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**SUB-REGIONAL PRE-EMPTIVE MECHANISM
FOR CONFLICT RESOLUTION: LESSONS
FROM LIBERIA (1990-2000)**

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ABSTRACT

Sub - Saharan Africa has experienced more intra-state conflicts since post Cold War possibly more than any other region of the world. Indeed the international community has tried to mediate in resolving conflicts in Africa but much of the efforts did not yield desired effect. But for how long can the international communities continue to support the African region

The involvement of ECOMOG in Liberia from 1990 to 2000 showed that security should be seen beyond the use of military force alone. Considerable progress can be made if democratic institutions are strengthened and much investment is made in social capital. The panacea for conflict prevention in Africa is the need to put in place pre-emptive mechanism, which should commence activities long before crisis develop into conflicts. It is more cost effective in the long run for pre-emption rather than resolution.

The lessons from Liberia hinged on the difficulty of command and control of military forces involved in enforcing conflict, particularly where the participants have divergent interests. Nonetheless, commitment on the part of a lead nation can translate into effective realization of conflict termination through peace enforcement if it becomes necessary to toe that line.

**SUB-REGIONAL PRE-EMPTIVE MECHANISM FOR
CONFLICT RESOLUTION: LESSONS
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INTRODUCTION

1. In the last 40 years, Africa has been and continues to be the most volatile and conflict ridden region of the world. A greater percentage of the conflicts are intra-state as against inter-state ones. By estimation, over 7 million people have died between 1955 and 1995 as a result of violent conflicts in Africa. These conflicts have resulted into untold hardships and the cost in terms of human and material losses is indeed great. Luc Reychie in his analysis revealed 8 types of costs arising from the effects of African conflicts, which are, humanitarian, political, ecological, social, cultural, psychological and spiritual cost. These costs far outweigh the cost of putting in place pre-emptive mechanisms and other measures aimed at preventing conflict escalation.

2. The Liberian conflict has its origin dating back to 1847 when it gained independence from the US. However, the immediate cause of the civil war is not unconnected with Samuel Doe military regime's failure to institute democratic reforms aimed at returning the country to democratic rule. The conflict was significant for 2 reasons: 'first, it served as an important example of a new type of external intervention – intervention by a sub-regional organization. Secondly, it has led to re-examination ... of the policy of non-interference in the internal affairs of states'.¹ The conflict also reaffirmed the realism that security, stability and development are inseparably linked and this contributed to the change of focus on the part of the West African leaders. Thus the expansion of the mandate of ECOWAS member states from purely political and economic perspectives to include 'questions of security was a natural progression in the sense that security is a vital component of development'.² ECOWAS thus redefined the concept of non-intervention on the basis of 2 premises. 'First, that in a situation of

anarchy where government had ceased to function, there was no longer sovereignty to protect. Secondly, the scale of killings relegated all sensitivity to the issue of sovereignty to secondary position, the primary objective being to stop the carnage'.³

3. The international community has not been fully keen in addressing the issues of conflict in Africa; hence Africa 'has been left to survive on its own as best as possible'.⁴ In West Africa in particular, conflicts and the likelihood of instability could not be wished away due to the economic backwardness, ethno-religious divergence and political rancour. Also, the post-Cold war era has called for greater initiative in the management of conflicts and regional stability. Therefore, the surge of pragmatism has given rise to renewed vigour for regional stability. In West Africa, it was the Liberian crisis that provided the test case with regard to the following issues: First, sovereignty versus human suffering; Secondly, Sovereignty versus regional stability and its associated socio-economic degradation. Thirdly, the desire to make a change versus the political will to embrace resultant changes.⁵ With these realities, African leaders became more than ever committed to finding lasting solutions to the incessant conflicts in Africa.

4. ECOWAS has provided a lead in this direction with the spontaneous formation of the ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) in August 1990. This was a direct response to the realities of the earlier omission of security concerns from the organization's agenda. It is worthy to note that ECOWAS was established as an economic rather than a security organization. Part of the objective of the organization includes promoting co-operation and integration in order to create an economic union. However, the outbreak of the civil war in Liberia in December 1989 and the accompanying humanitarian tragedy changed and broaden that perception. ECOWAS a sub-regional grouping of West African states was established on 28 May 1975. It is made up of 16 member nations, which are Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape

Verde, Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana and Guinea. Others are Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Niger, Nigeria, Mali, Togo, Senegal and Sierra Leone.

5. It is against the backdrop of all these issues that this paper seeks to examine the potency of ECOWAS mechanism for conflict prevention as enunciated in its 'Protocol Relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security' (otherwise called 1999 Protocol). The 1999 Protocol was conceived to address the shortcomings of the 1981 Protocol on Mutual Assistance on Defence, which primarily focused on intra-state conflicts. Essentially, what the sub-regional body seeks to do is to put in place effective pre-emptive mechanism and also the need to de-emphasise hinging conflict resolution purely on military solutions. The questions worth asking are: First, how effective will the Protocol be in an environment of different system of governments, unequal economic and military capabilities as well as linguistic animosities? Secondly, would the protocol and the envisaged institutional structures stand the test of time? Thirdly, how can ECOMOG be institutionalized without a standing HQ in the manner of NATO HQ? Finally, how applicable are the lessons learnt from Liberia in resolving other sub-regional conflicts?

6. It is perhaps important to assert that the provision of the 1999 Protocol may not work in an environment of diverse interests and unequal economic and military capabilities. Therefore, successful implementation of the protocol provisions can only be achieved with the tacit support of the sub-regional hegemonic power(s) or through a collective resolve on the part of all the ECOWAS members. Another set back of the protocol has to do with the issue of resolving conflict in a country with a more superior military capability than all the other members put together. In such instance, the only available means is the use of diplomacy rather than military intervention.

7. The purpose of this paper therefore is to contribute to the discussions on the lessons identified during ECOMOG involvement in Liberia from 1990 to 2000. Minimal mention will be made of the historical perspectives to the Liberian conflict. However, more

consideration is given to the operational dimension and limited emphasis on tactical, logistics and administrative issues of the ECOMOG Forces. Also, the conflict of interest between Anglophone and Francophone members in ECOWAS with respect to ECOMOG operations in Liberia has not been given much emphasis in this paper.

8. The following assumptions are however made in this paper; first that there is a widespread understanding of the issues surrounding the cause(s) of the Liberian conflict, hence not much of that is covered in this paper. Secondly, that there is a wide knowledge of the resultant effects of the Liberian conflict when viewed against the costs identified by Luc Reychier and from the gory pictures of a documentary by a Liberian journalist, named Sorious Samora on the CNN titled ‘Cry the Beloved Country’. Therefore, this paper highlights ECOMOG involvement in Liberia, the sub-regional environment post-Liberian conflict as well as the lessons identified from the Liberian conflict. Lastly, the way(s) forward for achieving a long lasting conflict prevention mechanism are highlighted.

AIM

9. The aim of this paper is to discuss ECOWAS attempt at sub-regional collective security with specific focus on lessons identified from Liberian conflict of 1990 – 2000.

ECOMOG INVOLVEMENT IN LIBERIA

NECESSITY

10. The involvement of ECOMOG in Liberian conflict was as a result of the request of the government in power in Liberia under the leadership of President Samuel Doe. However, the de jure Government was unable to exercise the functions of governance because it virtually existed only in the Presidential Palace, while its opponents had little control over the actions and activities of combatants under them. Consequently, civilians became the principal targets of the conflict.⁶

Therefore, the formation of ECOMOG was circumstantial, which was premised on a sub-regional resolve to put a stop to destruction of lives and property occasioned by internal crisis in Liberia. That singular act put to rest the issue of non-intervention in the internal affairs of member countries and the new place of humanitarian issues in political and diplomatic perspectives.

11. ECOWAS transformation from an economic to political integrative scheme started with the promulgation of the 1976 Non-Recourse to Aggression Treaty. Subsequently, in 1978, the Non-Aggression Protocol and the 1981 Protocol on Mutual Assistance on Defence were signed. These protocols provided for the establishment of diverse institutional mechanisms and administrative processes to be made operative during crisis. However, at the time of ECOMOG intervention in Liberia in 1990, the institutions to back up the protocols had not been established.⁷ Therefore, the intervention was done under ad hoc arrangements and the need for more lasting institutions became apparent in the aftermath of the conflict.

ECOMOG MANDATE

12. ECOMOG Forces stepped into Liberia on 24 August 1990 with what can be termed a tall order. The mandate included maintaining law and order in Liberia; protecting life and property; maintaining essential services; providing security to the Interim Administration; observe elections and conduct normal police duties.

13. One of the problems faced by ECOMOG was the understanding of its mandate. The force was launched into Liberia when there was no ceasefire in place and one of the factions was not disposed to the ECOMOG intervention. Therefore, there was a sudden change in focus to peace enforcement due to the inability of the political class to achieve any cease fire. The following ensued from the switch to peace-enforcement: First, over stretch, due to the extent of territory that the force had to hold with respect to the number of troops available. Secondly, the nature of the terrain (vegetation, roads and bridges) and

effect of weather hindered conventional type of operations. Finally, the force was also exposed to irritating attacks and ambushes.

14. It should be noted that the ECOMOG mandate suffered the basic handicap that was inherent in principles that are distilled from mere idealistic platforms. Thus ECOMOG operations in Liberia were admixture of peacekeeping and peace enforcement activities. It became a case of developing principles to rationalize the meeting of objectives. Concerning operational objectives, ECOMOG was not only expected to stop the warring factions from fighting each other, but was also expected to prevent further resumption of hostilities by them. Despite ECOMOG manpower deficiency, the force was to provide protection and humanitarian assistance to the local population and the international community within its area of operation. As a peacekeeping force, it was to operate on the basis of consent and cooperation. This required the force to combine firmness in carrying out its mandate, with sensitivity towards the local community. The aim was to solve the problems in a practical, just and fair manner and to avoid confrontations whenever possible.⁸

15. Essentially, an ECOMOG operation in Liberia was fraught with following set backs: First, the force was hurriedly set up with a mandate which did not reflect the realities on the ground. Secondly, the force moved in before clear terms of reference could be established. Thirdly, it was only once the force checkmated the game plans of contending parties that the looming protraction and complexities of the conflict, and the increasing burden on the peacekeepers, became evident. Most of the rules of the ECOMOG 'game' therefore had to evolve in response to the peculiarities of the situation.⁹

16. Although, the situation in Liberia was not a typical insurgency or popular rebellion, the factions employed armed force as the primary means of operation. Had the situation been otherwise, ECOMOG role in Liberia would simply have reverted to that of internal security operations. It is important to note that although principles of internal

security operations may not be universally applicable, they indeed helped to address the doctrinal differences that confronted the ECOMOG contingents.¹⁰

SUB-REGIONAL PREPAREDNESS

17. The ECOMOG involvement in Liberian “conflict betrayed how ill-prepared ECOWAS was for military engagement to protect the economic wealth that the Community seeks to create”.¹¹ The rivalry and deep suspicion between the ruling classes in West Africa complicated the political environment. Member states sometimes refused to participate in, or even actively opposed ECOMOG operations.¹² On the whole, the conflict showed the fragile nature of ECOWAS when viewed against the backdrop of linguistic, economic and military capability differences.

18. The different colonial experiences affected the political cohesion and thus the efficacy of ECOMOG operations. Consequently, ECOMOG was viewed more as a military force designed to solve the security problems of the Anglophone members using the collective economic resources of the entire community. This kind of animosities imparted on the operational expedience of the deployed forces.

19. The intervention also provided a lesson in the art of diplomatic balancing in an atmosphere of divergent interests and distrust between a faction to the conflict and one of the peacekeeping contributing nations. The emphasis at the beginning was on the need for neutrality. For example, ‘to allay the fears of Charles Taylor who had openly accused the ECOMOG of [only] coming to safeguard the presidency of [Samuel] Doe; Lt Gen Arnold Quainoo from Ghana was appointed the FC’.¹³ This was a delicate balance between the need to assuage the feelings of the factions and that of some ECOWAS members who were suspicious of Nigerian motive and intentions.

20. On the whole, the effectiveness of ECOMOG in any operation would be directly dependent on the level of political consensus that the community exhibits at any material time. Achieving that consensus was one of the major problems that plagued ECOMOG operations. In Liberia, there was clear division between the 5 members of the Standing Mediation Committee and other 11 members of ECOWAS. At worst, this led to situations where some member states actually offered their territories and gave extensive support to the insurgent movements against which ECOMOG was conducting military operations.¹⁴

ECOMOG OPERATIONAL CONSTRAINTS

21. The principles of internal security operations did help to address the doctrinal lacunae that confronted the ECOMOG contingents. The ECOMOG task metamorphosed into hybrid operation of peacekeeping, counter insurgency and peace enforcement. The principles of each type of operation were applied according to their relevance to respective phases or a combination of phases of operation.

22. One of the problems with the counter-insurgency approach was that survival instinct induced the populace to flow to relative safety as refugees outside Liberia, or as displaced people (IDPs) in the safe havens created within by ECOMOG. In this way, collateral damage to the innocent was minimized while dealing with insurgents. [However], a huge humanitarian challenge was created by the need to look after the basic needs of thousands of refugees and IDPs.

23. In the course of their operations, ECOMOG troops repeatedly encountered the problem of civilian refugees fleeing towards their positions. In most cases, the forward units with whom they came in contact did not have the food and medicine to take care of the large numbers. They were consequently forced to share their operational rations and drugs with the civilians. Efforts to get relief agencies to take over the management of refugees always proved difficult. The relief agencies were reluctant to go to the frontline and ECOMOG usually

lacked the transport facilities to move such large number of civilians to sites acceptable to the relief agencies. In addition the relief agencies were reluctant to hand over their food and medicine to ECOMOG to administer to the refugees. This problem was persistent, and solutions to it were not found by ECOMOG High Command.¹⁵

24. **No Buffer Zone.** ECOMOG Forces operated without ‘a clearly defined buffer zone to facilitate a more secured base for its operations to separate the warring factions’.¹⁶ The force was therefore, compelled to live among the civil population and that predisposed the troops to unconventional practices.

25. **Positive Neutrality.** It was difficult for the force to maintain positive neutrality as required by peacekeeping principles. ECOMOG had to go into de facto alliances at different times due to exigencies on the ground. Indeed, positive neutrality was impracticable when there was no cease fire document and it would have been foolhardy for ECOMOG to have tried to operate under strict peacekeeping principles. Essentially, its mode of operation was largely driven by circumstances and the need to respond to changing security situations. It was a matter of convenience for ECOMOG Forces to have allied with Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) and INPFL, which was a breakaway faction from NPFL until it was operationally expedient to disarm INPFL. For example, lack of maps caused the ECOMOG Forces to rely on ‘some of the factions as guides during deployment into their respective areas’.¹⁷

26. **Doctrinal Lessons.** By the end of October 1992, pertinent doctrinal lessons noted from ECOMOG operations in Liberia included: never to underrate the fighting spirit of the factions to a conflict; the necessity for contingency plans in preparation for peace enforcement tasks; the need to grasp the complex nexus between peacekeeping and peace enforcement and the need to include the control of displaced civilians and refugees as a mandatory part of the initial plan for any operation.¹⁸

LACK OF UNIFIED COMMAND AND CONTROL

27. The Governments of troop contributing countries exercised considerable political control over their contingents – a factor which had grave operational implications. The FC did not have absolute operational command and control of the contingents given to him and could not always deploy them according to his own operational appreciation. Usually, home governments of the contingents dictated where and how troops from their countries would be deployed. Each Contingent Commander answered to both the FC and his own Chief of Defence Staff, and the views of the latter inevitably carried more weight than the former.

28. Like most multinational peace support forces, ECOMOG experienced difficulties in trying to operate a unified command. Because of the high level of mistrust among member states and the influence of non-regional powers, troop contingents usually arrived in the mission area with different and sometimes conflicting instructions.

29. Because of the high level of control by home governments, the Contingent Commanders enjoyed considerable autonomy from the control by the FC. There were instances when contingent units were pulled out of their areas of deployment without approval or even the knowledge of the FC, thus endangering the deployment of flanking contingents. Also, some contingents at times refused to come to the aid of other contingents without clearance from their home Government.¹⁹

30. Therefore, the problems of command and control can be said to have started right at the beginning of the Liberian operation. ‘It is noted that in the circumstances that the force was launched into operation, the Force Commander (FC) did not have the benefit of a clearly defined command and control and communication structure. Even more seriously he lacked a firm political direction in the field’.²⁰ In the same vein, the ECOWAS secretariat, which was supposed to direct the

conduct of affairs of ECOMOG, 'did not have specific lines of communication with the force in the field'.²¹ The anti-Nigerian sentiments did not help matters with respect to command and control because the appointment of Lt Col Lamin Bagasuba from Guinea as the Deputy FC was not a 'welcomed development among the high command of the Nigerian Military'.²²

31. The appointment of Maj Gen Dogonyaro created the office of Field Commander in charge of field operations in Liberia, while the erstwhile FC operated from Banjul. However, this was the beginning of the process to ease out Gen Quinoo as FC and the subsequent appointment of 2 Deputy Field Commanders, one each from Ghana and Guinea. Thus, Nigeria assumed the command responsibility of ECOMOG Forces in Liberia and thereafter, occupied dominant positions in the HQ.

32. Not 'until **Operation OCTOPUS in 1992**, which was conducted by NPFL troops against ECOMOG Forces in Monrovia, all the separate national contingents essentially remained directly responsible to the Force or Field Commander through the DY FC, but not without any intermediate command HQs. The contingents operated almost independently and force packaging in terms of capability to achieve required combat power was absent. Unless, the individual country had such capabilities within its forces and Nigeria was the only one that could boast of that capability. It became apparent that ECOMOG had to be restructured for operational effectiveness. The new structure saw the regrouping of national contingents as appropriate. This led to the formation of 2 ECOMOG Bdes, a Ground Task Force comprising infantry and armour units with an arty bde. The new approach ensured that a more balanced tactical and operational grouping of combat and combat support assets to deal with specific operational situations.

EFFECTS OF ECOMOG INTERVENTION

33. Indeed, the difference between the official warlord armies became blurred over time as ECOMOG units cultivated their own warlords (or stimulated ethnic rivalries) to counterattack Taylor's forces. A strategic reason for this blurring of the lines between conventional and irregular armies lay in the fact that the very nature of conflicts in Liberia placed conventional armies in extremely dangerous situations.²³

34. Another characteristic of the ECOMOG operation was the tenuous control exercised over the field forces by the political directorate, technically the ECOWAS Secretariat. To a large extent, this was due to the fact that ECOWAS was unable to play its anticipated role in relation to the funding of the force. It had been agreed that troops from participating countries were to be self-sufficient for the first 30 days, after which ECOWAS was to pick up the funding, but it was unable to do so. This made it difficult for the ECOWAS directorate to claim control over a military force that was acting in its name, but for which it could not pay. It fortified perceptions of ECOMOG as a Nigerian operation. As far as the participating countries were concerned, funding and other resource constraints led to commanders on the ground being given considerable latitude to conduct operations as they saw fit, and to deal with problems as they arose. As it turned out, this was a blessing in disguise as it provided flexibility on the ground and avoided the delays normally associated with UN peacekeeping operations.²⁴

35. Ironically, a crucial factor in the success of the ECOWAS peace effort in Liberia was the manner in which military, political and diplomatic initiatives were articulated or rather 'disarticulated'. [For example], in the UN system, the relationship between field commanders and the political directorate centred on the Security Council and the office of the Secretary-General and or their representatives. This arrangement has always hampered effective

control of peacekeeping operations. In essence the tenuous control over ECOMOG by the ECOWAS Secretariat was actually a positive factor in the success of ECOMOG. In the long run, military operations were thus not held hostage to political bickering.

36. Another impact of ECOMOG has to do with the militarized form of regionalism, involving increasing integration between military structures and personnel in the region through regular joint training exercises. These military relationships have a focused and coherent character which was largely missing from the historically fractured relationships in the region. Perhaps it can be asserted that ECOMOG is accomplishing military integration, while ECOWAS as a body is failing to realize economic integration.

POST LIBERIAN CONFLICT

NEW SECURITY ARCHITECTURE IN WEST AFRICA

37. Several sub-regional security initiatives have been undertaken in West Africa over the last 2 decades. Indeed, the West African sub-region has not been the same particularly with respect to collective security arrangement. The new focus is not unconnected to the aftermath of the Liberian civil war of 1990 – 2000. The end of the civil war brought to the fore the need to address the internal security issues through sustainable security architecture rather than ad hoc measures. It affirmed the understanding that ‘post-Cold War conflicts present peacekeepers and peace negotiators with new and daunting challenges. These conflicts are cruel and protracted, with no distinction between combatants and civilians. Often the conflicts have no discernable agendas and are relatively resistant to external pressures’.²⁵ It became expedient on the ECOWAS leaders to search for new security structures to enhance sub-regional collective security.

38. As part of the efforts to strengthen the resolve for new security architectures in the sub-region; ECOWAS has put in place certain organizational structures around which future interventions will be

built. The organs established include the Mediation and Security Council, the Defence and Security Commission (DSC), Council of Elders, Early Warning Observation and Monitoring Centres and ECOMOG standby forces. The DSC is an organ that comprises military and security technocrats that plan ECOMOG missions. The Council of Elders is the organ that engages in preventive diplomacy. Essentially the Mediation and Security Council oversees the activities of the other organs. The aim is to accelerate decision-making in crisis situations by making decisions on deploying military and political missions and informing the UN and AU of such decisions on behalf of ECOWAS. The functions of the Council extend to the issue of reviewing mandates and terms of references of missions as well as the appointment of force commanders.

39. The most novel idea of the new mechanism is the early warning system. The system entails the observation and analysis of social, economic and political situations in the sub-region with the potential to degenerate into conflict and to present appropriate threat perception analysis. Given that new conflicts have deep roots, an observatory would have to examine the causes of impending conflicts, and will collect and analyse the information. To facilitate these functions, 4 offices have been established to monitor conflicts in the entire sub-region. The reporting zones are based in Banjul (to cover Cape Verde, Gambia, Guinea-Bissau and Senegal; Cotonou (to cover Benin, Nigeria and Togo); Monrovia (to cover Ghana, Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone) and Ouagadougou (to cover Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, Mali and Niger). One encouraging development of the ECOWAS early warning system is the involvement of civil society actors in its establishment.²⁶

40. The hub of the new security architecture in West Africa is the mechanism provided for in the 1999 Protocol. The mechanism makes it imperative that member states promote and strengthen cooperation in the areas of preventive diplomacy and the sharing of information. However, since the ECOWAS mechanism for conflict management came into being, events in Guinea-Bissau, Niger, Sierra Leone and

Cote d'Ivoire have challenged the effectiveness of its provisions. It is therefore, desirable to see the new structures stand the test of time, particularly in the light of the divergent interests of the various stakeholders in a multilateral arrangement. Indeed, this can be achieved once the stakeholders have a consensus on issues relating to peace and security in the sub-region.

INSTITUTIONALISATION OF ECOMOG

41. The 1999 Protocol provides for the establishment of a brigade size standby force, which would be ready to be deployed at very short notice. In line with this commitment, a number of ECOWAS member states have pledged a battalion each, however, the reality of these pledges remains to be seen. The roles envisaged for the institutionalized ECOMOG include: observation and monitoring, peacekeeping, humanitarian intervention, enforcement and embargos, preventive deployment, peace-building operations, disarmament and demobilization and policing duties.

42. The initial experiment with ECOMOG in Liberia brought to the fore a number of issues with regard to the need to institutionalize ECOMOG as a sub-regional standby force. The need for a standing ECOMOG HQ becomes imperative in view of the fact that ECOMOG is seen as not a realistic security wing of a weak regional body. Rather, it would be more appropriate for it to be a 'stand-alone regional mechanism for collective security like the NATO'. One of the difficulties that ECOMOG encountered at the early stages was the lack of clarity in the chain of command. The idea of a peace support commander not having a clue as to where final authority lay affects the direction and effectiveness of the force. Further to that, the position of the Force Commander on the ground was that of a military director, political leader and ambassador all rolled into one. Perhaps if there had been a Special Representative of the ECOWAS Secretary General for a particular mission with direct responsibility to coordinating the affairs of that mission in the sub-region.²⁷

43. With respect to the new provisions for ECOMOG force, 3 issues ensued: first, the need articulate the criteria for mandating military intervention; secondly, the importance of distinguishing between keeping and enforcing peace; thirdly, the danger of the force becoming a defence pact for the protection of local autocrats. The proposed ECOMOG is to be used in 4 cases: first, aggression or conflict within a member state; secondly, a conflict between 2 or more member states; thirdly, internal conflicts that threaten to trigger a humanitarian disaster, pose a serious threat to sub-regional peace and security, result in serious and massive violation of human rights and/or follow the overthrow or attempted overthrow of a democratically elected government and fourthly, any other situation that the Council deems appropriate.²⁸

44. The indications here are that interventions have to be determined on a case by case basis. In the same vein, the requirement for a two-thirds majority before intervention can be sanctioned is capable of undermining the effectiveness of the sub-regional collective security arrangement. In the event of lack of consensus, even on the ground of humanitarian crises, decision to intervention may be difficult to achieve. Similarly, with respect to peace-enforcement, the Protocol is silent and perhaps the assumption is that it is subsumed into peacekeeping. The sub-region therefore needs to establish a fully operational ECOMOG HQ, which would be under direct control of the ECOWAS Secretariat to facilitate command and control of the standby units and the decisions to employ ECOMOG forces.

45. [It is pertinent to point out that] ECOMOG can only be an effective security wing of a thriving integrative political structure. Ironically, ECOWAS remains a weak organization, which lacks, among other things, adequate financing and enforcement authority with its 16 members. Since the institutional arrangement is currently lacking and the structures are absent in individual countries, staff colleges cannot develop or simulate scenarios that can be adapted into practical operations. Neither has ECOMOG developed a doctrine of

peacekeeping in spite of the extensive experience acquired over the years.²⁹

LESSONS FROM LIBERIA

46. Nature of conflicts differs from region to region and lessons learnt from one region may not essentially be applicable to other cases. However, lessons can shape perceptions and approach to future conflict resolutions. Indeed, a number of issues came out of the West African intervention in Liberia and they are capable of influencing how to handle future conflicts of that nature. It also showed the constraints of command and control in an environment of divergent interests, which resulted into multiplicity of strategic influence on the tactical operations.

47. On the whole lessons learned can be seen in terms of redefinition of legality of intervention in the internal affairs of member countries; the need for early warning mechanism to identify likely flash points and possible measures to curb the developing conflicts. Also, to enhance the command and control of coalition or multinational forces, there is the need for forces to be under the auspices of a unifying body, which is capable of providing the requirements for the deployed forces. In that manner, effective command and control can be exercised without the operational level commanders having to contend with multiple strategic command chains. All these centre on the need for adequate legal imperatives for intervention, a proper warning and risk analysis mechanism. ECOWAS mechanism for conflict resolution is providing the international community with new forms of international law for collective security.

48. **Legal Imperatives of ECOMOG Intervention.** The ECOMOG intervention in Liberia raised issues of legality because even if this may not be legal in the context of the current international law, its legitimacy was unanimously endorsed. However, fears are expressed on the issue of ‘sanctioning unilateral action of states and/or regional institutions, especially where capacities within the region are not even

handed. [The fear is premised on the notion that some] states may use intervention as an opportunity to eliminate legitimate, but uncooperative governments under the guise of security umbrella. In spite of this caution, there are sentiments that the ECOMOG if fully institutionalized would serve as a basis for a new collective security arrangement for Africa. Consequently, the 1999 Protocol is seen as the ‘most comprehensive in contemporary international law, not only because it takes internal security issues as legitimate cause(s) of intervention, but also in spawning new forms of international law for collective regional security’.³⁰ ‘Since collective security refers to values, interests and norms that transcend the military element of security, the challenge is to avoid illegal overthrow of legitimately constituted governments’.³¹

49. **Design of Warning Methodologies.** In fashioning early warning mechanism, the Liberian conflict has shown that there is need for procedures that can be initiated or followed without recourse to decision-making organs. Therefore, the design methodologies should include information and understanding of: historical surveys and analyses of events; comparative analyses of relevant information; physical inspection and field visits and modeling and remote-sensing. Such information can be placed within the context of the ‘traffic light system’ whereby, red is used for states in crises; orange/yellow for states showing early signs of crises, green for other states. It could include political indicators; physical security indicators; the level of militarization in society; social indicators, and economic and environmental indicators. Finally a profile should be compiled for eminent person who could be called upon at short notice as mediators. The concern however, is on the ability to initiate early action or responses.

50. **Risk Identification.** Risk identification should be introduced to provide a constant and updated range of verifiable information that can point to the potential for a crisis erupting in a specific place. This will help in identifying countries or groups that have the potential to

cause conflict. This should rely on the use of local informants with credibility. This method provides another possibility of identifying crisis factors that can result in conflict by using a recommended checklist of evidence for regimes and other multilateral organizations to monitor emergency feasibilities in politically unstable areas.

51. The most notable aspect of the ECOWAS initiative was less the military than diplomatic. By every conceivable measure, Liberia was a diplomatic minefield. Commitments were repeatedly made and broken. In all approximately 10 cease-fires and 17 negotiated agreements before the 'peace' was achieved with the elections of 1997.³²

52. In addition to the recalcitrant of individual players, the difficulty of securing commitments to agreements was due to 3 characteristics of the warlord's formations. First, their easy access to light weapons and small arms, which were procured through private and black market sources with proceeds from sale of exploited raw materials, made them less resistant to external pressure. Secondly, unlike the earlier Cold-war insurgencies, these warlords have little by way of political organization or agenda, or compelling motivations to seek peace; the war was its own justification. Thirdly, the low cost of entry and their own lack of internal ideological coherence pose the danger of splintering and thus the consequent proliferation of warlord factions. Negotiated agreements were rendered academic by the emergence of new warlord factions.³³

54. One of the encouraging achievements of ECOMOG in the long term is in the success in pushing the region from argument to consensus and from division to unity on matters of regional security. Notwithstanding, the consensus, which helped to facilitate the end of Liberian crisis, ECOMOG experience teaches the important lesson that one should not blend regional security and human security. However, the authoritarian structures prevalent in the region at that time necessitated external intervention to support regional security. But at the same time, the same structures undermined human security on the domestic front. Hence, further indications are that while regional

political stability is a necessary condition for human security, it is far from sufficient.

THE WAY FORWARD

55. As ECOWAS strives to operationalise and institutionalize its security mechanism, the emphasis needs to be focused on the following 3 key issues: need for security sector reform; renewed focus on peacekeeping and development policies and the need to involve civil societies and external actors in managing conflicts in West Africa.

56. The key to stability in West Africa lies in the reform of the security sector because little attention had been paid to such reforms in the past. For example, several former ECOMOG commanders were of the view that incomplete disarmament and demobilization and the transformation of militias into national armies greatly contribute to instability in the region. Example is given of the transformation of Charles Taylor's NPFL militia into Liberian Army contributed to the instability in Liberia.

57. Security Sector reform should not only focus on military issues but should transcend and embody human and economic security issues. In this regard the moratorium of small arms and light weapons proliferations, which was adopted in 1998, could be made more effective and expanded to include the regulation of external weapon supplier to the region.

58. Peace-building and developments has the potential of improving ECOWAS effort at conflict management due to linkage between security and development. Therefore, the regional concerned should be primarily focused on raising the standard of living of the majority of the population, who are in abject poverty. This can be achieved if the sub-regional leaders can address the issue of improving the agricultural sector, where about 80 percent of the population is employed. This will go a long way to alleviate the poverty situation in the sub-region and has the potential of reducing tension and by implication conflicts.

59. Similarly, the involvement of civil societies and external actors in conflict management mechanism in the sub-region has the potential of providing not only a military focus to conflict resolution. However, the role of the civil societies must be better defined in the ECOWAS mechanism to enable the civil societies to effectively participate in conflict management. In the same perspectives, increase in the early warning observatories and improvement in the speed of decision-action cycle can enhance conflict resolution. However, there is need for the sub-region to also forge closer cooperation with other organizations, particularly to enhance conflict monitoring

CONCLUSION

60. At the time of ECOMOG intervention in Liberia in 1990, the institutions to back up its earlier protocols had not been established. Therefore, the intervention was done under ad hoc arrangements and the need for more lasting institutions became apparent in the aftermath of the conflict.

61. The glaring difficulties experienced by ECOMOG were examples of the challenges that can confront regionally based peacekeeping initiatives of that magnitude. Nonetheless, a number of issues were brought out particularly with respect to the divergent interests in the region and the consequent effect on command and control of field forces.

62. The intervention raised fear of a Nigerian unilateralism in the sub-region, hence the clamour for permanent structures to do away with the ad hoc measures. Hence, the promulgation of the 1999 Protocol, which was aimed at addressing the shortcomings of the 1983 Protocol on Mutual Defence Assurance, due to its focus on only inter-state conflicts. On the whole, the intervention is a lesson to the international community on the major steps taken by African countries in developing regional collective security as a means of managing regional conflicts within Africa.

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