

# The Role of Nigeria in Peacekeeping Operations from 1960 to 2013

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## Abstract

Peace keeping is a peaceful third party intervention which operates with a set of guiding principles that include the consent of the parties to the conflict, impartiality and the non use of force except in self-defense. This paper examines peacekeeping operations across the globe, particularly, in Africa and West African sub-region, with emphasis on Nigeria's role in the Liberian and Sierra Leone crises. It also analyzes the costs and benefits of the operations to the country within the period under review. The idealist theory was adopted as the tool of analysis, while the methodology was the systematic qualitative content analysis derived mainly from secondary sourced materials. The paper found out that keeping peace in one country is invariably saving an entire sub-region or region from possible spillover effects. More so, the resources expended on peacekeeping operations by Nigeria are at the expense of the country's domestic imperatives –welfare of citizens and infrastructural development. The paper concludes by recommending reduction of financial cost of peacekeeping and prioritizing the welfare of citizens.

## INTRODUCTION

This paper seeks to assess the role of Nigeria in peacekeeping operations within the West African sub-region, since the country's attainment of independence in 1960, with focus on Liberia and Sierra Leone. Nigeria has played and continues to play pivotal roles in support of countries challenged by political instability. This big brother role lends credence to the assertion that Nigeria remains a significant actor in peacekeeping, particularly within Africa.

However, while the country is being commended by the United Nations missions across the globe, a sizable number of Nigerians hold reservations regarding the huge resources expended on peacekeeping operations at the detriment of the country's domestic needs.

The idealist theory would be adopted as the tool of analysis for this paper. Idealism, as propounded by Immanuel Kant, P.R. Sakar and Hegel assumes that war and international anarchy can be reduced by strengthening the institutional arrangements that encourage its disappearance; also, war is a global problem requiring collective or multilateral, rather than national effort to control it.

## CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION OF PEACEKEEPING

Peacekeeping is a term mainly used to describe actions sponsored by the United Nations charter with primary responsibility of maintaining international peace and security. Agwu (2007) indicated that peacekeeping consists essentially of observer missions and lightly armed forces monitoring ceasefire, operating in an essentially static mode with the consent of the parties involved.

In its traditional sense, peacekeeping meant conflict containment and it adopted the form of neutral outside assistance to mediate and encourage belligerent parties to disengage (Dokubo, 2005: 253). For peacekeeping operation to succeed therefore, it needs to secure not only the cooperation of the conflicting parties but also of the international community-regional and sub-regional organizations like African Union, Economic Community of West African States, as well as United Nations.

Nigeria became a member of the United Nations immediately after its independence. It actively participated in ECOWAS Monitoring Group, African Union, as well as United Nations Peacekeeping Operations. The principles and objectives of Nigerian Foreign Policy made it mandatory for the country to be an active participant in African as well as global peacekeeping operations.

More so, as a non-aligned country during the cold war years, Nigeria maintained a neutral position, which made her a dependable mediator and courted participant in the forces raised to restore and maintain peace in conflict zones. This paper highlights the Liberian and Sierra Leone crises as well as the challenges that Nigeria faces in

peacekeeping operations. (Ahmed, 2010).

### **NIGERIA'S ROLE IN PEACEKEEPING OPERATION IN LIBERIA**

Nigeria contributed immensely to the ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG), an interventionist mediation force to end the protracted Liberian civil war, where the government of Nigeria puts the financial cost at 8 billion dollars (over N800 billion) apart from a large number of lost and maimed soldiers in 1987. The civil war in Liberia is significant for two reasons. First, it served as an important example of a new type of external intervention – intervention by a sub regional organization. Second, it has led to a re-examination by African leaders, of the policy of non-interference in the internal affairs of states. (Anifowose, 1999).

Non-intervention in the internal affairs of states is one of the principles underlying the OAU (now AU). African leaders are, however, far more aware of the threat to regional security posed by internal conflicts. This was reflected in the second principle of the 1991 Conference on Security, Stability, Development and Cooperation in Africa which stated that the security, stability and development of every African country is inextricably linked with those of other African countries. Consequently, instability in one African country reduces the stability of all other countries. Nigeria shared the joy of the return to democracy by Liberia. Additionally, The then Nigeria's president, Gen. Babangida served as the Chairman of ECOWAS thrice while the community's secretariat in Abuja - a project mainly funded by Nigeria was completed (Yakubu, 2011:101)

### **NIGERIA'S ROLE IN PEACEKEEPING OPERATION IN SIERRA LEONE**

Following a long period of military rule, Ahmad Tejan Kabbah was elected president of Sierra Leone on 17<sup>th</sup> march, 1996. Little more than one year later, On 25 May, 1997 he and his democratically elected Government were overthrown in a bloody coup led by dissident military officers and rebels from Sierra Leone's long standing insurgency. In March 1998, a peace keeping force under Nigerian leadership with considerable help from a British/Africa mercenary from a local paramilitary (the (Kamajor), entered Freetown, and restored Kabbah and his government. The motives of the Nigerian intervention were two fold: there was a natural desire for regional security, but General Sani Abacha also wanted international legitimacy for his regime which was being discredited by the international community. The initial success of the peace keepers helped obscure some of the troubling aspects of the intervention - the lack of an international mandate, the use of mercenary in peace keeping operations and the very undemocratic nature of the Nigerian regime.

At the peak of the operations, ECOMOG had 13, 000 troops in the country which conducted the operations. Late in 1999 the disputants in the sierra Leonean conflict signed an agreement in Lome, Togo to end the crisis; thus paving the way for UNAMSIL (United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone). (Anifowose, 1999).

Nigeria has every reason to be proud of her peacekeeping missions. Some of the peacekeeping operations in which Nigeria was involved include: sending a battalion to Congo (UNOC) 1960-1964; Military observers to new Guinea (UNSF) 1962-1963; battalion to Tanzania by bilateral agreement 1964; Military observers during the India-Pakistan conflict (UNIPOM) 1965-1966; battalion and staff officers to Lebanon (UNIFIL), 1978-1983; battalion and staff officers to Chad (Harmony I, via bilateral agreement) 1981-1982; brigade to Chad (Harmony II, under the auspices of OAU) 1982-1983; military observers during Iran-Iraq conflict (UNIMOG) 1988-1991; division to Liberia (ECOMOG) 1990 to date; military observers for Iraq-Kuwait (UNIKOM) 1991, and to Angola (NAVEMII) 1991-1992; training teams for Sierra Leone (NATNG) 1992-1995; military observers to Namibia (UNTAG) 1989-1990; to western Sahara (MINURSO) 1991; and to Cambodia (UNTAC) 1992-1993.

The country also contributed a battalion and staff officers to Somalia (UNOSOM) 1992-1994; battalion and staff officers to the former Yugoslavia (UNPROFOR) 1992; military observers to Mozambique (ONUMOZ) 1992; a battalion to Rwanda; (UNAMIR) 1993; training teams to the Gambia (NATAG) 1993; military observers A ouzo strip (UNASOG) 1994; and to Israel (UNTSO) 1995; Liberia (ECOMOG) 1987; Sierra Leone (ECOMOG) 1996; Darfur (UNAMID) 2003. (El-Rufai, 2012.)

### **CHALLENGES OF NIGERIA'S PARTICIPATION IN PEACEKEEPING OPERATIONS**

#### **Manpower**

The problem of manpower especially in the Nigerian Army became noticeable in the 1990s when the country began to experience insecurity. Troops had to be drawn from different units across the country to form up a complete battalion with the required strength that meets the UN standards for deployment to the mission area. In extreme cases, some personnel had been posted to deploying units as late as the time of their departure to the mission area. These individuals were deployed without pre-induction training. Obviously personnel of such ad hoc units that are filled at the last minute for a peacekeeping operation arrive in the mission area without adequate knowledge of each other's capabilities and deficiencies. This also creates problem of command and control.

Standardization of Nigerian Army units in terms of manpower would be a positive step towards equipping the Nigerian Army for effective participation in peacekeeping operation. This could be achieved if all postings and

marrying up of units are concluded 6 months prior to deployment. This would also ensure cohesion among the unit's personnel.(Ahmed, 2010).

### **Training and Doctrine**

Another major problem identified is that of training and doctrine associated with Peacekeeping Operations. Different countries have different training doctrines for the training of its personnel. The Nigerian Army was faced with the problem of training doctrine for Peacekeeping Operations. This problem had manifested itself in various operations. In the case of ECOMOG, Anglophone oriented troops were operating alongside francophone troops which further compounded this problem. The armed forces of Nigeria should come up with a suitable doctrine for Peacekeeping Operation. This would impact positively on all aspects (organization, training, leader development, material, and selection of soldiers) of the armed forces of Nigeria's preparations for and conducting peace keeping operations.

### **Logistics**

Logistic problems are another set of hindrance impacting on Nigeria's participation in Peacekeeping Operations. In the face of non availability of centralize logistical support for ECOWAS sub regional peacekeeping, participating countries suffered shortfalls in lift and other logistical capabilities. As a result most of them relied on Nigeria which was itself logistically hard pressed. There is the need to have adequate logistical support before embarking on peacekeeping operations. The nature of the logistic challenges faced by Nigerian troops deployed on Peacekeeping Operations include: lack of sufficient quantity of vehicles, lack of adequate medical facilities, insufficient communication equipment and individual soldier "kitting" the successful accomplishment of the tasks of devices(Ahmed, 2010).

### **Funding**

Nigeria suffered financially during the first intervention in Liberia in 1990. It was always in search of financial support from other ECOWAS members for the mission. Nigeria established an "endowment fund" for the operation with an initial amount of 50 million dollars being proposed. This fund received no contributions. Generally, assistance from other sources was slow in coming. Eventually ECOWAS member states that contributed troops threatened to withdraw from the force for lack of funding. This situation caused Nigeria to single-handedly provide substantial financial support for further ECOMOG operations. The sinking of substantial financial resources to restore peace in other countries while Nigeria's social and physical infrastructures were sorely in need of repair was difficult to rationalize with the public at large.

Most Nigerians feel the billions of dollars spent for Peacekeeping Operations could have been better used to reduce Nigeria's foreign debt or better still, to alleviate poverty in the country where 70 per cent of the populace survives on less than 1 US Dollar per day. Use of substantial sums of money to pay for Peacekeeping Operations also helps to explain negative responses from Nigeria's creditors when mention is made of possible debt forgiveness. Any major future involvement by Nigeria in peacekeeping would certainly be predicated on a firm commitment of financial support from either the UN or other international organization (Oni, 2002).

### **Administration**

Nigeria's participation in Peacekeeping Operations also surfaced problems in the areas of administration like medical care, medical evacuation, burial pay and allowance. Soldiers in deployed units also complained of lack of promotion opportunities and such simple things as not being able to observe holidays. These shortcomings were largely attributed to poor unit and sub-unit leadership. The poor quality of administration in deployed units has caused significant embarrassment to the Nigerian army and the country in general.

The failure of political reengineering attempts in some countries, particularly African countries, violent border disputes, interstate aggressions, civil wars and insurgency are some of the circumstances that have been provoking large scale refugee flows in Africa, with the attendant threat to security and stability in many countries. The need for peacekeeping and sometime peace enforcement has therefore become paramount to Nigeria. Material and human resources of the armed forces have been continually committed to these operations.

The strategic role that Nigeria played in the process cannot be ignored or discarded with a wave of hand. One significant gain is that by participating in such operations, the armed forces have acquired new information, new technology and new skills that will be beneficial to attaining higher standards of professionalism. (Agwu, 2007.) Undoubtedly, as heralded by the United Nations, Nigeria is the fourth contributor to world peace. There is therefore, no gainsaying that as Nigeria maintains peace in other states it is curtailing the security threat which could consume it if not contained. Mention also must be made of Nigeria's quest for permanent seat in the United Nations Security Council as one of the reasons for venturing into and over spending in such operations.

Nigeria has been involved in over 20 operations in and outside Africa, largely under the UN. The notable exceptions were the ECOWAS monitoring group (ECOMOG) which the country led in the 1990s to end the conflicts in Liberia and Sierra Leone and reportedly spent between 8 and 9 billion dollars, thus contributing more than 80% of personnel and finance. The huge resources committed to the operations in the face of ravaging poverty in the country are called to question. While at the end of each operation, Nigeria has virtually nothing to reap from it (Agbambu: 2010).

Apart from the fact that Nigeria lacks modern sophisticated military equipment to compete favourably with their peers in the international arena, the process of selecting troops to peace missions is also flawed. Some battalions are loaded with clerks, cooks, batmen and orderlies who can barely handle a weapon, but are 'well-connected'. It is not unusual for those in position of authority to influence the selection process, so competence and capability get compromised.

### CONCLUSION

The recurrence of intra-State conflict in various regions of the world, most especially in developing states, seems to make the word "sustainable peace" an illusion. This paper examined the role of Nigeria in peacekeeping operations since the country's attainment of independence in 1960. Nigeria played a prominent role in the peacekeeping and integrative efforts in the continent in places such as Sierra Leone and Liberia; the country's efforts at maintaining peace in some trouble spots across the globe have also been commended by the international community. However, it must be noted that the human, material and financial losses the country has incurred in these involvements have been significant; thus, having lost more than two thousand (2000) of its soldiers and expended about \$10 billion, the country was considered to have lost more than it benefited.

### RECOMMENDATION

Having examined Nigeria's role in peacekeeping operation since 1960, this research work came up with the following recommendations:

1. Selection process for peacekeeping mission should be done based on merit and competence to ensure optimum result.
2. Part of the resources expended on peacekeeping missions should be channeled for the maintenance of internal security, as every nation has to survive before pursuing other interests in the international system.
3. Rather than paying much attention to peacekeeping operations, the country should prioritize the welfare of its citizens and infrastructural development.
4. Since Nigerian foreign policy can only be meaningfully conducted in a stable political environment, there is the imperative need to evolve a stable polity in the country.

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