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Collective peace-keeping in West Africa

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Linus Malu provides the background to the prospects for collective peace-keeping in West Africa. His report appraises conflict prevention and resolution methods employed by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). First, it examines the operations of the ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) in the region and evaluates the impact of the body in conflict resolution. Second, it examines the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security established in 1999 by the ECOWAS Heads of States in Lome, Togo. In the last section Linus Malu evaluates the impact of the Mechanism on conflict prevention and resolution in West Africa. For the latest news see: <http://www.ecowasnews.com/>

I. Background

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) is a regional group of fifteen West African countries established in November 1975. It has its secretariat and headquarters in Abuja, Nigeria. The original objectives of the organization, as contained in the ECOWAS Treaty are, among others, to promote co-operation and integration in order to create an economic union in West Africa.

However, article 58 of the revised treaty, which provides for regional security, contains the undertaking of member states to work to safeguard and consolidate relations conducive to the maintenance of peace, stability and security within the region.

To this end, and in pursuit of these objectives member states undertake to co-operate with the Community in establishing and strengthening appropriate mechanisms for the timely prevention and resolution of intra-state and inter-states conflicts, paying particular regards to the need to:

- Maintain periodic and regular consultations between national borders' administrative authorities;
- Establish local or national joint commissions to examine any problems encountered in relations between neighbouring states;
- Encourage exchanges and co-operations between communities, townships and administrative regions;
- Employ where appropriate good offices, conciliation, mediation and other methods of peaceful settlement of disputes;
- Establish a regional peace and security observation system and peace keeping force where appropriate;
- Provide where necessary and at the request of member states, assistance to member states for the observation of democratic election

Article 58 is the organization's legal foundation for conflict prevention, management and resolutions in the sub-region. It provides for various aspects of conflict prevention, management, peace keeping and peace building. The article further provides that details relating to the provisions governing political cooperation, regional peace and stability shall be defined in the protocol.

Article 58 did not make provisions for peace enforcement, which could only be authorized by the Security Council. In practice however most ECOWAS peacekeeping operations (in Liberia and Sierra Leone in particular) had oscillated from peace keeping to peace enforcement and back to peace keeping.

International Legal Framework for Regional Security Arrangements.

The United Nations Charter recognizes the importance of regional organizations in maintaining international peace and security. Thus, in Chapter vii it made detailed provisions for the involvement of regional organizations in the maintenance of international peace and security.

Article 52 clearly stated that nothing in the Charter precludes the existence of regional arrangements or agencies for dealing with such matters relating to the maintenance of international peace and security, as are appropriate for regional actions provided that such actions are consistent with the purpose and principles of the United Nations

Article 53 however provides that no such regional enforcement action shall be undertaken without the authorizations of the Security Council. All measures taken by the regional arrangements in maintaining international peace and security shall at all times be duly reported to the Security Council.

A combined reading of the provisions of Chapter vii indicate an unambiguous mandate to regional organizations to use all pacific means to settle disputes within their regions, but all enforcement actions by regional organizations must be with the authorization of the Security Council

Evolution of ECOWAS Conflict Resolution Mechanism.

The first major conflict resolution agreement executed under the auspices of ECOWAS was the 1981 Protocol on Mutual Defense Assistance signed in Freetown, Sierra Leone which provides for a non-standing military force for the purpose of mutual military assistance to members of the Community attacked by external aggressors

The Protocol provides for collective response when external forces attack a member state and when such attack is likely to endanger the peace and security of other member states. In articles 13 and 14, the Protocol made provisions for the nature and composition of the non-standing army called, Allied Armed Forces of the Community (AAFC). Under this arrangement each member state was required to designate and set-aside a unit of its armed forces for emergency situations, and to be placed under the service of the Community. The operations and functions of the AAFC were for peacekeeping and

intervention. Although the Protocol was invoked during the Liberian crisis the AAFC never materialized, rather some ECOWAS countries set-up the ECOMOG.

The second stage in the evolution of the ECOWAS conflict resolution mechanism was the establishment and deployment of ECOMOG in direct response to the crisis in Liberia. The establishment of ECOMOG was essentially sequel to the request of President Samuel Doe for ECOWAS intervention. ECOWAS could not accede to this request through the AAFC because of the deep divide between francophone countries who were in support of Charles Taylor, the rebel leader and the Anglophone countries who were in support of Samuel Doe.

To get over this hurdle, ECOMOG was established under the auspices of the ECOWAS Standing Mediation Committee established in 1989 and was dominated by Anglophone countries (Nigeria, Ghana, and Gambia) The Standing Mediation Committee met in Banjul, the Gambia and agreed to send a military force, named ECOMOG to Liberia.

What could be regarded as the third phase in the evolution of conflict resolution mechanism in West Africa took place in 1999 with the adoption of the *Protocol relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peace-keeping and Security*. The Protocol provides for the establishment of various organs and mechanism for conflict prevention, mechanism, management and resolution in West Africa.

Methodology of ECOMOG Operations

The methodology of ECOMOG operations could be classified into three, namely, intervention, peacekeeping and peace enforcement. These methods have been applied at various stages of conflicts in West Africa.

Interventions:

Intervention operations of ECOMOG were based on express invitation of legitimate governments of ECOWAS member states who were victims of armed attack by rebel groups, and ECOMOG troops were deployed to prevent total breakdown of law and order. ECOMOG intervention missions have involved combat operations against insurgents or factions, which resists the authority of the government.

Such intervention operations were aimed at securing a cease-fire, creating conducive atmosphere for negotiation and the protection of non-combatants through the establishment of safe- havens under direct ECOMOG protection.

Peace enforcement:

ECOMOG operations in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Equatorial Guinea began with interventions in response to request by the governments of the respective countries and gradually transformed to peace enforcement when the parties could not reach a peace agreement towards the settlement of the disputes. The objective of all ECOMOG peace enforcement operation were to compel the warring parties to adhere to any agreement reached among them, most times involving massive use of force against any of the parties that had broken the agreement.

In ECOMOG operations in Liberia and Sierra Leone, the application of force by ECOMOG led to the further escalation of the conflict as the rebel groups engaged ECOMOG in direct combat and employed various unconventional tactics including deliberately targeting and maiming civilians during the conflict.

Peacekeeping

ECOMOG operations in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Equatorial Guinea followed this pattern of transformation from intervention, peace enforcement and eventually peace keeping. The only exception is the ongoing ECOMOG mission in Cote d' Ivoire, which progressed from intervention to peace keeping.

The major obstacle to the success of ECOMOG peacekeeping operations was to convince the parties that the force had actually transformed from a peace enforcement force to a peacekeeping force. This was no mean task, which ECOMOG had performed with different degree of success. To date ECOMOG has held peacekeeping operations in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Equatorial Guinea and Cote de Ivoire.

ECOMOG Operations

This part of the study briefly examines ECOMOG peace keeping and peace enforcement operations in Liberia (1990-1997),(Sierra Leone(1996-1999),Guinea Bissau(1998-1999) and Cote d' Ivoire(2002- date).

Liberia (1990- 1998)

In December 1989 soldiers of the *National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL)* under the command of Charles Ghanky Taylor launched an attack on Liberia from the Cote d' Ivorian boarder with Liberia. Within months the fighting had escalated with the NPFL making steady and continuous military progress toward Monrovia. By March 1990, law and order had virtually broken down in most parts of Liberia (Monrovia was clearly threatened) as various rebels groups, which had spring up fought for control of different parts of the country.

The Economic Community of West African States in response to the total break down of law and order in the country, the humanitarian catastrophe and the growing threat to sub-regional peace and security met in Banjul, the Gambia and established a Standing Mediation Committee to resolve the crisis. Efforts at peace agreement failed, thus by August 1990 ECOWAS deployed a 3,000 strong West African troops made up of contingents from Nigeria, Ghana, Guinea, Sierra Leone and the Gambia to Liberia.

ECOMOG deployment was vehemently opposed by the by Charles Taylor who saw ECOMOG as a ploy by some West African counties (particularly Nigeria) to deprive him from taking over Monrovia. NPFL thus launched immediate attack on ECOMOG as the troops landed in Monrovia. In response, ECOMOG was forced to change its operational mandate from peace keeping to peace enforcement within a month of deployment with specific order to create a buffer zone between NPFL forces and Monrovia

While in Liberia, ECOMOG were involved in various types of missions-peace keeping, peace enforcement, mediation, disarming of rebel groups, and the protection of humanitarian aids. ECOMOG peacekeeping operation ended in February 1998 but contingents of 5000 troops remain behind in capacity building roles.

Following the Abuja I and II peace agreement among the major warlords and other interest groups a cease -fire was declared, and a time-table set for election which were held on July 19,1997.The elections were overwhelming won by Charles Taylor's of the National Patriotic Party (NPP) with about 75.3% of the votes cast in the presidential election and 21 out of 26 seats in the Senates and 49 out of 60 seats in the House of Representatives

Sierra Leone (1996-1999)

The intervention of ECOMOG forces in Sierra Leone occurred following the overthrow of President Ahmed Kabbah. In February 1998, ECOMOG troops with contingents from Ghana, Guinea, Mali and Nigeria restored constitutional legality and reinstated the government of the democratically elected government.

At the peak of the operations ECOMOG had 13,000 troop in the country which conducted both peacekeeping and peace enforcement operations. All the warring factions and the government later signed a peace agreement in Lome in September 1999 ending the Sierra Leonean crises. In 2000, the United Nations Peace keeping force UNAMSIL replaced ECOMOG.

Guinea Bissau (1998-2000)

In June 1998, units of the armed forces of Guinea Bissau led by former chief of defense staff rebelled against the government of President Joao Bernardo Vieira. Relying on a bilateral defense between Guinea Bissau, Senegal and Guinea, the President requested for military assistances from the countries and they obliged him.

Also at the request of the President, and to offer support to the legitimate government of the country, ECOWAS leaders met in July 1998 and approved a peace plan for the country, which involves among others, the deployment of ECOMOG troops from Niger, Benin and Togo, and a master plan for supervision and control of a cease- fire agreement. However ECOMOG intervention did not save the president, as the rebel group forcefully removed him from power.

Cote d' Ivoire (2002- date)

On the 19th of September 2002, about 750 troops allegedly recruited by former president Guei attacked three strategic cites including the Abidjan in a revolt aimed at removing the government of President Gbagbo from power. This attempt failed but the rebels succeed in taking control of the southern parts of the country. The country is currently divided into two main parts with the main rebel group- *Mourvement Patriotique de la Cote d Ivoire* controlling the northern part and the government controlling the south. The standoff led to serious battle between the government troops and rebel groups.

In September 2002 France sent in a contingent of 1000 soldiers (later increased to 4000), while in December 2002 ECOWAS sent 1,200 soldiers to the country. Presently both the French and ECOMOG troops are keeping the peace in the country relying on UN Resolution 1464 (2003) that authorized a peace keeping and enforcement operation. On the 13th of May 2003 the Security Council decided to establish a UN Mission in the country to be known as MINUCI to help guild efforts by the French and ECOWAS troops to implement the Linas- Marcoussis Agreement.

II. Appraisal of Conflict Resolution Methods under the Protocol Relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Peace Keeping and Security.

Following the relative success of ECOMOG operations in Liberia and Sierra Leone and drawing from the experience of these operations ECOWAS leaders were encouraged to move towards the creation of a much more comprehensive arrangement for conflict prevention and resolution. Pursuant to this aspiration ECOWAS leaders met in Lome, Togo on December 17, 1999 and approved a suggestion for the creation of a mechanism for conflict prevention, management, resolution, peace keeping and security.

The Protocol laid the foundation for a new era in conflict resolution in West Africa, and according to article 3 of the Protocol, the objectives of the mechanism are:

- To prevent, manage and resolve internal and inter-state conflict;
- To implement the relevant provisions of article 58 of the revised treaty;

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