Managing Chaos in the West African Sub-Region: Assessing the Role of ECOMOG in Liberia[1]

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Introduction

The West African sub-region, consisting of Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Ivory Coast, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea-Conakry, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Togo, has had a troubled history. There is little democracy in West Africa and where it is taking root, the process has been destabilizing, especially in conjunction with other points of concern. Military spending is on the rise. West Africa is host to a large number of refugees. The region does not perform well economically. In addition, West Africa has been heavily hit by the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

Ivory Coast, Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Guinea-Conakry have all seen flare-ups in violent conflict of varying intensities and types, many of which have long histories. Revolutionary conflicts over the control of government structures, and fuelled by deep political and ideological differences, date back decades in Liberia and Sierra Leone, and continued well into the late 1990s. Struggles initiated soon after independence by groups in Liberia saw increased intensity. In the Gambia, a July 1994 coup led by Lieutenant Yahya Jammeh, seized power amid allegations of corruption directed at President Jawara. Several people were killed during a November 1994 counter-coup from within the army, which Jammeh survived.

In Senegal, a bloody separatist revolt in the southern province of Casamance started in 1982. In almost 20 years of fighting 231 villages have

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been abandoned, and 60,000 people displaced. The Senegalese government and the separatist Movement of Democratic Forces of Casamance signed a cease-fire and a peace agreement on March 16, 2001.[2] In 2000, raids occurred along the borders with Liberia and Sierra Leone—hundreds of people, including many civilians, were killed.

Since Sierra Leone's independence in 1961, a series of coups thwarted repeated democratic initiatives. A rebel war began in 1991 as parliament was approving a draft multi-party constitution. In spite of efforts to negotiate and sign peace agreements, the civil war intensified in 1995 and again in 1997, necessitating the installation of a Nigerian led ECOMOG force to enforce an embargo. Rebels continued a reign of terror that included a brutal spree of crude civilian amputation, looting, rape, and massive exploitation of children. In 1999 the Indian and Kenyan led UNAMSIL force was installed and twice required re-enforcements, lastly by the U.K. in 2000. The civil war was officially declared over in January 2002, and the government and the UN set up a Special Court for Sierra Leone.

It is important to note that the violent conflicts in Liberia and Sierra Leone embody a myriad of linkages, most notably through "a highly criminalized war economy"[3] that sustained the trade in diamonds, arms, and drugs. Analysts have noted that this was "years of brutality by forces devoid of ideology, political support, and ethnic identity. Only the economic opportunity presented by a

[2] The agreement allows the free circulation of people and goods; an end to all arbitrary arrests, kidnapping, torture, killings, and manhunts; and the resettling of refugees and building of roads to connect Casamance with the rest of the countryFollowing unrest within the army and civil service in 1992, President Lansana Conte (who seized power in a 1984 coup) sanctioned creation of political parties. During the 1993 election campaign, during which many people were killed, opposition groups alleged massive fraud. During the subsequent 1998 Presidential elections, opposition leader Alpha Conde was arrested and later tried and sentenced to five years of hard labour for 'threatening the security of the state' amid wide criticism at home and abroad. Accusations of interference erupted from both Guinea (accusing Taylor of backing rebels from Liberia and Sierra Leone in their attacks on Guinean border villages) and Liberia (accusing Guinea of supporting dissidents fighting government troops in northern Liberia). For a detailed risk assessment of the region see the Sub-Sahara Africa report and the West Africa report located at www.carleton.ca/cifp.

[3] Smillie, Gberie, Hazleton, "The Heart of the Matter. Sierra Leone, Diamonds & Human Security (Complete Report)" Partnership Africa Canada, January 2000.

breakdown in law and order could sustain [such] violence."[4] During the intense periods of fighting in Liberia and Sierra Leone, a substantial number of refugees escaped to neighbouring countries, in particular Guinea. However, the number of refugees produced is small when compared to the millions who were displaced internally.   The linkage between the two conflicts is notable. For example, in 1989 ex-civil servant Charles Taylor launched an invasion beginning a civil war that later developed several splinter factions. On July 19, 1996, legislative and presidential elections brought Taylor to power. Fighting occurred along the border with Guinea in 1999 and 2000. Throughout the 1990s and into 2000 and 2001, Liberian- supported smuggling and export of Sierra Leonean diamonds fuelled the civil war there.

As a result of the growing problems in the region and in particular to the deleterious effects the conflict in Liberia was having on neighbouring states, ECOMOG (Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group) was created in 1990 by the regional economic organization – ECOWAS (Economic Community of West Africa States) to establish peace in the region. [5] Since then, the force has intervened in Liberia in August 1990; Guinea-Bissau in June 1998; and in Sierra Leone since 1997 to restore the democratically elected government of President Kabbah that was deposed that year.[6]

On the one hand, ECOMOG represents a credible African initiative to maintain regional peace and uphold various peace accords,[7] at a time when some of the African countries engulfed in conflict no longer enjoy their 'Cold War privileges.' On the other hand, the force has been accused of bias, corruption and brutality directed against ordinary citizens. The purpose of this paper is to evaluate an emerging indigenous African peacekeeping capability in the light of concerns regarding ECOMOG's effectiveness and conduct.

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[4] Ibid.

[5] ECOWAS is comprised of all the 16-member states of the sub-region.

[6] ECOMOG was replaced in Sierra Leone by a United Nations Peacekeeping – UNOMSIL in October 1999. In May 2000, when the situation in Sierra Leone deteriorated as a result of the capture of UN peacekeepers by RUF rebels, ECOMOG had to come in once again.

[7] Several Accords were subsequently signed by the warring factions.

ECOMOG's intervention in Liberia from 1990 to 1997 constitutes the focus of this study.   We argue that the course of ECOWAS diplomacy in Liberia was fraught with problems and growing pains; the result of a lack of a cease-fire on the ground before the force was deployed; the absence of a clear and enforceable mandate and divisive regional power politics. These shortcomings notwithstanding, we conclude that ECOMOG's efforts in Liberia have helped the region as a whole. The net result has been a rapid but positive learning experience for the peacekeeping nations of West Africa, improved regional stability and an emerging regionally-based conflict management capacity.

The first section of this paper traces the birth of ECOMOG to its intervention in Liberia. In the second section, we evaluate the broad range of tools of diplomacy and coercion at ECOWAS' disposal in the context of that organization's attempt to manage the Liberian crisis. The third section briefly examines the conditions for success and failure of the ECOMOG initiative. In the final section we present lessons taken from the case.

The Birth of ECOMOG

ECOMOG's intervention in Liberia can be traced to two factors.[8] First, even though the outbreak of the Liberian conflict corresponded to the end of the Cold War, the demise of the East-West rivalry did not result in greater attention by the West to Africa's problems.[9] Instead, as Ignatieff observed, "huge sections of the world's population have won the right of self-determination on the cruelest

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[8] See George Klay Kieh, Jr., "The Obstacles to the Peaceful Resolution of the Liberian Civil Conflict," Studies in Conflict and Terrorism, Vol. 17, (1994), pp. 97-108; Stephen Ellis, "Liberia 1989-1994: A Study of Ethnic and Spiritual Violence," African Affairs (1995), 94, 165-197; Herbert Howe, "Lessons of Liberia: ECOMOG and Regional Peacekeeping" International Security, Vol. 21, No. 3, winter 1997, pp. 145-176; Christopher Clapham, "Liberia", in John Dunn, Ed., West African States: Failure and Promise (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1978), pp. 125-6; Leonard Brehun, Liberia: The War of Horror, Accra: Adwinsa Publications, 1991; Lindsay Barret, "Liberia and West Africa: Which Way Out?," West Africa, 6-12 May, 1996, pp. 697-700; Marc Weller, ed., Regional Peace-Keeping and International Enforcement: The Liberian Crisis, Cambridge International Document Series, Vol. 6, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994, p. xix.

[9] See Jean-Germain Gros, "Towards a taxonomy of failed states in the New World Order: decaying Somalia, Liberia, Rwanda and Haiti," Third World Quarterly, vol. 17, No. 3, 1996:455-471.

possible terms: they have been simply left to fend for themselves. Not surprisingly, their nation-states are collapsing."[10] Hans–Henrik Holm argues that the latest wave of weak states into the 1990s is a consequence of the way the international system has developed over the last ten years. Like Ignatieff, Holm believes that the Cold War ensured that most weak states at least "survived" but with its end most of these states have been left to "sink or swim."[11] Similarly, Robert Rosh and Mohammed Ayoob argue that state failure is largely a function of the withdrawal of outside support to weak states.[12] To the extent that regional conflicts as well as the maintenance of state integrity were both key features of the international system during the Cold War, there may be some validity to these claims.[13] The net result, as Ayoob suggests, is the absence of effective statehood in much of the 'Third World,' or what some scholars have termed 'quasi-states.' [14] In this vein, Liberia is an example of state failure and collapse.[15] The central government ceased to function, was unable to provide for the well-being of its population or protect it from internal and external threats.[16] The

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[10] Michael Ignatieff, *Blood and Belonging,* Toronto: Penguin, 1993, p. 8.

[11] According to Holm, "[t]he international system is created on the basis of the norms from the dominant states concerning the idea of the state, legitimacy, and the legal framework for the state. The weak states are unable to live up to these norms. The weak states represent both a system failure and a system responsibility. Hans-Henrik Holm, "The Responsibility That Will Not Go Away: Weak States in the International System," Paper Presented at the Failed States Conference, Purdue University, West Lafayette, February 25-27, 1998.

[12] Robert Rosh, "Ethnic Cleavages as a Component of Global Military Expenditures." *Journal of Peace Research,* (XXXIII, 1989) 21-30; Mohammed Ayoob, "State-Making, State-Breaking and State Failure: Explaining the Roots of 'Third World' Insecurity," in Luc van de Goor, Kumar Rupesinghe, and Paul Sciarone, (eds.), *Between Development and Destruction,* (London and New York: 1996) 67-86.

[13] Mohammed Ayoob (State-Making, State-Breaking and State Failure: Explaining the Roots of 'Third World' Insecurity) examines the western model of state-making (in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries) and tries to draw a parallel with what is currently taking place in the 'Third World. Ayoob also examines the twin concepts of ethno-nationalism and self-determination which relates to state failure. According to Ayoob, state failure "predominates when institutions collapse, when existing institutions are not fulfilling people's basic needs and when satisfactory alternative structures are not readily available" 80.

[14] Ibid, Ayoob's main argument is to link the emergence of state failure to superpower competition in the 'Third World.'

[15] From a video transcript: "Small Arms and Failed States" October 24, 1999. http://www.cdi.org/adm/1307/transcript.html.

[16] To understand what a failed state is, it is important to understand a successful state. At its core, a successful state provides for the basic security of its population, protecting it from both internal and external

economy weakened.[17] Education and health care became non-existent. Physical infrastructure broke down. Crime and violence escalated out of control. These conditions generated opposition groups which turned to armed uprising.[18] The Liberian conflict created sizable population shifts and refugee crises, a long-term food shortage, a failed economy, and the death of large numbers of civilians due to disease, starvation and direct conflict.[19]

Second and related to the first point, the absence of superpower competition in the region created an opportunity for regional organizations to act proactively. As Barnett has noted:

> ... whereas during the Cold War most regional organizations were imprinted by superpower competition, since its demise and the retreat of the superpowers many regional organizations are capitalizing on the power vacuum, first and foremost, to create new mechanisms to foster regional security and order, if not 'zones of peace', and secondarily, to fulfill the spirit of Chapter VIII.[20]

The case of Liberia is an interesting one given that one of the superpowers – the United States had 'special' ties with its peoples and had invested in the area during the Cold War. For example, Liberia was a major African recipient of US aid, with the Doe regime receiving about $500 million in US aid between 1980 and 1985. The US also had strategic interests in Liberia including the Omega

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threats. It also has the capacity to provide for the health and welfare of its population. See: http://www.cdi.org/adm/1307/transcript.html.

[17] *State Failure Task Force Report* (November 30, 1995). Prepared by: Daniel C. Esty, Jack A. Goldstone, Ted Robert Gurr, Barbara Harff, Marc Levy, Geoffrey D. Dabelko, Pamela T. Surko, and Alan N. Unger**.** According to the Task Force a failed state is one that is "utterly incapable of sustaining itself as a member of the international community" (p. 1). Narrowly defined however, "state failures consist of instances in which central state authority collapses for several years" (ibid.). However, since fewer than 20 such episodes have occurred during the last 40 years, it is difficult for any statistical analysis. Therefore, the task force broadened the concept of state failure to include a wider range of civil conflicts, political crises, and massive violations of human rights that are typically associated with state breakdown. In line with such a broad definition, the task force isolate four kinds of state failure: (1) revolutionary wars, (2) ethnic wars, (3) mass killings, and (4) adverse or disruptive regime change.

[18] "The weapons of choice are small arms, light weapons and explosives because they are cheap, plentiful, durable, easily transported and simple to use". See http://www.cdi.org/adm/1307/transcript.html. See also Pauline H. Baker and John A. Ausink, "State Collapse and Ethnic Violence: Toward a Predictive Model," *Parameters,* Spring, (1996), 19-31.

[19] See West Africa Risk Assessment: www.carleton.ca/cifp.

navigation station and the Voice of America's largest transmitting station in Africa.[21]   By the late 1980s, when the conflict between Taylor and Doe was beginning to destabilize the region, there was faint hope that the United States would physically intervene and even less likelihood that the United Nations would. As the situation in Liberia rapidly deteriorated, the United States with 2,000 Marines off the Liberian coast, preferred to 'watch from a distance.'[22] The UN for its part chose not to mandate a peacekeeping mission to the region.

As a result, the relatively powerless and largely untested sub-regional organization – ECOWAS - took on the Liberian challenge when the conflict was less than five months old. At the time, Salim Ahmed Salim, the secretary-general of the OAU justified ECOWAS' intervention: "Africans are one people. It is hence unacceptable that a part of that people should stand in silence and in seeming helplessness when another part is suffering."[23]

Experts do not agree with the Secretary General's assertion. George Klay Kieh, Jr., for example, writes that ECOWAS' decision to intervene transcended primordial and humanitarian concerns. In a detailed and thorough analysis, Kieh contends that the Liberian conflict directly affected ECOWAS' member states in two major ways. First, several member states had citizens in Liberia at the outbreak of the conflict. Some were killed while others were taken hostage (mainly by Taylor's National Patriotic Front of Liberia -NPFL).

Second, member states were concerned that the Liberian civil war would have a domino effect in the region. This fear was based on the fact that the preponderant majority of ECOWAS member states were governed by repressive and weak regimes.[24]   The movement of peoples fleeing the conflict across

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[20] Michael Barnett, "Partners In peace? The UN, regional organizations, and peace-keeping", *Review of International Studies* (1995), 21, 411-433.

[21] Holly Burkhalter and Rakiya Omaar, 'Failures of State,' *Africa Report,* Nov.-Dec. 1990, p. 28, in Funmi Olonisakin, "UN Co-operation with Regional Organizations in Peacekeeping: The Experience of ECOMOG and UNOMIL in Liberia, *International Peacekeeping,* Vol. 3, No. 3, Autumn 1996, pp. 33-51.

[22] See Chike Akabogu, "ECOWAS Takes The Initiative," in M. A. Vogt, ed., *The Liberian Crisis and ECOMOG: A Bold Attempt at Regional Peace Keeping,* Lagos: Gabumo Publishing, 1992, pp: 73-93.

[23] *West Africa,* Oct. 22-28, 1990, p. 2714.

[24] George Klay Kieh, Jr., "The Obstacles to the Peaceful Resolution of the Liberian Civil Conflict," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism,* Vol. 17, 1994, pp. 97-108.

borders combined with the constantly shifting military alliances could prove too much for these unstable and largely authoritarian regimes.[25]

As a result of these calculations, combining self-interest and a desire for regional stability, ECOWAS devised a peace plan designed to bring the bloody conflict in Liberia to an end. Working under Nigerian direction and funding, ECOWAS was able to produce by 1990, a comprehensive peace plan focusing on the following objectives:

1. A call for an immediate cease-fire between the warring factions;
2. The establishment and deployment of an ECOWAS Cease-fire Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) to monitor the observance of the cease-fire by all sides to the conflict;
3. The establishment of an interim government that would exclude Sergeant Doe and Charles Taylor;
4. The holding of free and fair elections within a year, under international supervision and observation.[26]

At an ECOWAS summit held in Banjul, in May 1990, the Standing Mediation Committee – SMC – was established, consisting of The Gambia, Ghana, Mali, Nigeria and Togo. It was the Committee's responsibility to oversee the implementation of the peace plan. The plan had the support of both the OAU and the United Nations but was rejected by Charles Taylor. For their part, the two leading Francophone countries in the region – the Ivory Coast and Burkina Faso also rejected the peace plan.

Ivory Coast and Burkina Faso are the two major francophone countries in West Africa. They opposed the plan for two principal reasons: first there exists some traditional colonial rivalries between the Anglophone and francophone countries and this was coupled with the fact the francophone countries suspected that the Anglophone countries, especially Nigeria, were going to use Liberia to

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[25] By mid-1990, close to a million Liberian refugees had moved across borders into neighboring countries. For details see Osisioma B. C. Nwolise, "The Internationalisation of the Liberian Crisis and Its Effects on West Africa," in M. A. Vogt, ed., *The Liberian Crisis and ECOMOG,* pp: 55-72.

maintain their dominance in the region. Second, personal reasons were at play. President Houphouet-Boigny of Ivory Coast at the time disliked Doe for having violently seized power and executed former Liberian officials. The widow of A. B. Tolbert (the brother of President William Tolbert), Daise Tolbert, was Houphouet-Boigny's goddaughter she later married Blaise Compaore, president of Burkina Faso.   Houphouet-Boigny and Compaore were therefore the two strong supporters of Charles Taylor in the region. Taylor launched his insurgency from Houphouet-Boigny's territory.

These oppositions notwithstanding, ECOMOG was established on August 7, 1990. ECOMOG was to be composed of military contingents drawn from the member states of the SMC as well as from Guinea and Sierra Leone. Due to the organization's lack of experience in the diplomacy of multilateral security, ECOMOG was given a mandate that was difficult if not impossible to execute. Indeed ECOMOG's mandate "to conduct military operations for the purpose of monitoring the cease-fire, restoring law and order and to create the necessary conditions for free and fair elections to be held in Liberia." appears on the surface to be similar in design to many more pacific UN peacekeeping mandates[27]

In reality the ECOMOG mission was much more ambitious, ultimately relying on a wide range of both peaceful and forceful instruments designed to stem the violence and to bring the belligerents to the table. On the one hand, ECOMOG forces were expected to neutralize the warring factions through forcible disarmament if necessary. On the other hand, ECOWAS envoys were dispatched to Liberia to conduct mediation and conciliation with the leaders of the warring factions. The following section evaluates how these approaches influenced the dynamics of the conflict.

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[26] See Clement Adibe, "The Liberian conflict and the ECOWAS-UN partnership," *Third World Quarterly,* Vol. 18, No. 3, pp. 471-488, 1997.
[27] "ECOWAS Standing Mediation Committee," Decision A/DEC, August 1, 1990, on the Cease-fire and Establishment of an ECOWAS Cease-fire Monitoring Group for Liberia, Banjul, Republic of the Gambia, August 7, 1990; in Mark Weller (1994) p. 68.

ECOWAS and Liberia: Diplomacy and Coercion

Since the outbreak of conflict in Liberia and the adoption of the ECOWAS peace plan in May 1990, the organization had assumed the role of chief mediator between the various warring factions in Liberia.[28]   Under the peace plan, the Standing Mediation Committee was established in May 1990 to seek ways of resolving the conflict. Regional leaders from The Gambia, Ghana, Mali, Nigeria and Togo orchestrated a series of coercive and diplomatic initiatives with the aim of getting the warring factions to lay down their arms. This section examines the instruments of force and diplomacy[29] employed by ECOWAS leaders and how they affected the peace process.

Peacekeeping

The concept of peacekeeping even though not specifically mentioned in the Charter of the UN was introduced to enhance Chapter VI of the UN Charter, which provides for the pacific settlement of disputes. Within ECOWAS, the 1981 Protocol on Mutual Assistance and Defence empowers member states to intervene militarily when the security of a member is threatened.[30]

According to James "a peacekeeping body is a traditional-looking military force, composed of a number of battalions and the authority of a commander. The battalions will have been detached from or supplied by various national armies, and the commander is appointed by, and be responsible to, the international authority which has arranged the operation."[31] The concept of peacekeeping is derived from certain principles: the consent of the parties to the conflict; the use of force only in self-defense and more importantly, claims to impartiality. It is well documented that these principles which constitute the basic

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[28] At the beginning there were two factions – Taylor's NPFL and Presidents Doe's AFL. A split in Taylor's ranks led to the emergence of the INPFL.

[29] Between 1990 and 1995 for example, eleven peace accords were signed by the various factions fighting in Liberia.

[30] See Appendix 3 "Protocol Relating to Mutual Assistance on Defence," in M. A. Vogt, ed.(1992) pp. 35-46.s

[31] Alan James, *Peace Keeping in International Politics,* London: Macmillan, 1990, p. 1.

elements of classical peacekeeping have become problematic in many intra-state conflict situations.[32]

According to Ryan, when ethnic groups are engaged in violent conflict, peacekeeping is often the most urgent and necessary of all peace strategies since it is the only one which deals directly with the warriors on all sides who are engaged in mutual destruction. Until this violent behavior is stopped, Ryan argues, any attempt at resolution will be an exercise in futility.[33] Peacekeeping is therefore seen as a temporary relief, in fact, a palliative, and not a cure. Brian Urquhart compared peacekeeping to nursing care when he wrote that:

> Peacekeeping is a sort of daily nursing care. It's like the staff in a hospital engaged in getting the patient's temperature down and keeping him reasonably healthy. And when you get to a certain point, a great surgeon may be able to arrive and deal with the problem. Maybe there isn't a great surgeon; maybe the case is not operable, in which case the aim must be to keep the patient reasonably comfortable. One's got to be realistic about the difficulty of settling the basic disputes, which give rise to peacekeeping.[34]

Throughout the 1990s, multilateral interventions deviated significantly from their predecessor missions in a number of ways. For one, the central characteristics of traditional missions no longer provided the delimiting boundaries for presumed mission success. Second, belligerents frequently act outside the purview of recognized authority structures. As a result, outside forces have employed a range of more forceful measures in order to sufficiently guarantee the safe-passage of humanitarian aid, to assist displaced persons and to stop the killing of ordinary citizens. These transformations have prompted some observers to conclude that the key principles informing conventional, essentially peaceful, peacekeeping missions, are anachronistic and no longer applicable to today's situations.

Not surprisingly, there has been a great deal of debate devoted to understanding why this new breed of more robust missions succeeds and fails. A key criticism within the literature points to the dynamic nature of conflict and its

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[32] See: David Carment and Patrick James (1998) *Peace in the Midst of Wars* Columbus, S.C. University of South Carolina Press.
[33] Stephen Ryan, *Ethnic Conflict and International Relations* , Hants: Dartmouth, 1995, p. 106.

changing circumstances in terms of intensity and the number of actors engaged. The failure of missions to adapt to the changing conditions on the ground is a determining factor in explaining the lackluster performance of recent missions. ECOMOG is no exception in this regard.

ECOMOG's peacekeeping efforts ultimately assumed the form of an armed intervention. From the onset, the peacekeepers were mandated by ECOWAS to perform both the roles of a nurse and a great surgeon. The 'peacekeepers' went into Liberia without any cease-fire on the ground and in fact, without any peace to keep, yet they were assigned peacekeeping duties.

There is *some* indication that member states were moved by humanitarian concerns; specifically, the mass killings taking place in Liberia and the influx of refugees into most countries in the sub-region.[35] This immediate and potential regional threat may have had an impact on the ill-advised decision to develop a comprehensive – blanket solution to the problem. Unfortunately, a key element required for a peaceful approach was missing – the consent of Charles Taylor and his faction. [36]

Peace Enforcement

It is obvious that the use of force in efforts to reduce violent intrastate conflict constitutes a basic violation of impartiality. Some, like Alan James have argued that favoritism in intrastate conflicts is more likely to make peacekeepers targets rather than intermediaries.[37] By way of contrast, Betts argues that intervention cannot hope to maintain impartiality if the form of forceful intervention is limited in scope.[38] He maintains that only in instances where the

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[34] Brian Urquhart, "A risky business ..." *UN Chronicle,* Vol. 25, no. 4., 1988, p. 13.

[35] For details about refugee movements, see Nwolise, *op cit.,* note 28.

[36] M. A. Vogt, (1992) p. 155.

[37] See Alan James, "Peacekeeping and Ethnic Conflict," in David Carment and Patrick James, eds., *Peace in The Midst of Wars: Preventing and Managing International Ethnic Conflicts,* Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1998, pp. 163-193.

[38] Richard K. Betts, "The Delusion of Impartial Intervention," in Chester A. Crocker and Fen Osler Hampson, eds., *Managing Global Chaos: Sources of and Responses to International Conflict,* Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1996, pp. 333-343.

outside power takes complete command of the situation and imposes a peace settlement will the intervention result in stability.   More limited forms of intervention undertaken with the goal of impartiality will usually keep either belligerent from defeating the other, but will not stop the adversaries from waging war in an attempt to do so.

Betts' argument is fourfold.   First, that the intervening force must recognize that to make peace is to decide who rules.   The intervening force should have no illusions that force will result in victory of one faction over the other.   Second, the intervener must avoid half-measures, because limited intervention will only create confusion within the belligerents' calculations for victory and create false hopes for victory – thereby increasing the level of violence.   Third, Betts counsels that one should not "confuse peace with justice" and that putting an end to the killing should be the intervener's first priority. Fourth, Betts cautions that intervention should be consistent with the interveners' military capabilities and their willingness to engage belligerents with the use of force.

Like Betts, Rothchild and Lake see evidence of a movement towards a norm of collective intervention in a wide range of situations, including genocide, interference with the delivery of relief, violation of ceasefire agreements, collapse of civil order, and irregular interruption of democratic governance.[39] Coercive intervention can alter the internal balance of ethnic power.   This can be useful in equalizing the forces and creating a "hurting stalemate" in which neither side can be victorious, and thus lead to a negotiated settlement.   However, it can also lead to situations wherein the intervention emboldens the weaker party.   Accordingly, Rothchild and Lake argue that pressure must be exerted on both sides to moderate their demands.

In general, the conclusions that can be taken from these analyses for the purposes of this paper are (1) the assumption that interveners must be perceived and act as impartial is flawed, and (2) an intervener should not be discredited in

seeing the conflict reach a specific outcome. Indeed as Zartman and Touval argue, a prospective intervener may be more effective in achieving a stable short-term outcome when they have a vested interest in a specific outcome that may favor one side over another.[40] For Zartman and Touval, power is the basis for this process.   Power translates into leverage in the form of persuasion, extraction (producing a favorable outcome for each party); termination (the ability to withdraw from a negotiation); deprivation (the ability to affect a hurting stalemate by withholding resources from one side or shift them to another); and gratification (the ability to add resources to the outcome). They emphasize that interveners make as much of a calculation based on interest in deciding to mediate as is the case for adversarial parties when deciding to engage in war.

Upon reflection then, there are good reasons – albeit theoretical – to conclude that had ECOMOG's efforts to stabilize Liberia been carried out effectively even with the loss of impartiality, the situation might have improved. Unfortunately, ECOMOG lacked the experience, training and capability to carry out anything more than rudimentary peacekeeping. For example, regional leaders were quick to notice that if they were to achieve their humanitarian objective of bringing peace to the war-torn country, they had to adjust their strategy to suit the situation on the ground. Thus, in September 1990, after only a few weeks of ECOMOG's deployment in Liberia, its mandate was readjusted to include some use of force. The new mandate brought in a Field Commander who was ordered by the SMC to effect the pacification of the country so as to deter continued attacks on ECOMOG and innocent civilians.[41] In addition, the force was ordered "to try and prevent arms and ammunition continuing to come into the rebel forces, who were still not subscribing to a ceasefire."[42]

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[39] Donald Rothchild and David A. Lake, "Containing Fear: The Management of Transnational Ethnic Conflict," in Donald Rothchild and David A. Lake, eds., *The International Spread of Ethnic Conflict: Fear, Diffusion and Escalation,* NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998, pp. 203-226.
[40] William I. Zartman, and Saadia Touval, "International Mediation in the Post-Cod War Era," in Chester A. Crocker and Fen Osler Hampson, ed., *Managing Global Chaos: Sources of and Responses to International Conflict,* Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1996, pp. 445-461.
[41] M. A. Vogt, (1992) p. 5.
[42] *African Research Bulletin,* Vol. 27, No. 10, October 1-31, 1990, pp. 9872-9873 cited in Ibid.

It is worth noting that ECOMOG forces landed on the beaches of Monrovia in August 1990 amidst hostile fire.[43] They were confronted by three contending factions: the Independent National Patriotic Front of Liberia (INFPL) and the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) eagerly offered cooperation, while Taylor's NPFL artillery quickly zeroed in on ECOMOG forces. It was this decision to work alongside two of the factions that proved the undoing of ECOMOG. According to Howe (1997), the INPFL and the AFL cooperated with ECOMOG for two self-serving reasons: each was too weak to challenge ECOMOG directly, but each could benefit from ECOMOG's protection and from any destruction ECOMOG inflicted upon Taylor.[44]

Thus, in the face of stiff opposition from Taylor's forces and the paralysis of social order in Liberia, the force was mandated to adopt a strategy of 'limited offensive.' This strategy was aimed first of all at driving Taylor's forces out of Monrovia and liberating some essential services – the central power plant and the main water processing plant from rebel hands.[45] Not surprisingly, ECOMOG's offensive intended to push the NPFL forces out of Monrovia was fiercely resisted resulting in the exchange of fire between the now 'peace enforcers' and Taylor's forces (at the time of ECOMOG's entry into Liberia, the NPFL controlled about 95 per cent of Liberian territory).

According to Adibe, the ECOMOG offensive against the NPFL produced three unpleasant consequences.[46] First, it unnecessarily escalated the conflict by pitting the 'peacekeepers' against one of the parties to the conflict in a way that created a disturbing disequilibrium. Rather than eliminating Taylor's forces altogether from the picture, their influence was simply reduced. ECOMOG's efforts diminished the presence and power of one of the local factions, thereby distorting the correlation of forces in the local arena. By dislodging NPFL militia from the positions that they had long occupied in Monrovia, ECOMOG forces arbitrarily enhanced the presence of the main rival militia, the INPFL. On

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[43] The initial troop-strength was about 2,700 comprising of contingents from the member countries of the SMC.

[44] Herbert Howe, "Lessons of Liberia", pp. 145-176.

[45] M. A. Vogt, *op cit.,* in note 24.

September 9, 1990, the INPFL took maximum advantage of their enhanced profile to abduct and kill President Samuel Doe on the premises of ECOMOG headquarters.

Second, as Adibe argues, perceptions of ECOMOG impartiality quickly disappeared, replaced by a widespread perception within and outside West Africa that ECOMOG had indeed become a warring faction in the Liberian conflict.[47]   This perception was further strengthened by a series of deadly encounters between ECOMOG and various factions from 1990 onwards.[48]

In sum, although ECOMOG was referred to as a 'peacekeeping force,' the NPFL threat to resist it as illegal and unwelcome, excluded any notion of consent, a key ingredient in conventional peacekeeping. As a senior UN official put it, "Pushing Taylor out of Monrovia by force is hardly peacekeeping."[49] However, as we noted above, in the face of atrocities and mass killings, there is a strong argument in favor of ECOMOG's forceful strategy – designed to halt the killings that were rampant at the time.[50] It is somewhat ironic that this forceful strategy could not have been implemented without the consent of some of the parties to the conflict. As Betts suggests, force is useful in the short-run, and can only prove successful if tied to a longer-term and comprehensive peace plan. Some analysts argue that the use of force, particularly the intimidating presence of ECOMOG, served only to increase Charles Taylor's intransigence and his suspicion of ECOMOG.[51] The popular view among ECOMOG soldiers was that the problem was not with ECOMOG's use of force per se, but rather Taylor's

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[46] Adibe, *op cit.,* in note 29.

[47] Apart from the NPFL, AFL, INPFL, groups emerged: The Liberia Peace Council (LPC), Lofa Defence Force (LDF), United Liberation Movement(s) of Liberia for Democracy (ULIMOs K-Kroma and J-Johnson) and National Patriotic Front of Liberia - Central Revolutionary Council (NPFL-CRC).

[48] Ibid.

[49] See Colin Scott, Larry Minear and Thomas G. Weiss, "Humanitarian Action and Security in Liberia 1989-1994," *Occasional Paper #20* (Thomas J. Watson Jr. Institute for International Studies), p. 9.

[50] Both rebel and government forces were involved in the indiscriminate massacre of civilians. For example, Doe's forces murdered about 600 civilians who took refuge in the St. Peter's Lutheran Church in Monrovia in 1990. The NPFL also targeted citizens of the SMC member-countries and journalists. For a detailed discussion see, Nwolise, *op cit.,* in note 28.

[51] Kofi Oteng Kufuor, "The Legacy of the Intervention in the Liberian Civil War by the Economic Community of West African States," *African Journal of International and Comparative Law,* Vol. 5, No. 3, cited in Olonisakin, "UN Co-operation with Regional Organizations in Peacekeeping," pp. 33-51.

ambition, which would have made any prescribed peace plan unworkable, except one that accepted him as Liberia's president.[52] Indeed, as it turned out, Taylor's forces stopped fighting only after his party's victory in the July 1997 polls.

ECOMOG's offensive in Liberia succeeded in containing the conflict, at lease for a short period, preventing the situation from degenerating into genocidal proportions like the type of all-out slaughter witnessed between April and July 1994 in Rwanda. The presence of a force of any nature in Rwanda would have at least prevented the all-out slaughter, even if in the long run it did not succeed in resolving the conflict. According to Howe, ECOMOG's overall strategy was for its conventional military force to intimidate the three factions while an interim government tried to resolve political differences and prepare Liberia for peaceful elections.[53] There is little doubt that this strategy was not wholly successful.

The ECOWAS Approach: A Futile Exercise in Muscle-Flexing?

ECOWAS, which took on the Liberian challenge a few months after the initial outbreak of the conflict, did not expect that the intervention would be a very difficult task. Given that the immediate cause of the conflict was NPFL's guerilla incursion into Liberia, ECOWAS envisaged, in the words of Clement Adibe, 'a short, surgical police action.[54]' This ECOWAS' perception of the conflict probably explains its approach to the conflict.

In adopting the ECOWAS peace plan, the members of the SMC were very impatient with the course of diplomacy. Very little or no negotiation took place between the SMC and the various warring factions, especially Charles Taylor's NPFL. According to some observers, the SMC held talks with the various factions involved in the conflict, and despite a failure to obtain the consent of all parties, especially the NPFL, decided on the deployment of ECOMOG.[55]

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52 Ibid.
53 See Herbert Howe, "Lessons of Liberia" pp. 145-176.
54 Clement Adibe, "The Liberian Conflict" pp.471-488.
55 See Roy May and Gerry Cleaver, "African Peacekeeping: Still dependent?" *International Peacekeeping,* Vol. 4, No. 2, summer 1997, pp. 1-21.

Timothy D. Sisk has observed that mediators in conflicts invariably bring their own interests to the table, if only an interest in moving the parties toward a negotiated settlement. The bias of mediators, Sisk observes, is to get an agreement.   In working with ethnic conflicts, this is a potential problem.[56] Horowitz rightly notes that "mediators have a process bias that keeps them form focusing on good institutional arrangements, in favor of 'getting yes,' any yes."[57]

This was the case with ECOWAS and the Liberian conflict. The president of Guinea, one of the architects of the Peace Plan, confirms the views of Sisk and Horowitz. Regarding the ECOWAS intervention, he was quoted as having said that: 'we do not need the permission of any party involved in the conflict to implement the decisions reached in Banjul. So, with or without the agreement of any of the parties, ECOWAS troops will be in Liberia.'[58] This, by all indications, does not augur well for the course of diplomacy.

Taylor, who at the time of ECOMOG's arrival in Liberia, controlled more than 90% of Liberia was a force to reckon with and ECOWAS should have given a lot of attention to his demands. Taylor accused ECOWAS of handing him down a set of instructions to roll back his forces from Monrovia whilst ECOWAS accused him of being arrogantly intransigent and declared its intention to proceed with or without the support of the factions.[59]

In an effort to resolve conflicts, it is imperative to take into account the interests of the various factions concerned, especially the dominant faction in the conflict. ECOWAS' approach failed to do this. With ECOWAS bent on a single-minded effort to push through its Liberian initiative, the NPFL warned that 'if there was any attempt at peacekeeping from any part of the world, [it] would not allow that force to enter.'[60] There was therefore no cease-fire for ECOMOG to monitor; yet, one of the functions of ECOMOG as envisaged by the Peace Plan, was

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[56] Timothy D. Sisk, Power Sharing and International Mediation in Ethnic Conflicts, p. 94.
[57] Cited in Ibid.
[58] *Africa Research Bulletin,* 15 September 1990, p. 9802, cited in Clement E. Adibe, "The Liberian Conflict" pp. 471-488.
[59] Clement Adibe, "The Liberian Conflict" pp.471-488.
[60] *The Guardian* (Lagos), 21 August 1990, p. 1., cited in Ibid.

cease-fire monitoring, the stage was set for a military debacle between ECOMOG and the various factions, especially the NPFL. .

As we noted before, ECOWAS combined force with diplomacy in its handling of the Liberian crisis. The Abuja Accord – one of the diplomatic initiatives, is detailed below.

The Abuja Accord

Signed in August 1995 in the Nigerian capital of Abuja, this agreement basically built on some of the previous accords. It contained 16 articles. The key points are:

- Extending the council of state to six members, appointing a third civilian, Mr. Wilton Sankawulo, as chairman;

- Naming LPC's George Boley as 'Coalition' representative on the council;

- Reasserting the allocation of ministries, public corporations and autonomous agencies agreed after the Cotonou Accord, confirming that IGNU posts would be ceded to LPC/Coalition members;

- Partially accommodating ULIMO-J without giving them representation on the council of state;

- Office holders in the LNTG were permitted to contest future election;

- Imposition of a Cease-fire in force from 26 August with installation of council of state soon after;

- Decision that the Council of State was to have a life span of approximately twelve months.[61]

The Abuja Accord, unlike the numerous accords before it, was viewed positively by the warring factions. Indeed, the leaders of all warring factions agreed to be brought into a transitional and power-sharing government. The thorny issue of how, exactly, the six-member council of state would be constituted was resolved with the inclusion of the leaders of the major factions: Charles Taylor from the NPFL, Alhaji Kromah from ULIMO and George Boley from the LPC.[62]

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[61] "Abuja Accord," Accord, http://www.c-r.org/cr/accord/sum_abuja.htm, Accessed: 4/4/98.

[62] See *West Africa* (London), 25-31 December 1995, and 1-7 January 1996, p. 1993.

Unfortunately the Abuja Accord and the peaceful formation of the council of state based on it, was not the end of the Liberian conflict nor ECOMOG's involvement.

Unfortunately, soon after it was constituted, the collective presidency was plunged into crisis as a power struggle ensued between its members 'over appointments to positions in government.' And to compound issues, factional in-fighting broke out within the ULIMO between Alhaji Kroma – the faction leader and a signatory to the Abuja Accord, and Roosevelt Johnson, forcing the latter to form his own wing: ULIMO-J.[63] Abiodun Alao was probably right when he observed that:

> The Abuja Accord managed to bring the leaders of all the warring factions into the transitional government, which was installed with due ceremony in September 1995. As such, it represents in many ways the fulfillment of the aspirations of the post-Cotonou peace process. It did not however bring peace to Liberia. Discontent continued to fester within groups and individuals who believed themselves sidelined in the settlement. Factions continued to guard their territorial and commercial resources jealously, with ongoing violence between NPFL and LPC and between various sub-groupings of ULIMO.[64]

Alao's observation is accurate. In any intense and protracted intrastate conflict there is always the likelihood that some parties, unhappy about the terms of agreements that they initialed, will undermine the peace process for further gains. As Stephen J. Stedman has noted:

> Peace creates spoilers because it is rare in civil wars for all leaders and factions to see peace as beneficial. Even if all parties come to value peace, they rarely do so simultaneously, and they often strongly disagree over the terms of an acceptable peace. A negotiated peace often has losers: leaders and factions who do not achieve their war aims. Nor can every war find a compromise solution that addresses the demands of all the warring parties.[65]

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[63] *West Africa,* (London), 18-24 March 1996, pp. 422-423. Such split in factions has very serious repercussions for any peace process.

[64] Charles Abiodun Alao, "Commentary on the Accords," *Accord,* http://www.c-r.org/cr/accord/alao.htm, Accessed: 2/23/98.

[65] Stephen John Stedman, "Spoiler Problems in Peace Processes," *International Security,* Vol. 22, No. 2, fall 1997, pp. 5-53.

In sum, the Abuja Accord, like all those before it, collapsed under the weight of inter-group rivalries and widespread killing. In its aftermath the political scene was marked by an increase in violence as rival factions scrambled for resources and territory. At this point ECOMOG was clearly an obstacle to factional ambitions. For example, according to a *West Africa* report, on December 28 1995, elements of ULIMO-J[66] ambushed Nigerian ECOMOG forces attempting to disarm the militias. This was followed by a heavy artillery bombardment of ECOMOG's base in the provincial town of Tubmanburg in the diamond-rich Bomi County.[67] Following this incident, the security situation deteriorated rapidly, leading to the indefinite suspension of the ongoing ECOMOG disarmament operation in the Liberian hinterland.[68]

When the council of state ordered the arrest of Roosevelt Johnson for his alleged responsibility for the ambush of ECOMOG soldiers, renewed violence was triggered leading to a return to street fighting in Monrovia and yet another round of refugee flows. The gravity of the situation led US forces to evacuate all foreign nationals from Monrovia.[69]

After the disturbances died down, a summer meeting was called by ECOWAS in Accra, Ghana. This meeting was an attempt to prevent the complete collapse of the Abuja agreement. On 17 August 1996, the leaders of Liberia's factions agreed to 'a Revised Version of the Abuja Accord' and appointed Ruth Perry to replace Wilton Sankawulo as the chair of the Council of State.[70] The key elements of the revised Abuja Accord were: implementation of disarmament and demobilization by 31 January 1997; dissolution of all factional militia by the end of February 1997; general elections by 31 May 1997; and formation of a national government by 15 June 1997.[71]

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[66] ULIMO-J was not a signatory to the Abuja Accord.

[67] *West Africa* (London), 22-28 January 1996, pp. 97-99.

[68] See Clement E. Adibe, "The Liberian Conflict,"

[69] Ibid.

[70] Max Ahmadu Sessay, "Politics and society in post-war Liberia," *Journal of Modern African Studies,* Vol. 34, No. 3, 1996, p. 402, in Clement E. Adibe, "The Liberian Conflict."

[71] Ibid.

The revised Abuja Accord was the last agreement to be signed by the Liberian factions and that has taken Liberia to its current stage – a government elected through a multi-party elections; an uneasy peace and sporadic clashes between government forces and rebel groups based in the Liberia, Guinea and Sierra Leone common border area. This revised agreement worked as planned, albeit with minor flaws.[72]

Why did this revised Abuja Accord succeed when all the agreements before it failed? Adibe argues that the parties evolved a *modus operandi* based primarily on the personal chemistry that existed between Charles Taylor and General Sani Abacha, Nigeria's military ruler at the time.[73] Abacha's recognition of Taylor was an act that was overdue, given the clout Taylor wielded in the conflict.   Indeed, the post-Abuja Accord era saw an Abacha-Taylor rapprochement. According to Adekeye Adebajo, the truculent warlord spent four days in Abuja in June 1996 with Nigeria's General Sani Abacha. Taylor thenceforth emerged as an Abacha favorite.[74]

If this was the case, then ECOWAS leaders, particularly the 'strong-man' Sani Abacha came to realize the political clout of Charles Taylor and the need to align themselves in order to achieve peace and stability in Liberia.

A second reason for the success of the revised Abuja Accord, was the proposal for ECOWAS-wide sanctions on 'persons found guilty of acts capable of obstructing the peace plan.'   These measures included travel and residence restrictions, the freezing of business assets, exclusion from participation in the Liberian election process and expulsion of violators' families from West Africa. ECOWAS also expressed its willingness to request international visa restrictions on accord violators and to invoke an OAU resolution calling for the establishment

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[72] Adibe, "The Liberian Conflict."
[73] Ibid.
[74] Nigeria vehemently opposed Taylor's ambition of becoming President of Liberia.

of a Liberian war crimes tribunal.[75] In this regard, the use of sanctions is akin to what Zartman terms - mediation as a *manipulation*.[76]

Exhaustion and fear of the future also explain why peace accords succeed. Indeed, by the mid 1990s the factions had been fighting for a period of almost six years. This is a long enough period to make fighters tired of continued fighting, especially in this case when most of the fighters are child soldiers. For example, a child soldier, Karsor Zazaboi, recruited by the NPFL when he was 9 years old and who fought until he was 15 had this to say: "I fought to liberate my country, but at this present time, we have no enemy. Our brothers and sisters are dying. We're tired, and it's time to go back to school."[77]

Perceiving this sense of exhaustion among the warring factions and out of fear that the revised Abuja Accord would be derailed like all its predecessors, the United States and West European states acted swiftly. First, the United States sent a Special Presidential Envoy in the person of Howard Jeter to assist in the peace process.[78] Second General Abacha, named one of his top military commanders, Major General Victor Malu, as head of ECOMOG forces in Liberia. – a clear indication of ECOWAS determination to ensure the success of the revised Accord. Third, the United States matched ECOWAS' determination by appropriating more than $30 million to give ECOMOG a state-of-the-art logistical capability. Finally, West European donors made vital contributions mainly in the form of trucks and jeeps.

The willingness of the warring factions to negotiate coupled with the newfound abilities of ECOMOG proved to be an effective combination. By the January 1997 deadline for disarmament and demobilization, ECOMOG had achieved what most international observers agree was substantial disarmament of the warring factions, albeit with a considerable number of weapons still

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[75] Andy Carl and Jeremy Armon, "Preface," Accord *http://www*.
c-r.org/cr/accord/preface.htm, Accessed, 2/23/98.

[76] I. William Zartman, "Bargaining and Conflict Resolution," in Edward A. Kolodziej and Roger E. Kanet, eds., *Coping with Conflict after the Cold War,* Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996, p. 281.

[77] "Liberian fighters trade guns for food, education," *The Daily Yomiuri* (Tokyo), January 31, 1997, p. 17.

[78] See "Backgrounder: Liberians go to the Polls July 19," *Relief Web, http://www.reliefweb.int,* Accessed: 4/6/98.

hidden.[79] Lynne Mason of the UN Department of Humanitarian Affairs, a UN site coordinator at the Gbarnga disarmament camp in central Liberia and the stronghold of warlord Charles Taylor, had this to say concerning disarmament in Liberia: "This is a real surprise. I didn't ever think this would happen."[80]

The aftermath of the Abuja agreements saw most of the warring factions laying down their arms. Elections were subsequently organized and Charles Taylor achieved through the ballot, what he could not achieve with the bullet.

Conditions for Success and Failure

It is evident that the course of ECOWAS diplomacy in Liberia was fraught with problems and growing pains. ECOMOG's nightmare in Liberia began with the lack of a cease-fire on the ground before the force was deployed and the absence of a clear and enforceable mandate.[81] Shortly after entering Liberia, ECOWAS mandated ECOMOG to 'enforce peace and not keep it.' It should be noted however that Taylor's refusal to consent to ECOMOG was not the only factor that accounted for ECOMOG's escalation. The lack of leadership, especially on the part of the United States, the perception among ECOWAS members and Liberian factions that Nigeria was using ECOMOG to project itself as the regional hegemon was also a contributing factor.

Washington's Refusal to Take Charge?

The outbreak of the Liberian conflict coincided with the end of the Cold War and the heightening of tension in the Gulf in the early 1990s. Consequently, the international community's attention was focused on the Gulf crisis as a result of which little or no attention was paid to the Liberian situation.   The   United States, which has for long been viewed as Liberia's closest ally was expected to

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[79] See for example "Backgrounder: Liberians go to the Polls July 19" and *The Daily Yomiuri* (Tokyo), January 31 1997, p. 17.
[80] *The Daily Yomiuri* (Tokyo), January 31 1997, p. 17.
[81] See Roy May and Gerry Cleaver, "African Peacekeeping: Still dependent?" *International Peacekeeping,* Vol. 4, No. 2, summer 1997, pp. 1-21.

intervene but that was not to be the case. Liberia was a major African recipient of US aid, with the Doe regime receiving about $500 million in US aid between 1980 and 1985. Also the US had strategic interests in Liberia included the Omega navigation station and the Voice of America's largest transmitting station in Africa.[82]

According to Herman Cohen, at the beginning of the Liberian crisis, the Policy Coordinating Committee (PCC) for Africa at the State Department convened a meeting on April 6, 1990 to assess the various options available to the US government. At the end of that important meeting, the PCC decided that:

- "The United States cannot and should not be passive in Liberia. The historical ties, the close relationships, the need to help refugees, and congressional pressures made it important that we be active.
- We must disassociate ourselves from the worsening military repression.
- We must continue to safeguard our three important installations.
- We should develop contingency plans to evacuate up to 5000 American citizens."[83]

Even though one of the outcomes of this meeting was the fact that the US cannot afford to be passive in Liberia, that was exactly what happened about five months later. With the expected US leadership not forthcoming, regional leaders decided to take the bold step to intervene in August 1990. For one thing, this US leadership could have made a big difference in the ECOMOG intervention. If the US had added her fire power to that of Nigeria, the various faction leaders, Taylor in particular, would have been made aware right from the beginning that he was up against a formidable force that was determined to succeed in bringing peace to Liberia at all cost. However, the US' conspicuous absence emboldened Taylor to put a strong fight against ECOMOG, a hastily put together force with no experience in multilateral diplomacy. As Adebayo Adekeye has noted, instead of

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[82] Holly Burkhalter and Rakiya Omaar, 'Failures of State,' *Africa Report,* Nov.-Dec. 1990, p. 28, in Funmi Olonisakin, "UN Co-operation with Regional Organizations in Peacekeeping: The Experience of ECOMOG and UNOMIL in Liberia, *International Peacekeeping,* Vol. 3, No. 3, Autumn 1996, pp. 33-51.

engagement, Washington distanced itself from ECOMOG, evacuated its citizens from Liberia and ignored calls from Liberians and some of its European allies for intervention.   Washington's action created a security vacuum that Taylor attempted to exploit.[84]

Regional Politics and ECOMOG

As we noted before the Ivory Coast and Burkina Faso initially rejected the ECOWAS peace plan for Liberia. They were to be joined later in their opposition by other Francophone countries in the region – Togo and Mali. This division had very serious repercussions not only for the performance of ECOMOG in Liberia, but also its stance as a neutral force working to restore peace to the beleaguered country.

Robert Mortimer notes that "the multilateral, but Nigerian-dominated force is more a classic study of competing national interests in the West African sub-region than a case study in regional peacekeeping."[85] In this regard, Howe argues that political tensions and ineffectiveness within regional organizations like ECOWAS are often a reflection of linguistic and political rivalries.[86] Within ECOWAS two sub-regional cleavages; the Francophone/Anglophone divide and Nigeria's military and economic preponderance created difficulties for ECOMOG.[87] Each is considered in turn.

From the outset of the conflict the perennial Anglophone/Francophone rivalry was influential.[88] The Francophone countries in West Africa vehemently opposed the intervention, which they viewed as a tool for furthering Anglophone

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[83] Department of State, Minutes of the Liberia PCC, 6 April 1990, In State Department archives, cited In Herman J. Cohen, *Intervening In Africa: Superpower Peacemaking In a Troubled Continent,* New York and London: St. Martin's Press and Macmillan, 2000, p. 135.

[84] Adekeye Adebajo, Building Peace in West Africa: Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea-Bissau, Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner, 2002, p. 49.

[85] Robert Mortimer, "ECOMOG, Liberia, and Regional Security," in Ed Keller and Don Rothchild, eds., *Africa in the New International Order,* Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 1996, p. 162.

[86] See for example, George Kieh, Jr. "Obstacles to the Peaceful Resolution"

[87] Ibid.

[88] Ibid.

domination in the region.   According to Peter de Costa, the Francophone countries saw the ECOWAS Peace Plan as an "Anglophone road show."[89]

As a consequence, the two leading Francophone countries in West Africa – Burkina Faso and the Ivory Coast covertly supported Taylor's NPFL. Burkina Faso is alleged to have supplied arms to Taylor's rebels while the Ivory Coast allowed the rebels free transit across its border into Nimba County in Liberia.[90] According to David Wippman, attempts made in 1990 to place the Liberian crisis on the Security Council's agenda failed, partly because of the Ivory Coast's opposition and partly because the Council's members shared the US view that the problem should be solved by Africans.[91]

For example, on August 13 1990, in a terse message to ECOWAS members, President Blaise Compaore of Burkina Faso declared his country's "total disagreement" with the intervention.   He stated that the SMC had "no competence to interfere in member states' internal conflicts, but only in conflicts breaking out between member countries." He warned of "an eventual expansion of the internal conflict, which could break out among member countries if an intervention force is sent to Liberia against the will of the Liberian people."[92] Thus, without full political support and unity of purpose from the members of the sub-regional organization, the diplomatic initiative of ECOWAS was bound to encounter serious difficulties as it did. For Taylor, regarded as being arrogantly intransigent by ECOWAS, had, after all, sympathizers within the same organization.

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[89] Peter de Costa, "Confused State," *West Africa,* Oct. 1-7, 1990, p. 2557.

[90] See for example, Herbert Howe, "Lessons of Liberia," pp. 145-176.

[91] David Wippman, "Enforcing the peace: ECOWAS and the Liberian civil war," in Lori F. Damrosch, Ed., *Enforcing Restraint: Collective Intervention in Internal Conflicts,* New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1993, p. 165.

[92] BBC Monitoring Report, 15 August 1990, "Report: Taylor to Visit Banjul; Burkinabe Leader Rejects ECOWAS Intervention, 13 August 1990," cited in M. Weller, ed. *Regional Peace-Keeping and International Enforcement: The Liberian Crisis,* Cambridge International Document Series, Vol. 6 Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994, p. 85.

Nigeria's Quest for Hegemony and the ECOMOG Initiative

It is an accepted fact that in international relations, particularly in military interventions, there is the need for a lead player around which intervention efforts can mobilize. As ECOMOG's architect, Nigeria's leaders chose to put the force together amidst opposition from the Francophone states.[93]   Nigeria provided the largest contingent of troops and was the major financial contributor to ECOMOG's Liberian initiative. It contributed about 9,000 out of the 12,000 troops in the field in the early 1990s. As well, Nigeria covered a large portion of the expenses of some of the smaller states in West Africa.[94] In her assessment Margaret Vogt defended Nigeria's role in ECOMOG, arguing that:

> Nigeria cannot take on itself the responsibility of guaranteeing African security without first ensuring its own territorial boundaries, of the states contiguous to it, of the West African sub-region, and then one can operate with confidence at the regional [African continent] level.[95]

In general Nigeria's involvement in Liberia should be seen as part of its efforts to ensure stability in the sub-region. Nigeria went to Liberia to defend the core values of its foreign policy – protection of its citizens in Liberia, ensuring the stability of the West African sub-region as well as preventing conflict contagion.[96] Defending his leadership in Liberia, Nigerian President Ibrahim Babangida had this to say:

> Our attitude over the years with all these countries has developed a consistent pattern and relentless effort to ensure and encourage peaceful co-existence. Above all, we believe that crises or conflicts in those countries [West Africa] would inevitably have adverse spillover effects on the peace and tranquility of our own country.[97]

Behind this facade of altruism however, is Nigeria's quest for regional influence and control which for obvious reasons pitted it against possible regional

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[93] See Robert A. Mortimer, "ECOMOG, Liberia and Regional Security in West Africa," in Edmond J. Keller and Donald Rothchild, eds., *Africa in the New International Order,* p. 152.

[94] See E. John Inegbedion, "ECOMOG in Comparative Perspective" in Timothy M. Shaw and Julius Emeka Okolo, eds., *The Political Economy of Foreign Policy in ECOWAS,* London: Macmillan, 1994, p. 231.

[95] See M. A. Vogt, "Nigeria's Defense Policy: An Overview", in A. E. Ekoko and M. A. Vogt, eds., *Nigerian Defense Policy: Issues and Problems,* Lagos: Malthouse Press, Ltd., 1990, cited in Terry Mays, "Nigerian Foreign Policy and Its Participation in ECOMOG", in Karl P. Magyar and Earl Conteh-Morgan, eds., *Peacekeeping in Africa: ECOMOG in Liberia,* London: Macmillan, 1998, p. 106.

[96] Ibid., pp. 107-116.

contenders, especially Ivory Coast. Despite growing crises at home, the Nigerian government continued to inject several millions of dollars into the ECOMOG initiative. From a moral and humanitarian point of view, it is difficult to fault Nigeria for her involvement in Liberia. But one could argue, especially given the nature of global interventions these days, that peace is not morality, it is politics. This is where analysts find problems justifying the Nigerian case, especially given the fact that her quest for regional hegemony has consistently plagued attempts at regional political and economic integration.

Conclusions and Lessons

The ECOMOG initiative, the first of its kind in Africa, was a significant milestone in African politics. It signified a bold attempt in designing African solutions to African problems within the current environment of international neglect and state failure. Given the novelty of the initiative for Africa, the complexity of the Liberian conflict, the intra-regional rivalries, the lack of experience in multilateral diplomacy on the part of sub-regional leaders and the difficult financial and political circumstances within which ECOMOG had to operate, there is little doubt that the initiative was ill-fated from the outset. Overall, the ECOMOG initiative is indicative of a number of lessons both for policy and theory on peacekeeping in Africa.

First, the intervention confirms previous claims that intra-state conflicts do not lend themselves to interventions that are premised on 'traditional peacekeeping.' Any strategy that is weak in capability will not be taken seriously as a credible a deterrent and is more likely to fail under extreme and hostile conditions like those that existed in Liberia. This may mean that intervention forces must be prepared to invoke robust mandates when necessary; acquiesce and possibly withdraw in the face of stronger counter-forces in other instances and; if incapable of mustering the necessary resolve, be prepared to not get involved in the first place. In retrospect, since there was no cease-fire in place

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[97] Ibid., p. 114.

before ECOMOG's deployment, it was imperative, given the nature of circumstances in Liberia, for Nigeria to get all ECOWAS members, especially the Francophone members to agree to the use of robust force. This it did not do. An agreement for more robust measures might have ensured hastened compliance from Taylor who would not have had allies in the sub-region.

     The United Nations/ECOMOG intervention in neighboring Sierra Leone during which United Nations peacekeepers were abducted and humiliated by the RUF rebels, point to the obvious and embarrassing conclusion that the lessons of the Liberian intervention have not been taken seriously.

     A second important lesson is that regional political rivalries should be recognized as a serious influence, if not constraint, on peacekeeping effectiveness.   Today's intrastate conflicts are seen too much as internal problems. They need to be better placed in a regional context – not only with respect to regional rivalries, but also with respect to how refugee flows affect conflict dynamics and how arms flows and local support for insurgencies undermine efforts at establishing a stable environment in which peace can be nurtured.

     Third, there may be ways of counter-balancing these constraints. For example, while it is realistic in today's world to argue that sub-regional organizations should manage crises in their backyard, it is also realistic to expect that there be global support for such initiatives.   With its years of peacekeeping experience in logistics and training the United Nations and its members states could be expected to do more in supporting regional efforts. UN support will not only have the effect of neutralizing the perception that 'regional hegemons' are at the forefront of local peace initiatives it could also do much to enhance the global organization's peacekeeping capabilities, influence and reputation.

     Fourth and following from the third lesson is the fact that ECOMOG would have benefited immensely from an American involvement and leadership right from the beginning of the initiative. This kind of leadership would have been important not only to demonstrate the existence of robust power but most importantly it would have helped dampen the perception on the part of Taylor,

and probably Ivory Coast and Burkina Faso, that the initiative was not (1) one that was biased towards the government of the day in Liberia; and (2) that it was not an exercise aimed at projecting Nigerian power in the region. Clearly, this would have helped to get all ECOWAS member states on board as well as probably elicit Taylor's consent for the deployment of ECOMOG.

Finally, not only was it important to have a strong leadership, especially from the Americans, there is also the issue of sustainability of whatever action is taken. ECOMOG left Liberia in 1997 after a fragile peace deal and "democratic elections." That was the time they needed to be deeply engaged in Liberia, not necessarily doing peacekeeping but other important jobs – security sector reform, demobilization and reintegration etc. Today, what is happening in Liberia is an important testimony to the fact in getting involved in civil war situations, be it by regional or international organizations, the issue of sustainability needs to be carefully taken into consideration.