

# H-Diplo | Robert Jervis International Security Studies Forum

## Roundtable Review 14-27

Emizet F. Kisangani and Jeffrey Pickering. *African Interventions: State Militaries, Foreign Powers and Rebel Forces*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022. ISBN: 9781108444941

17 July 2023 | PDF: <https://issforum.org/to/jrt14-27> | Website: [rjissf.org](http://rjissf.org)

Editor: Diane Labrosse  
Commissioning Editor: Frank Gerits

Production Editor: Christopher Ball  
Copy Editor: Bethany Keenan

### Contents

---

Introduction by Frank Gerits, Utrecht University .....	2
Review by Seung-Whan Choi, University of Illinois at Chicago .....	4
Review by Benjamin Fordham, Binghamton University (SUNY) .....	7
Review by Dennis Foster, Virginia Military Institute .....	10
Review by Patrick A. Mello, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam .....	15
Response by Emizet Kisangani and Jeffrey Pickering, Kansas State University .....	19

---

## Introduction by Frank Gerits, Utrecht University

---

Emizet F. Kisangani and Jeffrey Pickering have written a groundbreaking analysis of African international relations. As a historian of international history, with a particular interest in Africa, who also teaches courses on International Relations Theory (IR) I can only applaud its appearance. Increasingly my colleagues, who combine international history and IR theory, and I are presenting students with a critical reading of IR theory. Rather than go through Realism, Liberalism, Marxism, and Constructivism in an overview, we present them with the critical perspectives on these theories: feminism, postmodernism, and more historical approaches to international relations. It often leads to fierce debate and sometimes disappointment, because students tend to arrive in class with fixed ideas of what IR theory looks like. The Global South and Africa are always part of our new way of looking at IR, because the diplomacy on the continent tends to not confirm to Westphalian logic, while “classical” or “neo” IR theories have a tough time capturing the complexities of a continent shaped by colonialism and exploitation. While arch-realist Hans Morgenthau had already in the 1950s explored the continent’s position in international relations, IR theorists have always struggled with integrating Africa in their analysis.<sup>1</sup>

New work in political theory and new book series are beginning to provide an important response to this glaring absence.<sup>2</sup> *African Interventions*, however, is remarkable because it not only provides a critique of existing theories, but also, in the words of reviewer Patrick A. Mello, offers an “exemplary combination of historical narrative with statistical techniques and qualitative comparative analysis.” It combines an unconventional topic in IR—Africa—with a classical levels-of-analysis approach with the domestic-level driver, a transnational driver, and a systemic driver. Dennis Foster highlights a “singular contribution” of the book in its finding that diversion from domestic unrest is a consistent feature across external and intra-African supportive and hostile interventions.

Those interested in methodology who will find much to enjoy in this roundtable. While the reviewers agree that the book is informative and persuasive, they all have questions about the balance between quantitative and qualitative analysis. As Foster notes, the authors’ statistical findings are convincing precisely because they are supported by a detailed analysis of the implications. The authors rely on the International Military Interventions (IMI) dataset, which codes nearly 1500 interventions from 1946 to 2015 to prove that border fixity (the unwillingness to adjust the borders of African countries), the socially constructed self-conception of states, and the presence of rebel groups are the main variable that drive interventions.<sup>3</sup> Seung-Whan Choi makes the case for a comparative qualitative analysis where Africa could be compared to Europe, Asia, and the Middle East, while pointing to rebel movement theory to further enrich our understanding of African interventions. Mello, who points out that the combination of quantitative and qualitative data has become increasingly more popular in the field, nevertheless urges the authors to expand their quantitative analysis of role theory. Similarly, Benjamin Fordham argues the authors should have spent more time fleshing out the logic behind the specific roles of African states, such as the regional role of Guinea or the former colonial role of France and Great Britain.

Overall, *African Interventions* raises important questions and suggests many compelling explanations because it mixes quantitative and qualitative methods. The book points to a discipline that has become less nervous about combining methods and more aware of the need to integrate history into the analysis. As such the

---

<sup>1</sup> Hans J. Morgenthau, “United States Policy toward Africa,” in Calvin Stillman, ed., *Africa in the Modern World* (Chicago IL: University of Chicago Press, 1955), 317–28.

<sup>2</sup> Adom Getachew, *Worldmaking after Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self-Determination* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019); An example of the *Worlding Beyond the West* book series is A. Layug and John M. Hobson, *Globalizing International Theory: The Problem with Western IR Theory and How to Overcome It* (London and New York, NY: Routledge, 2022).

<sup>3</sup> Jeffrey Pickering and Emizet Kisangani, “The International Military Intervention Dataset: An Updated Resource for Conflict Scholars,” *Journal of Peace Research* 46 (June 29, 2009): 589–99.

book, and perhaps this H-Diplo Roundtable itself, will also serve as an interesting teaching tool for students who want to learn about international relations as a discipline.

### Participants:

**Emizet Kisangani** is a Professor in the Department of Political Science and the Security Studies graduate program at Kansas State University. A three-time Fulbright Scholar, he is the co-author of *The Democratic Republic of Congo: Economic Dimensions of War and Peace* (Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2006) with Michael Nest and François Grignon, which was cited as an Outstanding Academic Book by Choice for 2006. His work has appeared in *African Studies Review*, *American Journal of Political Science*, *British Journal of Political Science*, *Comparative Political Studies* and other outlets.

**Jeffrey Pickering** is a Professor in the Department of Political Science and the Security Studies graduate program at Kansas State University. He is a recipient of the International Studies Association's (ISA) Quincy Wright Distinguished Scholar Award and has served as editor in chief for the ISA journal *International Interactions* and as co-editor of the ISA journal *Foreign Policy Analysis*. His work has appeared in *International Studies Quarterly*, *American Journal of Political Science*, *British Journal of Political Science*, *Political Research Quarterly* and other outlets.

**Seung-Whan Choi** is Professor in the Department of Political Science at the University of Illinois at Chicago. His research interests include nationalism, terrorism, international conflict, and research methods. His work has been published in prestigious journals such as the *American Journal of Political Science*, *British Journal of Political Science*, *International Studies Quarterly*, *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, *Journal of Peace Research*, *Oxford Economic Papers*, and elsewhere. His recent books are *Emerging Security Challenges: American Jihad, Terrorism, Civil War, and Human Rights* (Praeger, 2018) and *New Explorations into International Relations: Democracy, Foreign Investment, Terrorism and Conflict* (University of Georgia Press, 2016).

**Benjamin Fordham** is Professor of Political Science at Binghamton University (SUNY). He received his PhD from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in 1994. His research focuses on the influence of domestic political and economic considerations on foreign policy choice, especially in the United States. His work has appeared in journals such as *International Organization*, *International Studies Quarterly*, and the *Journal of Conflict Resolution*. He is currently working on a series of articles about the politics of multilateralism in American foreign policy during the last century.

**Dennis Foster** is Jackson-Hope Distinguished Professor and Head of the Department of International Studies and Political Science at Virginia Military Institute. His research, which has appeared in such outlets as the *British Journal of Political Science*, *International Studies Quarterly*, *Political Psychology*, the *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, and *Foreign Policy Analysis*, focuses on the domestic impetuses of international conflict (economic difficulties, individual and interactive leadership psychology, and legislative behavior), democratic institutions and terrorist violence, and nuclear proliferation.

**Patrick A. Mello** is Assistant Professor of International Security at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. His research focuses on international security, foreign policy analysis, and comparative methods, particularly Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA). His books include *Democratic Participation in Armed Conflict: Military Involvement in Kosovo, Afghanistan, and Iraq* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014) and *Qualitative Comparative Analysis: An Introduction to Research Design and Application* (Georgetown University Press, 2021). He is also co-editor of the *Routledge Handbook of Foreign Policy Analysis Methods* (Routledge, 2023).

---

Review by Seung-Whan Choi, University of Illinois at Chicago

---

I study the causes and effects of international conflict, and I rely on quantitative methods to generalize my findings. Although my regional focus is not Africa, I agreed to review Kisangani and Pickering's *African Interventions* to broaden my knowledge. I find this book extremely informative and persuasive. The book is a must-read for anyone interested in learning the cause of the turmoil in African countries. Since the book employs a mixed-methods approach that combines quantitative, qualitative, and historical methods, it is accessible to a range of scholars, policy-makers, and journalists, regardless of their methodological backgrounds.

Much existing research on African interventions appears to be heavily qualitative and historical.<sup>1</sup> Its authors make a case based on a single case or a small number of countries. They are strong in illuminating particulars of individual military interventions, but weak in identifying general patterns across time and space. When they examine findings collected by quantitative researchers, they tend to dismiss them on the grounds that numbers do not tell the whole truth.<sup>2</sup> Much research in the area of African politics is siloed, given that it is largely based on historical examples. This is unfortunate, given that the best scholarly work could be done by collaboration between qualitative and quantitative researchers.

Kisangani and Pickering's *African Interventions* is a brilliant work that bridges the gap between qualitative and quantitative research. It starts with rigorous statistical analyses that show the factors that contributed to the outbreak of military interventions across African countries during the period from 1960 to 2015 (chapter 1). Quantitative scholars, who are in search of general patterns among African interventions, may appreciate empirical results reported in table 1.3 on pages 37-38 (and the appendixes). At the same time, one may wish to see a more detailed discussion about individual military interventions to grasp how specifically each of the interventions was determined by Kisangani and Pickering's main explanatory variables. If so, chapters 2 to 5 fill out the details by discussing the causes of military interventions by and into Rwanda. By drawing on quantitative, qualitative, and historical approaches, Kisangani and Pickering take great pains to simplify the complex and complicated process of African military interventions. The result is a clearly written book.

Kisangani and Pickering present three theories for why African countries engage in military interventions. They argue that African leaders are likely to launch military campaigns: (1) when they need to divert public attention from domestic problems to foreign affairs so that they can hold onto power as long as possible (diversionary war theory); (2) when they need to punish rebel groups that harbor in a neighboring country and are hostile to their regime (rebel movement theory); and (3) when they see themselves as foreign policy actors that can make a difference in African politics (role theory). After testing these three causal mechanisms quantitatively, qualitatively, and historically, they conclude that "transnational rebels and rivalry will figure prominently in future military interventions on the continent" (267).

This conclusion suggests that rebel movement theory provides the most compelling guidance in answering the question of why military interventional patterns in Africa are unique in the world. The evidence from the mixed-methods approach overwhelmingly gives credence to the conclusion. The evidence is particularly compelling since Kisangani and Pickering engage in comparison analysis by examining military interventions across three continents: Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Given that Africa is the only continent in which political violence is on the rise, Kisangani and Pickering's efforts to highlight the uniqueness of African interventions are welcome. The evidence could have been more compelling, however, if they had included

---

<sup>1</sup> Linnéa Gelot and Adam Sandor, "African Security and Global Militarism," *Conflict, Security & Development* 19: 6 (2019): 521–542; Robin Luckham, "The Military, Militarization and Democratization in Africa: A Survey of Literature and Issues," *African Studies Review* 37: 2 (1994): 13-75.

<sup>2</sup> Seung-Whan Choi, *New Explorations into International Relations: Democracy, Foreign Investment, Terrorism and Conflict* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2016).

more comparison continents, such as the Middle East and Europe. Alternatively, they could have created six regional dummies (Africa, Americas, Asia, Europe, Middle East, and Oceania) and plugged them into Model 1 (all countries), which appears in table 1.3 (37-38), in order to track how Africa plays out against the others. In addition, the use of interaction terms between sanctuary—Kisangani and Pickering’s variable that measures rebel activities—and each regional dummy could further substantiate their important finding that punishing rebel groups is the main cause of African interventions.

Chapters 2 to 5 provide detailed explanations of what creates different types of military interventions: external interventions by colonial powers and non-colonial states; African interventions in favor of and against the incumbent government; and African interventions into failed states. Without doubt, these interventions are the five most salient conflicts. If space were allowed, I would add two more chapters: one with all kinds of interventions that could have appeared before chapter 2, and the other on humanitarian interventions that should have followed chapter 5. In chapter 1 and the other chapters, readers may get a glimpse of the stories that I wish to tell in those two added chapters.

Before Kisangani and Pickering underscore the uniqueness of African interventions, they could include a more comprehensive statistical analysis regarding the causes of overall military interventions across continents. This chapter could further enforce Kisangani and Pickering’s rationale for focusing on Africa over the other continents. Since the demise of the Cold War, humanitarian military interventions have become more prevalent. Although there is an abundance of existing studies on humanitarian interventions, it would be useful to learn how humanitarian interventions in Africa differ from those in other continents.<sup>3</sup>

Chapters 4 and 5 contain five subsections by sub-region (East, Central, Southern, North, and West Africa). These sections guide readers through the intricacies of hostile or supportive military interventions. These sections offer ample historical and anecdotal examples through country case studies that will be useful for qualitative researchers. The exhaustive list of intervening countries is impressive: Kisangani and Pickering do not seem to have missed any major African country that initiated military interventions during the study period from 1960 to 2015. At the same time, as an empiricist, I am curious whether the qualitative insights are consistent with the quantitative results that could be obtained after those five sub-regions are incorporated into Africa (Model 4) in table 1.3.

Kisangani and Pickering delve into military interventions carried out by major powers including the United States and France, but provide a sketchy analysis of those by China, since the book’s period of study ends in 2015. China did not flex its muscles at African countries up until President Xi Jinping came to power in November 2012. The arrival of Xi Jinping drastically changed the strength of Chinese influence over African countries, though not necessarily militarily. For example, “Chinese FDI stocks in Africa grew nearly 100-fold over a 17-year period—from \$490 million in 2003 to \$43.4 billion in 2020, peaking in 2018 at \$46.1 billion. That makes China Africa’s fourth largest investor, ahead of the United States since 2014.”<sup>4</sup> Given the rapidly expanding role of China in Africa, a sequel to this book on the rivalry between China and the United States in Africa would be welcome.

Another possible venue that can be further explored is the relationships between rebel/terrorist groups and military interventions. Are these two phenomena positively related to each other? Do military interventions

---

<sup>3</sup> Seung-Whan Choi and James Piazza, “Foreign Military Interventions and Suicide Attacks,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 61: 2 (2017): 271-297; Seung-Whan Choi, *Emerging Security Challenges: American Jihad, Terrorism, Civil War, and Human Rights* (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2018); Choi, “What Determines U.S. Humanitarian Intervention?” *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 30: 2 (2013): 121-140; Choi, Youngwan Kim, David Ebner, and Patrick James, “Human Rights Institutionalization and U.S. Humanitarian Intervention,” *International Interactions* 46: 4 (2020): 606-635; Piazza and Choi, “International Military Interventions and Transnational Terrorist Backlash,” *International Studies Quarterly* 62: 3 (2018): 686-695.

<sup>4</sup> Yike Fu, “The Quiet China-Africa Revolution: Chinese Investment,” *Diplomat*, November 22, 2021.

increase activities of rebel/terrorist groups or vice versa? More importantly, is Africa distinctive in its relationships between rebel/terrorist groups and military interventions? After the fall of the Islamic State group and the return of the Taliban in Afghanistan, global jihadi terrorist groups are looking for a new haven where they can reorganize and thrive. Not surprisingly, global jihadi terrorism has quickly risen in Africa.<sup>5</sup> Will the rise of global jihadism in Africa impact the nature of military interventions by African countries? Will the rise of global jihadism change the choices of African countries that they must make when pondering about what interventions should be launched, pro or anti-hosting government? Scholars, who possess the in-depth knowledge and statistical skills, could easily write a compelling study of the rise and fall of terrorist groups in Africa. In doing so, they could offer further “analytical tools to help understand such increased intervention and the influences that lead different African and non-African states to send troops” (268).

---

<sup>5</sup> Wukki Kim and Todd Sandler, “Middle East and North Africa: Terrorism and Conflicts,” *Global Policy* 11: 4 (2020): 424-438; see also Choi and Davis Brown, “Islam and Suicide Terrorism: An Empirical Analysis,” *Global Studies Quarterly* 2:1 (2022): 1-14; Choi, “Terrorist Campaigns and the Growth of the Muslim Population,” *Japanese Journal of Political Science* 22:1 (2021): 40-56.

---

 Review by Benjamin Fordham, Binghamton University (SUNY)
 

---

*African Interventions* is the result of its authors' many years of research on military intervention around the world. They have repeatedly updated the International Military Intervention (IMI) data originally compiled by Frederic Pearson and Robert Baumann, greatly extending the time span it originally covered.<sup>1</sup> They have produced a series of insightful analyses of these data, such as their work on non-hostile military interventions as a form of diversionary behavior.<sup>2</sup> In this book, they turn their attention to Africa, a specific region of the world that has been the subject of separate line of research by Ezimzet Kisangani.<sup>3</sup> The expertise the authors bring to bear on this project is evident in the multiple methods they use, as well as in the detailed historical narratives they provide on African political conflicts and military interventions since 1960. In this review, I highlight several of the book's key contributions, then set out several areas where further research—either by the authors or others following in their footsteps—seems especially urgent.

The authors' decision to focus specifically on interventions in Africa and by African states since 1960 highlights the value of research conducted within historical bounds. Cross-national work on conflict typically examines the broadest possible sample, often the entire international system over a very long period. Focusing on a more limited slice of space and time, as this book does, has frequently overlooked benefits. One is that the narrower focus produces a more homogenous sample that permits more realistic estimates of what is going on within it, including some effects that might be submerged in a broader sample. In this case, a preoccupation with threats from rebels strongly influences intervention decisions by African states. Rebels matter elsewhere, of course, but the extent to which they supplant threats from other states in Africa is unusual. The norm of border fixity is also a special feature of the African setting, though, as I will explain later, the evidence in the book raises questions about its universality. Another strength of the focus on Africa is that it offers a corrective to theoretical arguments that are rooted in the experience of major powers and developed countries. Interstate rivalry and alliances appear to be less important in shaping the behavior of African states than that of the major powers. The point is not that empirical analyses and theoretical arguments focused on any particular set of states are wrong, but rather that the patterns they reveal and explain are bounded in time and space. Empirical analyses that ignore these bounds may underestimate (or miss entirely) relationships that are very important within them.

A second important strength of the book is the dataset it employs. The authors have been collecting data on international military interventions for many years. Since our discipline often gives more credit to the users of data than to those who gather it, this effort alone deserves recognition. The historical narratives in the book, with the sources they cite, will also make it easier for future researchers to refine the quantitative data to better fit other theoretical arguments about intervention. The IMI data employed in the book are better suited to answering the questions the authors ask about specific influences on foreign policy choice than are some other, more widely used datasets. Interventions, as the authors define them (7-8), are a very specific and readily observable choice: moving troops across international borders. By contrast, the incidents included in the Militarized Interstate Disputes (MID) dataset are much more broadly defined.<sup>4</sup> They include many incidents not immediately tied to state policy choices, and exclude some that are. For instance, the MID data do not generally include the benevolent and neutral interventions included in the IMI data because these do

---

<sup>1</sup> Frederic S. Pearson, and Robert A. Baumann, "International Military Interventions: Identification and Classification," *International Interactions* 14:2 (1988): 173-180.

<sup>2</sup> Emizet F. Kisangani and Jeffrey Pickering, "Diverting with Benevolent Military Force: Reducing Risks and Rising above Strategic Behavior," *International Studies Quarterly* 51:2 (2007): 277-300.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Michael Nest, with Francois Grignon, and Kisangani, *The Democratic Republic of Congo: Economic Dimensions of War and Peace* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2006); and Kisangani, *Civil Wars in the Democratic Republic of Congo, 1960-2010* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2012).

<sup>4</sup> Glenn Palmer, Roseanne W. McManus, Vito D'Orazio, Michael R. Kenwick, Mikaela Karstens, Chase Bloch, Nick Dietrich, Kayla Kahn, Kellan Ritter, and Michael J. Soules, "The MID5 Dataset, 2011-2014: Procedures, Coding Rules, and Description," *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, 39: 4 (2022): 470-482.

not always meet their definition of conflict. This is not a coding error: these incidents really are not disputes, as the MID coding rules define the term. However, they are decisions by state leaders to use military force. This conceptual difference may explain why, for instance, France engaged in 89 military interventions in Africa between 1960 and 2015 but only initiated 69 militarized disputes *worldwide* during this same period. The MID data are a valuable contribution to conflict research, but the disputes they include are a more heterogeneous lot than those in the IMI data. No dataset is suitable for every analytical purpose. Studies of foreign policy choice, as opposed to international conflict escalation and outcomes, are better served by data that are extremely specific about the choice being made.

Third, the authors present striking findings on several specific points. Their results concerning the role of rebel movements and of foreign policy roles are especially important. Perhaps the most surprising findings concern the impact of domestic political and economic troubles on intervention. The analysis suggests that diversionary pressures arising from these conditions play a much broader role in motivating international military intervention than most previous cross-national quantitative research has found.<sup>5</sup> The difference may be due to the distinctions the authors make among different types of interveners. The samples of former colonial powers, non-colonial major powers, and African states are each more homogenous than those examined in most cross-national research, and might respond to domestic conditions more uniformly. The differences in the conflict data they use, which are noted in the last paragraph, might also be responsible. Whatever the reason, the result deserves the attention of scholars working on this topic.

Moving beyond its contributions, some elements of the book's theoretical argument could benefit from further development in future research. First, the international roles that states define for themselves are one of the three main components of the book's explanation for intervention, along with domestic politics and border-crossing rebel movements. These roles, "widely shared understanding of a state's purpose in global affairs," are defined by key historical experiences, including the founding of the state (25).<sup>6</sup> The number of these roles which state leaders believe they hold affects intervention by major powers other than former colonial powers, as well as African decisions about interventions in failed states (37, 41). The historical narratives offer evidence that specific roles, rather than just their number, also influence intervention. For instance, French policymakers understand their role as a former colonial power differently than do British policymakers, resulting in a much larger number of French interventions in former colonies (86, 118). Similarly, policymakers in Guinea and Senegal appear to accord themselves a greater regional role than do policymakers in other West African states, acting more aggressively to establish and support friendly leaders in neighboring states (203-5). The logic behind these specific roles is more compelling than that behind counting the number of roles a state plays. The authors have discovered something important, but the concept of international roles needs further development. We need an account of their origins so that we can know when a specific role conception explains behavior better than capabilities, alliance ties, or other related considerations.

Second, the authors' discussion of domestic politics focuses on the possibility that state leaders might use foreign intervention to divert attention from political and economic problems at home. As noted earlier, their findings on this point are one of the most striking and important things about the book. However, diversion is not the only way that domestic politics that could influence intervention. For instance, the authors offer both quantitative and qualitative evidence that cross-border ethnic ties make a difference for many interveners (37, 41). Economic ties might play a similar role, creating potentially powerful factions in potential interveners with vested interests in other states. This could be true for major powers from outside the

---

<sup>5</sup> For a review of the literature on diversionary foreign policy, see Benjamin O. Fordham, "More Than Mixed Results: What We Have Learned from Quantitative Research on the Diversionary Hypothesis," *Oxford Encyclopedia of Empirical International Relations Theory*, vol. 2. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018): 549-64.

<sup>6</sup> On role theory, see Cameron G. Thies and Marijke Bruening, "Integrating Foreign Policy Analysis and International Relations through Role Theory," *Foreign Policy Analysis* 8:1 (2012): 1-4.

continent as well as for African states considering their neighbors.<sup>7</sup> Future research should look beyond diversionary pressures when considering the domestic politics of foreign intervention.

Like many good books, this one also raises some potentially interesting questions that it does not completely answer. One concerns the norm of border fixity. The book treats this norm as an established fact, something that leads national leaders to focus on internal threats from rebels rather than international threats from potentially predatory neighbors. However, the historical narrative, particularly the account of East African interventions in chapter 4 (145-66), raises questions about how secure and universal this norm really is. Despite border fixity, Ethiopia, Uganda, and Sudan all supported rebel movements that aimed at the division of neighboring states. Moreover, Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Somalia all sought territorial gains, and thus border revision, with varying degrees of success. The book recounts similar territorial disputes in North Africa. There were many fewer of these disputes in the western and southern parts of the continent. Is the border fixity norm simply stronger in these regions?

Another set of questions concerns the origins and character of interventions by major powers that had no African colonies. Compared to its activism in other regions, the United States did not intervene especially often in Africa during the Cold War era. When it did intervene, it often did so indirectly through local proxies. In some respects, Cuba and the Soviet Union were more active and intervened in more visible ways during this period. The book ties these differences to international role conceptions, but this argument still leaves us with the question of why these actors defined their roles differently. Relatedly, the United States became a more active intervener after the Cold War, eventually establishing the United States Africa Command (AFRICOM) to organize its military efforts to promote “good order” there (69). Did this development arise from a change in American policymakers’ understanding of their international role, the availability of new technologies like drones, or something else? Research to answer these questions might end up moving away from this book’s focus on Africa itself, but they are nevertheless interesting.<sup>8</sup>

Overall, *African Interventions* provides a great deal of food for thought about African military interventions. It presents many interesting and provocative findings about what drives these choices by various actors, and shows how to combine quantitative and in-depth qualitative historical research and could be a model for similar studies of other regions

---

<sup>7</sup> Examples of research on intervention evaluating this possibility include Michael G. Findley and Josiah F. Marineau, “Lootable resources and third-party intervention into civil wars,” *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 32: 5 (2015): 465-486; Fordham, “Power or Plenty? Economic Interests, Security Concerns, and American Intervention,” *International Studies Quarterly* 52:4 (2008): 737-758; Danielle Villa, Daniel Arnon, and Dan Reiter, “Causes of Foreign-Imposed Regime Change: The Signal of Economic Expropriation,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 66: 4-5 (2022): 651-676.

<sup>8</sup> Pickering and Kisangani, “The International Military Intervention Data Set: An Updated Resource for Conflict Scholars,” *Journal of Peace Research* 46: 4 (2009): 589-600.

---

 Review by Dennis Foster, Virginia Military Institute
 

---

My longtime colleague, mentor, and friend James Hentz, who passed away in February 2018, was a widely respected scholar of African conflict, and the founding editor of the journal *African Security*. Of the several lessons he imparted to me about his area of expertise, the most foundational is simply that Africa is different; for a wide variety of reasons, conventional theories of international relations just don't do a good job of describing, explaining, or predicting international conflict in Africa. While now familiar with a host of work on the subject, from Robert Bates to Christopher Clapham and Jeffrey Herbst, and from Paul Collier to Errol Henderson<sup>1</sup>, I believe that the most convincing statement of the reasons for these differences is given by Hentz himself, in an article published posthumously in the journal he edited:

Africa, while existing within the Westphalian state system, contains unique structural aspects of its own... that have profound implications on the behavior of states, the proclivity of armed conflicts, and their evolution... [F]or a useful structural theory of African warfare, specific attention needs to be paid to three unique aspects of the African state system: juridical statehood, neopatrimonial politics, and strained center–periphery relations.<sup>2</sup>

Emizet Kisangani and Jeffrey Pickering's *African Interventions: State Militaries, Foreign Powers, and Rebel Forces* begins from a very similar set of assumptions in its analysis of the causes and consequences of military interventions on the continent, both by African states and by external actors. In the course of developing an impressive and novel framework of analysis, an expansive new dataset, and a comprehensive set of empirical tests, Kisangani and Pickering make strong arguments and provide solid evidence for both for the uniqueness of Africa, and—somewhat surprisingly—the real possibility that some elements of our existing theories actually do a better job of explaining African interventions than it first may seem.

The book is one of big ideas from the start. In the broadest sense, Kisangani and Pickering try to bridge two disparate groups: IR (normally quantitative) scholars of interventions, who seek commonalities in explaining the causes of intervention across time and space without looking very closely at the uniqueness of context; and scholars of Africa, who excel in explaining the indigenous and/or unique causes of intervention with minimal reference to general trends and explanations. Following from the desire to maximize both external and internal validity, their analysis very effectively employs a blend of methods to try to explain African interventions as completely as possible, and they are to be lauded for their effort.

Border fixity in Africa—corresponding to juridical statehood—is the primary driver of their framework. The concept refers to the sacrosanctity of interstate borders in Africa that cut across ethnic and other boundaries, initially imposed by colonial powers but subsequently reinforced by African states themselves. Pickering and Kisangani identify fixity as the fundamental cause of African state weakness and, by extension, of several unique and crucial features of armed conflict in Africa. The absence of pressures generated by external interstate threat led to the absence of “capable state bureaucracies that could [both] collect revenue and finance external conflict... [and] provide effective governance within national boundaries” (4). As such, African countries have rarely been capable of extending their power to their internal peripheries, and non-state actors operating within those peripheries have become the dominant threat (with ‘archipelagos’ of governance reaching into areas of rebel control in border regions, resulting in center-periphery tensions). Add

---

<sup>1</sup> Robert Bates, *When Things Fell Apart: State Failure in Late Century Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Christopher Clapham, *Africa and the International System: The Politics of State Survival* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Jeffrey Herbst, *States and Power in Africa: Comparative Lessons in Authority and Control* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); Paul Collier and Anke Hoefler, “On the Incidence of Civil War in Africa,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 46:1 (2002): 13-28; and Errol Henderson, *African Realism? International Relations Theory and Africa's Wars in the Post-Colonial Era*, (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Press, 2017).

<sup>2</sup> James J. Hentz, “Toward a Structural Theory of War in Africa,” *African Security*, 12:2 (2019): 144-173, 151.

to the mix the colonial legacy of “divide and rule” policies among ethnic groups, and the recipe for recurring conflict—not to mention a unique set of impetuses for a variety of interstate interventions—is established.

The African framework being established, there are three “pillars” of Kisangani and Pickering’s theoretical model of intervention, corresponding to Kenneth Waltz’s three images: diversion (a domestic-level driver), rebel movement (a transnational driver), and role (a systemic driver).<sup>3</sup> First, interventions can deflect attention from dissension and unrest, and an overall positive association between these factors and intervention is predicted. But in Africa, “external” threats (as diversionary targets) are typically comprised of other groups within a country, or, if transnational, can result in attacking a non-state group receiving sanctuary in another state (a hostile intervention) or helping another government contend with a common cross-border threat (a supportive intervention). Under certain circumstances, even neutral or humanitarian interventions have the capacity to divert popular attention at lower risk, particularly for actors external to Africa.

Second, given that state weakness on the periphery facilitates rebel movement across African borders, the costs and risks of transnational interventions in one’s own self-interest are generally decreased: simply put, such interventions are less likely to be met with coordinated state response. Interventions involving rebels happen for a variety of reasons: when states ally with rebels in other countries; when host states delegate conflict to transnational rebels to weaken state and non-state rivals and avoid accountability; when states help each other in combating rebels who operate across borders; and when “safe havens” are established for rebel groups across borders. Though Kisangani and Pickering generally hypothesize that the presence of rebel groups in border countries is likely to lead to hostile interventions by home states into host states, the conditions facilitating rebel movement are most prevalent in Africa. As such, the hypothesis invites a richly detailed accounting of whether and when various types of interventions against African rebels are undertaken by African states or external actors, to ascertain whether Africa is unique on this dimension.

Finally, role theory stipulates that states’ actions in the international realm (including interventions) reflect their socially constructed self-conceptions of what their roles should be in the international system. Kisangani and Pickering reason that states with more roles are likely to discern more ways in which interventions are beneficial, and thus engage in the behavior with greater frequency. More specifically, they hypothesize that major powers are more likely to possess role conceptions that value the status quo, and therefore are more likely to engage in supportive interventions. Conversely, the self-perceived roles of non-major powers are probably more varied; as such, these states are more likely to engage in a mix of supportive and hostile military interventions.

To quantitatively test their hypotheses, Kisangani and Pickering developed the International Military Interventions (IMI) dataset, which codes nearly 1500 interventions from 1946 to 2015, about 450 of which take place in Africa<sup>4</sup>. Classifying interventions as hostile, supportive, or neutral, their descriptive statistics indicate that intra-African interventions have been overwhelmingly hostile, and have increased significantly in frequency since the end of the Cold War. Conversely, the volume of interventions by external actors in Africa dropped sharply after the Cold War, but they have become increasingly neutral (humanitarian), as opposed to generally supportive of host governments as in previous years. Such patterns fit well with expected changes in roles across external states commensurate with the dissipation of Cold War competition and the subsequent increase in systemic decentralization and a focus on humanitarianism.

A broad range of statistical tests (from pooled analyses of all interveners to subset analyses of interventions by colonial and non-colonial external powers and African states in Africa, as well as interventions in Latin

---

<sup>3</sup> Kenneth N. Waltz, *Man, the State, and War: A Theoretical Analysis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959).

<sup>4</sup> Jeffrey Pickering and Emizet F. Kisangani, “The International Military Intervention Dataset: An Updated Resource for Conflict Scholars,” *Journal of Peace Research* 46, no. 4 (2009): 589-599.

America and Asia to provide a point of comparison) provide rather strong support for Kisangani and Pickering's hypotheses. Both mass and elite unrest in intervening states are positively associated with intervention in Africa, for external and intra-African interventions alike; both colonial actors and African states are more likely to intervene given the presence of rebel sanctuaries in neighboring states; and the number of roles held is a positive and significant predictor of African intervention by colonial powers, even though it is an insignificant predictor of intervention by non-colonial powers (roughly mimicking the major/non-major power distinction in the fourth hypothesis) or African states. While the statistical analysis does raise some questions and leave others unanswered—such as some minor confusion in presentation and the absence of marginal effects analyses—the tests are carefully done and their potential shortcomings are noted up front by the authors. For example, Kisangani and Pickering take pains to limit the adverse impact of endogeneity arising from time-sequential mismatches between the independent and dependent variables, demonstrate that collinearity between explanatory and control variables (most importantly, between state power and the number of roles a state self-perceives) do not drive the findings of greatest interest, and seek to limit the effects of selection bias (arising from looking only at states that have actually intervened in Africa) by including a sample of non-interveners.

Much of the remainder of the book is dedicated to more finely-grained analysis of the implications of the statistical findings, using a combination of historical narratives and the employment of qualitative comparative analysis (QCA). The latter method, which relies upon Boolean logic to specify important causal conditions (defined in terms of necessity and sufficiency), analyzes decadal binary measures of the explanatory and control variables, and produces a host of nuanced findings about specific relationships and actors in the context of African intervention. For instance, narrative and QCA analyses more clearly demonstrate that in addition to power, rivalry, and alliance, role conceptions were instrumental in explaining interventions by non-colonial powers in Africa, particularly during the Cold War, in which the US, the USSR, and Cuba all intervened on the basis of ideological interest. The historical narratives of colonial incentives for intervention are particularly impressive, as is the identification of the importance of role conceptions to the divergence of French and British approaches: while “continued influence in Africa was central to France’s postcolonial identity” (141) and has resulted in consistent and significant intervention, the UK’s role conception was bound up in activities elsewhere, leading to a small number of neutral interventions. Finally, Kisangani and Pickering conduct analyses of hostile and supportive intra-African military interventions in East, Central, Southern, North, and West Africa, which generally bolsters the quantitative findings concerning hostile interventions against transnational rebel movements, and highlights cases in which state cooperation, interstate rivalry, and state weakness on the periphery alternately play dominant roles in determining outcomes.

Though the book clearly represents a singular contribution to the general study of intervention in Africa, its impact on our understanding of diversionary conflict—hinging on the finding that diversion from domestic unrest is a consistent feature across external and intra-African supportive and hostile interventions—ultimately might be just as substantial. Over the past twenty-five years or so, a (somewhat underappreciated) collection of work has developed on the use of force abroad for domestic political purposes. These contributions have moved far beyond broad claims of poor empirical results and the implausibility and/or immorality of the behavior, and towards a comprehensive if disparate treatment and parsing out of diversionary motivations; a fuller accounting of the factors that increase or decrease the likelihood that we observe diversionary violence; and analysis of a much broader range of diversionary settings and targets. Scholars have identified variations in the mechanisms by which armed diversion works, turning partly away from the socio-psychological “rally ’round the flag” phenomenon and recognizing that the use of force can

demonstrate managerial competence,<sup>5</sup> leverage political power over other intragovernmental actors,<sup>6</sup> and help to reset the national political agenda.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, the impetus for the political use of force often shapes the type of conflict in which states engage and, by extension, the enemies they target—or how, or whether, they use military force at all. In the realm of militarized foreign policy, the effect of risk on the likelihood of diversion should vary on the basis of what leaders are trying to accomplish politically: those who are trying to demonstrate competence by “pulling off a miracle” abroad should target more powerful states and incur greater risk,<sup>8</sup> while those looking for a quick burst of patriotic fervor at minimal risk seek quick victories against weaker foes. Exploring the variability of diversionary opportunity, some scholars have framed the political use of force as being most likely among major powers with broad foreign policy portfolios,<sup>9</sup> or against enduring rivals,<sup>10</sup> or against enduring rivals when initiators are not major powers.<sup>11</sup> In fact, states need not target other states: several works have found that armed diversion against non-state actors can accomplish political goals quite effectively.<sup>12</sup> Still others explore diversionary behavior short of the use of force, ranging from trade sanctions<sup>13</sup> to leadership rhetoric<sup>14</sup>

To be sure, Kisangani and Pickering are already notable contributors to the diversionary literature: among others is their important 2007 piece<sup>15</sup> on diversion through “benevolent military intervention,” something of a precursor to the book, which explicitly identifies non-hostile third-party interventions over ‘low politics’ (economics and humanitarian purposes) as being potentially just as impactful upon domestic politics (as agenda-setting tools) as are rally-generating hostile uses of force. But more effectively than any study to date, the theoretical framework in *African Interventions* interweaves insights about the myriad complexities of diversionary conflict into a nuanced, generalized theory, and uses it to explain diversion in a place where conflict often seems to defy explanation. The effects of border fixity in Africa on the diversionary incentives of many actors are profound, and they shape behavior in complex ways that are aggregately but separately anticipated by the several “tweaks” to diversionary theory outlined above. Given the state weakness and prevalence of rebel movement that result from fixity, non-state and sub-state actors serve as both the primary audiences and the targets of “rallies” stemming from hostile intervention by African states; at the same time, these factors ensure that the opportunity for lower-risk neutral/ideological (during the Cold War) and humanitarian, “agenda-resetting” (post-Cold War) actions in line with foreign policy master roles are in abundance for external actors. Indeed, Kisangani and Pickering’s discovery of the centrality of role to diversion represents an important potential alternative to (or, perhaps, a more comprehensive accounting of)

---

<sup>5</sup> Kyle Haynes, “Diversionary Conflict: Demonizing Enemies or Demonstrating Competence?” *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, 34:4 (2017): 337-358.

<sup>6</sup> Kenneth A. Schultz, *Democracy and Coercive Diplomacy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); David Brulé, “Congressional Opposition, the Economy, and U.S. Dispute Initiation, 1946-2000,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 50:4 (2006): 463-483.

<sup>7</sup> Karl DeRouen and Jeffrey Peake, “The Dynamics of Diversion: The Domestic Implications of Presidential Use of Force,” *International Interactions*, 28:2 (2002): 191-211.

<sup>8</sup> George W. Downs and David M. Rocke, *Optimal Imperfection?: Domestic Uncertainty and Institutions in International Relations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).

<sup>9</sup> James Meernik and Peter Waterman, “The Myth of the Diversionary Use of Force by American Presidents,” *Political Research Quarterly*, 49:3 (1996): 573-590.

<sup>10</sup> Sara M. Mitchell and Brandon C. Prins, “Rivalry and Diversionary Uses of Force,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 48:6 (2004): 937-961.

<sup>11</sup> Dennis M. Foster, “State Power, Linkage Mechanisms, and Diversion against Nonrivals,” *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, 23:1 (2006): 1-21.

<sup>12</sup> Jaroslav Tir and Michael Jasinski, “Domestic-Level Diversionary Theory of War: Targeting Ethnic Minorities,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 52:5 (2008): 641-664.

<sup>13</sup> David H. Clark, “Trading Butter for Guns: Domestic Imperatives for Foreign Policy Substitution,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 45:5 (2001): 636-660.

<sup>14</sup> Dennis M. Foster and Jonathan W. Keller, “Rallies and the ‘First Image’: Leadership Psychology, Scapegoating Proclivity, and the Diversionary Use of Force,” *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, 27:5 (2010): 417-441.

<sup>15</sup> Kisangani and Pickering, “Diverting with Benevolent Military Force: Reducing Risks and Rising above Strategic Behavior,” *International Studies Quarterly*, 51:2 (2007): 277-299.

the influence of state power on diversionary incentive and opportunity. As a scholar of diversionary conflict, I am aware of no more comprehensive and intelligent application of cutting-edge theory, and am eager to see augmentations to Kisangani and Pickering's approach, particularly in regards to studies of individual leader psychology.

*African Interventions* is an ambitious book. Emizet F. Kisangani and Jeffrey Pickering provide a sweeping account and empirical analysis of military intervention in Africa by former colonial powers, non-colonial foreign powers, as well as intra-African interventions. The book covers the time from the early Cold War to the current era. The quantitative analysis draws on Kisangani and Pickering's International Military Intervention (IMI) database, in an updated version that spans the time from 1960 to 2015.<sup>1</sup> Apart from its captivating accounts of the historical record of intervention into and within Africa, including some lesser known historical episodes, the book is also remarkable because of its thorough adoption of a mixed-methods approach, in a field where the historical context and causal complexity of military interventions are often neglected because they stand in the way of overarching generalizations.

Substantively, Kisangani and Pickering put forth an eclectic theoretical framework that differentiates between domestic, international, and transnational drivers of military intervention behavior (11–28). The domestic drivers argument largely rests on diversionary war theory, which derives its expectations from in-group/out-group dynamics and “rally around the flag” effects when there is a foreign adversary and open conflict with an out group. In turn, the international drivers focus on role theory and its emphasis on socially constructed foreign policy role conceptions and their implications for how states define their own interests vis-à-vis other states. Finally, rebel movement theory forms the basis for Kisangani and Pickering's expectations about transnational drivers. Here, the presence of rebel groups in neighboring countries is seen as a factor that can prompt hostile military intervention in the neighboring state.

Kisangani and Pickering employ a mixed-methods approach that aims to “untangle complex and competing causal stories” (30) using quantitative analysis, historical narratives, and qualitative comparative analysis (QCA). This methodological choice resonates with broader trends in the discipline, where the limitations of statistical techniques, despite their analytical rigor and utility for generalization, have become more widely acknowledged.<sup>2</sup> In some corners, multi-method research has come to be considered the methodological “gold standard” because it promises to overcome the limitations of individual methods through their combination.<sup>3</sup>

Consequently, *African Interventions* uses statistical techniques “to provide an initial foundation” for the historical and qualitative parts of the book (29). The results of the quantitative analysis are presented in a concise section of chapter 1, which is complemented by some additional tables in the appendix. The heart of the book, so to speak, are the historical narratives that provide a detailed examination of the intervention behavior of various actors throughout the observed timeframe, which are covered in five empirical chapters.

<sup>1</sup> Jeffrey Pickering and Emizet F. Kisangani, “The International Military Intervention Dataset: An Updated Resource for Conflict Scholars,” *Journal of Peace Research* 46, no. 4 (2009): 589–599.

<sup>2</sup> Bear F. Braumoeller and Anne E. Sartori, “The Promise and Perils of Statistics in International Relations,” in *Models, Numbers & Cases: Methods for Studying International Relations*, ed. Detlef F. Sprinz and Yael Wolinsky-Nahmias (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004): 129–151; Nathaniel Beck, Gary King, and Langche Zeng, “Improving Quantitative Studies of International Conflict: A Conjecture,” *American Political Science Review* 94, no. 1 (2000): 21–35; David Freedman, “On Types of Scientific Inquiry: The Role of Qualitative Reasoning,” in *Rethinking Social Inquiry*, ed. Henry E. Brady and David Collier (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2010): 221–236.

<sup>3</sup> See, for instance, Jason Seawright, *Multi-Method Social Science: Combining Qualitative and Quantitative Tools* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016); Gary Goertz, *Multimethod Research, Causal Mechanisms, and Case Studies* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017). However, the combination of multiple methods bears the risk of introducing new conundrums, such as ontological incommensurability. For critical perspectives, see Amel Ahmed and Rudra Sil, “When Multi-Method Research Subverts Methodological Pluralism—or, Why We Still Need Single-Method Research,” *Perspectives on Politics* 10, no. 4 (2012): 935–953; David Kuehn and Ingo Rohlfing, “Does It, Really? Measurement Error and Omitted Variables in Multi-Method Research,” *Qualitative & Multi-Method Research* 7, no. 2 (2009): 18–22; Michael Coppedge, “Speedbumps on the Road to Multi-Method Consensus in Comparative Politics,” *Qualitative & Multi-Method Research* 7, no. 2 (2009): 15–17.

Each of these also contains a QCA section that analyzes the conditions under which different types of interventions occurred.

In the concluding chapter of *African Interventions*, Kisangani and Pickering highlight the complexity of military interventions and note that “multiple, equifinal paths are required to shed adequate light on the use of interstate military force in Africa” (258). As expected, no single factor suffices to provide a comprehensive account of the phenomenon. Instead, the authors find that their empirical analyses underline combinations that involve strategic environments (as during the Cold War), mass unrest (as one form of domestic pressure), and role conceptions (especially when accounting for France’s numerous interventions during the observed time period). The authors also acknowledge limitations of their theoretical framework, for instance the difficulties of accounting for hostile intervention by non-colonial actors (259).

Before moving to some critical comments, one caveat is in order. While I have worked on military interventions and armed conflict, my own research focus has been on Western democracies as intervening countries, typically within the context of multinational military missions, for instance during the interventions in Afghanistan, Libya, and elsewhere.<sup>4</sup> For the most part, these are outside the scope of *African Interventions*. Hence, apart from some general observations, I will focus my comments on the use of QCA and its utility within a multi-method research design, also because the authors themselves hold the “mixed methods approach” (258) to be a key contribution of *African Interventions*.

While Charles Ragin originated QCA in 1987, it can still be considered an emerging method in international relations and conflict research.<sup>5</sup> Lately, an increasing number of applications using QCA and related approaches, especially in international security, foreign policy analysis, and conflict studies, have appeared.<sup>6</sup> Since its inception, QCA has undergone a dynamic evolution. This involves a growing consensus on standards of application and the development of specialized software for QCA and related methods.

This brings me to some observations regarding the use of QCA in *African Interventions*. To begin with, Kisangani and Pickering opt for the binary “crisp-set” variant of QCA, “since our dependent and many of our control variables are dichotomous” (43). While that is a valid point, it does not preclude the use of more fine-grained “fuzzy-sets,” especially because many of the variables used by the authors are not binary, including capabilities, regime type, the economic indicators, as well as the two indicators of public opposition to the governing regime (cf. 33). As I have argued elsewhere, “fuzzy-sets provide for more demanding tests of consistency and coverage,” and hence these should be preferred when the underlying concepts and the data allow for it.<sup>7</sup> Given the available data, it would have been feasible to conduct a fuzzy-set QCA, even with a

---

<sup>4</sup> Patrick A. Mello, “Curbing the Royal Prerogative to Use Military Force: The British House of Commons and the Conflicts in Libya and Syria,” *West European Politics* 40, no. 1 (2017): 80-100; Patrick A. Mello, *Democratic Participation in Armed Conflict: Military Involvement in Kosovo, Afghanistan, and Iraq* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); Patrick A. Mello and Stephen M. Saideman, “The Politics of Multinational Military Operations,” *Contemporary Security Policy* 40, no. 1 (2019): 30-37.

<sup>5</sup> Charles C. Ragin, *The Comparative Method: Moving Beyond Qualitative and Quantitative Strategies* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1987). Textbooks on QCA include Benoit Rihoux and Charles C. Ragin, eds., *Configurational Comparative Methods: Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) and Related Techniques* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2009); Carsten Q. Schneider and Claudius Wagemann, *Set-Theoretic Methods for the Social Sciences: A Guide to Qualitative Comparative Analysis* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Patrick A. Mello, *Qualitative Comparative Analysis: An Introduction to Research Design and Application* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2021).

<sup>6</sup> Tobias Ide and Patrick A. Mello, “QCA in International Relations: A Review of Strengths, Pitfalls, and Empirical Applications,” *International Studies Review* 24, no. 1 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.1093/isr/viac008>; Patrick A. Mello, “Qualitative Comparative Analysis,” in *Routledge Handbook of Foreign Policy Analysis Methods*, ed. Patrick A. Mello and Falk Ostermann (London: Routledge, 2023): 385-402.

<sup>7</sup> Mello, *Qualitative Comparative Analysis*, 103. See also Ingo Rohlfing, “The Choice between Crisp and Fuzzy Sets in Qualitative Comparative Analysis and the Ambiguous Consequences for Finding Consistent Set Relations,” *Field Methods* 32, no. 1 (2020): 75-88.

binary outcome (dependent variable). Alternatively, the authors could have reconceptualized the outcome to allow for gradations in the calibration. Since the dependent variable measures a country's intervention behavior throughout a decade, and assigns a "1" whenever "an actor initiated one or more interventions in that decade" (46), it would have been possible to introduce distinctions, for instance depending on the frequency and/or the intensity of a country's intervention behavior in the respective ten-year interval.

Relatedly, in their portrayal of QCA, Kisangani and Pickering suggest that "a major requirement in building a truth table is that the number of observations should be equal to  $2^k$  where  $k$  is the number of conditions or independent variables" (43). While it is accurate that the size of the truth table is determined by the number of conditions included, this does not mean that researchers are required to include as many cases as they have rows in the truth table. Quite often, there will be logically possible combinations of conditions for which there are no empirical cases. These are called logical remainders. Consequently, when designing a QCA study, it is important to consider the ratio of cases to conditions, and to examine the distribution of cases across truth table rows, but it is not a requirement to match truth table rows with cases.<sup>8</sup> This also goes to show the importance of the truth table as an analytical device – hence it is unfortunate that the authors have not provided any truth tables in the book, pointing to space constraints (45). While truth tables can become unwieldy because of their scope, a feasible compromise is to shorten the tables by leaving out the logical remainder rows and to focus on rows filled with empirical cases. Either way, the inclusion of the truth tables would have been highly informative.

The theoretical framework of *African Interventions* is consciously "eclectic," as Kisangani and Pickering highlight (16). As such, the authors draw on diversionary war and rebel movement theory from the conflict studies literature and on role theory from foreign policy analysis (16-28). These theories yield six variables for the analysis, which are complemented by variables on the type of intervention (supportive, hostile, or neutral) and a range of conventional controls such as alliance membership, capabilities, regime type, resources, ethnic ties, and others (33). While I agree with the authors that their overall framework provides them "considerable explanatory purchase" (16) to account for the observed intervention behavior in Africa, I have questions regarding the measurement and operationalization of role theory, in particular.

The authors provide a concise discussion of role theory and its application in foreign policy analysis. This resonates with numerous studies that have identified prevalent role conceptions as important factors that shape decisions on military interventions and the use of force.<sup>9</sup> Yet, the quantitative estimate that is used in *African Interventions* apparently comes down to "the total number of roles that state actors play in the global system" (33). This prompts questions about how the authors assess which and how many roles state actors played, and whether these must be roles that related to "the global system" or whether these could have also played out in regional contexts. Moreover, another question is whether role conceptions can change over time and how this can be assessed empirically. Finally, it is questionable whether a mere numerical count of role conceptions can do justice to such a rich qualitative concept. But clearly, role conceptions matter, as underscored in the analytical sections throughout the book, and Kisangani and Pickering also highlight this in their concluding chapter, pointing to the importance of "foreign policy beliefs, particularly for former colonial states and regionally powerful African states" (267).

Notwithstanding some of the above points, Kisangani and Pickering deserve ample praise for *African Interventions* and its comprehensive, multi-method treatment of military intervention behavior on the continent. The book will be the authoritative source for anyone researching patterns of military intervention behavior from the early Cold War to the current era. Moreover, the book provides a breath of fresh air to

---

<sup>8</sup> Mello, *Qualitative Comparative Analysis*, 27.

<sup>9</sup> Cameron G. Thies and Marijke Breuning, "Integrating Foreign Policy Analysis and International Relations through Role Theory," *Foreign Policy Analysis* 8, no. 1 (2012): 1-4; Sebastian Harnisch, "Conceptualizing in the Minefield: Role Theory and Foreign Policy Learning," *Foreign Policy Analysis* 8, no. 1 (2012): 47-69.

longstanding debates in conflict studies through its exemplary combination of historical narrative with statistical techniques and qualitative comparative analysis.

---

Response by Emizet Kisangani and Jeffrey Pickering, Kansas State University

---

To say that we are grateful to Frank Gerits for organizing this roundtable on our recent book and writing the introduction is an understatement. We also appreciate the time taken and the thoughtful reviews provided by four outstanding, well-known scholars in international relations. They offered praise and, as expected, helpful criticism. Most importantly, each reviewer shares ideas on how the scholarship in our book might be fruitfully extended. We look forward to being able to explore some of these topics in future research and hope that other scholars will heed the call to analyze these subjects as well. Since the reviews are all both detailed and thorough, we discuss them individually while also pointing out common themes.

Seung-Whan Choi's review provides a set of helpful comments that will be useful for ongoing scholarship. He contends that the best scholarly work is a product of "collaboration between qualitative and quantitative approaches," and we could not agree more. We appreciate that Choi commends us for using a mixed-methods approach to test our theoretical argument. He even asserts that the mixed methods evidence that we marshal "...overwhelmingly gives credence to our conclusion[s]." We are of course pleased that our methodological practices have been received so warmly, but we also recognize that our work will likely not be the last word on the subject of African interventions. We have advanced what we believe to be compelling theory and evidence, but all good scholarship inevitably raises additional questions. We fully anticipate and hope that other scholars will build upon our efforts in this book.

We are also pleased that Choi calls attention to the historical summaries that we provide for individual African interventions. Our efforts to detail these interventions were both time-consuming and painstaking, and we believe that we have helped to shed light on numerous important, but often overlooked, military operations on the African continent. As we emphasize in the book, a number of these little-known events proved to be consequential.

Choi also notes a number of areas where our work might have been enhanced or extended. Most notably, he suggests that our book would have benefited from more fine-grained statistical estimates, and also by devoting separate attention to humanitarian interventions. With regard to the former, our statistical presentation was designed to be accessible to a broad readership and to provide a basic foundation for the qualitative investigations to follow.<sup>1</sup> We refrained from separately studying humanitarian interventions for many of the same reasons that we chose to omit multi-national operations (other than those by the EU). As we point out (8), we felt that a fairly large and credible body of scholarship was already available on humanitarian and multinational interventions—and humanitarian actions have typically been multinational—such as the recent book by Jonathan Fisher and Nina Wilén.<sup>2</sup> In contrast, research on the full range of unilateral post-colonial African interventions has been noticeably lacking in the literature.

Choi also points to areas of future research. He notes that follow-on studies might concentrate on Chinese military activity in Africa, or the relationship between foreign military intervention and terrorist activity. We agree that these are valuable areas for research, particularly given the recent construction of a People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) military base in Djibouti (77), and the growth of jihadist influence in the Sahel and other African regions. We would add that Russian military influence should be included on any list for further study, to the extent that Wagner Group deployment is considered Russian state activity (which, so long as the current Russian regime is in power, certainly seems to be the case). The relationship between

---

<sup>1</sup> We agree that quantitative estimates of African sub-regions and also interaction terms between regions and rebel sanctuaries would have been useful. Space limitations prevented us from exploring a number of quantitative and qualitative avenues that would have provided further depth to our investigation but would have also added additional pages of discussion and comparison of large N (large sample) and small N (small sample) findings.

<sup>2</sup> Jonathan Fisher and Nina Wilén, *African Peacekeeping* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2022).

intervention and terrorism is also an interesting topic. However, we restricted our analysis to the causes of unilateral military intervention in this particular project, rather than its consequences.

Benjamin Fordham has also provided an insightful set of comments. We are especially grateful that he calls attention to our longstanding efforts to collect reliable data on overt military intervention. Fortunately, many scholars have recognized the utility of consistent data on military interventions, and have used International Military Intervention (IMI) data for their research. As Fordham emphasizes, the IMI collection captures a different and broader set of military actions than the commonly used Militarized Interstate Dispute (MID) dataset, and IMI is better suited to study foreign military intervention in Africa where supportive (i.e., non-dispute) interventions are common and impactful.<sup>3</sup>

Fordham also emphasizes the value of focusing solely on post-colonial Africa. We fully agree with him that concentrating on a "...limited slice of space and time" has benefits. As he points out, bounded studies provide more homogenous samples that help researchers capture causal relationships that might be obscured in analyses with broad geographical and temporal coverage. More importantly, as Foster in particular stresses in the next review, Africa is in many ways different from other global regions when it comes to a wide range of security concerns.

Fordham argues that our findings on the role that domestic economic and political variables can play in foreign military intervention are "one of the most striking and important things about the book." We appreciate his observation and agree that our results suggest that diversionary influences may impact interstate military force more often than is commonly understood. In particular, our qualitative comparative analysis (QCA) findings show that many African states launched military interventions during periods when they experienced substantial domestic economic difficulty. We also find evidence that domestic problems were acute when major foreign actors, like France, launched supportive interventions into Africa. In future research, it would seem wise to build on our findings on this relationship with in-depth qualitative methods, such as process tracing. Such focused studies will add more fine-grained knowledge on the mechanisms that lead to diversionary military intervention. Additional qualitative study seems necessary because most studies of diversionary military activity to date have been quantitative analyses of global samples. Such large-N or large sample research may well be masking considerable nuance in the relationship between domestic variables and military intervention.

Fordham notes that our qualitative treatment of state foreign policy "roles" (derived from role theory in the foreign policy analysis literature) is more refined than our quantitative measure of the phenomenon, and he encourages scholars to continue to hone measures of this variable which are suitable for large sample analysis. He also suggests that further research is needed on the ways that roles change over time, as with the US military role in Africa before and after the Cold War. These are valid points that we grappled with while writing the book. We suspect that quantitative analyses of foreign policy roles are uncommon largely because of challenges with operationalization, and we, of course, welcome additional development in this area. One of the difficulties that arises when translating detailed, qualitative conceptions of foreign policy roles into large-N measures is particularism. Each historically dependent national role could be argued to be in some ways idiosyncratic. Converting such distinctive roles into quantitative measures does little more, however, than adding country-level fixed effects to large-N analyses. Finally, Fordham points to two additional areas where future research may be worthwhile. He suggests that studies should investigate the relationship between economic interdependence and military intervention in Africa and variations in the border fixity norm across the continent. We agree that these are useful points of departure for additional research.

---

<sup>3</sup> IMI data is found here: <https://www.k-state.edu/polsci/about/faculty-staff/intervention/>; MID data is found here: <https://correlatesofwar.org/data-sets/mids/>.

Dennis Foster picks up on themes advanced by Choi and Fordham. Like them, he appreciates our mixed-methods approach and, similar to Fordham, argues that we make a contribution to the diversionary war literature as well as to scholarship on conflict and security in Africa. We are pleased that Foster calls particular attention to James Hentz's foundational work on African security.<sup>4</sup> Hentz's approach provides the initial, structural theoretical framework for our study, and it should without doubt be considered a cornerstone of scholarship on this topic. As with Fordham, Foster also draws attention to our findings on the underappreciated impact that role conceptions had on Cold War superpower interventions into Africa and even on interventions by regional African actors, such as Guinea and Senegal.

Foster gives considerable attention to the way in which our book advances diversionary theory. He appreciates our conclusion that diversionary incentives in the African setting are in fact distinct. The interstate actors that become the targets for intervention, and the domestic audiences for such actions, are typically not national populations, but sub-state groups. In addition, his review highlights one of our goals for the book that we were not able to fully accomplish. We had hoped to more fully tie our mixed methods results back to existing literature on the causes of intervention, but space considerations limited our ability to do so. We are grateful, however, that Foster still concludes that our work significantly advances knowledge on the use of military force on the African continent, which he claims is "...a place where conflict often seems to defy explanation."

Patrick A. Mello provides yet another valuable, thorough review of our book. We are grateful that he praises our "captivating accounts of the historical record of intervention into and within Africa." As we note above, we poured considerable effort into these narratives to provide a documentary record of an often overlooked but important phenomenon on the African continent. Since he is a leading scholar on QCA, we are also pleased that he concludes that our work "provides a breath of fresh air...through its exemplary combination of historical narrative with statistical techniques and qualitative comparative analysis (QCA)."

He does point out areas where our application of QCA might have been refined. For example, he maintains that we could have used fuzzy-set QCA to capture more detailed information on some of our independent variables and our dependent variable. We appreciate this observation. We did in fact consider both fuzzy-sets and crisp-sets before eventually selecting the latter. We did so in part to facilitate the clarity and accessibility of our analyses, which we hoped would have a broad readership. Our decision also reflects our agreement with Mello that QCA remains an "emergent method" where consensus has yet to be reached on a number of methodological issues. In this regard, some researchers such as Collier have criticized fuzzy-sets.<sup>5</sup> He cites Zachary Elkins, who maintains that fuzzy-set "...algorithms ultimately reduce the findings to dichotomies."<sup>6</sup> More recent work, such as Ingo Rohlfing's piece cited by Mello, holds that fuzzy-sets are no more rigorous than crisp-sets.<sup>7</sup> In fact, Rohlfing concludes that if scholars find consistent set relations with either crisp- or fuzzy-sets, there may be little need to investigate further, as a likely underlying relationship has been identified.<sup>8</sup> The lack of full consensus on this issue is perhaps why nearly 40% of published journal articles using QCA in international relations from 1987 to 2020 used crisp-sets, as Tobias Ide and Mello point out.<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> James J. Hentz, "Toward a Structural Theory of War in Africa," *African Security* 12, no. 2 (2019): 144-173.

<sup>5</sup> David Collier, "Comment: QCA Should Set Aside the Algorithms," *Sociological Methodology* 44: 1 (2014): 122-126.

<sup>6</sup> Collier, "Comment," 123; Zachary Elkins, "Gradations of Democracy? Empirical Tests of Alternative Conceptualizations," *American Journal of Political Science* 44: 2 (April 2000): 293-300.

<sup>7</sup> Ingo Rohlfing, "The Choice between Crisp and Fuzzy Sets in Qualitative Comparative Analysis and the Ambiguous Consequences for Finding Consistent Set Relations," *Field Methods* 32, 1 (2020): 75-88. Also, Michael Baumgartner finds the two approaches often produce comparable results: see Baumgartner, "Qualitative Comparative Analysis and Robust Sufficiency," *Quality & Quantity* 56: 4 (2022): 1939-1963.

<sup>8</sup> Rohlfing, "The Choice between Crisp and Fuzzy Sets in Qualitative Comparative Analysis," 86.

<sup>9</sup> Tobias Ide and Patrick A. Mello, "QCA in International Relations: A Review of Strengths, Pitfalls, and Empirical Applications," *International Studies Review* 24:1 (2022).

That said, we nonetheless appreciate that there is some value in analyzing different types of sets and calibration points to ensure the validity of results in this evolving method. We are also pleased that Mello finds that our crisp-set approach lent considerable insight into military intervention on the African continent.

Remaining on the topic of QCA, Mello also states that he would have preferred the inclusion of truth tables in our book. This is consistent with his appropriate call for open access to the information used to produce QCA results.<sup>10</sup> We agree with this push for greater transparency, but concluded at the time of writing that the norm was to report necessary and sufficiency outcome tables alone. Indeed, our review of the literature suggested that many authors do not even present tables on necessary condition outcomes. As consensus emerges on presenting truth tables, we will of course aim to provide such information.

Mello also joins other reviewers in calling for a richer quantitative measure of foreign policy roles than offered in the book. As we note above, we agree with appeals to add nuance and detail to large-N analyses of this important concept. Doing so is challenging, however, and this may be why quantitative studies of foreign policy roles are rare. Building in the richness included in qualitative studies of roles holds the risk of devolving into merely adding fixed effects for countries to quantitative analyses, where each country is coded as unique. We find such a fixed-effects approach to be an unsatisfying means of capturing foreign policy roles, and thus we add to the repeated call in this roundtable for scholars to continue work to develop quantitative operationalizations for role theory. As Mello observes, our approach may represent a first-cut at quantitative study of foreign policy roles, but when combined with our qualitative findings, it helps to provide considerable insight into the important impact that state foreign policy roles can have on interstate military intervention.

In sum, we are appreciative of this outstanding and thorough set of reviews which highlight the advance that our book represents along with some of its limitations. We have found this roundtable to be extraordinarily valuable and we hope that readers will as well. The four reviewers have presented stimulating ideas for future research that will surely help to advance our knowledge of both the conflict literature and the African continent over years to come.

---

<sup>10</sup> Ide and Mello, “QCA in International Relations”; Mello, *Qualitative Comparative Analysis: An Introduction to Research Design and Application* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2021).