

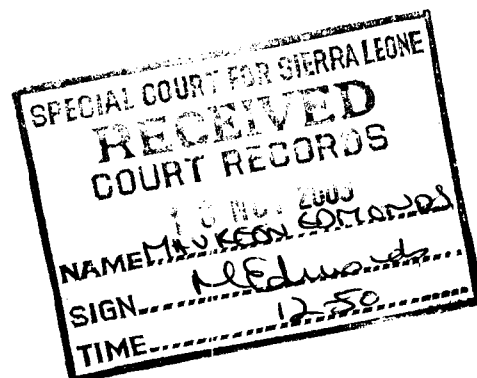
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**Defence List of Authorities**

1. R. Mortimer, From ECOMOG to ECOMOG II: Intervention in Sierra Leone in: *'Africa in World Politics, The African State System in Flux'*, Harbeson and Rothchild (ed.), p. 198.
2. H.A. Saliu, ECOMOG as a permanent force: issues and constraints in: *Africa Quarterly*, Vol 40, No. 2. 2000, p. 57.



# 8

## From ECOMOG to ECOMOG II: Intervention in Sierra Leone

ROBERT MORTIMER

mate environment. The UN Charter itself recognizes the role that regional organizations might be expected to play in the management of collective security within their respective regions. The creation of ECOMOG in August 1990 as a mechanism to halt the bloodshed in Liberia's civil war was widely hailed as a promising model of regional peacekeeping. Yet it soon became apparent that regional peacekeepers faced all the same political dilemmas that UN peacekeepers had confronted in the context of conflicting national interests that so often surrounds civil and interstate war. In the specific case of Liberia, ECOMOG became as much a party to the struggle for power in that war-torn land as anything else. This was because Nigeria, always the dominant military power within ECOMOG, had strong preferences about who should wield power in Liberia—preferences that clashed with those of other regional actors such as Côte d'Ivoire and Burkina Faso. As John Inegbedion wrote in 1994, "Nigeria was, and remains, the backbone of ECOMOG"; this was no less true in 1997–1998 when Nigeria decided to project ECOMOG into Sierra Leone, where a military junta had unseated a staunch ally of the Nigerian regime. This chapter analyzes the extension of ECOMOG's mission into Sierra Leone against the backdrop of its role in Liberia. The preeminence of Nigeria in the battle for Freetown confirms the unilateral essence of a nominally multilateral force and explains why ECOMOG's victory has intensified the search for an alternative model of African peacekeeping.

### The Sierra Leone Connection

Sierra Leone has been enmeshed in ECOMOG and the Liberian civil war from the outset. In July 1990 Freetown hosted the first meeting of the Standing Mediation Committee (SMC) that ECOWAS had only recently instituted at its May summit meeting. Even though it was not a member of the SMC, which took the decision to send an interventionary force into Liberia early in August, Sierra Leone decided to contribute soldiers to ECOMOG; moreover, Freetown served as the staging ground for the August 24 deployment of ECOMOG to Monrovia. Sierra Leone's apparent eagerness to participate stemmed from two related factors. Charles Taylor's insurrection was driving refugees across the border into Sierra Leone; and, even more important, Sierra Leonean President Joseph Momoh was fearful of the effects that a National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) victory might have upon his own fragile regime.

ECOMOG may well have been Momoh's best bet for containing the Liberian crisis's impact upon his country. In the stalemate that ensued between ECOMOG and the NPFL, however, Sierra Leone was inexorably drawn deeply into the conflict. Little inclined to respect conventional territorial boundaries in any case, Taylor sent his NPFL across the border.

Had any doubt ever existed that the Economic Community Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) was primarily an instrument of Nigerian foreign policy, it was dispelled by Nigeria's decision to mount an offensive against the junta in Sierra Leone in February 1998. Employing the banner of ECOMOG to cover an essentially unilateral operation, Nigeria moved to restore its regional ally Ahmed Tejan Kabbah to power. Victor in the 1996 presidential election, Kabbah had been ousted in May 1997 to virtually universal disapprobation. Yet the lack of any international support for the military junta did not overcome the reservations of several regional states to this unilateral display of Nigerian power. On the contrary, it enhanced long-standing fears of a Nigerian quest for hegemony in West Africa—fears already raised by its role in Liberia.

The concept of regional approaches to peacekeeping and conflict resolution is an attractive one to many theorists of international relations. Regional organizations like the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) seem potentially well suited to the task of mediating local disputes in their own zones. They have an immediate interest in regional stability, especially in preventing spillover of civil strife from one

Uneasiness with Nigeria's conduct of the ECOMOG mandate in Sierra Leone was evident at the December 1997 extraordinary ECOWAS summit in Lomé. ECOWAS had indeed imposed economic sanctions upon the AFRC regime, but it had not authorized the use of force against the junta. Although the discussions were not public, the delegates heard from General Malu as commander in chief of ECOMOG; the secretariat revealed that the ECOMOG experience had "fed the debates."<sup>20</sup> Abacha declined to attend the Lomé session; Foreign Minister Ikimi, however, defended Nigerian policy with the broad argument that West African regional peacekeeping was better than initiatives that came from elsewhere. Senegal's foreign minister indicated that his government had reservations about the manner in which the regional force was being employed in Sierra Leone.

The final communiqué handled these differences with diplomatic tact. It indicated that the heads of state "explored the ways and means aimed at preventing, managing, and settling conflicts as well as maintaining and strengthening peace, security, and stability in the region"; that they renewed their support to the committee dealing with Sierra Leone and expressed their "appreciation" of the role of ECOMOG there (after heated debate over whether to use the word *satisfaction*); that they hailed the positive action of ECOMOG in Liberia; and that they reaffirmed the role of ECOWAS (not ECOMOG) in settling the Sierra Leone crisis.<sup>21</sup> Close reading reveals that the communiqué was a rebuff to Nigeria and a warning not to act unilaterally. The full membership of ECOWAS had the authority to define the group's policy toward the junta. Nigeria alone did not have the right to expand the mission of the peacekeepers. ECOWAS invited President Kabbah to attend the summit, making perfectly clear that it did not recognize the junta and that it considered the deposed president to be the legitimate head of state. Support for Kabbah was not intended to give Nigeria a free hand, however.

The outbreak of hostilities between ECOMOG and the junta on February 6, 1998, thus took many of the members of ECOWAS by surprise. Nigeria claimed that junta troops carried out an attack on its peacekeepers east of Freetown, but there were some indications that the Nigerians may have been planning an offensive for some time.<sup>22</sup> The UN Security Council unanimously called for a cease-fire on February 11, "implicitly blaming" (in the view of *Le Monde*) "the ECOMOG forces."<sup>23</sup> ECOMOG reinforcements crossed the Mano River bridge from Liberia, bringing in heavy weaponry as the Nigerian forces closed in on Freetown. Whatever the initial provocation may have been, the Nigerian forces under the banner of ECOMOG launched a generalized offensive to restore Kabbah to power. Within a week, the Nigerians took Freetown while the junta leadership fled into the countryside. Nigeria thereby reestablished a kind of mili-

tary protectorate over Sierra Leone at just the moment that it was significantly reducing its presence in Liberia. With President Kabbah beholden to Abuja (which he visited in February, well before returning to Sierra Leone on March 10), Nigeria retained the capacity to project its power into the subregion. It remained well positioned to assist other regional allies such as Guinea, which was concerned about Liberian subversion. It also averted the need to repatriate some seven thousand war-hardened and not altogether satisfied troops back to Nigeria. Having discovered means of earning income in Liberia, these soldiers might find comparable opportunities in the diamond fields of Sierra Leone. Nigeria was able to accomplish these tactical and strategic goals while marching under the banner of restoring an elected leader to office.<sup>24</sup>

The tight interlocking between the Sierra Leonean and Liberian situations was evident during the hostilities as well. Nigerian commanders accused Taylor of sending NIPFL troops across the border to help the junta. Taylor in turn was irate that ECOMOG planes forced down two helicopters carrying junta officials in Liberian airspace and that Nigerian alpha-jets buzzed over the presidential residence in an obvious act of intimidation. He called upon ECOMOG to withdraw the armored vehicles that it was deploying in Monrovia during the Sierra Leonean campaign. Despite these protests, Taylor did not have the means to counter the Nigerian fait accompli, nor did other governments have the will.

Only Taylor's longtime backer, President Blaise Compaoré of Burkina Faso, publicly expressed reservations about Nigeria's unilateral decision to convert ECOMOG II into an enforcement operation. In particular, Compaoré questioned "just what might be the intentions of those who have employed force for the restoration of President Kabbah."<sup>25</sup> Although other states were reluctant to criticize the outcome openly, the weekly *Jeune Afrique* commented that the Nigerians reinforced their position in the region "with the silent approbation of ECOWAS (which in reality betrayed the disapproval of certain of its members)."<sup>26</sup> Elsewhere in the francophone press, it was clear that the intervention rekindled longstanding suspicions of Nigerian hegemonic aspirations. For example, *Sud-Quotidien* in Dakar questioned Nigeria's "eternal quest for leadership" and perceived a strong element of "opportunism" in the reconversion of ECOMOG.<sup>27</sup>

The adverse reaction of the Senegalese government became evident in the months following the Nigerian campaign, notably at the meeting of the ministers of foreign affairs of the ECOWAS member-states held in Yaoundoukro in March 1998. A debate erupted at this meeting between Foreign Minister Ikimi of Nigeria and his Senegalese counterpart, Moustapha Niassé, concerning regional peacekeeping. Ikimi lauded the achievements of ECOMOG, declaring that "[w]e have an instrument

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## ECOMOG AS A PERMANENT FORCE: ISSUES AND CONSTRAINTS

Hassan A. Saliu\*

### Introduction

Contrary to the expectations of the Cold War era, crises have taken place within nation-states in the international system. This is specially so in the case of the Third World countries where Cold War had assisted to sweep certain contentious issues under the carpet.<sup>1</sup> The opportunity offered by the existence of two super powers meant that the developing world could play one super power against the other. Somalia and Egypt would appear to have maximized this opportunity. However, the end of the Cold War and the consequent sacking of bipolar order have since revealed the limits of the strategy. With regard to the former,

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As the Liberian operation was on-going, the military struck in Sierra Leone citing the neglect of army as one of the reasons for their incursion into politics. The displaced Kabbah administration appealed to Nigeria with which his country had a defence agreement. Resting on the strength of the agreement, the Abacha regime, with little or no consultation, dispatched the ECOMOG to Sierra Leone to chase out the military usurpers of power. This definite instruction, however, caused some ripples within the ECOWAS circles. It was asked as to how an undemocratic regime could go to another to establish democracy. This remained a puzzle until the blunders committed by the ECOWAS Committee of Five were nullified through immaturity displayed by the Freetown junta when it went to announce that it would not be possible for it to hand over power to the displaced Kabbah's government a few weeks into the agreement period.<sup>11</sup> The onslaught brought to bear on the youthful military regime by the ECOMOG led to its dismissal.

Restoration of the Kabbah's government was, however, an item in the peace process. Law and order had to be enforced in Sierra Leone after the return of the democratic order as remnants of the junta and the RUF were still unleashing mayhem on Sierra Leone.<sup>12</sup> This understanding led to the relocation of the ECOMOG Headquarters to Sierra Leone from Liberia and the subsequent appointment of Brigadier-General Kombe (a Nigerian) as the Chief of Defence Staff for Sierra Leone. Massive destruction caused to the infrastructure in the country was also expected to be repaired by the ECOMOG. Indeed, the same level of repair work in Liberia was expected in Sierra Leone. Thus, close to two years after the restoration of the displaced democratic government, there is still a yawning gap between the requirements of a modern state and what the country could muster. The observed situation, no doubt, has returned a positive verdict to the ECOMOG while, at the same time, raising questions on the appropriateness of the platform for the maintenance of peace and security in the West African sub-region, especially against the background of the new dimensions introduced into the concept of peacekeeping by the existing power structure in the international system.

We can, therefore, say that the performance of the ECOMOG can be adequately assessed on the Liberian and Sierra Leonean conflicts, though the force was also deployed in Guinea-Bissau in 1998. With regard to Liberia, a functioning government has been established with some issues, that can strengthen peace, still lingering. On Sierra Leone, the return of Kabbah and the signing of an agreement among the RUF, remnants of the military junta and the government of the day (Kabbah's), which has led to the emergence of a cabinet embracing all shades of opinion, were remarkable achievements of the ECOMOG. However, the groan experienced by the financiers of the force has necessitated an invitation to the UN to take over from the ECOMOG. Indeed, the withdrawal of the ECOMOG troops from Sierra Leone (a process which has already begun) marked the end of the Force's intervention in the country.<sup>13</sup>

#### Emerging Issues

From the record of performance of the ECOMOG, some issues have emerged. These range from the need for a standing army to *conflict* prevention. Based on the enthusiastic remarks of some statesmen and observers, the retention of the ECOMOG would be in the interest of the security of the West African sub-region. It has been specifically argued that its work in Sierra Leone commends itself for a likely role that the ECOMOG could play, if it is retained. With the wave of military take-over not totally over in the sub-region, the existence of the ECOMOG will serve to frighten any potential trouble-makers.

The high number of crises in Africa has rekindled in the minds of scholars and observers the debate that took place preparatory to the formation of the OAU in 1963 on the need for the establishment of an African High Command. Dr. Nkrumah would appear to be justified going by the inflictions which African countries are faced with. It is common knowledge that Africa alone harbours nearly half of the World's refugees and displaced persons.<sup>14</sup> This came about as a result of wars and conflicts. To be sure, Somalia has been abandoned and the Hobbesian law guides social relations in the country.