

**Jett, Dennis C. Why Peacekeeping Fails. New York: St. Martin's, 1999.**

Carolyn Shaw

---

Volume 20, Number 2, Fall 2000

URI: [https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/jcs20\\_2br01](https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/jcs20_2br01)

[See table of contents](#)

---

Publisher(s)

The University of New Brunswick

ISSN

1198-8614 (print)

1715-5673 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

---

Cite this review

Shaw, C. (2000). Review of [Jett, Dennis C. Why Peacekeeping Fails. New York: St. Martin's, 1999.] *Journal of Conflict Studies*, 20(2), 147–149.

**Jett, Dennis C. *Why Peacekeeping Fails*. New York: St. Martin's, 1999.**

Dennis Jett's book *Why Peacekeeping Fails* is an astute assessment of United Nations (UN) peacekeeping operations and the factors affecting their success or failure. He examines factors both internal and external to the UN. Jett's discussion of the impact of such factors as the combatants' resources, the intervention of external actors and the combatants' commitment to peaceful settlement, is clearly illustrated by his in-depth analysis of the cases of Angola (UNAVEM) where the UN failed to end the civil war, and Mozambique (ONUMOZ) where thus far the settlement has been upheld. The similarity of conditions and strikingly different outcomes in these two cases provides for a good comparison of factors affecting success and failure. In addition to these case studies, Jett also incorporates data from the many peacekeeping operations conducted in the 1990s, as well as contrasting current conflicts and operations with historic missions. He concludes that, based on assessments of failed missions and the difficulties of reform implementation within the United Nations, UN "peacekeeping will continue to be less of an instrument of the international community than it otherwise could be." (p. 195)

Overall, this book is a remarkably concise and comprehensive account of UN peacekeeping operations. Jett begins with a brief history of peacekeeping and discusses the changes in the nature of conflicts following the end of the Cold War. Today, conflicts in which peacekeepers intervene are more likely to be civil wars, without stable ceasefires, where civilians are increasingly targets of violence. Missions have grown correspondingly more complex and ambitious in response to these conditions, and have thus had more difficulty in fulfilling international expectations. Jett notes that "in the uncivil wars of today, the sight of UN peacekeepers is as likely to provoke resentment, contempt, distrust, and aggression as it is to generate respect." (p. 56)

Following this overview, Jett breaks down his analysis of the factors affecting UN success in peacekeeping operations into three different phases: pre-deployment, deployment and post-deployment. Prior to deployment, one of the key organizational elements that affects the success of an operation is the selection of the Special Representative of the Secretary General (SRSG). The SRSG is responsible for ensuring that the parties remain committed to dialogue, revising the implementation process as necessary, maintaining international support and keeping political, military and economic elements coordinated. Within the UN, political considerations may outweigh other qualifications, resulting in less than ideal selections. Thus, some SRSGs bring more appropriate skills to bear on the conflict than others. In addition, Jett asserts that is important for the UN to negotiate with the parties for the peacekeepers to have a strong role in maintaining the peace, and that the parties be fully committed to a peaceful settlement.

During the deployment, Jett describes two significant factors that affect the likelihood of success: internal resources of the parties and actions of external actors. If the combatants have significant resources to fund the war, such as the Angolan diamond mines relied on by Jonas Savimbi, it is far more difficult to negotiate a conclusive settlement. Any settlement must include not only division of political power, but also of considerable

economic resources. Mozambique's resources were largely agricultural and not geographically concentrated, making it more difficult for the parties to use them to fund the war or thwart negotiations. External actors also can prove constructive or destructive to the peace process depending on their roles. In contrast to Mozambique, where foreign troops were not involved in the war, 50,000 Cuban troops joined the Angolan government forces in fighting against UNITA, complicating negotiations and prolonging the war. Additional factors to be dealt with by the peacekeepers include disarming and demobilizing the parties, providing humanitarian aid with minimal political and military consequences and removing land mines. In examining the termination phase of a peacekeeping operation, Jett notes that there are three different outcomes: first, the mission can be declared a failure when peacekeepers are forced out (or asked to leave) and the fighting continues; second, the mission can continue on indefinitely such as in Cyprus; and third, the mission can be declared a success once elections are held. The completion of elections, however, may not ultimately end the conflict as the cases of Angola and Cambodia indicate. Jett argues that although it is difficult for the UN to remain after elections are held because of sovereignty issues, the UN should actively engage in post conflict peace building activities to ensure an end to the fighting. For all the money that is spent on a peacekeeping operation, its success should be defined as more than simply providing a temporary break from the hostilities. Jett concludes that preventive diplomatic efforts and "classic" peacekeeping operations (i.e. Cyprus) are likely to continue, and that protective engagement and peace-building efforts are still possible, but that peace enforcement ought not to be carried out by the UN. Not only is there a lack of political will to carry out the type of mission necessary for successful peace enforcement, but the UN also struggles with dilemmas such as how to handle violations of human rights by the parties and yet remain neutral, and how to use enough leverage to get the parties to fulfill their part of agreements without alienating them. The situation on the Rwandan border demonstrates that the international community has yet to find a formula that is acceptable for sending troops into a civil war in which they have to kill some people to save others. Until these problems are addressed, there is unlikely to be any further expansion of peacekeeping activities, especially in the area of peace enforcement.

Jett's examination of the peacekeeping process is quite thorough, and yet he makes several points that raise further questions. He notes how the UN is gradually adapting its bureaucracy to "learn lessons" from past operations, but does not discuss whether any type of evaluation process is carried out while an operation is in progress and how such an evaluation affects the operation. Such an evaluation process might aid the SRSG in achieving greater flexibility in the field and in gaining greater support from New York for mission modifications, contributing to greater operational success. It is also possible, however, that the different definitions of success that the UN and its departments employ might limit the usefulness of such an evaluation. Another point that might be worth researching in greater detail is the leadership characteristics of the SRSG. Jett compares the skills of the SRSGs in Angola and Mozambique, and notes that each operated in very different contexts, but does not provide any additional information about other SRSGs and the success of their endeavors. Are there certain tactics that any SRSG could adapt to his/her situation? Or are certain personality traits most effective in bringing about

successful negotiations? One final point that might be fleshed out more concerns the role of regional organizations. Jett notes that the cost factor has given new impetus to interest in operations by the OAU, ECOWAS and SADC. These organizations can no doubt contribute greater knowledge of regional and factional politics to negotiation efforts, as well as contribute troops. Another possible contribution, however, might be linked to reform efforts within the UN. Jett mentions that intra-organizational turf battles can result in ineffective operations. Perhaps if regional organizations were assigned particular tasks, such turf battles would be less obstructive to implementing the mission's mandate.

Given the depth and clarity of the book, Jett has provided a resource that can be used by peacekeeping specialists, international relations scholars and novices. He provides realistic evaluations of the problems that peacekeepers face both within the UN, and in the field to achieve success. He is neither pessimistic nor overly optimistic in his assessments. Jett recognizes that there are no easy answers to the dilemmas faced by the international community in seeking more successful peacekeeping outcomes, but provides a strong analysis of some areas in which reforms might be most effective.

*Carolyn Shaw*

University of Texas at Austin