry and theft. Before long, the newly-formed concept of the state required securing against violence upon itself and those that lived within it, insuring the general good and thus fulfilling the social contract. So implicit was this requirement that even to this present day the state is essentially defined by its ability to provide security. Max Weber offered the baseline of the state as that which "upholds the claim to the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force in the enforcement of its order." Under Weber's conception, the state and its legitimacy is ultimately defined by the state's ability to be the lone actor able to project force within its boundaries- thus providing security to all those under its purview from both internal and external foes. As such, all other interactions of the state, be they economic, social, or political, ultimately rest on the ability of the state to provide security to its population and structures. This reliance upon security is as essential in Africa as it has been anywhere else across the globe.

Much of the recent work on Africa has in fact been defining its role within the global realm in the past and present. A good amount of this has been seen as a corrective to the decades of work that portrayed (and on occasion continue to portray) Africa as a passive backdrop for the interactions of the rest of the world. As noted by Ian Taylor, "Africa has never existed separate from the world but rather has been inextricably entwined in world politics and has continually exercised its agency."¹ Work such as Taylor's continues to expand upon the role that Africa has played politically within the global realm, while scholars such as A. G. Hopkins continue to explore the cultural and economic exchanges involving Africa during

globalization.² However, as noted these political, economic, and cultural exchanges still ultimately relied on the expansion and provision of security. With Africans being consistent actors on the global stage in all spheres, they are necessarily global security actors as well. Despite this, little work has been done on the history of Africans within global security, despite the enduring bonds between the local and global in this critical realm. Even as the nature of security within and without Africa has changed throughout history, Africans have always been involved within the expanding world and the securing of societies within it.

PRECOLONIAL AFRICA AND SECURITY (C. 1500 BCE TO 1885 CE)

Africa before colonization saw a vast plethora of societies rise and fall. Powerful centralized kingdoms such as Ghana and Zimbabwe remain the touchstones for early scholars but were certainly not alone. The decentralized Swahili city-states on the East Coast of Africa connected into the vast network of the Indian Ocean, creating economic and political connections across a multitude of cultures. However, in these early states, the idea of security remained generally similar. The authorities of the state required stability and protection. More than anything else, the concept of security was formed around the ruling regime, with their interests being essentially indistinguishable from those of the state. Those who provided the physical security to the state ultimately did so to protect the authority of the rulers of the state and expand their interests. As such, on a very basic level the idea of security was that of soldiers, who fought for the state and imposed the laws and economic principles favored by the ruler, as well as projecting the ruler's desires beyond the borders of the state. It was at these boundaries and within the exchanges that Africa and Africans became entwined within the expanding state networks in the world.

African participation in global security can be traced back to these pre-colonial societies and their roles in providing stability and safety. Some of the earliest interactions of Africans within the security sphere can be traced to Pharaonic Egypt. Nubian archers were hired troops within the army of the Old Kingdom pharaohs. The foundation of the New Kingdom of Egypt lay in its casting out of the Hyksos, a feat that rested squarely upon the shoulders of the Nubian Medjay mercenaries of Khamose. The XXVth Dynasty of the New Kingdom is also known as the Nubian dynasty following the conquest of Upper and Lower Egypt by the Nubian kingdoms to the south. African soldiers continued the interactions with the Mediterranean in the classical period, serving the Ptolemies following the Macedonian conquest of Egypt. The early Roman Republic found itself fought to a draw by a Carthaginian trading empire that relied heavily on Numidian troops of Berber descent. Scipio Africanus' eventual victory in the Second Punic

War can be traced to his own establishment of relations with the Numidians, which allowed him to hire away the potent Numidian light cavalry from the Carthaginians and thus deny them some of their most effective forces. Even at the height of its Empire, Rome felt the need to deal on even terms with African kingdoms. As Sudanic Meroe declined, the Romans encouraged the local Noba to settle within the Meroitic territory to secure the southern frontier of Egypt. The Ethiopic kingdom of Axum extended their territory to the region of Yemen, occupying it and struggling with the Sassanid Persians for control of Arabia itself in the late sixth century of the Common Era (CE).

The expansion of Islam reached Africa early on, with Islam spreading into Egypt along with its concept of the *Dar al Islam*³ and *Ummah*.⁴ This had the effect on integrating Africa within a greater globalizing force, that of Islamic culture. However, even as the idea of *Ummah* encompassed African civilizations and offered differing social and cultural foundations, the primary vector for security remained that of the state even as Africans fought to expand and protect the Islamic world. Sudanic soldiers remained in the pay of Egypt even as it was incorporated into the expanding caliphate.⁵ The Almoravids clashed with the Empire of Ghana in North Africa and absorbed many of their communities when Ghana began fragmenting in the eleventh century. These same Almoravids and their successors the Almohads of North Africa provided powerful reinforcements for the Muslim communities of Andalusia before conquering those communities in turn to add to their own growing state. In the east the Indian Ocean trade, which had incorporated the Middle East, South Asia, and East Africa for generations, had also sent Africans far across the sea as soldiers and slaves. Of course Africans were not only involved in the spreading of the *Dar al-Islam*. The Zanj revolt during the Abbasid Caliphate saw African slaves take up arms and take the city of Basra from Caliphate forces in one of the largest slave revolts of history from 869–883 CE.⁶ During the long struggle to reclaim the Levant during the Crusades, the emerging European Christian states recalled some of the power of the African kingdoms of the east, resulting in the hazy remembrance of an Ethiopic Prester John. This contained a powerful wish for the re-engagement of African power on the side of the Christians—one that they were largely unaware had already occurred with the Christian kingdom of Makuria on the Nile during the seventh century. However, Makuria could never substantively re-engage with the greater Christian world and so remained unknown or at best mythical to many of the Crusader states.

While the balance of interactions between the local and global at this point remained close to equal, with Africa remaining an equal partner within the security of the global Islamic world and limited interactions with Christian Europe, the balance would shift decisively away from Africa in the fifteenth century with the dawn of what would be dubbed “The Age of Exploration” by European historians. At the beginning of the sixteenth century,

Europeans had the sailing technology to undertake long voyages to West and West Central Africa, but the states there, whether the Songhay Empire or the Kingdom of Ndongo, had no matching ability to visit Europe. As such, Europeans had a far greater ability to act upon the Africans than the Africans had to act upon them. The Portuguese took immediate advantage of this, interfering with the local kingdom's struggles for power and even succession to foster a military dependency. In West Central Africa this led to military innovations falling upon both parties as the African kingdoms learned to incorporate European troops and firepower while the Europeans themselves needed to alter their own methods of warfare to effectively intervene in African issues. By the first several years of the seventeenth century, West Central Africa had become a region of intense competition, where European powers negotiated military and economic alliances with African kingdoms in an attempt to safeguard their economic and political ties to the region.⁷ Rulers such as the legendary Queen Nzinga took advantage of the local crises and competition to negotiate the Portuguese and their maritime rivals the Dutch against one another. Nzinga's plans were finally stalled out by the intervention of a Brazilian army under the control of the Portuguese.

During the same time period, the Portuguese crossed the Cape of Good Hope and entered the Indian Ocean World. While the West African groups did not have long-distance maritime traditions, the peoples of the East African coast had been engaged in maritime competition with the whole of the Indian Ocean for a millenium. In addition, these East African states were closer to other rivals that were opposed to the Portuguese encroachment in their trading spheres. As such, while no power could yet reach Portugal, fierce military competition began throughout the monsoon states. Portugal fought vicious struggles along the East African coast to maintain their toeholds on the Indian Ocean, founding strongholds like Fort Jesus in the venerable city of Mombasa.⁸ Struggles to maintain even this presence saw the Africans involved in negotiation and contestation with not only the Portuguese, but also the Ottoman Turks and the Omani Arabs. It was not until the end of the seventeenth century that the lines were finally drawn, with the Portuguese remaining in their Southern African colonies on the Zambezi,⁹ the Omanis having seized the island of Zanzibar and with suzerainty over much of the East African coast, and the Africans having entered a long period of negotiation and absorption of both peoples. The eighteenth century saw the continued swirl of the slave-gun cycle wars; the large African states that dealt with the Europeans and Arabs were caught up in primarily internal struggles as they competed for paramountcy in the slave trade. However, aside from the coastal enclaves, the "factories" within which European powers did their business, there were few foreign incursions into Africa even as the Africans had little direct foreign trade themselves. The European powers for the most part had neither the ability nor motive to conquer the states of Africa

militarily. Portugal maintained its significant *prazos* along the Zambezi and maintained its dominance in Angola, but overall the period was one of increasing local crises brought on by the mounting costs of the slave trade. Even as these crises were reaching their end point, a new process was bringing on an even greater foreign intervention.

Calls for the end of the slave trade began in the late eighteenth century and persisted past the turn of the nineteenth. The most powerful of the maritime nations, Great Britain, abolished the slave trade in 1807 and subsequently outlawed slavery throughout its Empire. While the practice would endure in some areas of the world, this marked the decline of the Atlantic slave trade and the beginning of increasing British (and later European) intervention into African affairs to stop the slave trade. These interventions often took the form of military interdiction, a practice that would see the Royal Navy deployed across the Atlantic and Indian Oceans in an attempt to crush the African slave trade. By the late nineteenth century the security of the local African states had been compromised to an unprecedented degree. With the failing of security structures in the face of aggressive expansion of European interests, local political and economic structures began crumbling as well. This in turn led to the vulnerability of African states to the even fuller intervention of the Europeans in the colonial era, an era that would redefine Africa's place within the global order and consequently its role in global security.

COLONIAL ERA (1885–1960)

The colonial era was a comparatively short period of time. Less than a hundred years separated Leopold II of Belgium's ambitions in the Congo and the following scramble from the sudden and often violent withdrawal of European control. However, in terms of the political, economic, and cultural life of Africa it was irreversibly transformative. The same transformation was undertaken in the conception of security within Africa. The European expansion into Africa marked a period of resistance where the traditional security apparatuses of African states fought and ultimately failed against the militaries of industrial Europe. After the states and their guardians were cast down, African security was redefined with far-reaching consequences. The new guardians of society no longer were concerned with the imposition of African social and economic stability. Now, those Africans involved in the security of Africa and beyond were charged with securing the metropole and its interests.

In terms of the colonial conquests, there are ample examples of histories of the African resistance to the campaigns of European conquest waged by Britain, France, Germany, Italy, and Belgium. Groups as diverse as the Zulu,¹⁰ the Somalis,¹¹ the Asante,¹² and the Swahili notables of the coast¹³ were all involved in resistance to the Europeans and this resistance is well

documented and appreciated by historians. However, while the Europeans often disposed of superior firepower due to their technological advantages, the oft-referred to "Maxim Gun" among others, they also continued their historic tradition of intervening in political struggles in order to gain local allies for their conquest. Rival Chaga rulers in the region of Kilimanjaro negotiated with the Germans for their own ends, with Marealle, a young and ambitious leader, even joining military forces with a German expedition he incited in order to overthrow his rivals.¹⁴

Local African leaders and states did not solely negotiate with Europeans to dispose of their local rivals; many rulers were shrewd enough to negotiate with their would-be colonizer's rivals to provide themselves with an edge. While no European power would go to war with another to protect an African state, commerce in weapons was another matter entirely. The West African state of Samori Ture benefitted from the colonial rivalry between Britain and France. While Britain would not take Samori's land under their rule when Samori offered it to them in 1885 to hold off French aggression, they did agree to sell Samori repeating rifles in large quantities.¹⁵ These rifles dramatically increased the military capability of Samori's disciplined army, which managed to slow French colonial expansion to a crawl and even won several victories against them between 1886 and 1898. While ultimately unsuccessful, Samori showed the capabilities of Africans to resist colonial conquest by targeted negotiation with other industrial states. This concept was even more dramatically shown by the Kingdom of Ethiopia under Menelik. While Britain and France both jostled in the Horn of Africa for control of the Red Sea, neither completely appreciated their Italian rival nor its imperial ambitions. As such, Menelik was able to negotiate with Italian and French sources for arms and ammunition, eventually equipping a large part of his force with firearms by the early 1890s.¹⁶ By the time the Italians undertook their attempted invasion of Ethiopia, they encountered an African army equipped almost entirely with modern weaponry. This, in concert with the Italian's disastrous plan of advance, led to the most significant defeat of any colonial power. The Battle of Adowa would stand for the next hundred years as the shining example of Africa's ability to resist European power even as the majority of the continent fell under colonial control.

The context of the colonial state brought forth new dimensions of African agency within the realm of security. With British, French, Belgian, Italian, and German colonial control on the rise, there was now the need for manpower to secure the new economic, political, and social structures that were attendant upon the colonial project. Even within the early period of colonial expansion, African participation within the colonial security apparatus was embraced. As early as 1857 the French formed the *Tirailleurs Senegalaise*, a force of African soldiers in French service, trained and equipped as European forces under French officers.¹⁷ These African forces took an active part in France's expansion of its colonial authority

and enforced French rule within its colonial territories. In exchange, these mostly volunteer forces gained privileged status within the French colonial state above and beyond those of most Africans under French rule. The British followed the same pattern, establishing forces such as the West African Frontier Force in their West African territories,¹⁸ and the King's African Rifles in Central and East Africa.¹⁹ The African peoples that chose to serve were generally accorded the title of "martial races," which created a separate and privileged military caste, firmly binding them to the British colonial structure. This structure was also mimicked by the Germans in their own colonial forces, with the African peoples that volunteered for service in the largest numbers most often seen as the most warlike and loyal and therefore were given a more exalted place within the colony itself.²⁰ Given the rapidly changing economic and political realities brought on by colonial conquest, the choice of Africans to serve the new colonial states in a military capacity was certainly a reasonable one. In exchange for service the colonial African soldier was paid a generous wage, was generally immune to most colonial prosecution, had many social and cultural fringe benefits among his fellow colonized peoples, and could often look forward to a small pension at the end of his service.

This new integration of African security issues into European colonial structures occurred at a momentous time. By the early twentieth century the lines drawn in the 1885 Berlin Conference now were the borders of functioning colonies, but in less than a decade these colonies, and their African soldiery, would be plunged into the global conflict which began in Europe. In 1914 Senegalese Tirailleurs were already serving on the Western Front, helping their colonial power hold back the German onslaught.²¹ While France would be the only colonial power to use its African troops to ensure its domestic security, the conflict also boiled over into Africa itself. French and British African troops fired some of the first shots of the conflict in their invasion and occupation of German Togo; a struggle that saw some of the first clashes exclusively between Africans in the struggle between their colonial states.²² Before long all of the major colonial powers had leapt into action in an attempt to preserve their own colonial interests while reducing their opponents' own capabilities. German Kamerun was overrun by British and French-led African forces while German Southwest Africa was conquered for the British Empire by reconstructed South African forces under the former Boer commando generals Louis Botha and Jan Smuts. However, all of these campaigns paled when compared with the German East African campaign, a sprawling affair that saw the African colonial troops of Britain, Belgium, and Portugal arrayed against those of the Germans in a savage conflict that lasted from 1914 until past the armistice of 1918. The loyalty of the Africans to their colonial officers in these conflicts remains the most stressed feature of this campaign, but the flexibility and interaction of the African soldiery with the changing security context remains evident. Toward the end of the conflict a full battalion of

British King's African Rifles were formed from captured or deserted German colonial troops. These soldiers served the British as well as they had the Germans and formed the nucleus of the postwar security apparatus of what became Tanganyika.²³ Far from thoughtless followers, the Africans negotiated the issues of inter-colonizer conflicts in ways that maintained their own advantage within the colonial society.

The interwar years saw the continued integration of African soldiery into the colonial security structure. Local agitation was often met by African gendarmes or soldiers, which by the late 1930s had become indispensable in holding together the African territories of their metropolises. However, the context of African service would again change with the advent of another global conflict. France again called on its African soldiers to take part in resisting the Germans and thousands were interned in Europe following the rapid collapse of metropolitan France in 1940.²⁴ Those French military forces that escaped the occupation of their home and wished to continue their struggles looked abroad to the colonies for sustenance and the African soldier and his home now became a central depot for the Free French forces. As to the British, the dark days following the blitzkrieg through France meant that all ends of the Empire were called upon to fight. In 1941 the British East African soldiers, assisted by Ethiopian partisans, effectively overthrew Italian East Africa, securing the Horn for the Allied forces for the remainder of the war.²⁵ Following this feat of arms and given the British Empire's weakness in their eastern territories, for the first time British African troops served abroad. Now no longer simply provincial security for their colonies, the British East and West African forces became part of the global conflict in Burma, where they fought the Japanese in the Kabaw Valley.²⁶ With the final defeat of the Axis, the African forces returned to their homelands, but the strains of the war, the promises the Allies had made, and the new ideas that had spread among the international contingents would change the security context of Africa yet again in the coming decades.

DECOLONIZATION, INDEPENDENCE, AND THE COLD WAR (1960–1991)

With World War II and its aftermath having fatally weakened the Great Powers that held colonies in Africa, security became a contentious question for Africa within the global context. While many Africans traced the stability of their society to the colonial structure and the security it offered, many nationalists seized the chance to reassert their local control over the African state. As such, in the early days of decolonization there was competition between two opposing conceptions of security—one which relied upon the continued understanding of the security needs of the metropole and one which insisted on the devolution of security concerns back to the

African societies. This clash of concerns would play itself out in the process of decolonization and take different forms in various African states.

Many African colonies were able to negotiate their independence with the metropolitan power. In French colonies such as Senegal and Chad the populace agitated and was granted political independence from the French state upon their acceding to membership in the French community. While not all of the former French colonies accepted membership within the community and the community itself quickly ran into difficulties, it still defined the future security arrangement for much of French Africa. While there was small local devolution of security issues to the now autonomous states in the form of limited militaries or gendarmeries, the balance of security concerns fell to France itself. As such, in the former French colonies the French interest remained paramount as far as security went. The process played out far differently within the majority of the formerly British territories. Britain had no equivalent agreement to that of the French community and instead placed their former colonial forces within the purview of their now-independent states. While this process would seem to give the African states what they wished, it instead revealed the extremely complicated issues of decolonizing a colonial military. Due to the recruitment and privileging of the martial races during the colonial eras, these groups rarely participated in the nationalist agitation that had led to independence. As such, there was often a social gap between the newly independent state government and the military, which itself had not been created nor trained to defend the independent state. This then manifested in a series of violent praetorian actions on the part of the soldiers, ranging from coups to mutinies in the early years of independence.²⁷ This same pattern played out in the Belgian Congo, where the ethnic differences and lack of support for the postcolonial state led to a military revolt and security collapse that is generally cited as evidence of a Belgian attempt to reassert control.²⁸ In each of these cases, the negotiated removal of colonial control led to a redefinition of security within the state, albeit not always to the benefit of the African populations.

However, in just as many cases, the two models of security violently clashed as the colonizer and colonized fought bloody wars to assert control over their lands. Early liberation struggles were fought in Algeria and Kenya. The Algerians of the *Front de Liberation Nationale* began their struggle in the city of Algiers and continued it in the countryside after French colonial and metropolitan troops crushed the urban insurgency. The Land of Freedom Army of the Kikuyu (known to the British as the Mau Mau) fought a guerrilla struggle from the Aberdare forests in Kenya. Although the movement would be crushed by both British and African troops, the struggle set the stage for the negotiated liberation of the colony. However, the most enduring of the struggles were those in southern Africa against the Portuguese control of Angola and Mozambique,²⁹ and the white settler colonies of Rhodesia and South Africa.³⁰ In all of these cases, extended guerrilla

conflicts occurred against the entrenched political, economic, and security interests of the colonizers. The Portuguese finally withdrew following the Carnation Revolution at home, but the struggles against the settler states would take much longer to resolve.

Each of these decolonization struggles was taking place within an international context that itself defined the interactions of those fighting in terms of global events. The Cold War had begun in earnest in 1956 and formed a bipolar struggle between the competing superpowers of the United States and the Soviet Union. The long reach of the struggle and its pervasive currents of ideology and financial support colored all aspects of African security as the states struggled to define themselves and their struggles within the capitalist or communist camp or as a non-aligned party.

The leaders of Africa took advantage of the context of the Cold War to help mold the security of their states. Leaders such as Mobutu Sese Seko in Zaire (née Congo) accepted their roles as proxies in exchange for the tools required to secure their own power and influence. Mobutu's alignment with the United States carried him to the pinnacle of his state and strengthened his control on the state. The superpowers also became involved in both sides of the struggle to liberate southern Africa. The wars to liberate Angola nationalist factions represented both poles of international power. The *Movimento Popular de Libertacao de Angola* (MPLA) was backed by the Cubans and Soviets, while the *Frente Nacional de Libetracao de Angola* (FNLA) was fed arms and support from the United States via Mobutu until their disintegration. These international dynamics continued even after the liberation struggles were over and the MPLA was instead struggling against the South African and American-backed *Uniao Nacional para a Independencia Total de Angola* (UNITA) for political control of the state itself.³¹ Even the conventional military struggles in Africa were colored by African negotiations of global security dynamics. These interactions were at their most absurd in the Ogaden War of 1977–1978, where Ethiopia swapped patrons from the United States to the Soviet Union, prompting the latter to halt their support for Said Barre's Somali invasion.³² The war was decisively won by Ethiopia thanks to the subsequent tidal wave of Soviet military hardware and training, which could not be matched by Somalia's new (and Ethiopia's former) patron, the United States.

While the Cold War dynamics created a bipolar context for the emergent struggles for African security, Africa itself began searching for ways to interact more effectively on the international scale. In 1963 in Addis Ababa, the decolonized states of Africa, formed the Organization of African Unity (OAU). Intended to both define the rules by which African states would relate to one another and also serve as a body for adjudication, the OAU was the first Afrocentric organization that was concerned with the security of the continent as a whole. Whether defining the borders of the decolonized states or affirming the sovereignty of the individual governments internally, the OAU would govern the international relations and security

of African states, even without any formal security forces themselves. This continent-wide initiative would also see the creation the regional organizations to deal with the international contexts of security issues. In 1975 the Economic Organization of West African States (ECOWAS) was formed. While, as the name states, it was originally a vehicle for economic cooperation, its framework allowed for eventual agreements on local security and military cooperation. Essentially, with the Africa emerging into a world that was increasingly international in outlook, Africans worked to create their own international bodies to secure African interests.

None of this is to say that Africa ignored the existing international bodies following their independence. The United Nations (UN) was a central pillar in the international interactions of African security. Ethiopian troops participated in the UN force fighting in Korea in the 1950s. The UN first intervened in Africa in the Congo Crisis, with Sec. Gen. Dag Hjammerksold demanding the removal of Belgian troops from separatist Katanga. The unfolding crisis eventually saw the United Nations take affirmative action to hold together the fragmenting country and suppress the rebelling factions.³³ Although the actions of the United Nations within the Congo Crisis were open to criticism, afterward the UN remained a respectable partner in African security during the Cold War. In 1989–1991, the final steps of the Cold War in Africa, the removal of foreign military forces from Angola and Namibia, were overseen by the UN, which completed the decolonization of Africa at same time that the global Cold War was ending.

ERA OF GLOBALIZATION (1992–PRESENT)

The years 1989–1991 saw the capitulation of the Communist Bloc with its final destruction signaled by the dissolution of the Soviet Union at the end of 1991. With the consequent cessation of the Cold War and its financial, political, and military infrastructure from Africa, the security of African states changed considerably. Conventional conflicts continued, but their connections to the global outlook now took a different turn. Former colonial powers or communist patrons no longer had the resources nor willingness to intercede directly on a large scale.³⁴ While these dynamics had already begun asserting themselves in the First Liberian Civil War (1989–1996), where ECOWAS had been the primary intervener in the conflict, these would quickly become the norm.³⁵ Increasingly regional, continental, or global organizations became the primary sources of intervention in African security issues. While the removal of direct national interventions was welcome, these new frameworks of military security did not always have the necessary guidance to fully secure their charges. The 1994 genocide in Rwanda was notable as much for the failure the UN security forces as it was for the mass violence that the *genocidaires* inflicted upon the populace. The 1998 Civil War in Sierra Leone also saw its ECOWAS–provided troops