

# **AN ASSESSMENT OF THE SECOND, THIRD AND FORTH ECOMOG PEACE-KEEPING OPERATIONS IN WEST AFRICA**

**By**

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## **ECOMOG MISSION IN SIERRA LEONE (The Second)**

The Sierra Leone military coup of 25<sup>th</sup> May, 1997 seems to have broken the resolve of Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and put paid, at least temporarily to the dissolution of the West African peace-keeping force known as ECOWAS Ceasefire Monitoring Group (ECOMOG), as the political leadership of the West African sub-region has once again and indeed for the second time, been obliged to respond to the threat and challenge emanating from Sierra Leone, by redeploying elements of ECOMOG troops there.

Some have queried the rationale and competence of ECOWAS which is supposedly a sub-regional economic group, to involve itself in the political fracas of member countries; and worse still, operating through the military mechanism of ECOMOG to broker peace settlements and if necessary, impose one by the deterrent

effect of the use of force which ECOMOG represents. The fact is that, not very many people are conversant with the provisions of the revised Treaty of ECOWAS which was signed by member states on 24<sup>th</sup> July, 1993.

Among other things, Article 58 of ECOWAS Regional Security provides as follows:

- i.** Member states undertake to work to safeguard and consolidate relations conducive to the maintenance of peace, stability and security within the (sub) region.
- ii.** In pursuit of these objectives, member states undertake to cooperate with the Community in establishing and strengthening an appropriate mechanism for the timely prevention and resolution of intra-state and inter-state conflicts, paying particular regard to the need to:
  - a.** Employ where appropriate, good offices, conciliation, mediation and other methods of peaceful settlement of disputes;
  - b.** Establish a regional peace and security observation system and peace keeping forces where appropriate;  
***(ECOWAS Revised Treaty, 1993).***

Clearly therefore, the violent overthrow of the legitimate government of President Tejan Kabbah by a section of the military in Sierra Leone, with its accompanying looting and wanton destruction of property and loss of lives which could not be ignored by ECOWAS and its leadership. It had a responsibility

to ensure that the conditions in Sierra Leone were returned to normalcy quickly; more so, as conditions there occasioning the fleeing of thousands of refugees into neighbouring Guinea and Liberia again, threatened the fragile economies and infrastructures of those states, thereby posing an unacceptable level of threat to the peace, security and economic stability of the ECOWAS sub-region.

Following extensive consultations by the then Chairman of ECOWAS, His Excellency General Sani Abacha of Nigeria, with his brother heads of state and government of the sub-region, broad consensus quickly emerged on a sub-regional response to the untenable situation in Sierra Leone. At the meeting of the ECOWAS Foreign Ministers in Conakry, Guinea on 26<sup>th</sup> June 1997, the ministers identified three objectives for sub-regional action which were:

- i.** The early reinstatement of the legitimate government of President Tejan Kabbah;
- ii.** The return of peace and security to Sierra Leone; and
- iii.** The resolution of the issue of refugees and displaced persons.

These objectives were to be realised by a combination of three measures. These were:

- a.** Dialogue and negotiation;
- b.** Imposition of sanctions/embargo; and
- c.** The use of force.

However, the visible military activities of ECOMOG in enforcing the ECOWAS Sanctions/Embargo against Sierra Leone, was the decisive factor that persuaded the military junta to accept ECOWAS peace negotiations and successful reinstatement of President Tejan Kabbah back to power.

The indispensability of ECOMOG in terms of the ECOWAS capacity to safeguard and maintain peace, security and stability of the sub-region has been established beyond any shadow of doubts. Whatever any one's perception of the relationship between ECOWAS and ECOMOG may be, it is neither a short-gun wedding nor a marriage of convenience.

ECOMOG was established by ECOWAS purposefully in response to a true need, and its continued relevance and necessity will depend upon the degree of peace and stability that subsists in the West African sub-region. This must be evaluated against the background of the many foreign-sponsored initiatives being sold to some members of ECOWAS ostensibly aimed at enhancing African peacekeeping capacities, especially the so-called African Crisis Response Initiative (ACRI).

Indeed, if these proliferating parallel initiatives, all of which purport to be aimed at assisting Africa in the area of conflict resolution, management and peacekeeping, are indicative of anything at all, it signifies that ECOMOG is a good idea whose time has come and should long endure.

The experience in Liberia exposed the shameful attitude and disposition of USA not to intervene and other key global powers with regard to their response-time to crisis in Africa, in

particular, with regard to UN peacekeeping troops deployed to African countries in times of crisis.

This flurry of extra-continental initiatives must be viewed with scepticism, if not downright suspicion. If their own version, whether it be ARCF, ACRI or whatever is considered good for West Africa and the rest of Africa, then our own very dear ECOMOG must be seen and presumed to be twice as good. Therefore, there is no reason why ECOMOG should be phased out or stood down after the Liberian and Sierra Leonean crises.

There is also basic inconsistency if not contradiction in these new “Theatre Arts” and show of concern for Africa’s well-being, when these same leading Western Nations, who also happens to be permanent members of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), are those who made it so difficult for the UN Security Council not to discharge its obligation fully and in a timely fashion, in times of crisis in Africa. This fact was aptly underscored by **(the Economist, 18<sup>th</sup> October, 1997)** which stated that:

The days when European or American front-line troops intervened in Africa, even for humanitarian purposes may well be over. The more recent deaths of French soldiers in the Central African Republic seem to have convinced Western Governments that Africa is not worth their soldier’s lives...the call nowadays is for African solution to African problems.

It was once totally acceptable to these Western governments that while we were under colonial rule, thousands of Africans were conscripted and sent to fight Europe's great wars, where they fought and died alongside their European and American comrades in Europe, the near East, the far East, the Southern Pacific as well as North America. Now, we are told that Europeans and Americans can fight and die in Bosnia, Sarajevo, Croatia etc; but not anymore in Africa. This new discrimination against Africa is different from the system of South Africa's apartheid which the world thought had been vanquished forever but it is still being manifested in various forms, ways and means.

In the light of the above, Africans emphatically repudiate the attempt to further divide Africa into Anglophone, Lusophone and Francophone peacekeepers; an attempt, in effect, to begin a repartitioning of Africa into sphere of influence and interests. Within that partition, they also seek to sow seeds of discord and drive a wedge between members of the same regional organisation.

ECOMOG therefore is the response and defence against the resurgence of Euro-American neo-colonialism and imperialism, in the shape of foreign-inspired initiatives for conflict management and resolution in Africa. And as long as that threat exists, ECOMOG will continue to be relevant and indeed wedded to ECOWAS for the preservation and maintenance of peace and security of the West African sub-region.

### **ECOMOG MISSION IN GUINEA BISSAU (The Third)**

It has been noted that the two key actors, (former Brigadier General Bernardo Vieira and Brigadier General Ansumane Mane) in the Guinea Bissau Civil War, were actually comrades-in-arms against Portuguese colonial rule in the 1970's. Both veterans were guerrilla leaders before Brig. General Bernardo Vieira seized power in the coup of 1980 in which he deposed Luis Cabral.

The Francophone and Lusophone open and latent struggle for Neo-colonialism and Imperialism in Guinea Bissau has been a source of worry to ECOWAS especially to the Anglophone member states.

France lobbied and openly welcomed Guinea Bissau (former Portuguese colony) into the CFA monetary zone in 1995 and was very supportive of President Vieira's government and Senegalese troop intervention, whereas Portugal, the former colonial master, has been sympathetic to the rebel cause of Brig. General Ansumane Mane.

The ECOMOG intervention in Guinea Bissau was significant for three reasons:

- a.** Firstly, it comprised only three Francophone countries and one Anglophone state, without active involvement of Nigerian troops. This effectively dispelled the rumour and insinuation that had always been made in certain quarters that; ECOMOG was basically conceived and had been employed continuously as a tool for advancing Nigeria's

defence and foreign policy interests across the ECOWAS sub-region.

- b.** Secondly, with the exclusion of Guinea and Senegal from participating at the request of the military-rebel group, the Guinea Bissau mission set the healthy precedent of a practice whereby a party's demand regarding force composition would be respected in mounting peacekeeping operations in future.
- c.** Thirdly, the operation indicated an improvement in the mandate and operational framework of peacekeeping operations in the sub-region. These factors have been instructive and remarkable that any comprehensive analysis of regional efforts at conflict resolution in West African must include the Guinea Bissau experience.

Furthermore, the 1997 general and presidential elections held in the aftermath of the Liberian Civil War sent a resounding message to West African leaders and warlords alike, that ECOWAS and the wider international community would immediately tolerate extreme violence as a political tool. The former warlord, Charles Taylor, became Liberia's president after deploying his considerable resources, obtained in the civil war to win an election that international observers declared free and fair.

The international community took no action to debar war criminals from seeking office in Liberia, thus demonstrating that they were totally indifferent to Liberia and its people. The resulting message undoubtedly reached Guinea Bissau where

even ***“their deaf, dumb and the blind”*** internalised the unambiguous gospel of “rebel impunity” whereby the end certainly justifies the means.

Furthermore, the controversial Lome Peace Accord for Sierra Leone which was signed on 7<sup>th</sup> July 1999, provided that Foday Sankoh (the brutal RUF Commander) should be pardoned for treason, granted the position of Vice President to President Tejan Kabbah and made Chairman of the Commission that oversaw Sierra Leone’s diamond mines.

Although, the Lome Peace Agreement was somehow subject of protests both in Sierra Leone and by International Human Rights Groups abroad, but it did to a large extent, latently supported and encouraged violence, brutality with impunity as a means of quickly getting to the corridors of power without exception and objection in the West African Sub-region.

Indeed, Guinea Bissau’s 1998-1999 conflict was rooted in a contest within the elite to control the state, rather than in any popular insurrection, secessionist demand or intense ethnic divide.

### **ECOMOG MISSION IN IVORY COAST (The Forth)**

In Cote d’Ivoire, it was established that ECOWAS mechanisms for conflict resolution were applied in good time and with good effects. In particular, the deployment of ECOMOG or ECOMICI (French) contributed significantly towards stabilising the situation in the country and bringing some measure of mutual confidence between the warring parties until the UN mission arrived in May 2003.

However, in spite of the contributions which ECOMOG made to conflict resolutions in Cote d'Ivoire during its 16 month operation before it was absorbed into UN mission, the force encountered some challenges. These included but not limited to:

- a. **Inadequate Troop Strength:** ECOMOG was mounted with a faulty appreciation of the gravity of the military situation in Cote d'Ivoire. As a result of this, it turned out that the number of troops pledged by troop contributing countries was far too small to execute the mission and the deployment of these troops was subject to the approval of the government of Cote d'Ivoire.

According to ECOWAS Special Envoy to Ivory Coast, **Ambassador Ralph Uwechue (2011)**, the limited troop strength was further whittled down because Mali was one of the most prepared to deploy its troops but did not deploy due to national sentiments towards the large number of Malian immigrants in Cote d'Ivoire which would compromise their neutrality. Nigeria, which in the past led other West African intervention efforts declined. Guinea Bissau which pledged the highest number of soldiers numbering 386 was not allowed to deploy them.

- b. **Ineffective Coordination between Executive Secretariat and Force Headquarters:** In Cote d'Ivoire, a dogmatic application of Article 33, paragraph 2 (d) which stipulates that "the Force Commander is accountable to the Executive Secretary through the Special Representative", was found to

impede the lateral and horizontal flow of information, thereby making coordination between ECOWAS Executive Secretary and the ECOMOG Force Headquarters ineffective.

**c. Capacity Deficiency at Executive Secretariat:** The Executive Secretary was not organisationally prepared to handle the Ivorian crisis. The Deputy Executive Secretary for Political Affairs, Defence and Security (DES-PADS) charged with the responsibility for assisting the Executive Secretary to implement the Mechanism, assumed duty in April 2001. By September 2002, when the crisis erupted, his professional staff consisted of only two: a Principal Programme Officer (Peacekeeping) and a Principal Officer (Political Affairs). This small team worked almost round the clock to implement the mechanism in response to the crisis in Cote d'Ivoire. This situation was also aggravated by the late nomination of the Force Commander.

**d. Lack of Resources:** Ambassador Ralph Uwechue (2011) also commented and recollected how ECOMICI was challenged by the lack of human, financial and other resources. This led to great reliance on the French, who were ECOMICI's main supporters but whose forces apparently had different plans, while it was eventually possible to deploy troops north of the cease-fire line: in Bouke, Man, Seguela and Bondoukou. The lack of resources meant that the Force Commander's concept of operations stalled at Phase 1 and was thereafter never completed.

e. **Lack of Strategic Support:** ECOMICI was also hampered by lack of strategic support for deployment of its forces. The problem started with the advance party which deployed at very short notice and had to rely on the French for mobility and support. There was also a very long period of waiting before the first troops arrived on ground. In the words of Ambassador Uwechue (2011),

The Force Commander had to use his own initiative, his own knowledge of Cote d'Ivoire and his own acquaintance to get things moving. Even so, it took more than three months to set up a basic ECOMOG force headquarters.

f. **Deficient Logistic System:** ECOMICI was also constrained by the logistic system which it operated. The system whereby French RECAMP provided support to certain countries, Britain provided support to Ghana and Belgium to Benin, was a key weakness as it lacked coherence. Individual troop contributing countries also provided their own contingent-owned equipments and USA equipment was supplied to the ECOMICI via a private company-Pacific Architects and Engineers (PAE). Though troops were provided with adequate logistic support, there was no integration whatsoever and that is one of the main principles of logistic support (**Col. Kwaskebe, NDC Report, 2005**).

Conclusively, this academic exercise is to assess the efforts and challenges of ECOMOG at resolving the conflicts in Sierra Leone

(the second ECOMOG intervention), Guinea Bissau (third ECOMOG intervention) and Ivory Coast (the fourth ECOMOG intervention) which were championed by ECOWAS, a regional economic organisation that transformed itself over time, in realisation of the fact that; regional peace and security constitutes the essential platform for any meaningful economic development; utilising ECOWAS mechanisms for conflict resolution in West Africa and examining the role of ECOWAS as a regional economic organisation using ECOMOG as a regional peacekeeping force in the resolution of conflicts in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea Bissau and Ivory Coast.

The West African sub-region has since the end of Cold War, experienced several conflicts, ranging from communal to inter-ethnic, religious and social-political wars. Some of these violent conflicts in the West African sub-region have demanded the interventions of ECOWAS via ECOMOG in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea Bissau and Cote D'Ivoire.

The methodology of ECOMOG's involvement in these conflict resolution efforts have been through intervention, peace enforcement and peacekeeping. The applications of these methodologies have produced mixed results with specific regards to conflict resolution.

In Sierra Leone, ECOMOG successfully restored democratically elected government of President Tejan Kabbah. However, its inability to carry out post conflict rehabilitation and reconstruction still raises questions. Therefore, if ECOMOG must succeed in future conflict resolution efforts, it must develop the capacity to carry out sustained peace-building processes. These

will include issues like transitional justice, economic and security sector reforms.

In Guinea Bissau, ECOWAS succeeded where the Community of Portuguese Language Countries (CPLP) led by former colonial master Portugal failed. Under the auspices of ECOWAS, Nigeria brokered a breakthrough in the conflict and a peace agreement was signed between President Bernardo Nino Vieira and Brig. General Ansumane Mane on 2<sup>nd</sup> November 1998, whereby ECOWAS deployed ECOMOG interposition force to monitor the peace agreement.

In Cote d'Ivoire, it was established that ECOWAS mechanism for conflict resolution were applied in good time with good results. The deployment of ECOMOG or ECOMICI contributed immensely towards stabilising the situation and brought some measure of mutual confidence between the warring factions until the UN mission arrived in May 2003, making it 16 months of ECOMOG stabilisation and peacekeeping operation in Cote D'Ivoire.

In short, without the ECOMOG interventions, it would have been a different ball game in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea Bissau and Ivory Coast as the popular saying goes.

ECOMOG's modest achievements underscored the need for closer regional cooperation in economic, political and security spheres. In retrospect, it may be argued that had ECOMOG been in place earlier, the crisis would not have been prolonged and more lives would have been saved.

Indeed, ECOWAS is the first regional economic organisation in the world that intervened in a regional political conflict, using a

regional peace-keeping force called ECOMOG. This is a rare experiment in the practice of conflict resolution in post Cold War Africa and as such, it represented an;

uncommon attempt by African States, to resolve African Conflicts, within African Continent, in the spirit of African Brotherhood, thereby demonstrating African Unity.