

Abiodun Alao, *Mugabe and the Politics of Security in Zimbabwe* (Montreal, Canada: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2012). pp. 293.

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In *Mugabe and the Politics of Security in Zimbabwe*, Abiodun Alao, a Nigerian senior research fellow for the Global Institutes at King's College London, methodically dissects the post-colonial challenges that Zimbabwe faced in establishing a secure state since independence: having inherited military, police, and laws all heavily entrenched in the previous white supremacist government's priorities. Alao breaks down the dynamics of the politics of security into seven chapters. First, he establishes the historical background of security in the country and how independence ruptured this. Additionally, Alao analyzes how Zimbabwe deals with security in regards to its neighbors, placing special emphasis on the civil wars that occurred in Mozambique and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Furthermore, Alao dissects how Zimbabwe relates to international power players, such as the United States, Russia, China, and the United Kingdom via its security tactics. Overall, this book offers a nuanced understanding of Zimbabwe's security dynamics since independence, using statistics and evidence as a basis for its claims, and layering insightful analysis throughout the text.

The strength of this book's arguments lies in its methodological structure, which places hard facts at the forefront, following up with interesting theories about Zimbabwe's national defense once the appropriate evidence has been laid out. Alao uses statistics and legislation to cement his arguments while maintaining creativity in his analysis. For instance, he cites several laws while building an argument on undocumented weapons: the Firearms Recovery Act, the Indemnity and Compensation Act, and the Enemy Property act, as well as bringing in government statistics.<sup>1</sup>

Besides using this framework to evaluate the country's security, Alao does not simplify Zimbabwe's complicated history. Acknowledging the typical narratives that qualify Zimbabwe's political dynamic as a simple dichotomy between the Ndebele and Shona peoples, the author works to incorporate nuance into his arguments. The complex history of Zimbabwe's independence, with its many political factions, which periodically split

and rejoined with one another, is fully incorporated into Alao's arguments instead of being simplified for convenience's sake. For example, he differentiates between the two air forces and how Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army (ZIPRA) developed into the national armed force instead of the Rhodesian air force, sparking conspiracy theories between "[Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army] ZANLA and the former Rhodesian army."<sup>2</sup> A clear explanation of these complicated tensions and alliances is imperative in order to understand Zimbabwe's history.

The book adroitly explains the importance of Robert Mugabe to Zimbabwe's security, as he has indeed led the country as Prime Minister, President, and Minister of Defense since independence. Alao considers Mugabe's decisions and politics without accepting the narrative that Mugabe is the sole propriety of Zimbabwe's defense policy. The author details Mugabe's evolution from an independence fighter in the 1960s and 1970s, to an esteemed global leader in the early 1980s, to the harsh dictatorial figure he is now most often portrayed. Evidence of this important transformation is littered throughout the text, which clearly inform Alao's arguments. Mugabe remains central to the discussion, demonstrating how his country's history cannot be studied without a nod to its leader. Mugabe cannot be studied in a vacuum; he is inherently entangled with and inseparable from Zimbabwe's security.

For a more complete analysis, especially for readers less knowledgeable about the region, Alao could have compared and contrasted Zimbabwe's defense with its neighboring countries. Despite writing extensively on the dynamics of Zimbabwe's relationships with nearby countries such as Mozambique, Zambia, Angola, and South Africa, Alao could have strengthened his analysis of the country's security by further comparing it to that of its neighbors. The author remarks that Zimbabwe's security, and even its history in a more general sense, is "unique"<sup>3</sup> to the region. It would be invaluable to understand exactly what about Zimbabwe's system differentiates it from other African countries. Understanding where security and defense fit into Zimbabwe's complicated, dichotomized identity is important, and although readers can surmise this to some extent from Alao's writing, it is not explicitly spelled out.

Overall, this book gives an excellent, thorough understanding of Zimbabwe's national security, and how it evolved through Mugabe's politics, as well as historical occurrences such as the independence struggle. Alao addresses the country's security from every relevant angle. Touching on issues that are not necessarily key to any argument, such as social structure, only solidifies Alao's book as well researched and reliable. The sound argumentation, coupled with clear structure and readable prose makes this a great read for anyone trying to understand how Zimbabwe's national security and Mugabe's contributions to it have evolved since its independence.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Abiodun Alao, *Mugabe and the Politics of Security in Zimbabwe* (Montreal, Canada: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2012), 72-74.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.