

THE POLITICS AND DIPLOMACY OF PEACEKEEPING IN WEST AFRICA: A STUDY OF THE ECOWAS OPERATION IN LIBERIA

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Abstract

The paper focused on the politics and diplomacy of peacekeeping in West Africa with emphasis on the ECOWAS operation in Liberia. The civil war in Liberia was one of the most devastating conflicts in the history of conflict in West Africa as the conflict claimed the lives of hundreds of thousands and led to the displacement of thousands in the country. The collective security theory was adopted as the theoretical framework. A secondary source of data was deployed; it involved the collection of data from textbooks, journals seminar papers etc. The study observed that the civil war in Liberia was a result of Samuel Doe's failure to implement people-oriented programmes in the country He was seen as a sectional leader who only promoted the interest of his ethnic group. This created mistrust in the system and led to the civil war. The study recommended that members of the force should be trained in two major languages (English and French) spoken in the sub-region. Common funds shall be established for peacekeeping operations in the sub-region. This fund shall be entrusted to the secretariat of the organization and contributions to the fund made mandatory for all members' state of ECOWAS.

Keywords: Liberia; Forces; ECOWAS; Security; Peacekeeping

Introduction

An analysis of war or conflict situations provides one of the most veritable instruments for studying international relations. Why conflict is an integral aspect of mankind, it is the task of the international system to put in place mechanisms for the enthronement of international peace. Peacekeeping has its origin in the United Nations (UN). William (2014) noted that since its inception, the United Nations has developed a number of instruments for controlling and resolving conflicts between and within states. The most crucial among these instruments include peace building, disarmament, sanction, and peace enforcement. The United Nations does not claim a monopoly of these instruments. It is pertinent to state that in many instances, the instruments have been usefully employed by regional organizations, ad-hoc groups of the states or individual states as is the case with ECOWAS, a regional organization that has the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) as its organ in the West African sub-region (William, 2014). Wiseman (2013) stated that the comparative advantage which the United Nations has over regional bodies like ECOWAS is the tremendous wealth of experience in the use of these instruments and the legitimacy of their use. Furthermore, the United Nations system appears to be better equipped and financed than regional organizations or individual member states to develop and apply the comprehensive, long-term approach needed to ensure the lasting resolution of conflicts. The political crisis in Liberia necessitated the establishment of the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG). The ECOMOG experience has shown that the West Africa sub-region has come of age because it was able to resolve the crisis in Liberia: It could also be said to be the first successful peacekeeping operation in the sub-region.

The Liberia War was one of the most devastating wars in the West Africa region. The war lasted for about seven years with the casualties estimated at about 150,000 (Vogt, 2011). The war also generated a grave humanitarian crisis in the sub-region. As of 2004, at least 200,000 Liberian refugees were living in surrounding countries. Years of civil war have destroyed the Liberian economy, which is now characterized by an extremely low growth rate, high foreign and domestic debt burdens, and an unemployment rate estimated at 80 per cent (Vogt, 2011). Prior to the outbreak of the civil war, Liberia was exporting raw timber, rubber and diamonds, but in 2001, the U.N. Security Council imposed an embargo on Liberian diamonds and timber, contending that the wrong people were profiting and that trade in these natural resources fueled further conflict (Urguahart, 2010). It was ECOMOG or rather ECOWAS that was able to restore peace and security to Liberia after about seven years in the fray. When the Liberia war began in 1989, it automatically engaged the attention of leaders and people across the West African sub-region. Given the magnitude of the tragedy, in which Liberia was engulfed, as well as the need for sub-regional security and indeed for the pride and dignity of the black race, a broad consensus emerged within the sub-region that the situation needed an urgent solution (Urguahart, 2010). It is also on record that at the outbreak of the war, the West African countries, though, saddened by the scope of the tragedy were seemingly preoccupied with their internal challenges. This state of affairs resulted in the inability of necessary world organizations (UN) to initially commit either human or material resources to salvage the rapidly deteriorating situation in Liberia. It was against this background that the ECOWAS decided to find an urgent solution that was capable of stopping the senseless carnage and restoring peace to Liberia. This was in response to the desperate pleas of the traumatized majority of Liberians. In August 1990, the authority of the Heads of State and Governments of ECOWAS initiated a mediation process, which eventually culminated in the formation and deployment of a sub-region peace-monitoring group, ECOMOG that restored normalcy to Liberia.

Theoretical Framework

Many theories can be applied to explain any conceivable social problem. However, it is the task of the researcher to identify and raise the appropriate theory/theories that will help him to offer adequate explanation of the problem under investigation. The field of political science is replete with varied theories and paradigms, which try to relate our ideas to the observations we make in the interactions between or among actors in national and international systems. At the moment no paradigm had emerged as an explanatory tool for all phenomena. This utility of a particular tool of analysis is heavily dependent on the extent to which it reflects the reality of what it sets out to describe. For the purpose of this study; we shall adopt the Theory of collective security.

The theory of collective security was propounded by Woodrow Wilson, the 28th President of the United States. He advocated for the establishment of an international organization, which later became the League of Nations, to ensure peace and security by collectively addressing aggression and conflicts among nations. The theory is anchored on the notion of indivisibility of peace; thus, a threat to peace in one country or region, is a threat to global peace and every nation must come together to address that common threat. According to Inis (1970), collective security is guided by the fact that the fabric of human society has become so tightly woven that a breach anywhere, threatens disintegration. Also, the essential commitments of the collective security system necessitate the willingness of nations to fight for the maintenance of the status quo, even though this involves injury to innocent people and the squealing of valid objectives to the moral legitimacy of a legally established state of things. To this end, the United Nations as well as some regional organizations, have sought to develop an international order in which the security of each state is expected to come

from combined effort of all. In other words, collective security theory in essence involves the promise by sovereign states to join together by constituting an organization that under certain circumstances will come to the aid of the state, which is threatened or attacked. Also, collective security assumes that bringing to bear overwhelming power against a state with the implication of inevitable defeat for the offender can prevent war. Although collective security originated from the League of Nations, it was further extended to the regional organization through Article 52 (1) of the UN charter.

Finally, the ECOWAS Protocol on Non-aggression (1979) and Protocol on Mutual Assistance (1982), UN article on the above, are all in line with collective security theory. Thus, the study finds it convenient to align with and agree with the collective security theory as the framework of analysis. According to Inis, L.(1970), collective security is a design for providing the certainty of collective action to frustrate aggression, for giving to the potential victim, reassuring knowledge, and conveying to the potential lawbreaker, the deterring conviction that the resources of the community will be mobilized against any abuse of national power. In other words, a collective security system entails the willingness of a nation to fight for the status quo.

Methodology

The descriptive research design was adopted for the study. The study made use of secondary data generated from diverse sources such as relevant empirical literature consisting of published scholarly works, government documents, gazettes and other documents alike. Data for the study were analyzed using the content analysis.

Results and Discussions

Origin of the Liberia War

Liberia is a country in the West African region. It was established in 1821 by freed slaves from America. Since its foundation, Liberia has experienced varying levels of conflict as a result of the injustices meted out by one group to another (Abegunde, 2009). The settlers commonly known as American Liberians imposed a colonial rule on the natives whom they met on the land. They used powerful institutions like the True Whig Party and the Masonic Lodge as repressive instruments against indigenous Liberians. The Whig Party won all the elections in Liberia between 1877 and 1880. This state of affairs did not augur well for Indigenous Liberians; as a result, their plight drew the attention of the League of Nations in 1929, which had to investigate the allegation of slave labour that was practised by the American-Liberians on the natives whom they met on the land (Abegunde, 2009). At a certain stage, in the marginalization of the natives by the American-Liberian, a man known as Samuel Doe a sergeant took a bold step to redress some of this injustice and so began a process which put an end to his predecessors (Williams Tubman, President of Liberia, 1944-1971)) through a bloody coup in 1980 to which the majority of the people, particularly the natives Liberian saw as a fulfillment of justice (Achon, 2012). The euphoria that greeted Doe's takeover was ephemeral as it soon turned into despair. Doe, like his predecessor began to implement repressive policies which led to ethnic tensions in various quarters and he used the Khan-dominated Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) as the instrument to subjugate the people (Achon, 2012).

Samuel Doe's repressive measure came under resistance when in December 1989, some rebels under the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) led by Charles Taylor invaded Liberia from its border with Cote d'Ivoire and created the pandemonium for the regime of Samuel Doe. It did not end there as full-blown guerilla warfare erupted in Liberia characterized by large-scale massacre of

civilians (Alan, 2007). The (AFL) of Doe on its part was immersed in the slaughter of civilians from Gio and Mano ethnic groups in Nimba country whom Doe accused of supporting the rebellion. Reprisal by the NPFL of Charles Taylor resulted in human suffering as traditionally accepted rules of war were totally ignored by the conflicting parties. Buildings (2009) noted that it was sad that foreign nationals were taken hostage and that the United Nations facilities as well as various embassies came under attack. By October 1990, Liberian refugees outside the country numbered over 600,000 thereby placing serious strain on the already fragile economies of the neighbouring states (UNGA, 1992). It is pertinent to note at this junction that Liberia had been a very close friend of America even in the friendish days of Doe. In fact, the United States has assisted Liberia in various forms. The regime of Samuel Doe received over 500 million US dollars between 1980 and 1985. The United States strategic interest in Liberia was evident in the establishment in that country of the Omega Navigation Station (ONS) and the Voice of America (VOA), the biggest transmitting in Africa (Fierabends and Nesvol, 2007). With that, it was expected that the United States which had maintained a friendly relationship with that country would intervene promptly so as to return peace but to the disappointment of many, the United States was more concerned with the evacuation of its nationals. By June 1990, the United States and the United Kingdom had stationed ships off the coast of Liberia to continue their evacuation of foreign nationals as the crisis intensified (Fierabends and Nesvol, 2007). The United States Marines also landed in Monrovia to protect the US embassy. In fact, many Liberians were traumatized by the fact that the US, its closest ally, did not, openly intervene in the conflict rather the US became more preoccupied with the Gulf War. Furthermore, the international communities were indifferent to the crisis in the country and it was this state of neglect that prompted the West African sub-region to intensify efforts to solve their own problems – through the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) (Egoreruia, 2006).

Politically, the Liberian crisis was first officially discussed by ECOWAS heads of state in May 1990 with the establishment of a Standing Mediation Committee (SMC), consisting of the Gambia, Ghana, Mali, Nigeria and Togo. An emergency meeting of the foreign Ministers of members of the SMC was held on July 5, 1990, to work out modalities for a cease-fire after which a decision was made to deploy a peacekeeping force known as the ECOWAS Ceasefire monitoring group (ECOMOG) to Liberia (ECOWAS Vanguard, 1990). The force consisted of troops from Gambia, Ghana, Sierra Leone and Nigeria, which contributed about 70% of the force. ECOMOG's intervention had political dimensions aimed at restoring peace and stability in Liberia. ECOMOG sought to mediate between the various factions, including Taylor's NPFL, Prince Johnson's Independent National Patriotic Front of Liberia (INPFL), and other smaller groups. ECOMOG also worked to support the interim government and later the elected government of Liberia. Also, ECOMOG engaged in diplomatic efforts to garner support for its intervention. This included securing backing from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the United Nations, and the international community at large. ECOMOG also worked to coordinate with other regional and international actors involved in the peace process.

There was abundant evidence that since the entrance of the minority America-Liberians into Liberia there had been the difference between them and African settlers or ethnic –Liberian majority. In fact, the activities of the Americo-Liberians prepared the grounds for the conflict between them and the indigenous Liberians (Gambari, 1997). Goodrich (2010) noted that the domination, subjugation and intimidation of the indigenous people by the Americo-Liberians were too glaring. Out of 19 Presidents before April 12 1980, none was an indigenous Liberian, besides, 11 out of the number were actually born in America. These and other retrogressive activities on the part of the Americo-

Liberian necessitated the “rescue operation” carried out by 17 non-commissioned and hardly literate officers of the Liberian Army by seizing power on April 12, 1980, in the spirit of nationalism against the imperialist American–Liberians. This singular act, though celebrated by the majority of Liberians in the spirit of nationalism was the pivot upon which the Liberian conflict evolved (Goodrich, 2010). Sergeant Samuel Doe, the first ethnic President of Liberia became too ruthless first to the Americo-Liberia, later to his fellow indigenes, though not from his ethnic group. In sum, his style of leadership and political ambitions engineered a lot of opposition against him. Finally, civil war broke out through the activities of Charles Taylor's (an Americo-Liberian) NPFL on the 24th of December 1989. At the end of it all, Charles Taylor an Americo-Liberian became the President of Liberia's 3rd Republic.

An assessment of ECOMOG Peacekeeping Operations in Liberia

In terms of strategy, the ECOMOG operation marked a radical departure from the Organization of Africa Unity (OAU) (now African Union) peacekeeping mission in Chad. The circumstances on the ground necessitated ECOMOG's response thereby giving the military a totally different role from what would be expected in classical peacekeeping (Higgins, 2008). When ECOWAS took the decision in July 1990 to dispatch a West African Force, (ECOMOG) to Liberia, it was made with the expectation that it would keep and “arrange peace” between the warring factions in Liberia. But under careful observation, it quickly became glaring that peacekeeping in internal conflicts was not as easy and predictable as in inter-state conflicts.

The National Patriotic Front for Liberia (NPFL) reneged on its earlier promise to abide by the terms of an ECOWAS peace plan, thus there was no peace to keep in Liberia. Against this backdrop, the rebel factions mounted powerful media propaganda against the ECOWAS force, aimed at winning international sympathy, for their various rebel factions and indeed government forces continued their atrocities, arguing in some cases that they were not under any obligation to honour international conventions to which they were not signatories (Higgins, 2008). The ECOMOG was repeatedly attacked by NPFL troops, which had opposed its deployment. At a stage, it became virtually impossible for humanitarian and other organizations to operate within Liberia due to the unpredictable and uncooperative attitude of the warring factions especially NPFL, in whose goodwill much of the humanitarian activity depended. In the face of ECOMOG's humiliation and the continued human misery in Liberia, the force's peacekeeping mandate was tactfully changed to that of enforcement (Idike, 2009).

Some members of ECOMOG were placed on what was referred to as limited enforcement action, which gave the force an advantage to push the warring factions out of the Liberia capital, Monrovia. Perhaps the most important benefits of this strategy were its ability to reduce the carnage in their operations, and also respond with force if attacked. The adoption of this strategy also created an atmosphere for peaceful negotiations. It is worthy of mention that the first comprehensive cease-fire of November 1990 was the result of a successful enforcement action by ECOMOG. ECOMOG also took over the monitoring of both the Seaport and Airport and some parts of Monrovia, to sustain the peace after the enforcement action (Idike, 2009). Thus following the first ceasefire of November 1990, a series of agreements were reached and broken by the warring factions at different times with the constant emergence of new factions. The ECOMOG managed to keep a fragile peace between the factions until October 1992 when the NPFL launched an attack on ECOMOG in Monrovia, an operation code-named “OCTOPUS” creating new humanitarian emergencies (Idike, 2009). In its bid to defend itself and to deny the rebel group the ability to attack Monrovia at will, ECOMOG

again switched to peace enforcement actions as had not been experienced, with the exception of peacekeeping operations in other bodies hence it undoubtedly posed serious challenges for the West African multinational force. The enforcement action that was launched in response to “OCTOPUS” was brought to an end with the signing of the Cotonou Accord in July 1993. This ushered in a new peacekeeping phase in which the UN Observer Mission in Liberia (UNOMIL) was established to operate alongside ECOMOG.

Despite the joint operation, however, the hopes of peace and stability in Liberia were dashed by the April 1966 hostilities in Monrovia. ECOMOG'S enforcement mandate at this point in time response was limited to a show of force, which had limited effect on the unyielding rebel group or factions. Between 1989 when the civil war broke out in Liberia and 1994, many attempts were made at finding an enduring peace in that country under the auspices of ECOWAS. In August 1994, the Abuja agreement was finally brokered under this agreement; major parties of the Liberia conflict were for the first time, brought into the government in Monrovia as members of the Liberia Council of State. The timetable for the peace process that would lead to and culminate in the holding of free and fair elections was spelt out. The tenure of the established Transitional Government was planned to expire on 12th August 1996 (Nzeribe, 2008). After holding free and fair elections, factional fighting again erupted on April 6, 1996, and Monrovia lost its safe-haven status, no thanks to the NPFL-led attack on Monrovia and ECOMOG, hence general acceptance by all and sundry, the Abuja peace plan of 1995. There was a cease-fire agreement that came into play, which later led to the holding of an election in July 1997. After the successful disarmament and demobilization, the results of the election that was conducted were generally accepted as free and fair by the generality of Liberians and the international community. That was indeed a very crucial period in the history of that country as the sub-region's collective efforts for over seven years to restore Liberia witnessed the Inauguration of a democratically elected government with Charles Taylor coming into power on 2nd August 1997.

Problems and Challenges of ECOMOG

ECOMOG though had an impressive performance, but it was not without challenges. Some of these problems were a results of the peculiar formation of states in the sub-region, hence the difference in ideology. These led to the initial effort to crush the rebellion in Liberia consequently, with the establishment of a Standing Mediation Committee (SMC). This group was able to bring each of the warring groups to a roundtable discussion, conversations, arguments as well as compromise, which resulted from bargaining which eventually brought peace or relative peace to Liberia. The attitude of the various factions left much to be desired, as no one of them was ready to abide by the agreements reached. The climax of this attitude led to the abduction and execution of President Samuel Doe by one of these factions, this introduced a new phase to the situation in Liberia. Leaders of the Sub-region had a rethink, consequently armed ECOMOG to be able to keep the peace as well as enforce it. It may also be interesting to say when the warring factions could not match the superior firepower of the ECOMOG force; they had little or no alternative but to stop fighting.

Another problem was that of finance, in fact, it is inarguable that huge capital is required in peacekeeping missions no matter the magnitude. Going by the nature of the economics of most countries in the sub-region, the financing of such a body was seen as incomprehensible so they decided to allow the country (Liberia) to handle its own problem until Nigeria came to the rescue of the body as a hegemonic leader. In fact, Nigeria had spent about \$ 13 billion in 12 years on the operations of the ECOWAS monitoring group (ECOMOG). Nigeria bore that heavy financial

burden because of its belief in good neighbourliness, peace, security and ability within the sub-region (Obasi, 2012). But even with the contribution from Nigeria, the body still suffered lean finances when compared to the magnitude of the problem it was meant to solve in the country.

The next problem was that of coordination and consistency. As a peace monitoring group involving different countries, it is expected that ECOMOG be given a reasonable period of time to get the personnel to work together effectively as a team. However because ECOMOG was a child of necessity, the purpose of bringing personnel together to enhance performance was short and not effective enough. This accounted for the so many deaths recorded in the early part of its mission. ECOMOG also suffered the problem of almost losing its credibility as a peacekeeping force because it was initially seen by the Charles Taylor group as a body that is skewed in favour of Samuel Doe. It was not easy for ECOMOG to convince the factions to understand its principle of impartiality, transparency, and credibility and above all to bring all warring parties to a round table discussion.

Findings

The following observations are made from the study:

1. The study observed that the Nigerian government was the brain behind the formation of ECOMOG and the eventual deployment of the forces to restore peace in Liberia. Nigeria spent huge resources (material and human) to ensure that Liberia did not collapse.
2. The work observed that the civil war in Liberia was a result of Samuel Doe's failure to implement people-oriented programmes in Liberia. He was seen as a sectional leader who only promoted the interest of his ethnic group. This created mistrust in the system and led to the civil war.
3. The study admits that the crisis originated from the inability of the Indigenous Liberia population and the Americo-Liberia minority population to live in harmony together

Conclusion

This study has attempted to review the various encounters by ECOWAS in its efforts to bring peace to Liberia through ECOMOG. The study concluded that Nigeria's desire to write off the bills of the ECOMOG operation in Liberia was informed by the altruistic tendency and the show of big brother posture in the sub-region as well as in Africa as a whole.

Recommendations

The analysis provided in this study has shown that the problems encountered by ECOMOG in Liberia stemmed mainly from the internal configuration of the forces in the group, as well as other extraneous factors. In view of these, the following recommendations are made:

- (1) The Economic Community of West Africa State (ECOWAS) should in view of the importance of having a sub-regional organization to help in maintaining peace and security create a more harmonious and integrated peacekeeping body in its efforts in the process of peacekeeping in the sub-region. In this regard, the forces so envisaged should be established well ahead of any crisis in the sub-region, perhaps in peacetime. The forces so established should have a common training orientation in peacekeeping.
- (2) Members of the force should be trained in two major languages (English and French) spoken in the sub-region. Common funds shall be established for peacekeeping operation in the sub-region. This fund shall be entrusted to the secretariat of the organization and contributions to the fund made mandatory for all members' state of ECOWAS.

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