

An Assessement of Nigeria's Participation in Peacekeeping Operations in Africa

Ajodo-Adebanjoko, A. Ph.D

Department of Political Science
Federal University Lafia
Nasarawa State, Nigeria
Email:angelaigo@yahoo.com

Bar. Okeke, V.O.S. PhD

Department of Political Science
Faculty of Social Sciences
Anambra State University
Igbariam, Anambra State, Nigeria
Email: okekevoss@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

This work is an assessment of Nigeria's role in peacekeeping operations in Africa since independence beginning from Congo in 1960 and spanning Liberia, Sierra Leone and Togo. The study identifies the justification for the country's peacekeeping operations which include; national interest, "responsibility to protect" (R2P) doctrine, need for collective security, neglect of African conflicts by the international community in the post-Cold War period and the need for preventive diplomacy. While recognizing Nigeria's efforts in bringing peace to many countries, it is recommended that Nigeria should solicit for the participation of other Africa states instead of acting unilaterally because of the cost involved and current realities in the country.

KEYWORDS: Assessement, Nigeria, Participation, Peacekeeping Operations and Africa

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1. INTRODUCTION

Since independence in 1960 successive Nigerian government has adopted an Afrocentric policy thereby making Africa the focus of her foreign policy thrust. Nigeria sees herself as a leader in Africa and the protector and champion of the course of the black race. Furthermore, Nigeria has often seen its own freedom, unity and economic progress as intrinsically tied to Africa's. While the Balewa regime laid the foundation for Nigeria's policy focus towards Africa, it was not until 1976 under the Obasanjo regime that this Afrocentric focus was clearly defined. This policy is manifested among others by Nigeria's peacekeeping efforts in Africa. Beginning with the Congo in 1960, Nigeria has participated in several peacekeeping operations in Africa under the ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) and United Nations Peacekeeping forces. It is on record that Nigeria has been involved in over 40 peace-keeping missions worldwide in both military and police roles since independence to date (Sanda 1992). As a country still grappling with issues of international cohesion and development, her effort to ensure the security of the African continent is quite commendable. While some have commendations for Nigeria, others are of the view that Nigeria's action was a breach of the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of member states.

However, if we understand that in the various peacekeeping operations Nigeria did not act unilaterally but under the aegis of the aforementioned Forces, the rationale among others being an attempt to prevent a spill-over of conflicts to neighbouring countries and the continent at large, then the country is vindicated. While participation in peacekeeping operations has brought some glories to Nigeria as the champion of the African cause, it has no doubt come with severe human, financial costs in addition to non-reprocity from other African countries which make some analysts to suggest that Nigeria should de-emphasise its Afrocentric policy. This work is an attempt to examine Nigeria's contributions to peacekeeping operations in Africa with a focus on the rationale, the cost-benefit and implications of the endeavour for the country.

2. CONCEPTUALISING PEACEKEEPING

Peacekeeping involves international military forces enforcing a truce within or between hostile groups in the international system. Peacekeeping operations derive their legal basis from the Charter of the United Nations Organization (UNO) which gives the Un Security Council the power and responsibility to take collective action to maintain international peace and security. This way, the activities of peacekeeping forces cannot be regarded as interference in the internal affairs of a state. Dating back to the Cold War era and the early years of the UN, Peacekeeping operations Peacekeeping has become a major instrument of conflict resolution for the UN and other organizations such as the Africa Union (AU), European Union (EU), and sub-regional organizations like the Economic Community of the West African States (ECOWAS). The major goal of peacekeeping Forces is to ensure that peace in the international system by providing conditions that could help this. Nigeria has participated in several Peacekeeping Operations within and outside Africa under the aegis of the UN while operations under the AU and ECOWAS were strictly within Africa. Acknowledging Nigeria's contributions to peacekeeping operations, UN Secretary General, Mr. Ban Ki Moon, has ranked Nigeria as the fourth largest contributor of troops to the UN's Peacekeeping Operations (PKO's). Nigeria's role in peacekeeping operations would be discussed in a subsequent section.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 The Doctrine of Collective security

To understand peacekeeping operations in Africa, this study adopts the doctrine of collective security. Collective security involves the formation of broad alliance by most major actors in the international system for the purpose of jointly opposing aggression by any actor, usually a powerful one (Goldstein, 2003). According to Rourke, (2006) the theory of Collective Security is based on three tenets. First, all countries forswear the use of force except in self-defense. Second, all agree that the peace is indivisible as an attack on one is an attack on all. Third, all pledge to unite to halt an aggression and restore peace by supplying to the UN or other Inter-Governmental Organizations (IGOs) whatever material or personnel resources necessary to deter or defeat aggressors and restore the peace.

To achieve this, the UN Charter identifies international peace and security as the organization's first goal, and the UN's founders wanted the organization to play a central role in collective security (Russett, Starr and Kinsella, 2007). Therefore, collective security means that all members agree to oppose together a threat to the security of any one of them, an arrangement that realists dismiss as idealistic. The purpose of employing the concept as the theory underpinning the study is driven by the obvious reason that both UN and AU peacekeeping missions in Africa are collective actions borne out of the desire to maintain security in conflicting areas in the continent through military, police and civilians alliances of their different member's states. Collective security is not only observed when there is inter-state conflict or where there is assumed or clear aggression of one against another but it is also applied in intra-state civil conflicts where peacekeeping is of necessity.

Consequently, the crises in Africa and peacekeeping missions of African Union and United Nations respectively can be better comprehended when there are “collective actions” that are anchored on the “doctrine of collective security of both UN and AU,” as stated in Article 52 that “the Security Council shall encourage the development of pacific settlement of local disputes through such regional arrangements or by such regional agencies either on the initiative of the states concerned or by reference from the Security Council” (Murithi, 2009).

4. OVERVIEW OF NIGERIA’S PEACEKEEPING EFFORTS IN AFRICA

Congo

As earlier stated, Nigeria’s peacekeeping efforts started in the Congo in 1960 to 1964. Immediately after independence from Belgium in 1960, there was a political upheaval and conflict in the Congo. These crises culminated into a civil war which lasted for four years. The issues which resulted in the crises were said to be over the issues of federalism and ethnicity. At the end of the conflict, over one hundred thousand people were said to have been killed including the country’s first Prime Minister, Patrice Lumumba and UN Secretary General, Dag Hammakjold who was killed in a plane crash while attempting to mediate in the conflict. The UN Peacekeeping Force intervened in the crisis on the diplomatic and military front. Nigeria’s involvement was therefore at both levels. On the political and diplomatic front, A 15-member Conciliation Commission was constituted by the UN with Nigeria as member and chair a month later. In addition, Nigeria also served on the UN Advisory Committee on Congo and the Secretary-General’s Congo Club. As a result of these commitments, the country became deeply involved in the resolution of the Congo crisis. On the military front, with the UN’s agreement to deploy troops, the first batch of Nigerian Army troops comprising 5th Infantry Battalion with Engineers, Signals and Medical Services elements were sent with the 4th Infantry battalion following suit thereafter and by the end of the mission, a total of approximately 5,000 Nigerian Army personnel had served in the Congo in rotation over 4 years (Ogomudia 1997).

Liberia

The country was enmeshed in two civil wars beginning from 1985 which led to the death of over half a million people and devastation of the Liberian economy. The civil war in Liberia had its origin in the apartheid regime in the country, the monopoly of power by the True Whig party of the Americo-Liberians and exclusion of the indigenous Liberian populations from the political, economic and social mainstream and the repressive character of political control. Nigeria played a critical role in ending the crisis and instituting democracy Under President Shehu Shagari Nigeria staged a walk out of ECOWAS leaders to show their displeasure with the military government of Samuel Doe.

In terms of material and human resources, Nigeria spent over \$5 billion dollars and its soldiers constituted over 75 per cent of the military personnel with casualty figures estimated at several thousands. Nigerian soldiers were first deployed to Liberia early in 1990 apparently to defend Doe’s government, and later formed the bulk of ECOMOG which undertook peacekeeping, peace enforcement and peacebuilding operations under Nigeria’s leadership. On the political and diplomatic front, Nigeria was involved in virtually all peace talks, negotiations and elections that produced the interim national government headed by Professor Amos Sawyer, President Taylor, interim president Bryant and finally President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf. In the words of Osaghae (1992) ‘the story of the Liberian civil war and its ultimate resolution is also the story of Nigeria’s most direct and successful *regime change* intervention in the internal affairs of another country’.

Sierra Leone

The Sierra Leone Civil war which lasted for 11 years, began on 23rd March 1991 and ended on 18th January, 2002. It started when a group calling itself the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) intervened with the aim of overthrowing the Joseph Momoh government. The small band of insurgents consisted primarily of disaffected youth from the criminal cultures spawned in the urban ghettos of Freetown and the mining regions, though a number of university students who has been radicalized by conditions in Sierra Leone

and inspired by the revolutionary teachings expressed in Muammar al-Qaddafi Green Book (Pratt, 1980) also participated. They were led by Foday Sankoh, a former army corporal and photographer who had received military training in Libyan camps.

Nigeria's role in the democratization process in the country include the following:

- In January 1996, Brigadier J.M. Bio replaced Strasser and following pressure from Nigeria and other powers to immediately restore democratic rule,
- the Nigerian air force was fully involved in the process as it used the Lungi airport for its operations
- Nigerian Forces Assistance Group, which was administratively under ECOMOG but controlled from Nigeria, was deployed to the country under an extant Status of Forces agreement. With Ghana's reluctance to get involved in the crisis, it meant that although the peacekeeping force in Sierra Leone was administratively ECOMOG, it was a wholly Nigerian contingent.
- the Nigerian government arrested and detained Foday Sankoh in 2000 and helped to restructure the Sierra Leonean military in acknowledgement of which General Maxwell Khobe, commander of the Nigerian contingent, was appointed Chief of Defence Staff.
- Like as in Liberia, Nigeria's role in Sierra Leone was not unilateral, as it had the backing of ECOWAS, OAU (later AU) as well as the UN which imposed an arms embargo on Sierra Leone and passed a resolution in October 1997 supporting ECOWAS' intervention.
- Nigeria was also fully involved in the diplomatic efforts that complemented military intervention. For instance, agreement to hand over power and restore democratic rule by April 1998 was signed in Conakry in October 1997 between ECOWAS and the Koroma junta. Ambassador Olu Adeniji who later became the country's foreign minister served as the UN's Special Representative in Sierra Leone and was a prime mover of the Peace Accord signed in 2000 that produced a government of national unity.

Togo

After the death on 5 February 2005, of President Gnassingbe Eyadema who ruled the country for 38 years his son Faure Gnassingbe was sworn in as president instead of the president of the parliament, Fambare Ouattara Natchaba as required by the constitution, pending a presidential election to be held within sixty days. This takeover was described by the Africa Union as a coup d'état in addition to mounting pressures on the country from the United Nations. Furthermore, riots broke out in the country in opposition to the takeover and this led to the death of many. Gnassingbe decided to step down as president but was re-elected on 24 April, 2005 as president. During the period, under Nigeria's leadership, the profile of ECOWAS as an agent of conflict resolution, peacebuilding and collective security (anchored on the Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance of the Economic Commission of West African States 2001) grew and gave it the needed backing to engage in first line mediation in any country where there was crisis.

Nigeria recalled the country's ambassador and contemplated military intervention and economic sanctions. The ECOWAS Mediation Committee that included Nigeria's Foreign Affairs Minister Olu Adeniji with foreign ministers of Ghana and Niger, also threatened imposition of sanctions and expulsion, while at the same time exploring various diplomatic channels. These efforts made the military to bow and agreed to hold elections. Diplomatically, the crisis was resolved through power sharing negotiations between Gnassingbe and the opposition brokered by Nigeria and ECOWAS. Furthermore, it was the effort made by Nigeria and other countries within ECOWAS that prevented the crisis from metamorphosing into a civil war. Apart from these countries, Nigeria has also participated in peacekeeping operations Chad, Somali and Dafur.

5. RATIONALE FOR NIGERIA'S PARTICIPATING IN PEACEKEEPING OPERATIONS

The question has been asked as to the justifications for Nigeria's participation in peacekeeping operations. Nigeria's role in peacekeeping in Africa can be viewed from the following angles:

It was based on the "responsibility to protect" (R2P) doctrine, which provides a normative framework for legitimizing humanitarian interventions (Osaghae, 1992). An important element of the R2P norm is the premise that the international community, including major powers which Nigeria aspires to, has a responsibility to protect innocent lives in countries where governments are either or unable or unwilling to provide that protection." Based on this doctrine, the international community looked upon Nigeria to lead the region in protecting the lives of people within the region.

Furthermore, Nigeria's intervention in these areas was legitimate and based on the May 1983 ECOWAS Protocol on Mutual Assistance on Defence which provided for collective armed intervention in the event of aggression against any member state that constituted a threat to the entire community, or armed conflict between two or more member states, or internal conflict with proven external instigation and support. President Samuel Doe of Liberia for instance requested for military assistance from ECOWAS on the basis of this protocol (Osaghae, 1992).

In addition, Nigeria's intervention was necessary owing to the neglect of African conflicts by the international community in the post-Cold War period. Nigeria not only saw her destiny tied to her African brothers but sees herself as the champion of the African cause and a leader in the region. There is also the consideration for national interest. There was fear that the protracted conflicts and civil wars in the various countries could spill over to other neighbouring countries thereby engulfing the entire region of which the country is part. For instance the Liberian civil war had the character of a regional war not only because various rebel forces were composed of recruits from all over West Africa, but also because the civil wars that subsequently erupted in Sierra Leone, Ivory Coast and Guinea Bissau were either directly or indirectly connected with the Liberian situation.

Economic benefits that accrue from participation in peacekeeping operations is also a motivation. Countries which contribute to peacekeeping operations often have financial benefits in addition to military trainings among others. Reimbursements that accrue from Nigeria's participation in UN peacekeeping are said to be a source of income for soldiers and the state. In sum, the need to prevent humanitarian disasters, the need for political stability in the sub-region and for the avoidance of spill-over effect of conflicts spreading to other areas, including Nigeria, as well as domestic and international pressures to intervene provide a justification for Nigeria's intervention in the internal affairs of other countries.

6. A CRITIQUE OF NIGERIA'S PARTICIPATION IN PEACEKEEPING OPERATIONS

Nigeria's peacekeeping efforts in Africa has come under sharp criticisms by scholars

In the first place it is believed that while Nigeria is carrying out this policy of Father Christmas, the home front is neglected. The critics are of the view that charity begins at home and that Nigeria should put her house in order before venturing outside the country. It is believed that while Nigeria has not being able to arrest the trend of conflicts within the country; it is busy 'wasting' its effort and resources on others. It is advocated that the money spent on these endeavors could have been used to better the lot of Nigerians at home in terms of socio-economic transformation, power generation among others.

Secondly, Nigeria does not enjoy the appreciation of some of the countries for which she has staked her human and financial resources for. In the heydays of Nigeria's sanction by the international community, South Africa was at the forefront of the campaign for its realisation. In recent times, there have been xenophobic attacks by South Africans against other nationals including Nigerians showing that they do not appreciate Nigeria's contribution to ending apartheid in the country.

Thirdly, the number of Nigerian soldiers who have lost their lives as a result of Nigeria's liberation struggles in Africa cannot be accounted for. This means that many bread winners have been lost, many women widowed and children becoming fatherless for a cause that is not appreciated by many.

Fourthly, despite huge financial expenditures and massive loss of human and material resources in the Liberian and Sierra Leonean wars, for instance, Nigeria has not been able to reap any economic benefits. To date, one cannot tell one single Nigerian company involved in the post-conflict reconstruction activities going on in these two countries. What major economic niche has Nigeria carved for herself in these post-conflicts countries? There is hardly anything one can point finger towards. Yet, the Africa-centeredness framework has continued to maintain a stronghold on foreign policy thinking in Nigeria.

Furthermore, the appointment of a Rwandan general, Patrick Nyamvumba, to lead the United Nations/African Union Hybrid Mission in Darfur (UNAMID), in place of a Nigerian is unfair to the country.

Despite these criticisms, Nigeria has reaped some benefits from her involvement in peacekeeping operations. Nigeria has received much military assistance from advanced countries, particularly United States of America. In the year 2000, USA approved the sum of \$66m as military aid to Nigeria. Also, Nigeria was among the beneficiaries of US sponsored African Contingency Operation Training and Assistance (ACOTA) which aim at giving training support to African countries that actively participates in international and regional PSOs. The military aids received by Nigeria do not only boost the morale of her troops, but also increased their combat efficiency

There are also enormous economic benefits derived from the endeavour. Every Troops Contributing Country (TCC) stands to benefit tremendously in terms of financial reimbursement by the UN. The UN in an agreement with governments of the TCCs leases individual soldier for a PSOs task for a certain period of time. The reimbursement goes to the government for raising, training and sustaining each peacekeeper. Another advantage is in the benefits that accrue to the country through appointment of her nationals to strategic positions. Prof. Ibrahim Gambari one-time Joint AU-UN Special Representative and Head of the UN Mission in Darfur and Margaret Vogt have served as Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General. In addition, some Nigerians have served as UN force commanders among them Major General Chris Garuba in Angola and Major General Joseph Owonibi in Liberia.

7. CONCLUSION

Peacekeeping as a concept was invented in the 1950s while Peacekeeping Operations were birthed in the wake of the Cold War in the early 1960s as a way to ensure collective security in conflict resolution. Peacekeeping is based on the principle that an impartial presence on the ground can ease tensions between hostile parties and create space for political negotiations. Since independence in 1960 and despite grappling with the issues of internal cohesion, Nigeria has been involved in peacekeeping operations in Africa under the UN, AU and ECOMOG forces and has been instrumental to resolving conflicts in the continent. Civil conflicts in Africa in the post-independence era necessitated the use of Peacekeeping Forces in the various conflict-ridden countries. Nigeria remains a major contributor to Peacekeeping Forces in Africa in terms of deployment of troops and financial resources. Despite this, the country has not reaped much from her involvement based on criticism against her from the international arena. In view of this, the following recommendations are made:

Objectives of peacekeeping operations must be clearly stated and reviewed periodically. Such objectives must also be made public to carry the people along. There is need for planning. In this regard, Nigeria should undertake a strategic review and assessment of past peacekeeping operations with a view to determining where her interests lie. There is need for the country to focus on conflict prevention or preventive diplomacy by ensuring that crises do not fester by promoting good governance, democracy and human rights.

Nigeria needs to focus on the home front; in other words, on issues of national development. It would be good that while we are helping to stem crises in other countries, we deal with the issue of insurgency and ethno-religious conflicts among others. If this is done, she will have a moral justification for her peacekeeping efforts. Furthermore, there should be socio-economic transformation of the country to improve the lot of citizens. There is also need for Nigerian leaders to consult with the citizens on whether to participate in peacekeeping operations or not. This is because in the past especially under military regimes, the country got involved without bothering to sample the opinion of the masses. Finally, where there is a decline in UN Peacekeeping Forces in Africa, Nigeria should solicit for the participation of other Africa states instead of acting unilaterally because of the cost involved.

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