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Title of the thesis:

**CHARACTERISTICS AND SPECIFICITIES OF CONFLICTS IN AFRICA,
FEATURES AND EFFORTS TO ADDRESS THEM
FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF HUNGARIAN SECURITY POLICY**

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Introduction to the topic

Human history is largely a series of political and military conflicts. After the great world wars of the 20th century, the international order established by the victors raised hopes of a significant reduction in wars, civil wars and other armed conflicts. However, this hope has only partly been realised: while the world order defined by the great powers has managed to contain many local or regional conflicts, the end of the Cold War and the break-up of the Soviet Union have led to a growing number of 'genie in the bottle' movements and the resurgence of previously repressed conflicts. The hoped-for world peace, the 'end of history' (Fukuyama), seems less and less likely. However, the characteristics of political-military conflicts seem to be changing: in a globalising world, even seemingly local conflicts are rapidly taking on global significance.

The struggle for independence of African colonies in the second half of the 20th century also failed to bring about peaceful coexistence between countries on the continent. Peoples and ethnic groups, in many cases previously separated only by natural formations, inherited the arbitrary borders drawn by the colonialists.

Peoples with foreign languages and cultures were placed side by side in a state, while related ethnic groups often found themselves on opposite sides of the state border, which already coded many later conflicts. The

Western-style political system, based on democratic elections, had no tradition and at many points clashed with surviving tribal-ethnic traditions, which, in addition to ethnic frictions and general economic underdevelopment and poverty, also exacerbated internal conflicts. The situation on the continent became particularly critical from around the turn of the millennium, when the influence of the former colonial powers had already declined significantly and the interest of the major powers in African politics had temporarily waned. In the meantime, new powers have gradually emerged – notably China, but also India and other politically and economically stronger countries, Russia is trying to regain its former influence and Islamic radicalism has emerged as a new power factor. All of these represent a different and divisive political, economic and cultural influence, a different pattern of civilisation, in Samuel Huntington's terminology, in African states. This is particularly the case in those regions of the continent where, for historical reasons, culturally and ethnically unified nation-states could not be established. The 'civilisations' (the West, China, Russia and the Islamic world) have been fighting each other, often in the form of proxy wars fought by local forces, for influence over a politically and economically unstable continent. The so-called 'second race' (Gábor Búr) for Africa has been launched, which has made it topical to reinterpret the problems that have long been present on the continent. In addition to global efforts to gain influence, a number of local conflicts, for different reasons, are also increasing tensions in many regions of Africa. Most often, these can be explained by ethnic and

cultural differences, struggles over natural resources, and underdeveloped economic and political cultures. Local political forces are generally unable to resolve these conflicts peacefully, and the international political community sees the need for peaceful intervention. However, experience so far shows that these peacekeeping operations are generally unable to achieve lasting results and social change, partly due to their limited political and military mandate.

Aims of the research, hypotheses

In my thesis, I therefore set out to examine in depth the characteristics of African conflicts and their specific contextual framework. After a thorough review of the literature, the picture that emerged is that the causes of local or regional conflicts are to be found in the geopolitical tensions inherited from the colonialists, traditional tribal-ethnic conflicts, religious differences, struggles over limited natural resources, low levels of political culture (typically authoritarian political structures) and restrictions on human rights. These types of conflict, sometimes distinct and sometimes intertwined, are responsible for the fact that most of the armed conflicts in recent decades have emerged or resurfaced on this continent. It is often difficult to see the exact causal system of a political conflict and therefore very rarely possible to resolve it in the short or medium term, a situation that is exacerbated by the fact that the typically chaotic political structures generally lacked the capacity

or the real will to do so. This certainly explains the fact that most peacekeeping operations have so far been launched by international organisations in Africa.

Overall, reconciliation attempts and peacekeeping operations initiated by the UN, the African Union or other organisations or countries do not present a positive picture. In my thesis, I have sought to shed light on the precise reasons for this – insufficient political-military authority, weak military strength, logistical failures and shortcomings, limited material resources for the scale of the task and often inadequate cultural and linguistic preparation of the deployed – and formulated my first two hypotheses on the basis of my preliminary assumptions. However, my study of the literature and sources also revealed that Hungarian foreign policy and military leadership committed to participating in international peacekeeping operations performed very well, even in operations that were otherwise doomed to failure, according to international feedback. It was the verification of this observation that led me to formulate my third hypothesis.

In my thesis I wanted to prove the following hypotheses:

1. Only a small percentage of peacekeeping operations in Africa are considered successful in the longer term, and it can be concluded that the various international organisations need to change their political approach and their specific military-logistical methods in order to make African peacekeeping missions more effective. This requires identifying

the specific causes of local conflicts and adapting the programme of action accordingly.

2. The course of the conflicts in Mali and Darfur and the way in which they have been handled by peacekeepers show that the overall capacity of the African Union and other African regional organisations to resolve conflicts in Africa is not yet adequate, nor is their political transparency and lack of interest. The effective management of local and regional conflicts at the current level of development of the continent, and in particular the Sahel region, cannot be achieved without the involvement of international organisations (UN, EU, NATO and the major powers with an interest in the region).

3. The role of Hungarian missions and soldiers has contributed greatly to the partial results of the peacekeeping missions of various organisations, thus strengthening the credibility of Hungarian foreign policy efforts. The main reasons for this are neutrality of interest in the conflict, good training, a high degree of organisation and good communication taking into account local conditions.

Research methodology

I divided my thesis into five chapters according to the planned course of my research. First, I examined the concept of conflict, in particular the defining features of political and military conflicts, on the basis of the

relevant national and international literature, and concluded that researchers have approached this issue from a variety of perspectives – historical, economic sociological, ethnological, religious, ethical and, more recently, ecological – but that the individual disciplines alone have not been able to provide a fully satisfactory answer. The causes and manifestations of a contemporary local or international political conflict, often armed, are so complex that only an interdisciplinary approach, drawing on the results of several disciplines, can provide a credible interpretation.

In the second chapter, I narrowed down the scope of the research to African conflicts and to the definition of their characteristics and typology. In doing so, I have come to the conclusion – based on extensive literature – that the specific nature of an African military conflict is that, among many similar causes, certain counter-types, such as disputed border issues, problems arising from the co-existence of diverse ethnic groups, the persistence of tribal-religious traditions in a more modern state structure, abject poverty and corruption, which often pervades and paralyses state life, are widespread, common or one might say 'over-represented'.

After the conceptual interpretations, in the third chapter I analysed the functioning of international peacekeeping operations, a modern form of armed conflict management, with a special focus on the evaluation of the activities of African missions. In this chapter, in addition to

processing the literature, I also drew on the results of my own source research: I processed some 2,000 pages of archival material (the National Archives of the Hungarian National Archives, the material of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (i.e: HU-MNL-OL (National Archives of the Hungarian National Archives) -XIX (higher organs of state administration)-J (foreign affairs) fond group -1 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs) fond-j (TÜK, i.e. the repository of secretly managed files)), which contained diplomatic correspondence on peacekeeping in Africa between 1987 and 1995 and gave me insights into the nature of conflicts in Africa and enabled me to examine the effectiveness of local and regional conflict management. In addition, over the past years I have conducted several interviews with former peacekeepers, now retired military officers, who served in the field during the operations I have studied, which, in addition to providing a better understanding of the local conflicts, has helped me to assess the activities of Hungarian soldiers and police and the quality of their work.

Finally, in the fourth and fifth chapters – further narrowing the scope to the sub-Saharan region – I conclude my thesis with an analysis of the causes, immediate antecedents, course and attempts to resolve the conflicts in Darfur and Mali, using my own previous work in addition to the literature. This professional approach also confirmed that I had correctly formulated my hypotheses.

Results, verification of hypotheses

After the first two chapters of my thesis, in which I examined the concept of conflict and political and armed conflict and the typical forms in which they are most frequently manifested in African countries, I began to verify my hypotheses by consulting other sources and applying new research methods.

To this end, at the beginning of this chapter I summarised the political objectives, theoretical foundations and practical workings of peacekeeping, as well as its history in Africa. Based on my research and a review of the international literature, I have concluded that peacekeeping began after the Second World War, with the creation of the United Nations in 1945, and that this consensual form of international political intervention in Africa – and the academic consensus on this point is unanimous – was motivated primarily by national and inter-national military conflicts, which can be seen as a political legacy of the colonial past, and that even the first official UN missions – the Palestine and ONUC (1960-1964) Congo missions – were virtually fruitless, and that subsequent international operations have mostly led to failure or only partial and temporary results. It can be said that one of the reasons for the failure of international efforts has been symptomatic treatment, by which I mean that in many cases they have failed – often the participants have not even tried – to identify and eliminate the real causes of the conflicts, but have only advocated the achievement of a ceasefire and, if it is

achieved, have advocated political solutions that have already been tried and tested in the West, but which local societies have mostly failed to integrate. In many cases, the goals of international political intervention could not be shared by the local political forces, which were in conflict with each other, and often the intervening powers or former colonial powers diverted the process from its original intentions.

The main architect of the principles of peacekeeping and its translation into political practice was UN diplomat Dag Hammarskjöld, under whose leadership the UN sought to avoid or minimise interference in the internal affairs of the countries it was helping. The small political mandate thus given – quite understandable in a post-war political context – was a major reason for the little more than symbolic importance of early peacekeeping missions. After the initial limited results, international diplomacy sought to increase the political and military mandate of the missions, as evidenced by the introduction of the concept of peacekeeping alongside that of peace-building.

The effectiveness of peacekeeping operations was jeopardised by a number of factors in addition to those described above. Both my archival and oral sources clearly attest to the fact that the effectiveness of the contingents deployed in the African context was greatly reduced by dysfunctional state institutions, logistical difficulties (long distances, supply problems, poor infrastructure), ethno-cultural fragmentation and often difficult-to-understand local interests. In my case studies of two

extensive sub-Saharan conflicts with regional and even international implications (chapters four and five), I have elaborated on this in detail, describing the complex causal system of political antagonisms and the persistence of armed conflict. In more than one case, corrupt state-military leaderships exploiting ethnic and economic antagonisms at the systemic level see peacekeeping units as a means to legitimize their power internationally.

In order to analyse the role of UN peacekeeping, I also examined armed conflicts in several African countries (Congo, Angola, Namibia, Mozambique, Rwanda, Sudan, Mali), using Hungarian archival and oral sources, in addition to literature and documents from international organisations. With few exceptions, the various types of sources have virtually unanimously confirmed my hypothesis about the relative failure of UN peacekeeping operations. In this context, I also had to clarify what is meant by the concept of effectiveness in this context, because an international intervention with a limited scope cannot be expected to, for example, completely transform the political system and ensure its sustained good functioning. Results can be interpreted in relation to the objectives pursued (achieving a ceasefire, disarmament, preparing and securing parliamentary elections, helping to provide security and supplies for the population, etc.), but it can be concluded that international peacekeeping operations have, with few exceptions, not produced lasting results. The failures of these efforts are particularly well illustrated by the

conflicts in the sub-Saharan region, which I have described in detail, and by the evolution of international conflict management.

Overall, therefore, UN missions have generally had little lasting impact, mainly due to a lack of knowledge or superficial treatment of the local conditions and the depth of conflicts, which justifies the conclusion that, in order to be effective, the UN needs to change its methods and political approach, which have been ineffective for many decades.

A similar conclusion was reached in proving my second hypothesis, that the independent peacekeeping efforts and military missions of the African Union and other regional organisations are even less successful. To prove this claim, it is also necessary to briefly look back to the not too distant past. After the disappearance of African colonies and the emergence and consolidation of independent states, the need arose for local forces to resolve local conflicts. The reason for this was partly to erase the bad memory of the colonial period and partly to demonstrate the political maturity and equality of African states. To this end, the Organisation of African Unity was set up in 1963 and has continued to operate under the name of the African Union since 2002.

The African Union was quickly confronted with the many conflicts that needed to be resolved and set up its own African Peace and Security Organisation (APSA), a specialised organisation for local conflict resolution, which launched African-led peacekeeping operations in cooperation with AU regional organisations. The APSA has been

criticised for its inability to carry out its tasks without external resources and for the often untargeted and suboptimal use of these resources. An EU report in 2018 highlights the following typical shortcomings and deficiencies: the need to strengthen the financial and institutional capacity of the AU and regional organisations, the lack of real political will to address conflicts in many cases, the lack of an appropriate mechanism for implementing decisions, weak cooperation between the different bodies and institutions and insufficient cooperation with local government bodies with similar objectives.

These experiences are confirmed by my own sources. Both Hungarian diplomatic reports in the archives and retired peacekeeping officers report that the local experience with African missions is not good: there is a constant lack of resources, logistical problems arise on a daily basis, language and cultural difficulties are common and the level of training of African soldiers and peacekeepers is low. Another recurrent criticism in the literature on the subject is that in many cases African missions are not functional, but become part of the conflict: they become embedded in the chain of corruption or represent the interests of their own government rather than the intended objective. The latter problem arises particularly when a politically and economically more powerful African country is given the right to lead a peacekeeping mission.

All these operational difficulties were also encountered in my detailed examination of the Darfur and Mali conflicts, where I discussed

separately the role of international and African peacekeepers (AMIS I-II-III operations in Darfur and AFISMA and EUTM missions in Mali) and the success of their mission. In almost all cases, historical examples show that operations launched under the auspices of the African Union have stalled, failed to achieve their objectives and have therefore had to rely on the assistance of other international organisations (which is why, for example, UNAMID, a hybrid operation between the UN and the African Union, was launched) or other missions launched from outside Africa have had to deal with the chaotic political and military situation that has developed (such as Operation Serval in Mali, launched by France).

To sum up, the research carried out has clearly confirmed my hypothesis (Hypothesis 2) concerning the political and military potential of African peacekeeping missions and has also highlighted the intrinsic links between armed conflicts in Africa and peacekeeping operations initiated by African states, which need to be understood in order to ensure more effective international operations in the future.

My archival sources and in-depth interviews were particularly helpful in proving my 3rd hypothesis. In my earlier studies of peacekeeping operations, I noticed that, compared to the relative failure of the missions, the Hungarian contingents participating in each mission were perceived very well, not only by the Hungarian government and military sending agencies, but also by the host countries. Due to its relatively minor importance in the past, there is not much literature on

this topic, so the new sources have certainly been of great help to the research work.

The documents on the subject clearly show that the role of Hungarian missions and soldiers has contributed greatly to the partial results of the peacekeeping missions of various international organizations, thus strengthening the credibility of Hungarian foreign policy efforts. In examining the reasons for this, I became aware of several factors. One of the most important of these was the political neutrality of the sending party. The purpose of the Hungarian military, law enforcement, medical or logistical contingents always coincided with the goal of the international mission and the long-term interests of the host country (not even the Angolan operation launched during the Kádár-era, where the Hungarian side's perception was not negative despite its clear political commitment to the interests of the Soviet Union, and thus the demand for our participation in the mission remained even after the regime change). This neutrality of interest is a conscious policy that can be traced to this day: with the Chad mission currently under way, Hungary has not offered its help to end hostilities or to settle a political situation, but to maintain order and security in the only practically stable state in the sub-Saharan region, and to prevent the emergence of possible conflicts. (There is also an ulterior and not hidden political interest behind this mission: the Hungarian government is investing financial resources in preventive measures in the remote African country in order to prevent the mass

influx of refugees to Europe that is expected to follow the complete political collapse of the sub-Saharan region.)

Another factor contributing to the effectiveness of Hungarian peacekeepers is the relatively high level of training and the good level of cooperation that goes with it. According to our sources, our soldiers and policemen have often tried to overcome chaotic situations, even at the cost of breaking administrative regulations, to ensure proper supply of the areas entrusted to them and to maintain order. Their cooperation has won the sympathy not only of the local authorities and population, but also of other foreign peacekeepers. Our oral sources – the peacekeeping officers we interviewed – may of course be somewhat biased in this respect, but official documents and relevant literature confirm this in substance. It should be noted that my research also revealed the shortcomings of Hungarian peacekeepers. A professional and political evaluation of their activities revealed that it would be advisable to provide them with more in-depth knowledge in order to better adapt to local conditions, for which, in addition to better language skills, experts (Besenyő) recommend a targeted cultural anthropology training as part of the pre-mission training programme.

The assessment of the activities of Hungarian peacekeepers is important not only or not even primarily from a moral point of view, but also because the contingents sent on missions represented Hungary and had an impact on the international perception of Hungarian foreign

policy. A country with a small political weight like Hungary does not, of course, pursue specific ambitious political goals on a distant continent, but it itself represents the international or alliance system of which it is a part (UN, EU, NATO), and good political relations with local countries can be economically fruitful in the medium or long term. The Hungarian political leadership, together with many other countries, including those in Eastern Europe, is confident that Africa is on the verge of significant economic development if political chaos can be prevented (for example by curbing jihadism). The fact that Hungary does not follow the logic of blocking in Africa, but is also interested in extensive economic cooperation with other foreign countries present (for example, Hungary's participation in the large-scale railway development in Egypt or the already launched major road and bridge construction project in Congo), may be attractive for many local countries.

On the basis of the above, I can conclude that my third hypothesis can also be considered justified and that I have thus achieved my research objectives.

Summary, outlook

To summarise the research succinctly, I believe that I have succeeded in structuring the five chapters in a logical and coherent manner and in writing a meaningful dissertation, in the course of which I have been able

to prove the hypotheses put forward. As the chapters progressed, I have tried to support my research with as many primary and secondary sources as possible. In the first chapters I researched the meaning of conflict, I tried to find a comprehensive definition of conflict and then of conflict in Africa by using the literature available, and then in the second chapter I tried to analyse, typify and break down African conflicts into parts in order to better understand the meaning of the concept. The third chapter, in which I used primary sources to seek answers to justify my hypotheses, was a key chapter in the writing of my dissertation. By using the primary knowledge extracted from the long archival work and interviews I conducted, as well as the secondary literature, I was able to confirm my initial hypotheses and hopefully provide new perspectives for future security policy analysis. In the fourth and fifth chapters, I also confirmed my third hypothesis by presenting case studies – the Darfur and Mali conflicts – from a new perspective. In the light of all this, I am confident that the arguments of my thesis will prove convincing and will enrich academic thinking with new and substantive insights.

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