

RE-EXAMINING NIGERIA'S PEACEKEEPING INTERVENTIONS IN LIBERIA AND SIERRA LEONE: THE PROMPTINGS AND PLUSES

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Abstract

This paper re-examines Nigeria's peacekeeping interventions in Liberia and Sierra Leone in order to analyze the motivation and benefits of these missions. It examines the Nigeria's Afrocentric foreign policy, which initially prompted the interventions. The study further critiques the gains derived from these interventions. Using the current economic climate in West African sub-region, the paper establishes that the Nigerian State has benefitted from the sacrifices of its military personnel in the conflicts where it intervened to restore peace and security. Drawing on insight from constructivist theory, the paper also argues that although Nigeria's benefits do not commensurate with the costs of these interventions, its corporations and private businesses have gained significantly in the expanding economies of these states. Within this theoretical framework, Nigerian government agencies have also benefitted from the stability currently experienced, with the Nigerian State-represented by these agencies- symbolized private international relations. The Methodology adopted is descriptive and qualitative, relying on secondary sources for data collection. The paper concludes that the Nigerian State is benefiting from its peacekeeping interventions in Liberia and Sierra Leone through Nigerian-owned businesses which symbolize private international relations. The expansion of Nigeria corporations and businesses in these states is attributed to the stability and democratic governance achieved, to which Nigeria's interventions significantly contributed.

Keywords – Peacekeeping, Intervention, Afrocentric, Commensurate, Stability, Reciprocity, Private international Relations.

Introduction

Nigeria from the onset of independence in 1960, pursued Afrocentric foreign policy. The first Prime Minister of Nigeria, Alhaji Abubakar Tafawa Balewa was the first to moot the idea of African- centeredness of Nigeria's foreign policy.¹ In his address to the United Nations as Nigeria becomes the 99th member of the world body, the Prime Minister was quoted to have said

“Nigeria hopes to work with other African states; Africa must claim attention in our external affairs.”² It was this foreign policy thrust earlier on, threw Nigeria head-on into engaging in peacekeeping operation in Congo soon after her independence. It continued to play the big brother role in conflicts across African continent. As states emerge from Colonial rules to self rule, lack of preparedness on the part of most nationalists who fought and won independence for their countries led so many of these new political states into crises, requiring Nigeria to either send in troops or diplomats in search of stability, peace and security in the continent.

It is also important to add that some of the conflicts were as a result of the partition of African States in Berlin conference of 1884-85 which allocated African States to European countries in a sharing formula that only had political and economic interest of the European powers, without considering the existing African States, culture and historical antecedents, as Chukwu puts it, “African rulers were not consulted in the process and were only pawns in the European imperial game.”³

Consequently, what followed soon after independence was political and economic crises resulting in Military Coups, Civil Wars, uprising, ethnic and tribal tension, external interferences and geopolitical interest.⁴ These challenges plunged most of these newly independent countries into unending cycle of conflicts. The upheaval was the same from Congo to Comoros Island, Mali, Guinea Conakry, Angola, Nigeria, Chad, Central African Republic, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Sudan and many more.

Nigeria, despite facing its own political crises and fresh out of a devastating Civil War rose to the defense of African countries in its search for peace, security and stability of nations emerging from years of colonial rules. It went a step further in advocating for independence of countries such as Zimbabwe, Angola and a voice against apartheid system in South Africa.

This paper therefore, sorts to analyze the benefits accruing to Nigerian State in the sacrifices it made in these African States, particularly Liberia and Sierra Leone. It also detailed the benefits being enjoyed by Nigeria

corporations, private investors and individual business men in the stability and economic growth being experienced in Liberia and Sierra Leone recently. It went a step further to question why the lack of reciprocity in Nigeria foreign policy thrust and why every government that had ruled Nigeria has continued to follow the same part that has led nowhere on the state to state level international relations, rather transnational international relations was what emerged from the efforts made by the Nigerian State in its effort to find peace and stability in the continent especially in the West African Sub-region.

Despite little benefits to the Nigerian State, its military image and national prestige were respected before comity of nations. On the other hand, the Nigerian economy benefited through repatriation of capital by its corporations and businesses thriving in these countries. Questions have continued on the justification of such expensive military operations if Nigeria as a State has no significant benefit from her numerous human and financial sacrifice in these missions. In response, this paper presented detailed research of the pluses of the inventions to assuage skepticism surrounding the decisions of Nigerian Government to get involved in these missions.

Nigeria's Contribution to Peace and Security in Liberia and Sierra Leone

Nigeria played key role in fostering peace and security in West African Sub-region, especially in Liberia and Sierra Leone, this, following its efforts and strategic roles it played in the formation of Economic Community of West African States, ECOWAS in 1975. It was also a key actor in the formation of ECOWAS Monitoring Group, ECOMOG when the need arose for a stand-by force to be deployed in the conflicts raging in Liberia in 1990. This stand-by force comprising of military of West African States such as Nigeria, Guinea, Sierra Leone, Ghana and Cote D'Ivoire was gallantly led by Nigerian officers. It was also deployed in Sierra Leone when domino effect of the war in Liberia spread to the country.

In the case of Liberia, Nigeria and other member states including, Ghana, Sierra Leone and Guinea on 23rd August, 1990 deployed over 3000 troops when sociability was no longer attainable in the country. Nigeria and Ghana contributed one battalion each while Sierra Leone and Guinea contributed the forces amounting to a battalion.⁵

Nigeria's led ECOMOG troops were involved in peacekeeping as Liberia descended into chaos following the overthrow of President Samuel Doe who was accused by his opponents of ruling with iron fist. He was also accused of despotism, totalitarianism and characterized with corruption, violence and mismanagement of the nations resources.⁶ As consequences, in 1989, Charles Taylor led the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) who marched-in from Cote D'Ivoire to wage war against Doe's regime. Within a year of NPFL led insurgency, Charles Taylor was able to capture most of Liberia.⁷

President Doe was eventually captured by forces under the command of Prince Johnson, he was subsequently tortured to death. Unfortunately, the death of Samuel Doe did not bring to an end of the carnage and killings in Liberia. The violence, instead escalated and spread out of Monrovia to every part of the country, prompting response by the Sub-regional organization ECOWAS who in its 15th summit of Heads of States in Lagos set-up ECOMOG and immediately deployed troops to restore order.

Incidentally, as the Liberia descended into chaos the United Nations ordered her staff out of the country and did little or nothing to save the situation. On the part of the African Union (AU) then Organization of African Union (OAU) it lacked capacity to intervene in the flaring conflicts leaving Nigeria as regional power to lead the ECOMOG peacekeeping mission to the West African State.

It was against this backdrop that Nigeria's big brother role in the continent manifested once again, deploying valuable human and material resources to restore order in Liberia, without considering to what extent will such expensive military adventure benefits her and its citizens. Considering that national interest is central in formulation of foreign policy and determines the posture a state will take in its behavior in international system.

For Chuka Eneka in his analysis of the place of national interest in the formulation of foreign policy, he stated thus " foreign policies are usually conceived and formulated on the basis of interests of a state defined in terms of those goals she needs to satisfy in her relations with other states." ⁸

Despite the goals Nigeria intends to achieve in its peacekeeping mission in Liberia not properly defined in terms of benefits accruing to her, it played a key role in restoring peace and security in the West African State through

its military intervention which cost according to some estimates over 12 billions dollars, ⁹ 15,000 Military personal out of 17,000 deployed, about 500 dead or missing in action.¹¹ Military equipment manned by her Air force, Army and Navy, not excluding the roles played by its diplomats and civilian contingents to the war.

The critical roles of the Nigerian State in Liberia both under ECOWAS mandate and United Nations Mission, were strategic in restoring peace and security, which created an atmosphere conducive enough for national election that brought Charles Taylor to power and restoring democracy and stability to the state. The peaceful environment encouraged both local and foreign investors in the country, these investors including many Nigerian businesses majorly among them are banks and automotive industry.

Intervention in Sierra Leone

Similarly in Sierra Leone, Nigeria military was on hand to ensure the return of democracy when the domino effect of the war in Liberia spread to its neighbor, Sierra Leone. According to Wikipedia, domino theory, is geopolitical theory which posits that changes in political structure in one country tend to spread in neighboring countries.¹⁰

It was this scenario painted above that transpired in Sierra Leone following the Civil War in Liberia. The destabilizing influence of Charles Taylor was felt in Sierra Leone in the mid nineteen-nineties. A rebel group that was alleged to have been sponsored by the Liberian strong man operated in Sierra Leone. The objective to fund a rebel group in the neighboring country was to gain access to the vast diamond mines in the country in order to sponsor his own war in Liberia, hence the genocidal activities of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF). The men of RUF acting on the orders of Charles Taylor took over Diamond mines in Sierra Leone from where it smuggled same to Liberia in exchange for weapons from Charles Taylor.

Invariably, this is not to say that Sierra Leone was a peaceful paradise before the activities of Charles Taylor destabilized the country, no, far from that, Sierra Leone was enmeshed in its own political crises in early 1990s. The political crises in the country stemmed from the one party system practiced in the country. It was under the guess of the opposition to one party system that on March 23, 1991, Foday Sankoh struck in a Military Coup. The coup exacerbated the political crises in the country which lasted through the regime of Captain Valentine Strasser and Brigadier Bio.

The crisis created a fertile ground for RUF, led by Major Johnny Koromah to stage another coup against democratically elected President Ahmed Tejan Kabbah in 1997.¹¹ This Military Coup created further instability, disrupting fledgling democracy and caused tension in the country. The Coup leader in order to assert his authority in the country, formed an administrative structure known as Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) to administer the country.

It was on this premise that ECOMOG troops led by Nigeria, were sent to restore democracy in the country, this, despite Nigeria being under oppressive military regime of General Sani Abacha.

ECOMOG troops were deployed in Sierra Leone in May 1997 following the Military Coup. The mandate was simple, restore democratically elected government, ensure peace, security and stabilize the country. With these orders, Nigeria led the deployment of ECOMOG troops, landing troops in Lungi and Hastings Airports under the guide of Nigeria and Guinean forces.

In keeping to its primary mandate of restoring democracy in Sierra Leone, Nigeria Alfa fighter jets flew over Freetown maintaining pressure on Major Johnny Koromah led AFRC.¹²

To ensure enough pressure was mounted on the Rebels, Nigeria Navy sailed its frigates to the waters of Sierra Leone, docking at Government Wharf in Freetown carrying hundreds of soldiers in demonstration of ECOMOG troops resolve to restore democracy to the war-torn country.

ECOMOG forces having fully deployed, swiftly advanced towards the capital, Freetown and State House with a combination of ground and air assault. The capital failed to ECOMOG forces just within seven days. As the rebels flee the capital, the forces bolstered by the determination of ECOWAS Leaders to restore democracy in Sierra Leone, ensured the return of Tejan Kabbah to power.

Nigeria initially deployed over 7000 troops in the country, the number later increased to 12,000 strong peacekeeping force during the Sierra Leone Civil War. However, the gallantry of the ECOMOG troops did not

bring the desired peace and security in the country, as the rebels moved into the countryside and continued atrocities against the citizens of the country. With RUF in control of the many mines in the country, the illegal exportation of diamonds continued, contributing to major source of funds and weapons to the group in its quest to destabilize the country.

As the conflict escalated, Nigeria pulled out its troops ending the role of ECOMOG in the conflict, making way for United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL)¹³

Before the UN took over the operation, the Nigerian contingents both military and civilian played critical roles in making the atmosphere conducive for the UN mandated forces, to be deployed.

Challenges Faced by Nigeria Peacekeeping Troops

As expected, the peacekeeping missions in Liberia and Sierra Leone came with different challenges to the Nigerian Military contingent, these challenges include : limited funding, welfare, Injuries, fatality, logistics and other operational challenges. Despite these numerous obstacles, Nigeria troops demonstrated heroism and capacity in the restoration of peace, security and stability in these two West African neighbors.

Theoretical Analysis

Deploying constructive theory in the analysis of Nigeria's sacrifice in Liberia and Sierra Leone, Nigeria expanded funds just to maintain big brother neighbor with these two countries without much interest in the material gains while formulating its Afrocentric foreign policy and efforts to demonstrate African centeredness rather than economic or material gains from such pursuit.

Even when Nigeria as a state has benefitted little or nothing from such expensive military adventure, Nigeria corporations and private businesses benefiting somehow, cannot be said to be out of place, considering that profits from some of the Nigerian-owned investments are repatriated back home and help boost foreign exchange, strengthen the Naira and add to GDP of the country.

This paper strongly argues that Liberia and Sierra Leone cannot be accused of not reciprocating the sacrifices made by Nigeria in restoring peace and security in the country, which resulted in economic growth and stability, when they have allowed Nigeria businesses to establish and invest in key sectors of their economies. As propagated by constructive theory, private international relations is still on itself an international relations.

Re-examining Nigeria's Afrocentric Foreign Policy

Nigeria's Afrocentric foreign policy thrust has been the reason it keeps getting involved and intervening in conflicts and political turmoil in many African sovereign States. In search for peace and security, Nigeria has also ensured stability, promotion of human rights of citizens and protection of democratic institutions across the continent. For proper understanding of Africa in Nigeria's foreign policy, one has to analyze the foreign policy formulations in order to understand, the unseen reasons behind the seen foreign policy action of states.¹⁴ To this end, analysis of Nigeria's foreign policy which prompted its interventions in Liberia and Sierra Leone will form the basis for understanding why and how of Nigeria's foreign policy formulations.

To analyze, as Obi and Ozor postulate: would suggest to keenly, critically examine or appreciate a thing, be it a concept, phenomenon or substance, with a view to discovering in some detail the common and special peculiar characteristics such a thing possess.¹⁵ The Nigeria's peacekeeping interventions in Liberia and Sierra Leone can be analyzed from the classical approach of international relations as advanced by Hans Morgenthau in his 1948 book titled " Politics Among Nations" Morgenthau explained that power politics is central to international relations. Nigeria's peacekeeping interventions in Liberia and Sierra Leone can be viewed from the paradigm of geopolitics of the West African sub-region. Nigeria having played big brother's roles in many conflicts across the continent was naturally qualified to step-in when conflicts escalated in its immediate environment (West African sub-region). More so, it can not stay idle while the region burns, having projected itself as balancer of power in the sub-region and a regional power in other conflicts. Considering its various roles in other regions especially in the Southern Africa where it was in the forefront of the fight against apartheid in Republic of South Africa, supported independence movement in Zimbabwe, strategic involvement in Angola's liberation movement and many others.

Therefore, as Liberia descended into chaos, Nigeria intervention was seen as inevitable, considering the incapacitating situation of the OAU and sudden withdrawal of UN staff from the country. Similarly in Sierra Leone the same scenario played out making Nigeria to continue with projection of power and regional big brother to these African countries.

For purposes of clarity, the Nigerian foreign policy of interventionism in West Africa, was not limited to its peacekeeping roles in Liberia and Sierra, instead, there were other non-traditional peacekeeping roles it played in Togo, Côte d'Ivoire and São Tome and Príncipe where it deployed other strategic means of peace enforcement, diplomacy and minimal use of force to defend democracy, prevent conflicts from escalating and restoration of constitutional order.

Having justified its decision to intervene in these external conflicts, Nigeria's foreign policy objectives in these interventions comes to mind, as the place of national interest is unambiguously stated in foreign policy formulation and implementation by any state. Regrettably, prior to its involvement in Liberia and Sierra Leone, Nigeria has never gotten commensurate reciprocity in its other pursuits of African centered foreign policy. The bad experience it got in the hands of Zimbabwe, South Africa and others should have been determinant in its future behavior in the international system, thus, requiring a new foreign policy direction.

Arguably, Nigeria has not directly benefited from its involvement in African conflicts. Apparently, foreign policy should hinge on national interest which can only be achieved when transnational assistance is reciprocated in other forms and nature. The case of Nigeria was obvious, contrary to what is obtainable in international system. Therefore one has to ask to what end is Nigeria's Afrocentric foreign policy thrust ?

It has been argued that Nigeria has not benefited much from the Billions of dollars and enormous human resources it had expended in its pursuit of Afrocentric foreign policy. This debate has also followed its involvement in Liberia and Sierra Leone where it played its most critical and strategic roles, as well as its most expensive military adventure ever in peacekeeping and peace roles in the continent.

To this end, this paper dug deep into further research to establish as fact, that despite Nigeria's state failure to directly benefit from its sacrifices in these countries, the peace and security alongside the stability being enjoyed in Liberia and Sierra Leone today have benefited Nigeria citizens and businesses. Positing the position of constructive theory in the analysis of international relations; private international relations is on itself international relations. Constructivist introduced the possibility of agency and have emphasized process of interaction.¹⁶ From the paradigm of Constructivists, the Nigerian corporations and businesses thriving in these countries as agencies of foreign interaction, have exemplified that Nigeria has benefited from the sacrifice it made in the sub-region through these agencies that symbolized private international relations.

Pluses of Nigeria's Peacekeeping Interventions in Liberia and Sierra Leone

Critics have argued and questioned Nigeria's peacekeeping involvements in Liberia and Sierra Leone, considering the enormous human and material resources spent in such military engagements. Even when some of the benefits were pointed out, the questions kept probing further, whether the benefits commensurate with the cost on Nigeria's economy and sacrifice of her military personnel who fought and died in these conflicts. It therefore becomes an academic exercise to detail both benefits of these missions to Nigeria's image at the diplomatic level, benefits to its military, and economic impacts accruing to Nigeria corporations and businesses as a result of Nigeria's roles in peace and stability in the sub-region.

Nigeria's contributions to peace and security in Africa have literally enhanced her image and prestige amongst comity of nations in international system. Through her numerous peacekeeping interventions, Nigeria has contributed in stabilizing conflict zones, restore order and ensure security of lives and property of citizens in West African sub-region. These contributions have not gone unnoticed by observers and commentators in international system.

Additionally, Nigeria is seen as continental leader, which has earned her respect in the diplomatic circle in Africa. For instance, the West African stand-by force ECOMOG which was deployed in conflict zones in the sub-region was generally known and identified as Nigeria led West African Peacekeeping Force. For this, Nigeria has been assigned some prominent positions in the United Nations leadership system. Nigeria diplomats such as Ibrahim

Gambari and Ambassador Olu Adeniji were assigned Special Representatives of the Secretary-General (SRSG) in many conflict zones in Africa. Gambari served as SRSG in Angola, Darfur, while Adeniji served in Central African Republic and Sierra Leone respectively. These respectable appointments served to booster Nigeria's image and prestige among nations in international system. Thus winning Nigeria a prominent position as a worthy partner in peace and stability of Africa continent and recognized globally as a significant contributor to regional and global peace and security.¹⁷ Qualifying her military as a stabilization force in military emergency and conflict management as it has demonstrated in Liberia, Sierra Leone and other countries in West African sub-region and beyond.

Additionally, Nigeria Police Force through its foreign missions, has demonstrated excellency in international arena. The high level of professionalism and ethical conducts the force exhibited in international engagements have earned Nigeria huge respect when it comes to policing. These missions by Nigeria Police Force were largely sponsored by international and regional organizations such as United Nations (UN) and African Union, (AU) in such instances, the institution always presents itself as a symbol of professionalism and excellence, making the nation proud in the comity of nations, through its laudable performances.¹⁸

The United States' Department of State on its website, provided details of military assurance to Nigeria's military as a partner in peace and stability of West African sub-region.¹⁹ This partnership in stabilization of West African sub-region was as a result of Nigeria's roles in peace and security and its willingness to provide military support in troubled States in the sub-region.

The laudable cooperation and military aids from the United States, are valid demonstration of Nigeria's strategic place in world peace and security and its leading roles in stabilization of the West African sub-region. Invariably, the United States support to Nigeria in efforts to strengthen security in the region also keep American boots off the ground in West African sub-region, thereby saving its personnel from embarking on a dangerous mission of peacekeeping in most conflicts in Africa helping her avoid a repeat 1990's Somalia experience.

Other strategic cooperation and military assistance have been extended to Nigeria by her former colonial ruler Britain. These have come in form of trainings, sales of arms and education of its personnel. For instance From 2014, the UK shifted its focus towards training and supporting the Nigerian Armed Forces to help it counter violent extremists. In 2015, 350 British troops were deployed in the country to deliver a training programme. Training is provided by Short Term Training Teams (STTTs) which are typically rotated every six weeks. The operation remained active, as of May 2022.²⁰

There are also some economic benefits accruing to Nigeria government, private individuals and Nigerian based corporations in the West African sub-region as benefits for Nigeria's peacekeeping interventions in these countries. The security and stability recorded in the sub-region have translated in improved economic activities and regional cooperation between Nigeria and its West African neighbors.

Subsequently, everyday, tons of goods leave Nigeria ports to these West African countries, including Liberia and Sierra Leone. Trade relations has significantly improved as a result of stability following restoration of peace and security in these countries. Similarly, there are movement of people and goods among these countries both through land, sea and air. These exchanges is in utilization of ECOWAS Trade Liberation Scheme (ETLS) a scheme designed by ECOWAS to ensure unhindered trade exchanges among member states.²¹

Additionally, many Nigerian registered companies engage in businesses in formal sectors of Liberia and Sierra Leone's economy, these include Nigeria banks, notable among these banks operating in Liberia are Eco Bank Liberia Limited, (EBLL) United Bank for African Liberia Limited, (UBALL) Access Bank Liberia (ABL) and Guarantee Trust Bank Liberia (GTBL)²²

Nigeria manufactured goods are also readily available in the markets of these countries, from motorcycle parts manufactured in Nnewi, to households products, Aba made shoes and clothes are exported in large quantities by Nigeria manufacturers to these countries.

The deepening bilateral ties between Nigeria and other West African countries especially Liberia and Sierra Leone was demonstrated following the signing of African Continental Free Trade Area (AFCFTA) by the then

Nigeria President Muhammad Buhari in 2020, the government of Sierra Leone placed order for Innoson Vehicle Manufacturing Limited (IVM) Nnewi, Anambra state-based Nigeria automobile manufacturer to supply its military, vehicles worth 4.7 Million Dollars.²³

The order were placed by the country, through its Defense Ministry led by Mr. Edward Soloku, the Minister of Internal Affairs, as well as the Sierra Leone Road Transport Corporation, (SLRTC) Mr. Isaac Ken-Green, with the approval of the President, of Sierra Leone Julius Maada Bio, during a high powered delegation visit to Nigeria.

As a result of continued stable relations and cooperation between the two countries, IVM in November 2022 delivered the first batch of vehicles manufactured for government of Sierra Leone to the country.

The military grade vehicles arrived Queen Elizabeth II, Port in Freetown for distribution to military officers across the country.

Additionally in 2020, to reciprocate Nigeria's sacrifice for peace and security in the country, the Sierra Leone Parliament, ratified a petroleum exploration and production license in favour of Nigerian Multinational, Innoson Oil and Gas. This was contained in a letter of conveyance in April 2021. Consequently, the company began exploration of oil deposits at the Sierra Leone basin in Gulf of Guinea and on 14th May 2022 announced the discovering of Gas amounting to 8 trillion cubic feet (TCF).²⁴

Conclusion

This article demonstrates that Nigeria has benefited significantly from the sacrifice it made in the peacekeeping interventions in Liberia and Sierra Leone, particularly in terms of gains to its military and diplomatic corps. On the other hands, the Nigerian private sector has also secured its share of the benefits by penetrating deep into the formal and informal economies of these countries. The Nigeria economy has further benefited from capital repatriated from profits made by these businesses. Similarly, Nigerian migrants residing in these countries contribute to Nigerian economy through remittances. The question that remains is whether these benefits commensurate with the costs of these military engagements. Perhaps not yet; however, the sacrifice of the Nigerian peacekeeping troops cannot be regarded as wasted efforts and Nigeria's Afrocentric foreign policy cannot be dismissed as entirely ineffective

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