

# The Role of Nigeria in Peace-Keeping Operation in West Africa: 1960 – 2010

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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. The thesis, examines Nigerian's role in peacekeeping exercise across the globe under the United Nations Organisation, with special emphasis on the Liberian and Sierra-Leone crises. Certainly, this peace keeping effort has cost Nigeria significant human and material losses. The study therefore, examined regional efforts at mediating and resolving the Intra-State conflicts that nearly brought the states concerned to the brink of total extinction. 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 concludes by recommending reduction of financial cost of peacekeeping and prioritizing the welfare of citizens.

**Keywords:** Peace Keeping, Operation Nigeria, West Africa

## Introduction

Since creation, human societies have been fraught with conflictual contradictions that have necessitated the desire for peace. As a result of this, third parties have emerged as mediators with various strategies towards maintenance of peace. Such sentiments and the development of peace movements or efforts have over the years found expression through anti-war s peace ideas.<sup>1</sup>

However, since World War I, statesmen have been engaged in initiating peace settlements and establishing international system for the maintenance of peace and security. The outcome of these endeavours was the treaty of Versailles, the establishment of the League of Nations and now the United Nations Organisation.<sup>2</sup> The Nigerian Army Participation in Peacekeeping operation dates back to over 50 years. General Aguiyi Ironsi led Nigerian Army Troops out for the First Time in a Peace Support Mission to the War ravaged Congo in the 1960s. The Nigerian Army success in this endeavour endeared her to the International Community as a reliable peace partner.<sup>3</sup> Since then, the Nigerian Army has continued to contribute to World Peace whenever the Federal Government of Nigeria decided to participate.

For example, at the sub regional level, Nigeria played a prominent role in the integrative and peace building efforts within the West-African Region. At the regional level, she has contributed to various peace building and peacekeeping efforts on the African Continent in places such as Somalia, Sierra Leone and Liberia. Globally, Nigeria participated in conflict area such as Lebanon, the area of the Former Yugoslavia and Kuwait. To date, Nigeria has contributed to more than 40 United Nations, Organisation of African Unity/African Union and ECOWAS Missions<sup>4</sup>. This big brother role lends credence to the assertion that Nigeria remains a significant actor in peacekeeping, particularly within Africa. This paper therefore, seeks to assess the role of Nigeria in peacekeeping operations within the West African sub-region with special focus on Liberia and Sierra Leone.

## Conceptualization of Peace-Keeping

The concept of Peace-Keeping was developed by the United Nations at the start of the Cold War in the late 1940s because of the unworkability of the original collective security system envisage by the organisation and the increasing disagreement among the major powers<sup>5</sup>. It is therefore, safe to say that Peace-Keeping Operations are essentially practical mechanism developed by the United Nations to contain and control armed conflicts and to facilitate their resolution by peaceful means. As a mechanism for controlling inter-state conflict, peace-keeping has thus become an important instrument which the United Nations utilizes to exercise its vital role of maintaining international peace and security. Peace-keeping can therefore, be rightly called "The Invention of the United Nations".<sup>6</sup>

Agwu observed that peacekeeping consists essentially of observer missions and lightly armed forces monitoring cease fire, operating in an essentially static mode with the consent of the parties involved.<sup>7</sup> Dokubo further observed that peacekeeping in its traditional sense, meant conflict containment and it adopted the form of neutral outside assistance to mediate and encourage belligerent parties to disengage<sup>8</sup>. 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 organisations like the African Union, Economic Community of West African States, as well as the United Nations.

Peacekeeping therefore, is a term mainly used to described actions sponsored by the United Nations charter with primary responsibility of maintaining international peace and security.

### **Brief History Of Nigeria's Involvement In Peace-Keeping.**

The Nigerian Army has since independence been actively involved in the management of International peace, either under the sponsorship of the United Nations or under the bold assumption of roles and certain specific responsibilities for the management of regional security concerns.

In its over 50 years of independence, Nigeria's decision-makers have continuously designed, shaped and maintained a foreign policy which have continued to have some impact on the International scene. The foreign policy statement of Nigeria's First Prime Minister, Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa perhaps confirms Nigeria's commitment to achieving World Peace on the occasion of Nigeria's Formal Admission to the United Nation at its General Assembly Session in October, 1960, he said:

.....First, it is the desire of Nigeria to remain on friendly terms with all Nations and to participate in the work of the United Nations Organisation. Secondly, Nigeria has absolutely no territorial or expansionist intention. Thirdly, we shall not forget our old friends and we are proud to have been accepted as a member of the commonwealth, but nevertheless, we do not intend to align ourselves as a matter of routine with any of the power blocs. We are committed to uphold the principles upon which the United Nations Organisation is founded. Fourthly, Nigeria hopes to work with other states for the progress of Africa and to assist in bringing all African territories to a state of responsible independence.<sup>9</sup>

This statement was an expressed demonstration of Nigeria's commitment towards bringing about cooperation, progress and promotion of international peace and security. The Prime Minister's views were reinforced by Chief Jaja Nwachukwu the then foreign Minister when he said:

"We want Africa to live in peace but we do not want her to continue in pieces. Nigerians believe in the integration of the African Continent.....Pan Africanism is no longer merely a theory; it is a fact.....<sup>10</sup>".

These statements at the early period of Nigeria's independence are vindication of her expressed determination to adhere to and abide by the purposes and principles of both the United Nations and the Organisation of African Unity. As noted earlier Nigeria Army Participation in Peacekeeping dates back to over 50 years when General Aguiyi, Ironsi, led troops out for the first time in support of the United Nations Operation in the Congo crisis of 1960 – 1964.<sup>11</sup> Nigeria committed over 6,000 troops to this operation. The United Nations Long Conciliations Commission was also led by Jaja Nwachukwu of Nigeria. Subsequently, Nigeria was invited in 1965 to participate in the United Nations India-Pakistan Observer Mission. In 1978, Nigeria accepted the United Nations request again to provide troops for the peacekeeping operation in Lebanon. Hence, Nigeria mobilized 6,323 troops and other military logistic elements to serve in Lebanon before the country pulled out in 1983.<sup>12</sup> General Yakubu Gowon has earlier pointed out that "Nigeria would pursue all measures designed to achieve a durable and just peace in all parts of the world". Nigeria participated in the United Nations India – Pakistan Observer Mission (UNIPOM), the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), United Nations, Iraq Military Observer Group (UNIMOG), United Nations Transition Assistance Group to Namibia (UUNTAG), United Nations Iraq – Kuwait Observer Mission (UNIKOM). Nigeria was also in the United Nations Operations in Israel and participated in United Nations Operation in Somalia (UNOSOM). As at 1997, Nigeria had contributed over 200,000 troops to the United Nations Peacekeeping Missions.<sup>13</sup> Nigeria is today one of the strategic members of the 113 Troops Contributing Countries (TCCS) of the United Nation. Nigeria has been involved in 41 Peacekeeping Operations Globally under the United Nations, Organisation of African Unity/African Union (AU) and ECOWAS. About 23 of these operations were in Africa while 18 Peacekeeping Operations were outside Africa.

Again in 1964, when the Tanzania Army revolted against the government, the government of Tanzania invited the Nigerian Army to assist in suppressing the mutiny. Similarly, in 1978, Nigeria's Armed Forces were deployed to Chad. In pursuit of Nigeria's Commitment to the decolonization processes in Africa, peter and Aminu observed that the Nigeria Air Force was actively involved in the evacuation of refugees back to Zimbabwe from various frontline states where they had gone on exile during the run up to the First Zimbabwean Election to enable them participate in it. <sup>14</sup>. Other deployment include Nigeria's Armed Forces Participation in the United Nations Operation in Mozambique (UNOMOZ 1992 - 95), the United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda of West African States Monitoring Group, (ECOMOG).

### **Nigeria's Role in Peacekeeping Operation in Liberia**

Nigeria contributed immensely to the ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG), an interventionist mediations force to end the protracted Liberian Civil War, where the Government of Nigeria puts the financial cost of 8billion dollars (over N800billion) 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 Organisation. Secondly, it has led to a re-examination by African Leaders, of the policy of non-interference in the Internal Affairs of States. <sup>15</sup>

Non-Intervention in the Internal Affairs the OAU (now AU), Africa 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, General Babangida served as the Chairman of ECOWAS thrice while the community's secretariat in Abuja – a project mainly funded by Nigeria was completed.<sup>16</sup>

### **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 17th March, 1996. Little more than a year later, on 25th 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 peacekeeping force under Nigerian Leadership with considerable help, from a British/Africa Mercenary from a local paramilitary (The Kamajor), entered free town, 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 peacekeepers helped obscure some of the troubling aspects of the intervention – the lack of an international mandate, the use of mercenary in peacekeeping operations and the very undemocratic nature of the Nigerian regime. At the peak of the operations, ECOMOG had 13,000 troops. Late in 1999 the disputants in the Sierra Leonean conflicts signed an agreement in Leone, Togo to end the crisis; thus paving the way for UNAMSIL (United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone).<sup>17</sup>

Nigeria has every reason to be proud of her peacekeeping missions. Some of the peacekeeping operations in which Nigeria was involved, include sending troops 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 1981 – 1982, Military observers during Iran-Iraq conflict (UNIMOG) 1988 – 1991; division to Liberia (ECOMOG) 1990, 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 – 1993; battalion and staff officers of 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; Daigwu (UNAMID) 2003.<sup>18</sup>

### **Challenges faced by Nigeria's Participation in Peacekeeping Operation**

#### **Manpower**

The problem of manpower especially in the Nigeria 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 United Nations 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 is. These individuals were deployed without pre-induction training. Obviously personnel of such Adhoc units that are filled at the last 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 of units are concluded 6 months prior to deployment. This would also ensure Cohesion among the units personnel.<sup>19</sup>

#### **Training and Doctrine**

Another problem identified is that of training and doctrine associated with training and 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 (organisation, training, leader development, material, and selection of soldiers) of the Armed Forces of Nigeria's preparations for and conducting peacekeeping operations.

### **Logistics**

Logistic problems are another set of hindrance impacting on Nigeria's participation in peacekeeping operations. In the face of non-availability of centralized 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 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 includes:

- ✓ Lack of sufficient quality of vehicles
- ✓ Lack of Adequate Medical Facilities
- ✓ Insufficient Communication
- ✓ Equipment and Individual Soldiers "Killing".
- ✓ The successful accomplishment of the task of devices.<sup>20</sup>

### **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 better used to reduce Nigeria's foreign debt or better still, to alleviate poverty in the country where two percent of the populace lives on less than 1 US Dollar per day, use of substantial sum 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 United Nations or other International Organisation.<sup>21</sup>

### **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 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.<sup>22</sup> As observed by the United Nations, Nigeria is the fourth contributor to world peace. Hence, Nigerians desire in world peace is to curtail the security threat which could consume it if not contained. Nigeria's quest for permanent seat in the United Nations Security Council could also be seen as one of the reasons for venturing into and spending much in such operations. Nigeria has been involved in over 20 operations in and outside Africa, largely under the United Nations. The notable exception was 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 at the expense of the country, its citizens and infrastructural development.<sup>23</sup>

### **Prospects for the Future**

The tasks of preserving world peace and security are the collective responsibility of all mankind. The issues involved, therefore are numerous and complex. Thus the following suggestions are recommended for further works in this area:

1. Instead of paying much attention to peacekeeping operations, the country should place a lot more emphasis on the welfare of its citizens and infrastructural development.

2. Part of the expanded resources on peacekeeping, missions should be channeled for the maintenance of internal security, as every nation has to survive before pursuing other international interest.
3. The lesson for future intervention is that participating states must show overt and covert neutrality and impartiality in order to gain the trust and confidence of the warring factions.
4. States and international organisations must shun half-hearted reactions in instances where the use of armed forces becomes unavoidable. Intervening states or organisation must be ready to go full throttle and with a clear-cut objective. They must resolved to achieve their aim by legitimate force or without force at all. Indecisive or half-hearted resources can only worsen problems.

### Conclusion

The study examined the role of Nigeria in peacekeeping (under the United Nations) operations since the country's attainment of independence in 1960. Nigeria doubt played a prominent role in the peacekeeping and integrative efforts in the continent and particularly in places such as Liberia and Sierra Leone. The country's efforts at maintaining peace in some conflicting spots across the globe have also been commended, it should be noted that the human, material and financial losses the country has incurred in these involvements cannot be overemphasized. Hence, having lost more than two thousand (2,000) of its soldiers and expended over \$10billion, the country was however considered to have lost more than it benefited.

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