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EXPLORING THE PROSPECT FOR PEACE IN WEST  
AFRICA: IS ECOMOG THE SOLUTION?

By

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## **Preface**

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), whose main objective is to promote economic development in West Africa, created a military branch called ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG). ECOMOG was created to perform peacekeeping operations in the ECOWAS countries in crises. Since its establishment, ECOMOG was deployed in Liberia, Sierra-Leone and Guinea-Bissau. During its different deployments, it faced several financial and logistical problems; however, its presence in West Africa helped bring about peace in the countries where there are conflicts.

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*Abstract*

In West Africa, there exists a community that was created in order to promote the free movement of people and goods within the region. Its name is Economic Community of Western African States (ECOWAS). This organization has a military branch called the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG). The objective of ECOMOG is to safeguard peace and security in West Africa and intervene when conflicts arise.

ECOMOG was deployed during crises in Liberia, Sierra-Leone, and Guinea-Bissau. In Liberia, it helped to organize the presidential elections with success in 1997. In Sierra-Leone, ECOMOG reinstated an elected government that was overthrown by force. In Guinea-Bissau, after a coup d'etat perpetrated by rebels, ECOMOG stopped its mission in that country. Currently, the democratization of the world and the promotion of security and peace are significant issues. They can not be achieved with the existence of war breaking out all over the globe. The different interventions of ECOMOG in West Africa stopped the fighting, although only temporarily, allowed for peaceful negotiations, and led to the legitimacy of governments. For that, one can conclude that ECOMOG is a necessary peacekeeping institution in West Africa.

## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) is one of the organizations in West Africa. It was created in order to allow the free movements of people and goods within the region as well as to promote the economic development of West Africa. In December 1989, when the civil war started in Liberia, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) already had a military cooperation instrument; It is a “Non Aggression Protocol” that prohibited the use of military forces by one state against another one within the community.<sup>1</sup> That protocol had a Special Committee for the settlement of conflicts in West Africa. The committee was created in May 1990 and its name is the ECOWAS Mediation Standing Committee (EMSC). Because of the conflict in Liberia that affected the whole West African countries with massive movements of refugees, criminality and other scourges, the ECOWAS decided to send an interposition force in Liberia. That decision led to the creation of the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group called ECOMOG. The ECOWAS Monitoring Group was supposed to work as the United Nations (UN) peacekeeping forces.

In its history, ECOMOG was first deployed in Liberia, then in Sierra-Leone and after in Guinea-Bissau; three West African countries in which there were political problems

and civil wars. The main role of ECOMOG is to achieve and monitor the cease-fire in West Africa. In addition it will help to conduct free elections as well as fostering respect of democratic rules in those countries.

This academic thesis will explore the different interventions of ECOMOG in West Africa and show how that regional peacekeeping institution is necessary.

### **Notes**

<sup>1</sup> Adjovi, Roland, *Questionnements sur l'ECOMOG: Liberia, Sierra-Leone et Guinee-Bissau*. <From [http://www.Lexana.org/f/org/lettre2\\_ra.htm](http://www.Lexana.org/f/org/lettre2_ra.htm)>.



## **Chapter 2**

### **ECOMOG in Liberia**

#### **The Problem Background**

In 1980, there was a successful coup in Liberia. That coup overthrew the last government of the descendant of American slaves known in Liberia as Americos. Master-Sergeant Samuel Doe who was the leader of the coup belonged to the Krahn ethnic group that was one of the poorest and most isolated of Liberia's indigenous peoples. Doe included in his government and in the key services many of the Liberia intellectuals who were against the last Americo regime and led the protests against that regime in 1970. He created and led the People's Redemption Council (PRC) that was largely composed of military personnel; that council included also a majority of civilians. Unfortunately, because of corruption the coalition collapsed and some of the intellectuals left the government.

By the mid-1980s, the political instability grew up in the country and Doe was executing opponents. The departure of the educated reformer, the corruption and the new political situation in Liberia led to the deterioration of the government's capability to run the country. As a result, in 1984, the Liberian leader dissolved the PRC and established the National Democratic Party of Liberia (NDPL) that he also chaired because of the coming elections scheduled for October 1985. Many reformist parties participated in the

elections and competed against the NDPL. Doe won the elections and most people in Liberia believed that he stole those elections; that situation increased the anger of the Liberians.

### **The National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) insurgency against the government.**

In December 1989, the leader of the NPFL CHARLES Taylor, who is currently the President of Liberia, launched an insurgency against Doe's regime. As result, the civil war started in Liberia between the NPFL and Doe's Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL). The NPFL of Charles Taylor, supported by some African countries such as Libya, Burkina Faso and Ivory Coast controlled 90% of Liberia. Violence ensued and thousands of people were killed and displaced.

### **Gambia meeting**

Because of the situation in Liberia, the ECOWAS organized a meeting in Banjul (Gambia). The leaders of other countries of ECOWAS established a Standing Mediation Committee (SMC) in order to face the regional security problems. To do so, the SMA that was composed of the representatives of Gambia, Mali, Nigeria and Togo called for a cease-fire and a military intervention in Liberia; that decision led to tension between Anglophone and Francophone countries of ECOWAS. Countries like Burkina Faso and Ivory Coast that supported Charles Taylor disapproved the deployment of ECOMOG in Liberia while Senegal, Mali, Togo and Benin were pleased with the decision.

### **Role of ECOMOG**

In 1990, ECOMOG was deployed in Liberia after the Anglophone countries decided to send forces in that country. In the beginning, the ECOMOG forces were composed of

troops from Gambia, Sierra-Leone, Ghana, and Nigeria. Later, troops from Guinea, the only Francophone country involved, joined ECOMOG. But later on, troops from Benin, Ivory Coast, Mali and Niger also joined ECOMOG in Liberia in order to make that force more credible.

The mandate of ECOWAS Monitoring Group was not clear but it stated the following actions:

- The agreement of a cease-fire between the different factions
- To monitor the cease-fire
- The settlement of a widely represented interim government in which all Liberians will take part
- To hold general and presidential elections within 12 months
- To monitor the elections<sup>1</sup>

## **Result**

In Liberia, while the other factions were waiting the arrival of ECOMOG, Charles Taylor claimed that Nigeria was committing an aggression and launched an attack to capture Monrovia (the capital). Then when ECOMOG forces landed in Monrovia in August 1990, the NPFL shelled the port, the beaches and sent troops to attack them. ECOMOG repelled the NPFL and set up camp in Monrovia. At the same time, the peacekeeping force was fighting with the other factions against Charles Taylor.<sup>2</sup> Despite the challenging tasks ECOMOG faced, it successfully supervised implementation of the final cease-fire negotiated by ECOWAS and assisted the legislative and presidential elections organized by Liberians in July 1997. Charles Taylor was the winner of these elections and at his request, a small contingent of ECOMOG remained in Liberia to

consolidate the peace. This was because ECOMOG played a key role in restoring peace in Liberia and was able to help maintain it.

#### **Notes**

1 “La voix du combattant” Revue des Forces Armees Beninoises, Jan 98.

2 M, baye, Ibrahima, Lieutenant Colonel, ECOMOG: Strength and weakness as regional security institution, AUL-MU 39080-53 M 478E, pp.3

## **Chapter 3**

### **ECOMOG in Sierra-Leone**

#### **Problem Background**

Sierra-Leone, a former British colony won its independence from Britain on April 27, 1961. Siaka Stevens, the head of the All People's Congress and Sierra- Leonean President was replaced by Joseph Saidu Momoh who was the Chief of the Sierra-Leonean Armed Forces. This happened because of the economic decline of the country. Momoh, who was not able to improve the economic situation in his country found his government facing strike, political protests, and corruption among government officials. As a result, Momoh's government was overthrown by a military coup led by Captain Valentine Strasser.

#### **Revolutionary United Front (RUF) political actions**

While Momoh was facing economic and political problems and Strasser was planning his coup in Freetown (capital of Sierra-Leone), Foday Sankoh, head of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) was leading some troublemaking movements in the provinces. The RUF established political cells throughout the country and seized numerous foreign nationals as hostages. For example, the RUF took two British relief workers hostage, claiming that the United Kingdom was arming the government. Since

Sierra-Leone had troops inside the ECOMOG forces deployed in Liberia, Charles Taylor supported Sankoh in order to help him to overthrow the Sierra-Leonean government.

### **Armed Forces Successful Coup**

As result of the political problems in Sierra-Leone and an attempted coup in October 1995, Strasser scheduled legislative elections for February 1996. Before that date, Strasser was overthrown by his Chief of Staff Maada Bio. Despite the RUF actions and the political violence in Sierra-Leone, the elections were held and Ahmed Tejan Kabbah won and became the President of Sierra-Leone.

In May 1997, the Armed Forces of Sierra-Leone overthrew the elected President Ahmed Tejan Kabbah in a military coup. This happened under the leadership of Major Johnny Paul Koroma who established the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC).

### **Role of ECOMOG**

When ECOMOG was deployed in Sierra-Leone, it performed the following difficult tasks:

### **Reinstatement of the Legitimate Government**

Nigeria had an independent and bilateral defense agreement with Sierra-Leone and had 900 troops in the country when the coup occurred. Consequently, Nigeria called its troops to bring back order in the country and reinstate President Kabbah. Nigeria increased the number of its troops that it added to the troops of Ghana and Guinea in order to have the statute of regional force. Nigeria did that because it wanted to operate in the name of ECOMOG, since it was the most powerful country militarily in the organization. The ECOWAS countries did not approve the establishment of an

ECOMOG force because for them, it was not a good idea to use force. After the coup, ECOWAS leaders asked Koroma to give back power to the elected government. He did not do so and as result, the ECOWAS leaders decided to send an ECOMOG force to Sierra-Leone. In this case, the ECOMOG mandate was: “to assist in creating the conducive atmosphere that would ensure the early reinstatement of the legitimate government of Sierra-Leone.”<sup>1</sup>

### **Reinstallation of the Legitimate Government and its Consequences**

The ECOMOG mandate did not give free reign to Nigeria to lead ECOMOG as it wanted because Nigeria’s intention was to perform its will in that country. However, since Nigeria financed much of ECOMOG’s operations, it followed its own military strategy and in February 1998, it conducted an offensive and occupied Freetown and reinstalled the legitimate government. That act led to the guerrilla operations perpetrated by the RUF and the AFRC forces that controlled some diamond mines in the country. ECOMOG registered many casualties, financial, military equipment and disciplinary problems then could not successfully fight the rebels. Because of that, Nigeria as country decided to leave Sierra-Leone. With that new situation, ECOWAS countries were worried and some countries such as Mali and Ghana sent troops to reinforce the ECOMOG troops in Sierra-Leone. Despite the cooperation between ECOMOG and the new Armed Forces that the government established and composed of the former RUF and AFRC soldiers, the ECOWAS countries leaders initiated a peace talk. They succeeded to obtain a cease-fire and an agreement to establish a government in which even the rebels will take part. The UN that established the United Nations Observer Mission in Sierra-Leone (UNOMSIL) approved the agreement. This mission was composed of 11,000 UN

peacekeepers that replaced ECOMOG after its withdrawal.<sup>2</sup> Later, the RUF started taking UN peacekeepers hostages and this led to the deterioration of the situation in Sierra-Leone. The UN asked for more troops and another intervention of ECOMOG.

### **Notes**

1 “La voix du combattant”; Revue des Forces Armees Beninoises, Oct 98.

2 M, baye, Ibrahima, Lieutenant Colonel, ECOMOG: Strength and weakness as regional security institution, AUL-MU 39080-53 M 478E, pp.5



## Chapter 4

### ECOMOG in Guinea Bissau

#### **Problem Background**

A civil war started in Guinea-Bissau with the dismissal of Chief of the Armed Forces Staff in 1998. In June that year, President Joao Bernado Viera of Guinea-Bissau accused General Ansumane Mane, his Chief of Armed Forces Staff, of supporting the Senegalese separatists of Casamance (a rich region in Senegal) by supplying arms to them. Because of that, he discharged Mane from office. As result, the majority of the military joined Mane in order to overthrow Viera. That was the beginning of the rebellion that led to the political conflict in the country.

#### **Foreign Troops in Guinea-Bissau**

Following the attempt to remove President Viera from office by the rebels, Senegal and the Republic of Guinea, that had a bilateral defense agreement with Guinea-Bissau, sent troops to that country in support of President Viera.

In fact, Senegal was more concerned about the separatists of Casamance and the Republic of Guinea about receiving possible influx of refugees.<sup>1</sup> This because as long as Viera was in power, the situation will be easy for them. The Senegalese forces that were well supported, had the mission to capture Bissau (capital of Guinea-Bissau) while the Guinean troops that suffered logistical support problems such as supply and finance,

should assure the protection of Bafata (the second largest city of Guinea-Bissau). The Senegalese troops succeeded in their mission, but Guinean troops failed to fulfil their own. As a result, the Senegalese troops controlled the capital and the rest of Guinea-Bissau was under the domination of the rebels who were supporting General Mane. Because of the cost of the operations and the rate of casualties on the Senegalese side, the government of Senegal faced Senegalese public opinion that was against the intervention.

### **Role of ECOMOG**

Bowing to the pressure of public opinion, the Senegalese government tried to convert the intervention to an ECOMOG operation. Despite the support of the other ECOWAS countries to Senegal and Guinea, their leaders did not approve the idea of establishing an ECOMOG force in Guinea-Bissau. But in 1998, ECOWAS arranged a cease-fire between both sides. After negotiation with both sides, ECOWAS obtained a peace agreement that will result in the departure of the Senegalese and Guinean troops from Guinea-Bissau.

In February 1999, Senegalese and Guinean troops were replaced by a new ECOMOG force of 600 troops from Benin, Gambia, Niger and Togo with the mandate of “monitoring the cease-fire and thereby facilitating the holding of elections.”<sup>2</sup> France supported the ECOMOG forces deployed in Bissau by providing transportation, military trucks and per diem to the troops.<sup>3</sup> These regional forces in Guinea-Bissau were not experienced in peacekeeping operations and were not strong enough for the mission assigned to them. In addition they suffered a lack of logistical support.

## Result

General Mane, because of the weakness of ECOMOG troops, exploited that situation and broke the cease-fire agreement. At the same time, he conducted an attack against President Viera and removed him from office. Following that, the leaders of the countries whose troops were members of the ECOMOG forces deployed in Guinea-Bissau decided to withdraw contingents from that country. That decision led to the end of the ECOMOG operation in Guinea- Bissau.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Adjovi, Roland, *Questionnements sur l'ECOMOG: Liberia, Sierra Leone etGuinee-Bissau.* <From [http://www.Lexana.org/f/org/Lettre\\_2\\_ra.htm](http://www.Lexana.org/f/org/Lettre_2_ra.htm)>.

<sup>2</sup> Mbaye, Ibrahima, Lieutenant Colonel, *ECOMOG: Strength and weakness as regional security institution*, AUL-MU 39080-53 M 478E, pp.6

<sup>3</sup> *La voix du combattant*”; Revue des Forces Armees du Benin, Oct 99.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Necessity of ECOMOG**

#### **Difficulties**

Created in 1990, ECOMOG faced several problems. One of them was the diversity of cultures linked to colonization. In the ECOWAS countries, three languages are spoken: English, French and Portuguese. That makes unity in the region difficult. In fact, the Anglophone and Francophone countries did not have the same opinion on the ECOMOG deployment anytime there is trouble in West Africa. The case of Liberia was an example; while the ECOWAS Anglophone countries believed in military intervention in that country, the Francophone countries thought in the opposite way. This situation was linked to the fact that Ivory Coast and Burkina Faso supported Charles Taylor and President Houphouet-Boigny of Ivory Coast easily convinced the other Francophone country's leaders on any issue. As result, at the beginning Houphouet-Boigny and the other Francophone leaders except the one of Guinea did not want to participate in the ECOMOG intervention in Liberia. At the same time, Nigeria and the other Anglophone countries found the solution of the Liberian conflict in a regional military intervention. In addition, at the beginning, that diversity of language, consequently led to a lack of uniform regional military training and support of the ECOMOG operations. ECOMOG also had financial problems. The ECOWAS countries, despite the Nigerian financial

efforts, were not able to sustain and equip men. They also faced logistical requirements of the regional peacekeeping institution when it will be deployed for a long duration mission. Sometimes men did not have their salaries or per diem on the field and that usually led to motivation and discipline problems within the contingents. Additionally, Nigeria had the highest strength of troops in the institution; that constituted a difficulty for ECOMOG because that situation led to the superiority of Nigeria anytime the ECOMOG officials had to make a decision. For that, most of the ECOMOG commanders in chief come from Nigeria that financially and logistically supported the institution.

In addition to those problems, Liberian President Taylor's supporters did not agree with the idea to create ECOMOG and affirmed that "ECOWAS is an economic rather than a security organization, with no legal right to create a military group such as ECOMOG. The 1978 ECOWAS Protocol on Non-Aggression and the OAU and UN charters all prohibit interference in the domestic affairs of member state's internal conflicts."<sup>1</sup>

### **Peace Restoration**

Despite these difficulties and criticisms, ECOMOG successfully executed its challenging missions. In Liberia, ECOMOG successfully supervised the implementation of the final cease-fire and assisted the legislative and presidential elections. In other words, with its presence, ECOMOG fostered respect for democratic rules in the country. In addition, it protected and saved Liberian lives by stopping fighting in the country. In Sierra-Leone, it succeeded to reinstall an elected government that was overthrown by rebels. In Guinea-Bissau where ECOMOG did not finish its mission, it prevented

manslaughter after the coup. Right after the coup, officials and the loyalists of the overthrown government surrendered to ECOMOG that protected them for some days before handing them over to the new officials in front of religion leaders and diplomats who served as witnesses.

It had been also noticed that after the withdrawal of ECOMOG from the countries, the trouble starts again as the Liberian President Taylor said, "from 1999 to this date, this country has been at war".<sup>2</sup> Another example is the fact that ECOMOG was asked again to intervene in Sierra-Leone when the RUF started taking the UN peacekeeping personnel hostages.

In addition to the facts above, ECOMOG becomes the permanent military forces of ECOWAS. It is also a structure composed of several stand-by units in their countries of origin, ready for immediate deployment. These stand-by units are trained, equipped and organized ECOWAS through the office of the Deputy Executive Secretary for Political Affairs, Defense, and Security. The regional centers for training are in Ivory Coast and Ghana.

Taking all this in consideration, these successes of ECOMOG, despite all its problems and Taylor's supporters criticisms, prove that ECOMOG is a necessary institution to help bring about peace in West Africa.

### **Notes**

<sup>1</sup> Taw, Jennifer Morrison. *U.S. support for regional complex contingency operations: Lesson from ECOMOG*, pp.62

<sup>2</sup> See Taylor claims <From <http://allafrica.com/stories/200202090129.html>>, pp.2

## **Chapter 6**

### **Conclusion**

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), created to promote economic development in West Africa, is one of the organizations in the region. Countries in West Africa did not have the same colonizers so different languages are spoken in this part of Africa. That fact made unity in the region difficult. In December 1989, with the conflict in Liberia, ECOWAS set up its military force in order to intervene in that country; that force is called ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG). Taylor's supporters did not share the idea of ECOMOG creation and claimed among many other criticisms that "ECOWAS is an economic rather than a security organization, with no legal right to create a military group such as ECOMOG." Since its creation till today, ECOMOG was deployed in three countries: Liberia, Sierra-Leone and Guinea-Bissau. In those countries it successfully helped restore peace and fostered respect for democratic rules such as organization of free elections despite its financial, and logistical difficulties, and criticisms from Taylor's supporters. ECOMOG can do better if ECOWAS countries leaders fight for unity in the region, for a better financial and logistical support to the institution. A greater cooperation between the supporting countries and other international organizations such as UN and OAU (Organization of African Unity) can

also help. Considering all those facts, I can conclude that ECOMOG is a necessary peacekeeping institution in West Africa.



## **Glossary**

AFL	Armed Forces of Liberia
AFRC	Armed Forces Revolutionary Council
ECOMOG	ECOWAS Monitoring Group
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EMSC	ECOWAS Mediation Standing Committee
NDPL	National Democratic Party of Liberia
NPLF	National Patriotic Front of Liberia
OAU	Organization of African Unity
PRC	People's Redemption Council
RUF	Revolutionary United Front
SMC	Standing Mediation Committee
UN	United Nations
UNOMSIL	United Nations Observer Mission in Sierra-Leone

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