

"Every Car Or Moving Object Gone" - The ECOMOG Intervention in Liberia

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Abstract: This article examines the ECOMOG intervention in Liberia in terms of its usefulness as a model for future African peacekeeping operations. Whilst the holding of elections in 1997 and the subsequent withdrawal of ECOMOG clearly indicate that the operation was not a failure in the way that, for example, Somalia was, this article argues that its success did not lie in its achieving answers to perennial peacekeeping problems. In terms of its intent, method and outcome, the intervention was deeply flawed and its eventual success lay in compromises made by Nigeria in the face of ECOMOG's inability to produce the desired end-state at an acceptable cost.

October 1999 saw the final withdrawal from Liberia of the ECOMOG peacekeeping force. For much of its seven year duration, the vicious civil war in the West African state of Liberia barely touched Western consciousness. From the beginning of the war in 1989 to its formal conclusion in 1997, 200,000 died and 1.2 million were displaced out of a pre-war population of only 2.5m. The conflict itself exhibited all the manifestations of post cold-war intra-state conflict: state collapse; ethnic conflict; political fragmentation; warlordism; and a late and inadequate response from the United Nations.

Yet despite the severity of the conflict, 1997 saw an agreement to end hostilities, the disarmament of warring factions, the establishment of political parties and elections in July 1997 which returned Charles Ghankay Taylor as President of the Republic of Liberia. A key component of the process by which conflict termination was achieved was the deployment of a peacekeeping force sent by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) the ECOWAS Ceasefire Monitoring Group, or ECOMOG.¹ The achievements of this deployment have been favourably compared by some commentators with the failures of Western operations in Somalia and held up as "an example for the rest of the world to follow"² and a "unique feat in both military and peacekeeping terms."³

Understandably, therefore, there is a growing interest in the idea of a more developed African peacekeeping capability building in part upon this perceived success. In 1997 France established its RECAMP programme⁴ and the US has introduced its Active Crisis Response Initiative.⁵ ECOMOG troops have been actively engaged in Sierra Leone and deployed into Guinea-Bissau. There are, of course, good reasons why specifically regional responses make sense, not least the manifest unwillingness of the international community to countenance significant engagement.⁶ Nevertheless, the problems concomitant with an African regional

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initiative are many. The purpose of this paper⁷ is to examine the ECOMOG deployment in Liberia from 1989 onwards, focusing on its applicability as a model for African peacekeeping capabilities.

THE ECOMOG DEPLOYMENT

A comprehensive examination of the origins of the Liberian conflict lies outside the scope of this paper.⁸ It is sufficient to identify that in December 1989, Liberian rebel forces of the National Patriotic front of Liberia (NPFL), led by Charles Taylor, crossed into Liberia from Cote d'Ivoire intent upon overthrowing the regime of President Samuel Doe. As the fighting escalated, and the international community displayed marginal interest, ECOWAS initiated a regional response to the crisis, establishing a Standing Mediation Committee (SMC) to try and encourage a diplomatic solution. On August 7th 1990, a lack of progress on the diplomatic front prompted the SMC to begin the insertion into Liberia of a military monitoring group (ECOMOG). ECOMOG was deployed in order to overawe the warring factions, and to oversee the implementation of a cease-fire, the disarmament of the warring factions, the cessation of arms imports and the release of prisoners.

The ECOMOG operation began on 24 August 1990 with deployment of 3,000 West African troops into the Liberian capital Monrovia. It was tasked with "assisting the ECOWAS Standing Mediation Committee in supervising the implementation and in ensuring the strict compliance by the parties with the provisions of the cease-fire throughout the territory of Liberia."⁹ Whilst the commander initially envisaged a six month operation, the force continued to be deployed until late 1999, and, indeed, expanded its operations into neighbouring Sierra Leone.

The contributing nations and troop strengths varied, but included at one time or another Nigeria, which provided the bulk of the forces, Ghana, Guinea, Senegal, Gambia, Mali, Benin, Cote d'Ivoire, Uganda, Tanzania, Niger, Burkino Faso and Sierra Leone. In February 1995, for example, the force consisted of 8,430 troops organised into ten battalions; of these troops 4,908 were Nigerian, 1,028 were from Ghana, 609 from Guinea, 747 from Tanzania, 760 from Uganda, 359 from Sierra Leone, and ten each were provided by Gambia and Mali.¹⁰ The force peaked at a strength of around 16,000 in 1993 and by early 1997 consisted of around 11,000 troops.

During the period of its deployment, ECOMOG engaged in a variety of missions including protection of humanitarian aid, disarming of factions, cantonment, mediation, and peace enforcement. ECOMOG's formal peacekeeping role ended in February 1998, but a contingent of 5,000 remained deployed after this in a "capacity-building" role, helping to train the new Liberian security forces and to maintain order. Further withdrawals commenced in January 1999 after disputes between ECOMOG and Taylor over the treatment of ECOMOG soldiers by Liberian forces.¹¹

DIFFICULTIES

The ECOMOG operation was never likely to be easy given the complexity of the situation in Liberia. Whilst ethnicity was much less of a factor early on in the struggle, as in Bosnia the manipulation of ethnic differences by faction leaders for political purposes led to a conflict

increasingly fought along ethnic lines. As well as embittering the fighting, this led to a rather "zero-sum" approach to negotiations¹²: cease-fires, for example, were often used in a calculated fashion to provide breathing spaces during which to consolidate and re-arm. In its early incarnation, the civil war pitted the troops of Doe's Liberian government, the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL), against the insurgents of the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) under Charles Taylor, the former drawn predominantly from the Krahn ethnic group, the latter from the Gio and Mano tribes. As the war continued, the situation became increasingly confused as, often with outside support, new groups appeared and existing groups fragmented. The NPFL, for example, spawned the Independent National Patriotic Front of Liberia (INPFL), as well as the Central Revolutionary Council. A new group, ULIMO (the United Movement for Democracy and Liberation in Liberia), emerged in 1991 only to fragment into a Krahn faction (ULIMO-J under Roosevelt Johnston) and a Mandingo faction (ULIMO-K under Alhaji Kromah). By 1995 there were at least eight major factions as well as many more minor ones.¹³

The progressive splintering of the militias (which was caused by, but also contributed to, the longevity of the conflict) created a range of problems.¹⁴ As with Bosnia, there was a pronounced shift towards "localism" within militia groups in which weak central control led to the emergence of warlords whose objectives extended no further than personal gain; for example, economic motives such as the control of diamond mining and rubber plantations became an important dynamic in the continuation of the war. This made the formulation of an over-arching political solution very difficult.

Moreover, ethnic hatred and the progressive factionalisation of the militias made concrete advances on issues such as disarmament and demobilisation very difficult. Since weapons and troops were the basis of faction power in Liberia, agreements regarding the handing over of weapons and so forth could only succeed if every faction, however small, was included (a problem also experienced in Somalia). In reality, such difficulties meant that some factions excluded themselves from political agreements; for example the Lofa Defence Force (allied to Taylor) and the Bong Defence Front (allied to Kromah) were not signatories to the Cotonou Agreement of 1993.¹⁵ Neither was the Liberian Peace Council, which operated in NPFL areas with clandestine support from the AFL.

The situation was further complicated by strife in Sierra Leone, one consequence of which was that Sierra Leonean resistance groups based themselves in Liberian territory; these competed with ULIMO for control of territory and resources.¹⁶ The overall situation was also exacerbated by the composition of the militias. At least a quarter of the soldiers were children¹⁷ who, as the conflict progressed, naturally found it harder and harder to integrate back into society. Warlords also vied for a predominant position within their ethnic group as was the case with the struggle between the Krahn groups of Roosevelt Johnson's ULIMO-J and George Boley's LPC. This provided yet another autonomous dynamic behind the war. Thus, as the war became more prolonged, the nature of the war shifted, complicating ECOMOG's attempts to formulate a coherent strategy and encouraging "mission creep".

At face value, the question of whether ECOMOG has been a success would seem to be redundant. Given the termination of conflict, despite the considerable difficulties posed by the complex nature of war outlined above, the case for "The ECOMOG Miracle"¹⁸ might appear to be self evident: sceptics who characterise the operation as "unwarranted aggression and

illegality camouflaged as a peacekeeping operation"¹⁹ might seem to have missed the point. In reality, however, ECOMOG provides a poor peacekeeping role model. In terms of intent, method, and outcomes, the ECOMOG operation embodied serious flaws which make it an imperfect model upon which to build future African intervention capabilities.

INTENT

Even at its inception, ECOMOG was controversial, not least because the justifications given for intervention were questionable. ECOWAS maintained that intervention was a duty as prescribed by the 1981 ECOWAS Defence Protocol. According to Article 16, the Head of State of the member under attack may request action or assistance from the Community. Article 4 of the Protocol empowers ECOWAS to initiate collective intervention in any internal armed conflict, within any state, engineered and supported actively from outside likely to endanger the security and peace of the entire community. Article 6(3) and Article 17 empower the Authority to decide on the expediency of military action, to impose a peacekeeping force between the warring factions or to engage in political mediation. Also Article 13(1,2) provides for creation of Allied Armed Forces of the Community (AAFC) from earmarked units.

The problem was that whilst Doe did request aid, it was from Nigeria not ECOWAS. It was Nigeria who then took the issue to ECOWAS for consideration. Whilst attempts were made to justify the intervention in terms of the existence of a crisis that would "endanger the security and peace of the entire community", ultimately there does not exist (and probably never will) any objective criteria to decide when a problem might or might not fit into this category. Given this, the issue was one of political interpretation; in the case of Liberia, this interpretation did not command consensus and provoked resistance from Francophone states such as Cote d'Ivoire and Guinea who were themselves sympathetic toward or actively supporting the NPFL.

As justifications for intervention, democracy and human rights prove to be equally problematic; humanitarian considerations provide no legal reason for intervention²⁰, nor could one ignore the irony of states such as Nigeria in 1990 tasking ECOMOG with "creat[ing] the necessary conditions for free and fair elections." Nor could the intervention draw on international legitimacy, since the UN did not authorise ECOMOG from the outset: the first UN political response was not until October 1992 when it retrospectively approved ECOMOG's actions under Chapter VIII of the UN Charter.

METHOD

It might be thought that a regional operation would stand a much better chance of avoiding common peacekeeping problems, if only by virtue of a greater interest in, and understanding of, local conditions. In dealing with a complex dispute, however, the ECOMOG force faced many of the same problems of UN operations. Indeed, in key areas, such as strategic direction, the formulation of mandates, the use of force, co-operation with other organisations, and the question of resources, the operation proved to be little more effective than other international deployments.

Divisions at the strategic political level had a significant impact on the operation. Whilst, in theory, a multi-national operation is a method of reducing tensions by preventing unilateral advantage, it can, in practice, simply act as a catalyst for conflict. This was indeed the case with ECOWAS, which was the mandating body for ECOMOG and which was supposed to exercise political control over it. ECOWAS was divided by conflicting ideas over how the ECOMOG force should operate, a situation attributable to the diverging geo-strategic interests of its member states and to emerging problems over contributions to the operation.

The clearest problem resulted from the clash between the interests of Nigeria and those of other West African states, notably Cote d'Ivoire.²¹ Nigeria, which provided the bulk of the ECOMOG troops and financial contributions opposed Charles Taylor's NPFL. It provided Samuel Doe with assistance; despite denials by the then President Ibrahim Babangida, the Nigerians supplied weapons and ammunition to Monrovia during the AFL campaign in Nimba county.²² Once Doe had been killed, Nigeria continued to provide support for factions opposed to the NPFL, including the AFL, ULIMO, and the Liberian Peace Council (LPC). Nigeria's opposition to Taylor was founded on a number of pillars. Whilst Doe was a good friend of Nigeria's President, Taylor's actions, including the killings of up to 1,000 Nigerian nationals in Monrovia in 1990, and his close links with Nigeria's regional rival Cote d'Ivoire, seemed to threaten Nigerian interests in the region.²³ Fear of a "ripple of instability" that might be generated by the Liberian war and concerns that once Taylor was in power, Liberia might become a refuge and source of aid for opponents of Nigeria's military regime, were also contributory factors.

According to Babangida:

"[In] a sub-region of 16 countries where one out of three West Africans is a Nigerian, it is imperative that any regime in this country should relentlessly strive towards the prevention or avoidance of the deterioration of any crisis which threatens to jeopardise or compromise the stability, prosperity and security of the sub-region.... We believe that if [a crisis is] of such level that has [sic] the potentials to threaten the stability, peace and security of the sub-region, Nigeria in collaboration with others in this sub-region, is duty-bound to react or respond in appropriate manner necessary to ensure peace, tranquillity and harmony."²⁴

Nigerian policy towards ECOMOG-its methods and objectives-were therefore coloured by its fundamental antipathy toward Taylor's NPFL. Taylor, on the other hand, received support from Cote d'Ivoire and Burkino Faso as well as from further abroad, e.g., France and Libya.²⁵ The manoeuvrings of the rival Anglophone group, dominated by Nigeria, and the Francophone's, dominated by Cote d'Ivoire, had profound implications for the ECOMOG operation. There existed considerable resentment of Nigeria's rather heavy-handed use of its influence: for example the dispute with Ghana and Benin regarding Nigeria's unilateral replacement of the ECOMOG Force Commander Arnold Quainoo (a Ghanaian) with the Nigerian Joshua Dogonyaro. One member of the SMC stated that "ECOMOG ... is nothing but a convenient camouflage for an effective Nigerian war machine."²⁶ Moreover as Nigerian influence within the operation grew, it became increasingly difficult to isolate ECOMOG from Nigerian domestic politics. Thus Dogonyaro's eventual removal as commander has been attributed to Babangida's fears about the former's successes and the possible emergence of a future rival.

The economic and political costs to those involved also contributed to divisions. As the operation became progressively more dangerous, costly and protracted, the willingness of ECOWAS states to support potentially dangerous options often reduced correspondingly. The Senegalese contingent, for example, was withdrawn after initial casualties caused the Government to forbid its contingent to engage in combat operations without significant Nigerian support.²⁷

Divisions at the strategic political level eroded the decision-making capability of ECOWAS and led to an inability to decide which objectives to pursue at any given time. The effect on ECOMOG was to commit it to a composite "operation of the lowest common denominator", in which political priorities often triumphed over military practicalities. Moreover, in time honoured fashion, the national governments intervened directly in ECOMOG operations by giving instructions to their own contingent, undermining the cohesion of the force and sometimes creating potentially disastrous situations.²⁸

Another related difficulty was the lack of clarity in the mandates given to ECOMOG. Initially, the ECOMOG Force Commander was tasked with the "conduct of military operations for the purpose of monitoring the cease-fire" and "restoring law and order to create the necessary conditions for free and fair elections to be held in Liberia".²⁹ However, as the situation evolved, the operation found itself tasked with various functions in which the mandates were often very vague, particularly over the situations in which force would be used.³⁰ For example, within a month of deployment the Force Commander, Arnold Quainoo, found himself subject to a major NPFL offensive. Far from "monitoring" a cease-fire "The military situation [is such that] my forces now have no choice but to mount a limited offensive in order to protect their positions and enforce a cease-fire".³¹ Yet the Nigerian president stated soon after that "ECOMOG is a peace force Our mission there is clear, precise and attainable ECOMOG forces are soldiers without enemies or favoured faction in the conflict; they can open fire only in self defence."³²

Agreements at Bamako (November 1990) and Lomé (February 91) tasked ECOMOG with "monitoring" cease-fires, drawing up buffer zones, the establishment of check points, and the disarmament of militias without any clear guidelines about how this would be achieved in a non-permissive environment. At Lomé for example the ECOMOG cease-fire was to be "supervised and maintained" by ECOMOG through the take-over of airports and ports, the establishment of roadblocks at strategic locations, patrols into the countryside, escorts/transport to repatriate displaced persons and so forth.³³ How they were to be maintained, given the paucity in the numbers of troops, and what would happen if ECOMOG were resisted, was not stated.

Another example of the confusion surrounding mandates was the later decision relating to implementation of the Yamoussoukro IV agreement: ECOMOG was tasked on the one hand with using "all necessary measures" to ensure compliance with sanctions³⁴, whilst on the other an explicit assumption of the forces status as peacekeepers continued to be made.³⁵ The mandates were thus often only tenuously linked to the reality of ECOMOG's material and political circumstances and provided little guidance on how the use of force could be linked to the attainment of the operations wider strategic objectives.

Closely linked to the difficulties caused by strategic level political differences and the issue of mandates were the problems associated with ECOMOG's military strategy, which oscillated between peacekeeping and peace enforcement without decisive breakthroughs in either. Peacekeeping in Liberia was always likely to be difficult; the examples of Bosnia and Somalia illustrate the problems associated with trying to apply the Cold War concept of peacekeeping in post Cold War conflict environments. The value-based nature of disputes and the complexity of the politics lead to circumstances in which risk escalates, consent is contested, violence is vicious and endemic, and where impartiality is difficult to maintain. In Liberia, the traditional essentials for a peacekeeping operation, the consent of the protagonists and a working cease-fire, did not really exist—indeed the ECOMOG force was fired upon even as they landed.

Through ECOMOG enforcement, a measure of stability was then established which lasted until October 1992 with ECOMOG in control of Monrovia and the NPFL controlling most of the rest of Liberia. Sporadic violence continued, but at a much lower level and ECOWAS was able to establish an Interim Government of National Unity (IGNU) in November 1990. However, attempts by ECOMOG to establish buffer zones and police the UN arms blockade were complicated by continued conflict between the militias. Indeed the early cease-fire did not represent any significant change in the NPFL's opposition to ECOMOG and was instead a tactical decision designed to consolidate the NPFL's position before returning to the offensive.³⁶

It became clear that peacekeeping was essentially a temporary solution, capable only of freezing the situation, without reducing the capabilities of both sides to resume fighting. It could not address one of the critical reasons for the prolongation of the conflict—Taylor's belief that he could obtain more through continuing the violence than by agreeing to a political settlement. In circumstances where ECOMOG appeared divided and its commitment to "staying the course" was questionable, ECOMOG could provide neither the neutral reassurance necessary to overcome problems associated with "co-operational insecurity," nor could it coerce an unwilling NPFL into implementing political agreements.

The early failure of peacekeeping was indicated on 15 October 1992 when the NPFL launched Operation Octopus, a surprise attack against Monrovia and the predominantly ECOMOG forces defending it. This precipitated another switch from peacekeeping to peace enforcement by ECOMOG forces in the defence of Monrovia and subsequent ECOMOG counter-attacks. The move to peace enforcement had some early success. The NPFL were beaten off and in January 1993 ECOMOG went onto the offensive, drafting in 5,000 extra troops, and using air and naval assets as well as co-operating with ULIMO and the AFL. Significant gains led the ECOMOG field Commander Major General Olurin to expect victory. This victory, however, eluded ECOMOG and ultimately it accepted a negotiated settlement in July 1993 with the signing of the Cotonou Agreement. This agreement, which paved the way for the deployment of a UN mission, failed to provide a lasting settlement and, after a progressive breakdown in order, serious fighting broke out in 1996.

The problem for ECOMOG was that effective peace enforcement was difficult. One effect of increasing the risk and intensity of operations was that it further eroded consensus within ECOWAS because of the progressive "Nigerianisation" of the Command Structure and the way in which ECOWAS operations were directed specifically against the NPFL. The friction

generated by this contributed to a lack of strategic direction as to where force ought to be applied and the outcomes that ECOMOG wanted to achieve.³⁷

This problem was exacerbated by several other factors. One was the NPFL's move towards a guerrilla strategy which meant that, despite holding Monrovia and extending the area controlled by the IGNU, ECOMOG found it difficult to exploit their success. Another was that, despite being a West African force, ECOMOG displayed a remarkable ignorance of the geography, people and politics of Liberia even to the extent that the initial planning for the operation was carried out on the basis of a tourist map.³⁸ Often lacking an understanding of the context in which it operated, it is not so surprising that ECOMOG found that its military strategy did not always produce the desired results. Moreover, ironically, the early territorial gains made through peace enforcement tended to encourage the view within ECOMOG that a military solution could be found which served to undermine attempts to find a political solution, particularly early on.³⁹

Moving to peace enforcement, of course, also undermined the already partial consent for the ECOMOG deployment. The loss of consent in itself, may not have been a critical weakness if ECOMOG had retained its impartiality, but this too was further compromised through its attempts at peace enforcement. Nigeria's determination to get rid of Charles Taylor reinforced the perception that ECOMOG was not neutral.⁴⁰ Even before ECOMOG was deployed, Taylor had announced his intention to resist the operation, making Babangida's comment that ECOMOG was "going to Liberia not to fight but to keep the peace" rather optimistic.⁴¹ The NPFL's concerns about ECOMOG were also extended to IGNU which had little ability to secure itself and, as a result, was seen by the NPFL as a government imposed by Nigeria through ECOWAS.

Finding it difficult to score a decisive success against the NPFL, ECOMOG tried to exploit the civil war situation by allying itself with some of the warring factions; for example the AFL, ULIMO, and forces controlled by IGNU co-operated with ECOMOG in the attacks on Taylor's HQ at Gbarnga in 1993.⁴² During the outbreak of violence in April 1996 ECOMOG forces were alleged to have helped clear a way for the forces of Kromah and Taylor in their assaults on Prince Johnson's positions in Monrovia.⁴³

The impartiality issue was significant since, after the signing of the Cotonou Agreement in 1993, ECOMOG attempted to shift into a new peacemaking phase in co-operation with the UN and OAU. The problem was, however, that the disarmament, and cantonment of the factions was always going to be difficult if the NPFL and its allies had no confidence in the willingness of ECOMOG to treat all the factions equally.

Even without the preceding difficulties, ECOMOG's task would have been a challenge, simply because of a lack of resources. Financial and material constraints left ECOMOG consistently short of the means necessary either to inflict a "defeat" decisive enough to deliver lasting political gains or to implement the ambitious peace-making programmes. This in part explains the initial force of only 3000 which was inadequate for anything except a holding operation. Indeed, without heavy investment from Nigeria, the operation could never have been mounted, a fact which made it easier for it to adopt a leadership role.⁴⁴

Estimates made at the time indicated that the complete occupation of Liberia would have required Nigeria to increase its ECOMOG forces to 15,000 at a cost of \$135m. Although, as one

ECOMOG commander pointed out, the sum was "what NATO spends in a few days in Bosnia", it represented a prohibitive expense for ECOWAS.⁴⁵ The lack of troops was one explanation for the inability of the force to seal off the border and cut the NPFL's access to finance and materiel and also the failure to prevent the war from spreading into Sierra Leone in March 1991. Even when numbers were sufficient, there were critical equipment shortfalls, not least with regard to communications equipment and transport, particularly helicopters.⁴⁶

The lack of resources also had important implications for the effectiveness and morale of the troops; according to Jean-Daniel Tauxe of the ICRC, ECOMOG forces were variously unpaid or underpaid, and in such conditions are peacekeepers in name only".⁴⁷ This created friction with the UNOMIL personnel whose operation was much better funded but who depended upon ECOMOG to function.⁴⁸ It also led to numerous alleged incidents of corruption,⁴⁹ including the sale of fuel purchased by the US and intended for ECOMOG vehicles; hence the local joke that ECOMOG was an acronym for "Every Car or Moving Object Gone".⁵⁰ The issue of low and irregular pay was worsened by the lack of an organised system of roulement to relieve troops deployed in Liberia. As one UN officer commented "They're not motivated, not rotated, often not paid".⁵¹

The poverty of the ECOMOG contributors highlighted the significance of external sources of aid; this was, however, a double-edged sword. The degree of dependency on outside sources gave leverage to aid donors and led to considerable discontent in ECOMOG, discontent which was unlikely to foster faith in their mission. The US, as the largest contributor to the UN Trust Fund for Liberia, held what amounted to a veto over expenditure, even to the extent of cancelling some fuel purchases.⁵² The US also created resentment through its tardy provision of promised logistics, transport and communications equipment for ECOMOG forces.⁵³

One area in which ECOMOG might have scored highly was in its relationship with the UN. The UN established the United Nations Observer Mission in Liberia (UNOMIL) in 1994 following an agreement reached by the protagonists at Cotonou in the previous year, and UNOMIL and ECOMOG worked in tandem to implement the peace accord. This represented the first ever such arrangement and its potential utility as a method for resolving other disputes makes it a relationship worth examining.

The relationship between UNOMIL and ECOMOG was often less than harmonious. The difficulties were partly practical, such as who should be in control of joint operations, and partly psychological, not least a certain degree of resentment of the UN on the part of ECOMOG and thus an unwillingness to relinquish control. There were tensions at the higher level, between the respective force commanders, the central issue being which should be the lead force ECOMOG was already deployed and was the larger formation UNOMIL, on the other hand, was entrusted under Cotonou with "supervising" implementation, which implied some kind of directing role.⁵⁴ Additional friction was caused by perceived UN high-handedness and an alleged lack of appreciation of the realities on the ground - including a failure to keep ECOMOG properly briefed and naïveté in their dealings with the NPFL. In part, these problems could be attributed to the late involvement of the UN; the lack of effective political direction exercised by ECOWAS in the period before UNOMIL involvement led ECOMOG to become in some senses self tasking, taking control of both the political and military aspects of operation. This naturally made it more difficult to accept co-operation with a UN agency.⁵⁵ Some

ECOMOG soldiers also viewed the whole idea of being "monitored" by the UN as being at best irrelevant and at worst an act which undermined them; according to the Gambian contingent commander in July 1994 "...it is like an inconvenience. Monitoring Ecomog symbolises distrust." These problems were worsened by the UN's own attempts to improve its local profile; the "trust the UN" public information campaign in Liberia was seen by some ECOMOG members as an implied criticism of the West African force's credibility with the population.⁵⁶ It is, therefore, no surprise to find a certain tension in the UNOMIL/ECOMOG relationship at the lower level as well.⁵⁷

The difficulties outlined above stemmed directly from the very vague nature of Chapter VIII of the UN Charter, which does not lay down any detailed guidelines on the relationship between the UN and regional organisations.⁵⁸ Chapter VIII of the UN Charter permits a degree of "farming out" of responsibility; allowing regional organisations to deal with matters concerning threats to international peace and security, as long as "such arrangements or agencies and their activities are consistent with the Purposes and Principles of the United Nations."⁵⁹ There is no detail elaborating the exact relationship between the regional organisation and the UN, beyond the restriction that "no enforcement action shall be taken under regional arrangements or by regional agencies". This causes particular problems in respect of multi-organisation operations; which organisation, for example, should lead? Who should have overall political authority? How does one avoid dual chains of operational and political control?⁶⁰

In Liberia, the late involvement of the UN left it "imprisoned within the framework of strategies determined by ECOWAS."⁶¹ This problem also extended to command and control structures, with UNOMIL having to compete with arrangements that in many cases had been established for years. This problem was compounded by the Cotonou peace accord which also failed to address such issues. The executive powers given to Special Representative of the Secretary-General were widely regarded as too weak and the degree of authority over ECOMOG was unclear; the SRSG was cast in the role of "co-ordinator" with UNOMIL and ECOMOG having separate and autonomous chains of command. There was no one to decide categorically when, where, or how ECOMOG was to support the UNOMIL teams.⁶²

These problems caused enormous practical difficulties. The coordination between the deployment of the UNOMIL and ECOMOG forces was often very poor. UNOMIL observers were sometimes deployed into areas without ECOMOG backup, leaving them in an exposed position. Thus UNOMIL personnel deployed into Lofa County and Northern Nimba were without ECOMOG protection and in summer 1994 observers were subsequently held hostage following a dispute over alleged arms deals with a warring faction.⁶³ Even where UNOMIL and ECOMOG were deployed together, UNOMIL was sometimes subject to so many ECOMOG restrictions that the credibility of the UNOMIL operation was undermined.⁶⁴

OUTCOME

The issue of whether or not the ECOMOG deployment prolonged the war is a controversial one.⁶⁵ Eight years on, Taylor occupied the position that he might have occupied in 1989; as he himself commented, "If we had been allowed to win on the battlefield, we would have finished

the war in six months in 1990."⁶⁶ Taylor's assessment is perhaps overly optimistic, given that Liberia had antagonistic neighbours that may well have been willing to provide support to anti-Taylor factions in continuing the struggle. Nevertheless, even a prolongation of the conflict might have been acceptable if it had resulted in a better quality of outcome--a long-term solution for Liberia's instability and the promotion of regional stability.

Clearly, in some respects, the outcome was initially positive. The election process was at least inclusive, ensuring that the major factions became involved in a political process. A military victory by Taylor in 1990 might simply have pushed opposition factions across the border, leading to continuous low-level conflict in Liberia. Another crucial difference between the situation in 1997 and that which might have occurred in 1990 is that it has been brought about with the active support of Nigeria and at least the acquiescence of other major protagonists, such as Cote d'Ivoire; thus the current Taylor government is at least not subject to outside efforts to de-stabilise the regime. Moreover Taylor's electoral victory shored up his legitimacy in the eyes of the international community, opening up the prospect of financial and other aid. Yet there remain several areas of concern. In many respects Taylor has succeeded in squandering the early advantages that accrued to him through his landslide election victory. It is clear that Taylor's electoral victory was the result of a number of factors including having more resources, better organisation, and better media coverage, but it is also apparent that the strength of his support was related to a fear on the part of the electorate that if he were not elected, violence would return.⁶⁷ Whilst Taylor's approach in the immediate aftermath the election was generally benign,⁶⁸ he could afford to be magnanimous given the scale of the NPP victory in the elections and its grip on the levers of power. Yet in 1992 Taylor dismissed "All this foolishness about multiparty democracy."⁶⁹ More recent incidents indicate that Taylor's commitment to democracy may be questionable: the use of predominantly ex-NPFL manpower to fill out the nucleus of the new Armed Forces of Liberia,⁷⁰ the summary sacking and reinstatement of cabinet ministers,⁷¹ and attempts by Taylor to curb the media.⁷² The government remains heavily centralised with the legislature exerting little meaningful power over the Executive. The Government's human rights record is poor with frequent harassment of political opponents and democracy and human rights activists.⁷³ Taylor's relationship with some of his rivals remains tense; the President recently accusing Alhaji Kromah of raising forces in Guinea in preparation for an assault on Liberia.⁷⁴ Renewed tension between Taylor and Roosevelt Johnson led to armed clashes in September 1998. These issues have negatively influenced Liberia's relationship with potential aid donors, and resulted in an unwillingness of states such as the US to diplomatically engage with the Taylor regime.

Regional stability also remains problematic. With regard to Sierra Leone, for example, ECOMOG proved unable to contain the Liberian conflict thanks to its inability to seal off the borders. In March 1991 the war spilled over into Sierra Leone when NPFL elements made incursions in collaboration with the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), a Sierra Leone rebel group. The NPFL took around 25% of Sierra Leone⁷⁵ and disrupted the areas which provided most of Sierra Leone's export earnings. The prolonged Liberian conflict thus made a direct contribution to the prevailing instability in that country.⁷⁶ Liberian-Nigerian relations also remain strained; notwithstanding the emergence of a new Nigerian civilian government under Olusegun Obasanjo, which itself raises issues regarding future Nigerian policy towards Liberia.

Tensions were already emerging over a range of issues. Nigeria has accused Taylor of breaking the arms embargo and distributing weapons to the Liberian security forces. The military/RUF Government of Johnny-Paul Koroma contained many Taylor allies and the Liberian president is thus at odds with Nigeria over ECOMOG's reinstatement of the deposed president Ahmad Tejan Kabbah.⁷⁷ The ECOMOG commander has made claims that Taylor is supporting the rebel forces in Sierra Leone, claims which Taylor denies.⁷⁸ Thus, long-term Nigerian support for the Taylor regime cannot be taken for granted.

Conclusions

There can be no doubt that the ECOMOG intervention in the Liberian crisis provides an interesting case study in post-Cold War peacekeeping. Intrastate conflicts are on the rise, with their associated humanitarian problems and "insecurity ripple" effect. Calls for greater intervention by the United Nations have tended to founder upon legal wrangling, worries about feasibility, a lack of consensus and a certain crisis fatigue.⁷⁹ The question of the success or otherwise of the ECOMOG deployment thus has considerable bearing not only on Africans' view on the utility of UN/regional interventions in general and on peacekeeping in particular, but also on the whole issue of Chapter VIII co-operation. It is less clear, however, whether the operation provides any new answers to perennial themes with regard to the problems of peacekeeping or if it represents a more effective model for new regional peacekeeping initiatives.

Ultimately, ECOMOG's success was less in peacekeeping, since the fighting may well have been more prolonged and heavy than if it had not intervened. The ECOMOG operation was, in reality, an ambiguous exercise in attrition, sustained by Nigeria's willingness to accept heavy material costs,⁸⁰ which succeeded largely because of eventual compromises made bilaterally between the then Nigerian President, Sani Abacha, and Charles Taylor which gave Taylor much of what he sought. Prolongation of the war was the key reason for its eventual termination, but this prolongation was made possible by the fact that the Liberian crisis was viewed by Nigeria as an issue of national interest: it did not stem from a new approach to conflict resolution.

The ECOMOG deployment was in several respects a very poor choice of role model for future African peacekeeping operations. Whilst it was in many ways no worse than other contemporary peacekeeping operations, it struggled to be much better and it provided few answers to enduring peacekeeping problems. Indeed, to answer the question "how might it have been done better?" one would be on familiar post-Cold War territory--resources, commitment, speed, appropriate strategies, well defined end-states, and so forth. For answers to vexed questions on the best way to keep the peace in complex emergencies and on the appropriate co-operation between regional and international institutions, the search continues.

Notes

1. ECOWAS: founded in 1975 by the states of Dahomey, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Ivory Coast, Liberia, Mali Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Togo and Upper Volta (now Burkino Faso). Its original purpose was the promotion of

regional economic and social integration. In 1981 a Protocol on Mutual Assistance on defence expanded the remit of the organisation into the sphere of security.

2. Alex Okunor, "Africa's Shining Example", *West Africa*, 16-22 June 1997.
3. Ben Asante, "The ECOMOG Miracle", *West Africa*, 24-30 March 1997.
4. "Renforcement des Capacites de Maintien de la Paix en Afrique": for details see Melanie Bright, "African Peacekeeping Comes of Age", *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 26 May 1999, pp.22-27.
5. See Bright, *Ibid.*, and Ebow Godwin, "Blueprint for Enforcement", *West Africa*, 6-12 October 1997.
6. For a discussion of the potential advantages and disadvantages of regional approaches to peacekeeping see Paul Diel, "Institutional Alternatives to Traditional UN Peacekeeping: An Assessment of Regional and Multinational Options", *Armed Forces and Society*, Vol.19, No.2 (Winter 1993).
7. The opinions expressed are the authors own and should not be taken as representative of HM Government policy.
8. For a useful examination of the origins and nature of the conflict, see Stephen Ellis, "Liberia 1989-1994: A Study of Ethnic and Spiritual Violence", *African Affairs* (1995), 94, pp.165-197.
9. ECOWAS Standing Mediation Committee, Decision A/DEC.1/8/90, Article 2 in Marc Weller (ed.), *Regional Peace-Keeping and International Enforcement: The Liberian Crisis* (Cambridge; Cambridge University Press 1994).
10. Figures from *The UN and the Situation in Liberia*, UN Reference Paper (UN Department of Public Information April 1995), p.18
11. Segun Adeyemi, "Nigerian Monitoring Troops Leave Liberia", *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 27 January 1999, p.19.
12. For a summary of the ethnic and religious characteristics of the protagonists during the war, see "Liberia on a Knife-Edge", *New African*, March 1995.
13. These included the NPFL (led by Charles Taylor), ULIMO-K (led by Alhaji Kromah), ULIMO-J (Roosevelt Johnson), the AFL (Lt.General Joshua Bowen), the Liberia Peace Council (LPC, under George Boley), Lofa Defence Force (Francois Massaquoi), Central Revolutionary Council (CRC, Tom Woewiyu) and the Movement for Justice in Africa (Moja, Amos Sawyer). See Anthony Clayton, *Factions, Foreigners and Fantasies: The Civil War in Liberia* (Conflict Studies Research Centre 1995).
14. For a more detailed examination of warlordism in Liberia, see Paul B. Rich, 'Warlords, State Fragmentation and the Dilemma of Humanitarian Intervention', *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, Vol.10, No.1 (Spring 1999), pp.78-96.
15. An important milestone in the peace process, signed 25 July 1993, which tried to arrange a ceasefire, the disarming of warring factions, de-mobilisation, the establishment of a transitional government and a timetable for elections. See "Letter from the Charge' d'Affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Benin to the United Nations," Addressed to the Secretary-General, 6 August 1993 in Weller, *Op. Cit.*, pp.343-352.
16. "Liberia: Problematic Peacekeeping", *Africa Confidential*, 4 March 1994, pp.2-3.
17. "Beware the Children", *Time Magazine*, 4 December 1995.

18. Asante, Op.cit.
19. Baffour Ankomah, "The UN: Taking Sides in Liberia", *New African*, November 1993.
20. See Comfort Ero and Suzanne Long, "Humanitarian Intervention: A New Role for the United Nations", *International Peacekeeping*, Vol.2, No.2 (Summer 1995) pp.140-156.
21. For more details on these and other external players, see George Klay Kieh, Jr., "Combatants, Patrons, Peacemakers, and the Liberian Civil Conflict", *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Vol.15, pp.125-143.
22. Clement E. Adibe, "Coercive Diplomacy and the Third World: Africa After the Cold War." Paper presented to the Workshop on Coercive Diplomacy, King's College London, 7-9 June 1995, p.14.
23. Ibid. p17.
24. Ibrahim Babangida, "The Imperative Features of Nigerian Foreign Policy and the Crisis in Liberia", *Contact* 2 (3) (November 1990) from Adibe, Ibid. p.12.
25. For examples, see Emmanuel Kwesi Aning, "The International Dimensions of Internal Conflict: The Case of Liberia and West Africa", Copenhagen Centre for Development Research, Working Paper 97.4 (June 1997), p.12. ([Http://www.cdr.dk/wp-97-4.htm](http://www.cdr.dk/wp-97-4.htm)).
26. W. Ofuatey Kodjoe, "Regional Organisations and the Resolution of Internal Conflict: The Ecomog Intervention in Liberia", *International Peacekeeping*, Vol.1, No.3 (Autumn 1994), p.290.
27. Abiodun Alao, "ECOMOG in Liberia-the Anaemic Existence of a Mission", *Jane's Intelligence Review*, (September 1994), p.430.
28. Herbert Howe, "Lessons of Liberia", *International Security*, Vol.21, No.3 (Winter 1996/97), p.162.
29. Ecomog Standing Mediation Committee, Decision A/DEC.1/8/90. Article 2(2) from Weller, Op.cit., p.67.
30. Alao, Op.cit., p.430.
31. "Call for Ecomog Summit: ECOMOG given 'Fresh mandate'", BBC Monitoring Report, 21 September 1990, in Weller, Op.cit. p.100.
32. "Speech at Press Briefing of Media Executives by the President of Nigeria", 31 October 1990, in Weller, Op. Cit. p.105.
33. "Agreement on Cessation of Hostilities and Peaceful Settlement of Conflict, Lome, Togo, 13 February 1991", Article 1(1) & Article 2(7) from Weller, Op.cit. pp.136-139.
34. ECOWAS, A/SEC.1/10/92, Article 6, in Weller, Op.cit. p.227.
35. "Final Communique of the First Joint Summit Meeting of the ECOWAS SMC and the Committee of Five, Article 10.20/10/92", in Weller, Op.cit. p.230.
36. For a more detailed examination of Taylor's strategy see Jinmi Adisa, "Nigeria in ECOMOG: Political Undercurrents and the burden of Community Spirit", *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, Vol.5, No.1 (Spring 1994), pp.83-110.
37. Nigeria was always keen to target Taylor's NPFL whereas others, including Cote d'Ivoire, sought to resist this. Ofuatey-Kodjoe, Op.cit., p.290.
38. Howe, Op.cit.,p.164.
39. "Liberia:The Battle For Gbarnga", *Africa Confidential*, Vol.34, No.11, 28 May 1993, pp.1-2.
40. Ofuatey-Kodjoe, Op.cit., p.293.

41. "ECOWAS Peace-keeping Force to be Sent to Liberia; Foreigners Released by the NPFL", BBC Monitoring report, 9 August 1990, in Weller, Op.cit., p.66.
42. "Liberia: The Battle for Gbarnga".
43. "Liberia: Out Of Control", *Africa Confidential*, 10 May, 1996, pp.1-4.
44. Ofuatey-Kodjoe, Op.cit., p.291.
45. Thomas L. Friedman. "Warlords Versus the People, Who Have No Voice", *International Herald Tribune*, 22 January, 1999.
46. Howe, Op.cit. p.168.
47. Jean-Daniel Tuaxe, letter to the *International Herald Tribune*, 17 May 1996.
48. See, for example, Funmi Olonisakin "UN Cooperation with Regional Organisations in Peacekeeping: The Experiences of ECOMOG and UNOMIL in Liberia", *International Peacekeeping*, Vol.3, No.3 (Autumn 1996) pp.33-51.
49. Friedman, Op.cit.
50. "Witness to insanity", *Newsweek*, 29 April 1996.
51. Ibid.
52. "Liberia: problematic Peacekeeping", Op.cit.
53. "Liberia: Keeping What peace?", *Africa Confidential*, 16th February 1996, pp.2-3.
54. "Liberia: Problematic Peacekeeping", Op.cit.
55. See the United Nation's Secretary-Generals Report on Liberia 1995.
56. "Liberia: Problematic peacekeeping", op.cit.
57. Olonisakin, op.cit., p.41.
58. For example Article 52 (1) and Article 53 (1) of the UN Charter.
59. UN Charter, Chapter VIII, Article 52 (1).
60. Olonisakin, Op.cit., p.44.
61. "The UN: Taking Sides in Liberia", *New African*, November 1993, pp.16-17.
62. Olonisakin, op.cit., p.42.
63. Ibid, p.41.
64. Ibid., p.40.
65. See, for example, Karl P. Magyar, "Liberia's Peacekeeping Lessons for Africa," in Karl P. Magyar and Earl Conteh-Morgan, "*Peacekeeping in Africa: ECOMOG in Liberia*" (Macmillan: London 1998).
66. "Liberia: The First 100 Days", *New African Special Report*, December 1997, p.6.
67. Terence Lyons, "Liberia's Path from Anarchy to Elections", *Current History*, May 1998, p.232.
68. For example, giving his previous enemies minor positions within his cabinet as well as making great play of the human rights issues.
69. Jinmi Adisa, Op.cit., p.104.
70. "The Key to Security," *West Africa*, 24-30 November 1997.
71. "Liberian President Re-instates Sacked Cabinet," *BBC Online Network*, 22 May 1999 (<http://news2.thdo.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/world/africa/newsid%5F350000/350452.stm>)
72. Lyons, op.cit., p.233.

73. 1999 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices - Liberia, US Department of State, February 25th, 2000
(http://www.state.gov/www/global/human_rights/1999_hrp_report/liberia.html)
74. "Cross border incursion into Liberia", *BBC Online Network*, 21 April 1999
(<http://news2.thdo.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/world/africa/newsid%5F325000/325452.stm>)
75. Ofuatey-Kodjoe, Op.cit., p.283.
76. See, for example, Earl Conteh-Morgan and Shireen Kadivar "Sierra Leone's Response to ECOMOG: The Imperative of Geographical Proximity," in Magyar and Conteh, op.cit.
77. "A Diplomatic Coup", *Africa Confidential*, 6 March, 1998, p.4.
78. "Liberia Denies Backing Rebels", *BBC Online Network*, 10 April 1999
(<http://news2.thdo.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/world/africa/newsid%5F314000/314957.stm>)
79. Ofuatey-Kodjoe, op.Cit, p.261.
80. According to Nigeria \$8bn and 500 dead, although Nigeria may well have an interest in talking up its efforts . "Liberia Peace Cost Nigeria 8 Billion Dollars," *BBC Online Network*, 25th October 1999.

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